

**WHERE ENGLISH AND TAIWANESE CULTURE  
MEET: INVESTIGATION OF STUDENT TOUR GUIDES’  
“SPEAKING IN ENGLISH TOURISM” COURSE**

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**ABSTRACT**

Local tour guides’ English speaking competence determines inbound international tourists’ travel experiences. This study investigated student tour guides’ English learning by adopting role-play tasks. The communicative tasks were designed to explore how real interactions prepared English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners to become cultural ambassadors who introduce Taiwanese features to the world. Twenty-nine students were recruited from an “English for Tourism Purposes” course to interact with international students who acted as tourists. The student tour guides took turns introducing a topic unique to Taiwan. Data included recorded conversational interactions between the international and local students, comments on tour-guiding performances, and reflective notes. Adopting conversation and thematic analysis, the researcher analyzed the objective learning outcomes by observing how students performed in the tour-guiding tasks and examined the subjective viewpoints from the participants’ reflective notes. The results revealed distinctive spoken features for communicative competence and the benefits of gaining a deeper intercultural understanding of how to communicate Taiwanese culture in English and developing various communication skills for interacting with foreigners. Pedagogical implications are discussed in terms of the design of English for Tourism teaching.

Key Words: English for Tourism Purposes, communicative competence,  
intercultural communication

## **INTRODUCTION**

The tourism industry in Taiwan involves typical cross-cultural communication. Learning English for the purpose of tourism is a dynamic process of bridging the gaps between Taiwanese local culture and English language barriers. To succeed in upgrading Taiwan as an international tourism destination, raising the quality of professionals within the tourism industry is necessary. Cross-cultural oral communication is a multifaceted language learning process (Murphy, 1991). The ability to communicate in English is important to achieve global competitiveness. Hence, this study focuses on speaking competence in cross-culture contexts. To work as a tour guide, a student must develop the ability to deliver facts or stories about tourist attractions and—as a competent intercultural mediator—help acquaint tourists with the local customs. Speaking in English is a basic competence that should be mastered, especially when the language is used professionally (Hanifa, 2018).

Local tours of Taiwan involve cross-cultural interactions. Real-time details of social interactions between a local tour guide and foreign tourists must be studied (Pastorelli, 2003) to identify the relevant interactional features that indicate successful communication between a tour guide and visitors. The actual usage of the language in professional settings can illustrate the complex nature of social interactions and the adoption of various language skills. A tour guide needs to create a shared understanding with tourists; therefore, dialogues and discussions employed on the job are important. This study focuses on how Taiwanese university students manage the interactional work involved in a tourism task (e.g., addressing local culture-related issues and responding to questions) in a dyadic conversation between local Taiwanese students and English-speaking international students.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **English for Tourism Purposes**

Distinguished from English for general purposes, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) prioritizes learners' needs in their specialized fields. The statement that "learners know specifically why they are learning a language" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1992, p. 6) sums up the essence of ESP. The objective of an ESP course should be to provide meaningful, functional, and communicative content, and to develop language skills to help achieve goals specific to one's occupation (Basturkmen, 2010). Chang and Hsu (2010) suggest that to increase students' competitiveness in tourism-related industries, social and communicative abilities in English should be developed. A needs analysis was conducted in Taiwan to determine the direction of education for Tourism English, as Liao et al. (2017) claim that Taiwanese students' English-speaking ability does not meet the level required by the international tourism industry. They advocate that English for tourism should focus on developing students' English communication skills to facilitate their work in the tourism sector.

The communicative language teaching (CLT) approach is widely used to encourage learners to express themselves through interpersonal communicative activities undertaken in language classes. Richards (2006) encourages adopting CLT to teach ESP. He believes that participation in focused communicative activities enhances students' learning outcomes and helps them communicate competently in English. In interactive tasks, information is distributed among the participants and flows more effectively during interaction. Although one-way communication is easier for learners, genuine communicative competence involves interactional communicative competence (Shadabi et al., 2017). According to Foster (1999), "giving learners tasks to transact, rather than items to learn provides an environment which best promotes language learning process" (p. 69). The focus of communicative language teaching is on interaction: With tasks given to groups or pairs, students can deliver their thoughts in conversations through this learner-centered approach (Foster & Ohta, 2005).

