

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This study explores the English proficiency of the hotel front desk staff in communication with their guests in Chiang Mai. The method to determine the English proficiency of the hotel front desk staff was a written questionnaire and a verbal interview in the form of relevant questions related to fifty-four English functions and their job responsibilities. Initially to design the correct questionnaire, information was collected and reviewed by the thesis advisors, the linguistic experts, and the hotel front desk managers to assure that this information was pertinent to the final version of the questionnaire and the interview theme was consistent.

This chapter explains the procedures used in this study, how the information related to the study subjects was gathered, how the questionnaire was developed in both the verbal and situational questionnaires, how and where the questionnaires were distributed and collected, how the data was analyzed and finally the statistical procedures used throughout the study were all provided.

#### **Population**

There are 136 hotels in Chiang Mai. In this study, the researcher chose 5 hotels out of 7 possible hotels in which the number of guest rooms were more than 300 (table 5). In these 5 hotels there were totally 124 front desk staff who could be divided into 5 groups (Table 6). The subjects for this study were 101 hotel front desk staff for the questionnaires and 53 hotel front desk staff for the interviews who worked in these 5 hotels which were Chiang Mai Phucome, Imperial Maeping, Pomping Tower, Lotus Pang Suan Kaew, and The Empress. These hotel front desk staff were front desk managers, receptionists, reservation clerks, telephone operators, and front desk cashiers.

**Table 5 The Size of the Hotels in this Study**

<b>Names of Hotels</b>	<b>No. of Rooms</b>
Chiang Mai Phucome	576
Imperial Maeping	371
Pornping Tower	325
Lotus Pang Suan Kaew	690
The Empress	375

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand 2005.

**Table 6 The Total Number of Front Desk Staff in Five Positions in Each Hotel**

<b>Names of hotels</b>	<b>Front desk managers</b>	<b>Front desk cashiers</b>	<b>Reservation clerks</b>	<b>Telephone operators</b>	<b>Receptionists</b>	<b>Total</b>
Chiang Mai Phucome	1	0	5	4	8	26
Imperial Maeping	1	10	5	4	8	28
Pornping Tower	1	6	3	4	7	21
Lotus Pang Suan Kaew	1	10	6	4	8	29
The Empress	1	6	3	4	6	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>124</b>

Source: The Personnel Offices of the Five Hotels

## Sampling

### 1. Sampling for Questionnaires

A stratified random sampling by proportion technique was used based on the four job categories of hotel front desk staff (except for the front desk manager section in which everybody was given a questionnaire because there was only 1 person in that position of each hotel). The four job categories of the front desk staff of the 5 Chiang Mai hotels were chosen by the formula  $[n = N/1+Ne^2]$  with a total of 113 staff for completing questionnaires (Table 7).

**Table 7 The Sample Number of Hotel Front Desk Staff for Questionnaires**

Names of hotels	Front desk managers		Front desk cashiers		Reservation clerks		Telephone operators		Receptionists	
	N	n	N	n	N	n	N	n	N	n
Chiang Mai	1	1	8	7	5	4	4	4	8	7
Phucome	1	1	10	9	5	5	4	4	8	8
Imperial Maeping	1	1	6	6	3	3	4	3	7	6
Pomping Tower	1	1	10	9	6	5	4	4	8	7
Lotus Pang Suan Kaew	1	1	6	5	3	3	4	4	6	5
The Empress	1	1	6	5	3	3	4	4	6	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>33</b>

**N = Population, n = Samples**

## 2. Sampling for Interviews

The stratified random sampling by proportion was the technique used to find a sample from four categories of hotel front desk staff for the interview. Again every front desk manager from each hotel was selected because there was only 1 person in that position at each hotel. Fifty percent of the total staff in each job category were chosen for the interviews; that was 65 staff (Table 8). Each respondent took almost one hour for each interview.