Johnson (2004) asserts that naturalistic interactions are part of communicative competence. Guo's (2002) research provides evidence that Chinese-speaking university students could not perform

well in English conversations, as they failed to demonstrate either strategic or sociocultural competence in these conversations. Regarding interactional competence, Wen (1999) further argues for the incorporation of cross-cultural understanding. She claims that as a major component of communicative competence, cultural differences should be properly dealt with in interactions. Being competent in one language means being able to convey facts, ideas, and thoughts fluently in that language. Considering the job requirements in the tourism industry, it is worthwhile to investigate learners' English competence in interacting with English speakers.

### **English Learning through CLT Tasks in Tourism Contexts**

Pedagogies of second language (L2) acquisition suggest that instructors should provide learners with ample opportunities to learn the target language in a meaningful or communicative environment (Albino, 2017; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011), for learners to develop the ability to use the L2 to communicate (e.g., Littlewood, 2011). The tasks, especially communicative tasks, are believed to provide simulated situations that promote L2-learning processes, in which learners carry out meaning-focused conversation in dyadic interactions (Ellis, 2003; Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Skehan, 1998). When communicating with foreigners in real life, the exchanges are highly dependent upon understanding how and what the interlocutors say to each other. The messages are perceived and interpreted in another cultural context (Liu, 2021). Therefore, proper communication also depends on the ability to assume the perspective of the listener or speaker, which points to the need to develop learners' communicative competence (Byram, 1997).

The concept of communicative competence is explained explicitly by Celce-Murcia et al. (1995, pp. 13–35). It includes several elements. The first is sociocultural competence, which refers to the speaker's ability to communicate in a language appropriately and culturally, in accordance with pragmatic factors. The second is linguistic competence, which is not simply grammatical competence; rather, it includes lexis, phonology, morphology, and syntax. The third is interactional competence, which refers to competence in comprehending and conveying communicative purposes (Newton & Nation, 2021), that is, matching actional purposes with a linguistic form based on the knowledge of an inventory of verbal schemata that carry an illocutionary force (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995, p. 17). The

fourth is discourse competence, which concerns the selection, sequencing, and arrangement of words, structures, and sentences to achieve unity of the spoken or written text. The last is strategic competence, which can be conceptualized as knowledge of communication strategies and how to use them when considering psycholinguistic, interactional factors, and communication continuity to deal with communication difficulties (e.g., Nguyen, 2019). Fujita et al. (2017) also indicate that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) employees are not strategically competent in speaking, hence failing in communication in the tourism industry.

### **Using a Communicative Approach to Develop English-speaking Ability in Tourism**

In Taiwan, it is common to see organized tourism with the service of English guides during travel and at destinations. Certain roles are ascribed to tour guides, as they are critical for tourism and the tourist experience. A tour guide is perceived as a medium for conveying important information. Black and Weiler (2005) point out that a good tour guide helps tourists obtain information, understand local norms and traditions, and protect local cultural heritage values. All these require communicative competence. Celce-Murcia's (2007) study indicates that strategic competence, such as turn-taking, can be positively enhanced through carefully designed communicative activities. Erazo et al. (2019) think that role plays cultivate students' speaking competence. The students assume the role of a tour guide and act out a given situation. This type of activity increases tourism professionals' English skills.

Even though most EFL teachers believe that students' communicative skills could be fostered, in Taiwan, language teachers in tourism predominantly adopt a functional-notional approach. Speaking activities are organized according to functional-notional situations with fixed sentence or linguistic patterns taught to match the given travel scenarios. Lacking warmth and subtlety, fixed-pattern instructions seem to yield less conversational significance, as they offer limited help in spontaneous, face-to-face interactions between travelers and service providers. Thus, vivid real-life interactions are proposed to replace prescribed patterns of conversation in professional training.

Young (1999) proposes the idea of cultivating interactional

competence as the reinforced means of developing communicative competence, as learners acquire a “practice-specific interactional competence by participating with more experienced others in specific interactive practices” (He & Young, 1998, p. 7). Pragmatically, when defining interactional competence, Hall (2018) notes that it can mean “the underlying competence of learners on which they draw to participate in their interactions” (p. 25). Researchers have attempted to specify features of conversations that constitute competent interaction between interlocutors (Kasper, 2013; Pekarek et al., 2017; Pekarek, 2019). Interactions in English as a foreign language in the tourism context, especially during tour guiding, may demonstrate some of these interactional features. A detailed analysis of how participants perform could provide insights into the constructs of oral language use that can be operationalized in real-life tasks (Paltridge, 1992; Porter, 1991; Wiliam, 2011). Incorporating tasks that closely relate to what students will face in their future careers can help them contextualize and prepare for using the language on the job.

### **Evaluating Communicative Competence during Tour-guiding Interactions**

Douglas (2001) points out the necessity to develop evaluations of ESP in which the test format, content, and rating criteria are derived from target situations. Davies (2001) argues that there is no evidence to support that ESP tests are less valid than general proficiency tests. Out of practicality, contextualized speaking evaluation still has its place in tourism. Considering the importance of oral communication in tourism, studies have investigated interactional features as a starting point for designing the evaluation of tourism English. The context of a tour-guiding task can therefore help capture what learners have learned and how they can improve their future career performances.

Tests of communicative competence are usually designed with a combination of productive and receptive skills. In real tourist/tour guide interactions, different productive and receptive skills are used interchangeably; these skills are not applied in isolation. Previous researchers have examined learner discourse and identified certain patterns in learners’ interactions. The findings help with our understanding of the oral production displayed at different levels of proficiency (e.g., He & Young, 1998; Johnson & Tyler, 1998; Taguchi & Kim, 2018, Youn, 2019). From this perspective, interactional competence in existing studies is usually defined as the linguistic and

interactional resources “employed mutually and reciprocally by all participants in a particular discursive practice” (Young, 2011, p. 428). In developing students’ communicative competence in tourism, the primary concern is to find out how good their speaking competence is. Rating criteria of role plays intended for language testing is usually adopted as a reference for speaking practice (e.g., Youn, 2015, 2020). These rating categories show how speakers and listeners leverage resources in their interactions. Swain (2001) states that successful communication hinges upon the student’s ability to use the language, the user’s level of involvement, and the context in which the language is being used. This study contextualizes ESP communicative language by incorporating the local culture. Considering the importance of communicative competence for tour guides in Taiwan’s travel sector, the present study was set up to explore EFL learners’ speaking mainly through a qualitative inquiry approach, supplemented by quantitative data. The guiding questions are listed below.

(1) What are the interactional features that characterize higher-scoring and lower-scoring students’ communicative competence in the CLT tour-guiding task?

(2) In developing students’ English proficiency to become local tour guides, what are the perceived challenges and benefits of this CLT tour-guiding task from the students’ perspective?”

## METHOD

### Participants

Twenty-nine students participated in this study, and each of them signed a consent form. Their participation was voluntary, and they were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time. The participants were either juniors or seniors in a private university in northern Taiwan, with an average age of 21.8 years. The majority (76%) of these students were English majors, while the others (24%) majored in different fields (i.e., tourism, economics, theatre performance, and international trade); 61% of them were female, and 39% were males. The participants’ Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) scores ranged from 460 to 820, indicating

that their English proficiency levels varied from the upper A2 to the lower B2 band of the Common European Framework of Reference.

### **Research Procedures**

This study was designed to explore the development of communicative language competence and foster the growth of EFL university students' intracultural awareness in the ESP course throughout the semester. In the first week of the semester, the instructor assigned the students to form six groups (approximately five members per group). Each group comprised one or two non-English majors. Although the participants of other majors were of lower English proficiency, they could bring different perspectives from their study domains to facilitate cooperative learning. In the second week, the groups wrote an outline for interviewing a self-selected international student of no specific nationality. They then invited an international student for the interview to find out what this student was curious about regarding Taiwan. To prepare student tour guides to collect information on cultural issues that interest foreigners, this interview was designed as a "pre-task" for the tour-guiding task. From the interview, the tour guides could know what the potential topics were for conversation in a guided tour to enhance international tourists' cultural knowledge. From the third to the seventh week, students were instructed to complete the pre-task interview, in which all group members acted as interviewers, asking one or two questions in turn, thereby allowing them to interact with the international student. Meanwhile, in regular class sessions, the instructor introduced principles of tour-guiding from textbooks, covering topics such as introducing Taiwan's heritage, maintaining the sustainability of tourism, and promoting ecotourism by fostering respect for nature and indigenous cultures (Table 1).