**Table 8 The Sample Number of Hotel Front Desk Staff for Interviews**

Names of hotels	Front desk managers		Front desk cashiers		Reservation clerks		Telephone operators		Receptionists	
	N	n	N	n	N	n	N	n	N	n
Chiang Mai Phucome	1	1	8	4	5	3	4	2	8	4
Imperial Maeping	1	1	10	5	5	3	4	2	8	4
Pomping Tower	1	1	6	3	3	1	4	2	7	4
Lotus Pang Suan Kaew	1	1	10	5	6	3	4	2	8	4
The Empress	1	1	6	3	3	1	4	2	6	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>19</b>

N = Population, n = Samples

### 3. Research Tools

3.1 In this research, questionnaires were used to evaluate writing proficiency. The English writing proficiency was studied by the researcher and a professional English native teacher by using the Likert scale (Chapter IV) and the Next Generation TOEFL Test Independent Writing Rubrics (Educational Testing Service, 2004) which consists of five bands (Table 9).

3.2 Meanwhile, interviews were also conducted in order to assess listening and speaking proficiency. The English listening and speaking proficiency were evaluated by the researcher and a professional English native teacher by using the Likert scale (Chapter IV) and the PET (Preliminary English Test) Assessment (Diana, 1991) that includes five bands which consist of four main aspects: fluency, accuracy and appropriacy of language, pronunciation, and task achievement (Table 10).

**Table 9 The Next Generation TOEFL Test Independent Writing Rubrics  
(Scoring Standards)**

**The Next Generation TOEFL Test Independent Writing Rubrics (Scoring Standards)**

Score	Task Description
5	<p>An essay at this level largely accomplished all of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) effectively addresses the topic and task.</li> <li>2) is well organized and well developed, using clearly appropriate explanations, exemplifications, and/or details.</li> <li>3) displays unity, progression, and coherence.</li> <li>4) displays consistent facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety, appropriate word choice, and idiomaticity, though it may have minor lexical or grammatical errors.</li> </ol>
4	<p>An essay at this level largely accomplished all of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) addresses the topic and task well, though some points may not be fully elaborated.</li> <li>2) is generally well organized and well developed, using appropriate and sufficient explanations, exemplifications, and/or details.</li> <li>3) displays unity, progression, and coherence, though it may contain occasional redundancy, digression, or unclear connections.</li> <li>4) displays facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety and range of vocabulary, though it will probably have occasional noticeable minor errors in structure, word form, or use of idiomatic language that do not interfere with meaning.</li> </ol>

Score	Task Description
3	<p>An essay at this level is marked by one or more of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) addresses the topic and task using somewhat developed explanations, exemplifications, and /or details.</li> <li>2) displays unity, progression, and coherence, though connection of ideas may be occasionally obscured.</li> <li>3) may demonstrate inconsistent facility in sentence formation and word choice that may result in lack of clarity and occasionally obscure meaning.</li> <li>4) may display accurate but limited range of syntactic structures and vocabulary.</li> </ol>
2	<p>An essay at this level may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) limited development in response to the topic and task.</li> <li>2) inadequate organization or connection of ideas.</li> <li>3) inappropriate or insufficient exemplifications explanations, or details to support or illustrate generalizations in response to the task.</li> <li>4) a noticeably inappropriate choice of words or word forms.</li> <li>5) an accumulation of errors in sentence structure and/or usage.</li> </ol>
1	<p>An essay at this level is seriously flawed by one or more of the following weaknesses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) serious disorganization or underdevelopment.</li> <li>2) little or no detail, or irrelevant specifics, or questionable responsiveness to the task.</li> <li>3) serious and frequent errors in sentence structure or usage.</li> </ol>
0	<p>An essay at this level merely copies words from the topic, rejects the topic, or is otherwise not connected to the topic, is written in a foreign language, consists of keystroke characters, or is blank.</p>

Table 10 The PET (Preliminary English Test) Assessment

## The PET Assessment Criteria

Marks	Fluency	Accuracy and Appropriacy of Language	Pronunciation	Task Achievement
5	Able to sustain flow of language appropriate to the tasks with occasional hesitation to search for language.	Generally effective use of structure, vocabulary and paraphrase at this level.	Generally easy to understand despite L1 accent.	Tasks dealt with fully and effectively.
4	Noticeable hesitations of not such as to strain the listener or impede communication.	Meaning is conveyed despite noticeable structural inaccuracies, lack of vocabulary and ineffective paraphrase.	L1 interference occasionally causes difficulty in understanding.	Tasks dealt with adequately.
3	Hesitation often demands unreasonable patience of the listener.	Meaning occasionally obscured by structural inaccuracies and/or limited vocabulary and inability to paraphrase.	L1 interference frequently causes difficulty in understanding.	Limited ability to deal with tasks.