**Table 1***Weekly activities arrangement*


Weeks	Activities
1–2 (Interviews) Pre-task Planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Twenty-nine students formed six groups in which members had mixed levels of English proficiency.</li> <li>2. Interview preparation: As a pre-task for the tour-guiding task, the groups wrote outlines for interviewing on-campus international students to find out what they want to know more about regarding Taiwan.</li> </ol>
3–7 (Interviews) Pre-task in Progress	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The instructor introduced tour-guiding principles and discussed culture-related materials.</li> <li>2. The interviews: Six groups carried out their on-campus interviews to collect information.</li> <li>3. Data collected from the interviews: Issues related to Taiwan (including but not limited to customs, beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, traditions, food and drink, arts, ideological beliefs that influence the behaviors of Taiwanese people, religious traditions, practices, geographical or historic features concerning the Taiwanese environment) were identified and categorized.</li> </ol>
8–10 (Tour-guiding) Main-task planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Based on the findings from the interviews, the class organized specific themes, and each group developed culture-related topics about Taiwan, to be used in the tour-guiding main task.</li> <li>2. The instructor introduced students to learning resources for the main task (e.g., <i>Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus of Modern Chinese</i> for translating Chinese information into English and for local or cultural terminology; Taiwan Panorama Magazine of Chinese/English parallel texts for in-depth descriptions; and governmental websites such as the Tourism Bureau, for travel guides</li> </ol>

Weeks	Activities
	<p>and suggestions).</p> <p>3. Six groups wrote specific topics and attached colored photos to the flashcards to be used in the communicative tasks (e.g., “bwua-bwei”: divination blocks).</p>
<p>11–12 (Tour-guiding) Main-task Planning</p>	<p>1. After receiving the instructor’s feedback, the groups revised the descriptions of the flashcards’ contents. Each card contained a 100-word description on one side and a colored photo on the other side (Figure 1).</p> <p>2. Sixty flashcards were uploaded online for the class to share and study.</p>
<p>13–15 (Tour-guiding) Main-task Planning</p>	<p>1. The instructor led the class to discuss how to present the information orally.</p> <p>2. Students in each group paired up to practice introducing culture-related topics.</p> <p>3. Each group wrote the corresponding questions as fun fact quizzes about Taiwan. The tourists should have learned these from the local tour guide.</p>
<p>16–17 (Tour-guiding) Main-task in Progress</p>	<p>1. Two international students were invited by the instructor to participate in this communicative task as tourists.</p> <p>2. Twenty-nine local students acted as a tour guide one at a time. Everyone drew one flashcard from the pile of 60 flashcards to explain the topics unique to Taiwan.</p> <p>3. The two tourists picked from the pile of flashcards (with no word description) with the pictures corresponding to what the tour guide described. The tourists interacted with the local tour guide.</p> <p>4. All their conversations and interactions were video recorded.</p>
<p>18 Post-task Analysis (Video- watching &amp; Reflection- writing)</p>	<p>1. The student tour guides viewed the video recordings and wrote reflective notes.</p> <p>2. The two tourists wrote fun quizzes.</p> <p>3. The two raters wrote comments and scored the performances.</p>

After conducting the interviews, the groups organized the topics that the interviewees mentioned they would like to know more about regarding Taiwan. Together with the instructor, the class categorized the collected topics. Six major themes were uncovered from the pre-task interviews: (1) landscape, history, and people; (2) religious activities; (3) festivals and holidays; (4) customs and folk practices; (5) culinary delights; and (6) social and entertainment trends. Each group was assigned one of the above-mentioned six themes to make flashcards for the communicative task. Finally, each group made 10 flashcards based on their designated themes. Combining their efforts, 60 culture-related topics were written on the flashcards. On one side of each flashcard, a colored picture that demonstrated a unique feature of Taiwan was displayed, while on the other side, a 100-word description was written to explain this specific topic. An example is “100 peaks of Taiwan: Táiwān bǎiyuè.” See Figure 1 for this topic, the group glued a picture of mountains on one side of the flashcard, while on the other side, they wrote about the essence of “Táiwān bǎiyuè,” which tour guides were advised to share with foreign tourists (Figure 1).

## Figure 1

Sample of a student-made flashcard for the CLT tour-guiding task:  
*Landscape of Taiwan*

	<p>100 peaks of Taiwan: Táiwān bǎiyuè 台灣百岳</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Taiwan is a particularly mountainous island, with more than 4,000 named peaks.</li><li>2. To promote high-altitude hiking in Taiwan, a list of 100 mountains is suggested for enthusiastic hikers to conquer. The highest and most prominent peak is Yushan.</li><li>3. Taiwan is an ideal place for outdoor adventures, given its great natural landscape such as towering peaks, rushing waterfalls, and pristine national parks.</li><li>4. On the list are 69 peaks located in the Central Mountain Range, the largest of Taiwan's five principal mountain ranges.</li></ol>
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Picture source: Taiwan Tourism Bureau

After reviewing the contents of the students' flashcards, on weeks 11 and 12, the instructor provided feedback on how to prioritize the key points on the chosen topics. For accuracy, things such as grammatical errors were pointed out to make the content more presentable. The groups recomposed the descriptions to clarify the content. After revision, each group uploaded their flashcards onto the

course management system for all the other students to see and to memorize the content for the tour-guiding task. From weeks 13 to 15, the instructor led the class to discuss how to present orally the information on the flashcards. The groups found time to write the corresponding questions for fun quizzes to be used on week 18. On weeks 16 and 17, the main task of tour-guiding was conducted. Two international students were invited by the instructor to act as tourists in the communicative task. Before the communicative task, a drawing was held. The student who acted as tour guide drew a topic from a box containing 60 topics. Twenty-nine student tour guides took turns to draw lots before they assumed the role of a tour guide; then, they conversed with the tourists about the topic drawn. After interacting with the tour guide, the international students who acted as tourists were asked to pick the correct flashcard—with only pictures and no words—from the pile of 60 cards. The tourists were allowed to ask any questions related to the topic introduced in the process. The communicative task was considered completed when the tourists picked the correct picture.

All conversations and interactions were video recorded. The international students who were involved in the communicative task rated the student tour guides based on their interactions. They commented on the student tour guides' performances according to rubric categories. On week 18, the student tour guides viewed the video recordings together, and they wrote reflective notes as a post-task to reflect upon their learning. The international students acting as tourists were asked to answer the fun facts quiz designed by the participants. For example, on the topic of "100 peaks in Taiwan," as demonstrated in the example, the corresponding question was: Please choose the incorrect description of Taiwan: (A) Taiwan baiyue originally was a list made for avid hikers; (B) The largest mountain range in Taiwan is the Central Mountain range; (C) Taiwan has mostly gentle sloping plains; it is not truly mountainous; (D) For nature lovers, Taiwan is a dream destination. This question focuses on Taiwan's geographical features. The correct answer is (C).

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

### ***Video Recordings of the Tour-guiding Task***

An individual participant took approximately three to five minutes to finish his/her tour-guiding communicative task. The data were recorded and transcribed verbatim. To address the interactional features that characterize higher- and lower-scoring students' performance, the two international students who acted as tourists were assigned the responsibility of rating the tour-guiding performances.

### ***International Students Acting as Tourists***

The two international students were both 20 years old and registered in the program of international business at the same university. One was from Canada and the other from the United States; one was male and the other was female. At the time of the study, they had been in Taiwan for 10 and 11 months, respectively, and English was their native language. The female, a second-generation Sri Lankan, lived in Canada, and the male student, a third generation Indonesian, spoke only English.

In the communicative task, the two international students, acting as foreign tourists, took turns interacting with the student tour guides. For each tour-guiding task, there was a pre-assigned main speaker who was responsible for the initial conversation exchanges, and the other speaker was allowed to join the ongoing conversation when it was deemed socially acceptable to interrupt.

### ***International Students as Raters***

After the class, the two international students rated the student tour guides' performances. Before serving as raters, these international students had experienced assisting the researcher in the evaluation of students' oral presentation in other speaking classes. According to the student tour guides, these two raters provided fair grading and constructive feedback. Because these two international

students were also inbound tourists, the local students' interaction with them mimicked authentic conversational exchanges with international tourists.