Marks	Fluency	Accuracy and Appropriacy of Language	Pronunciation	Task Achievement
2	Speech very disconnected and difficult to follow.	Frequently incomprehensible because of limited vocabulary and numerous structural errors.	Frequency impossible to understand.	Ineffective handling of tasks.
1	No connected speech.	Virtually incomprehensible because of insufficient vocabulary and gross errors.	Virtually unintelligible.	Unable to deal with tasks.

### Constructions of the Questionnaires and Interviews

#### 1. Construction

The questionnaires and interviews were constructed to assess 54 functions of English which are the purposes of using language for communication (Blundell, Higgens, and Middlemiss, 1982:xvii-xx). There are 3 parts including 23 main functions, 23 social formulas, and 8 making communication work as follows:

1.1 Main Functions: The uses of language are involving information, attitude, and action (Blundell, Higgens, and Middlemiss, 1982:xvii-xx). There are twenty-three functions:

1. saying you do not know/showing a limitation of knowledge
2. asking about remembering
3. saying something is correct/not correct
4. saying you are not sure
5. saying what you hope will happen
6. saying you are looking forward to something
7. asking how someone feels after something happen
8. asking about preference
9. giving your opinion

10. giving reasons
11. offering to do something for someone
12. asking for permission
13. giving permission
14. refusing permission
15. saying someone is obliged to do something
16. saying someone need not to do something
17. telling someone how to do something
18. advising someone to do something
19. suggesting
20. requesting
21. persuading
22. saying you are willing to do something
23. refusing to do something

1.2 Social Formulas: Language usage in society according to social formulas that confirms social relationships rather than expressing strong feelings (Blundell, Higgens, and Middlemiss, 1982:xvii). They consist of twenty-three categories as follows:

1. starting conversation with a stranger
2. introducing someone
3. answering an introduction
4. attracting someone's attention
5. greeting someone
6. asking how someone is
7. giving someone your general good wishes
8. inviting someone
9. accepting an invitation
10. offering something
11. declining an offer of something
12. giving something to someone
13. thanking

14. responding to thanks
15. complimenting
16. congratulating
17. responding to compliments or congratulations
18. saying sorry
19. accepting an apology
20. showing sympathy
21. leaving someone politely for a short time
22. ending a conversation
23. saying goodbye

1.3 Making Communication Work: This usage of language helps effectively to continue conversation rather than truly communicate actual ideas or attitudes (Blundell, Higgens, and Middlemiss, 1982: xvii). There are eight functions:

1. asking someone to say something again
2. checking that you have understood
3. saying something again
4. saying something in another way
5. giving an example
6. showing you are listening
7. giving yourself time to think
8. changing the subject

2. The structure of this questionnaire was adapted from the instrument used in Inpin (2000:137).

3. The researcher gathered data according to the Chiang Mai hotel front desk staff in communicating with their guests by using English in different situations based on the 54 functions of English which are the purposes of using language for communication (Blundell, Higgens, and Middlemiss, 1982:xvii-xx).

4. The thesis advisors, the independent experts, and hotel front desk managers were consulted to confirm the questionnaires' appropriateness and validity.

### **Pilot Study**

By use of questionnaires, a preliminary research tool was produced to tailor information specifically for hotel front desk staff to find fault and show confusing or ambiguous language that could be removed or edited. The content and structure were reviewed by the thesis advisors, the independent experts, and the hotel front desk managers. This initial study was used to get a base line, so the effectiveness of the final questionnaire could be measured and to assure the greatest level of co-operation from Chiang Mai hotel staff by the ease of administering the questions. The final draft of the questionnaire was administered to a total of twenty front desk staff in different positions throughout five hotels in Chiang Mai.