Since tour guides also serve as social catalysts or mediators within the tour guide experience for inbound tourists, the feedback from real foreigners might provide perspectives that could go unnoticed by the local instructors from Taiwan when writing comments in grading. These two international raters watched the videos with deliberation to assess the performances, award scores, and write comments for the student tour guides. They were instructed to think back about the interactions in the communicative task and determine whether the student tour guide was clear and communicated successfully as if it were a real-life tourist–tour guide communication.

### ***Scoring Rubric***

The scoring rubric was taken from Youn (2020), *Rating Criteria for Role-Play with a Professor*. This rubric was designed to assess L2 learners' way of communicating to request a professor's recommendation letter. Youn's task-based assessment of conversation adopted analytic scoring schemes. The raters in the present study used this rubric, scored the performances analytically, and commented on each individual student tour guide's strengths or weaknesses according to the rubric's five categorical dimensions. The raters could provide one or more comment for every student tour guide. On the rubric, the researcher kept Youn's (2020) descriptors, but the examples originally given were revised by two university instructors because Youn's task was set for a different scenario. For instance, under the categorical dimension of sensitivity to the situation, the following observations were mentioned in Youn's: "not acknowledge a short letter due, insist turning in the letter on time, lack of explanations for refusal," and these do not apply in tourism scenarios. Therefore, the examples for the current study were rewritten as follows: "not understand the requests from tourists, continue with irrelevant information, and lack of explanations on an issue." After scoring, the raters provided comments according to the five categorical dimensions of content delivery, language use, sensitivity to the situation, engagement through interactions, and turn organization.

On each of the five categorical dimensions from Youn (2020), the scales were divided into 3 bands from 1 to 3, with 1 being the lowest

and 3, the highest. Here, the separate scores on these five categorical dimensions were added to convert to a final scaled score. The final scores in this study (on a scale of 5 to 15), were the average of the scores from the two raters. The final scaled scores were used to identify higher- and lower-scoring groups.

### ***Reflective Notes and Raters' Comments***

To answer the first research question about the interactional features that characterize the communicative competence of higher- and lower-scoring students, raters' comments were collected, and the frequency counts under each category of the scaled rubric were used to determine such features. The reflective notes written by the 29 students were also collected at the end of the semester to answer the second research question. These were introspective notes on what was learned and what can be improved. The students were told to use the language that they felt most comfortable with to write their notes. To analyze the perceived benefits and challenges, thematic analysis was applied (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To answer the second research question, the participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences throughout the semester, with prompting questions such as "In preparation for this communicative task, what effort did you make?;" "What challenges did you face?;" "What did you learn?;" and "What competency do you think you have developed to accomplish these tasks?"

The researcher went through all the data repeatedly to identify and encode patterns of meanings during the primary qualitative research, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), for themes in reflective notes. After categorizing the codes, the researcher organized them into potential themes deemed important in the depiction of the phenomenon under study (Daly et al., 1997). Subsequently, the researcher re-read the potential themes to provide names that capture the essence of the selective data before interpreting the content and drawing conclusions. For rater comments, the five predetermined categories from the rubric were adopted. Under each categorical dimension, the researcher identified units of meaning, labeled them with codes, and organized them into themes (Tables 2 and 3). An assistant, who was a PhD student working on a doctoral research in humanities, coded 20% of the data from both reflective notes and rater comments. Before starting the coding, the assistant discussed with the researcher the scheme based on the sample data sets, during which



coding disagreements were addressed before the assistant deployed the coding scheme on the full set of data. Several rounds of discussions were conducted and disagreements were resolved. In the end, the means of the inter-coder reliability among different sets of data reached 0.85 for the reflective notes and 0.91 for the rater comments.

## RESULTS

RQ (1): What are the interactional features that characterize higher- and lower-scoring students' communicative competence in the CLT tour-guiding task?

The spoken features are first reported based on a careful analysis of written comments and remarks made by the two raters. The transcription from the conversation analysis is also provided to show more details of language-in-use that the participants themselves drew upon in the tour guide–tourists interaction task. The task's reliability was estimated by assessing the two raters' agreement. Cohen's Kappa inter-rater agreement was employed for inter-rater reliability. The coefficients for the five rating categories were as follows: content delivery, 0.82; language use, 0.81; sensitivity to the situation, 0.83; engagement through interactions, 0.86; and turn organization, 0.79.

The rubric used 3-point scales and had five categorical dimensions and 15 total points. The top 15 (bottom 14) higher (lower)-scoring students had an average of 12.60 (5.96) points. Table 2 shows the major themes (according to the predetermined five categorical dimensions) that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the comments for those who scored higher. Table 2 provides a description written by the raters and the frequency of mentions. The themes pertaining to a specific spoken feature were identified as demonstrating a relatively more successful way of communicating. In terms of content delivery, the raters perceived that a good conversation should include new information ( $N=12$ , 41%) and more content ( $N=8$ , 27%). In terms of language use, attention should be given to expressivity ( $N=12$ , 41%) and varied sentence structure ( $N=5$ , 17%). In terms of sensitivity to the situation, the participants should clarify and elaborate on cultural issues when needed ( $N=6$ , 21%). Three aspects were included in engagement—actions of attentive engagement ( $N=10$ , 34%), acknowledgements and confirmations

( $N=7$ , 24%), and responsiveness ( $N=5$ , 17%). For in-turn organization, breaks between sentences ( $N=5$ , 17%), frequent use of discourse markers to make transitions clear ( $N=5$ , 6%), and smooth speed and rhythm ( $N=2$ , 6%) were mentioned.

**Table 2**

*Themes identified from the Raters' comments on the higher-scoring students*

Rubric Category	Theme	Rater's Description (General Statement)	Frequency
Content delivery	New information	Learned a lot of new things about Taiwan	12
	Longer content	A long chat with lots of fun facts	8
Language use	Expressivity	The tour guide accessed correct words quickly and correctly, and used a wide range of expressions to describe Taiwan	12
	Varied sentence structure	Talked with different sentence patterns	6
Sensitivity to the situation	Clarify and elaborate on the cultural issues when needed	Provided a lot of details to make it interesting	6

Rubric Category	Theme	Rater's Description (General Statement)	Frequency
	(e.g., able to detect contexts necessary for additional interpretation)		
Engagement through interactions	Actions of attentive engagement (e.g., offering visiting or travel tips)	Passionate introduction to local food	10
	Acknowledgement and confirmation	Used active responses such as "I didn't know your country is like that"	7
	Responsiveness (e.g., successfully achieved a shared understanding)	Interesting exchange of information between cultures	5
Turn organization	Breaks between sentences	Used pauses to shift between topics	5
	Frequent use of discourse markers to make transitions clear	Used "okay, you know, wait" to indicate the direction of speech	5
	Smooth speed and rhythm	Near-native speaking fluency	2

**Table 3**

*Themes identified from the Raters' comments on the lower-scoring students*

Rubric Category	Theme	Rater's Description (General Statement)	Frequency
Content delivery	Minimal information	Insufficient information on the topic	12
Language use	Limited sentence structure	Choppy sentences	8
	Poor pronunciation and articulation	Wrong stressed/unstressed syllables	8
	Inaccurate linguistic expressions that obscured the meaning	Irrelevant/incorrect words used	8
Sensitivity to the situation	Cannot properly respond to the speaker's request	Showed less interest in the conversation, lacking conversational responses	3
Engagement through interactions	Lack of body language	Avoided eye contact, no signs of interest	5
	Noticeable absence of coherence in responses	The responses did not seem quite right. Did not answer the questions	4
Turn organization	Interruption	Waited for a long time for the next sentence	3
	Not enough pauses	Hurried through the speech	3

Table 3 shows the major themes that arose from the analysis of the performance of 14 participants who garnered the bottom scores. In this Table, a disfluent conversation was indicated by a lack of content information ( $N=12$ , 41%), fragmented sentences ( $N=8$ , 28%), poor pronunciation and articulation ( $N=8$ , 28%), inaccurate linguistic expressions ( $N=8$ , 28%), failure to respond to the speaker's requests ( $N=3$ , 10%); lack of body language ( $N=5$ , 17%), noticeable absence of coherence in responses ( $N=4$ , 14%), interruption ( $N=3$ , 10%), and not enough pauses ( $N=3$ , 10%).