Additionally the hotel front desk staff were asked to criticize the questions, the content, the difficulties they found and the ease of using the questionnaire. It was also asked that hotel front desk staff give opinions, suggestions and ways they thought the study could be improved. This advice combined with that of the thesis advisors, the independent experts, and the hotel front desk managers allowed meticulous revision to produce the most concise questionnaire for the study.

### **The Questionnaires**

In the questionnaire, every question was projected concerning the purpose of the study and was based on 54 English functions (Blundell, Higgens, and Middlemiss, 1982:xvii-xx). Furthermore, every question was related to each English function. The 54 English functions were used to evaluate the Chiang Mai hotel front desk staff's English proficiency in communicating with their guests. The sample questionnaire is represented in Appendix B.

#### **Part 1** General Background

This part was to collect demographic data of the subjects of this study such as age, gender, position, work experience, and educational level.

#### **Part 2** English Proficiency in Communication with the Guests

In this section, there were 54 questions based on the above 54 functions of English. These questions were used to ask hotel front desk staff to answer them in English.

### **Part 3 Needs**

This section showed what the hotel front desk staff perceived to be the most significant language skill and what the hotel front desk staff wanted to improve.

### **Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaires**

By use of questionnaires, this study examined the English proficiency of the hotel front desk staff in communication with their guests in Chiang Mai. To create hotel front desk staff specific questionnaires, the literature used focused on functions of English and research reviews of previous studies. Initially the questionnaire was reviewed by the thesis advisors, the independent experts, and the hotel front desk managers then taking into account the advice given, edited to remove ambiguous phrases and language. After the initial study, the questionnaire was re-reviewed by the thesis advisor, the experts, and hotel front desk managers and re-edited to make perfectly clear the objective of the study, which resulted in the final questionnaire used in the main study.

To make absolutely sure the questionnaires were reliable in the study; the questionnaires were calculated for reliability value by using the Alpha Reliability Coefficients. The coefficient given for reliability is 0.9583 in this study.

### **Distribution of the Questionnaires and Collection of the Data**

1. The 113 questionnaires were distributed to the subjects of this study.
2. Seven days later, the researcher collected the questionnaires from each hotel.

### **The Interviews**

The interviews were constructed based on 54 English functions (Blundell, Higgins, and Middlemiss, 1982:xvii-xx). The sample questionnaire is represented in Appendix C. Due to the limitation of time and the objective reasons, 53 hotel front desk staff out of 65 staff were selected randomly.

1. In the interview, every question was asked concerning the purpose of the study and was based on 54 English functions.

2. The researcher recorded the conversation between the researcher and the subjects of this study based on interview questionnaire.

### **Analysis of Data and Statistical procedures**

The questionnaires and the interviews results were analyzed by the researcher and a native professional English teacher. When the researcher collected the completed data, the data were interpreted, categorized, and tabulated on computer sheets and a program was run to calculate the statistical values. Finally, the data analyses were completed by using percentage, mean, and standard deviation of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 11.0 for Windows).

The statistical procedures were used as following:

#### **1. Frequency Distributions and Percentages**

The frequency distributions and percentages were calculated for the hotel front desk staff's English proficiency, and also presented the hotel front desk staff's background such as gender, age, positions, work experience, and educational levels.

#### **2. Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation**

The arithmetic mean and standard deviation were used by the researcher to provide a single summary of the average level of proficiency in English.

#### **3. Weighted Scores**

Weighted scores were used to rank the needs and problems of English language skills by the hotel front desk staff in their careers. The specific weight was assigned for each specific rank. For example, a weight for the most required English skill was given as 4, the second required English skill was designed a weight of 3 and so on. Therefore, the highest weight was at the first rank and the lowest weight was at the last rank.

#### **4. Alpha- Coefficients**

The Alpha reliability coefficients were used to ensure reliable feedback from each item.