Extract 1 shows an example of an interaction in which Student 2 (S2) received a high score. The transcription system developed by Atkinson and Heritage (1984) was adopted to illustrate the conversations. In extract 1, to carry out his duties efficiently and successfully as a tour guide, S2 exercised politeness and speaking skills to ensure that a smooth and pleasant relationship was established. He observed the tourists' reactions, as shown in the new sentences that were started only when a clear signal, such as nodding by his listener, was received (turns 4, 7, 8, and 10). In addition, the gestures of pretending to play a musical instrument (turn 6) seemed to close the gap between him and the tour guide. Moreover, the pauses from the student tour guide gave an indication of a more relaxed and natural behavior (turns 1, 3, 6, 9, 11, and 15). As he paused and said, "wait a second," the gesture provided an opportunity for the listener to participate in the conversation. Positive comments were given by the raters: "abundant information (content delivery); good eye contact (engagement through interactions); good organization, and nice shifts of topics (turn organization)." The other wrote: "showed genuine interest in sharing Taiwanese culture with me (engagement through interactions)." Clearly, a good rapport was established.

**Extract 1. Glove Puppetry (Bù Dài Xi)**

1 *Student 2*: ehm, I want to introduce to you a kind of(.) performance and it is a traditional performance in Taiwan and. (.) Some last-generation Taiwanese grew up with it. Maybe watched it on TV, too, I think.

Originally from Fujian in China in the 17 century, and then it came to Taiwan.

2 *Tourist 1*: ri:ght.

3 *Student 2*: er. (.)It came to Taiwan with some IMMIGRANTS because they need some form of entertainment

- 4 *Tourist 1:* =nodding  
5 *Student 2:* It is not really getting popular in Fujian but gets more popular here in TAIWAN. hhh.  
6 *Student 2:* Traditionally, it has elements (of...) er (...) stages, we played it with some kind of musical instrument—like drums, gongs ((pretending to hit a gong)), like that. Most of the time, has lots of oral conversation or [verbal dialogues. With interesting Taiwanese stories to promote justice, brotherhood, our values.  
7 *Tourist 1:* [Right.  
8 *Tourist 2:* = nodding  
9 *Student 2:* And there is something ↑ interesting. As you cannot see a real person on stage, they will put some dolls on their hand and, at the show(.) wait a second. (0.4). If you go to a temple with (...)  
10 *Tourist 1:* ((nodding ))We are in no hurry. Ha  
11 *Student 2:* I am going to (...)  
12 *Tourist 1:* Is it the [puppet [((points at the flashcard))  
13 *Student 2:* [Oh,  
14 *Student 2:* right. But ↑ I can [finish  
15 *Tourist 1:* [go ahead  
16 *Student 2* You go to a temple with some festival; you will see the puppet show. From what I read, the China government had lots of limits for the show, and it is not interested in preserving it. But during the occupation of Japanese (0.3). 'Cuz before 1911, Taiwan was occupied by Japan, eh... at that time. And it gradually become a popular entertainment in Taiwan, for common people, and for children.  
17 *Tourist 2:* ((nodding )) Okay.  
18 *Student2:* All right; that's it. Thank you, if you want to ask me more, I will stay behind.

### **Extract 2. One-year-old Catch (Zhuā Zhōu )**

Extract 2 is part of a conversational transcript of S16 who delivered the talk appropriately. From turn 10 onward, tourist 2 found the topic interesting and joined the conversation. The topic of a one-year-old-catch, a baby's first birthday custom, was found to be fascinating. The tourists from different backgrounds also shared their customs (turn 13) with laughter (turns 16 and 21). Both raters gave the tour guide a high score. The comments read, "I like the way she

responded. She shared my feelings” (sensitivity to the situation). The other rater wrote, “Fun facts, good English command” (language use).

- 9 *Student 16*: On our first birthday, ehm, Taiwanese parents will put items on the floor for the baby to pick from. I have seen(...) toy pianos, books, and other stuff.
- 10 *Tourist 1*: Got it, ((nodding)).
- 11 *Tourist 2*: = ((nodding))
- 12 *Student 16*: Er, it’s said that whatever they pick shows (0.2), er, it links to [the] future career.
- 13 *Tourist 1*: Can we ask, among these, what items would the baby choose from? Er, I mean, what are the things that are there for the baby? hhh, like gold? or pen? something like that? So:: when you pick up the pen, you would probably become a ↑ writer?
- 14 *Student 16*: Nodding, y[es]. That is basically what we believe, er, or, think.
- 15 *Tourist 1*: [Oh, right. We have several items [that are] similar.
- 16 *Student 16*: The picture at your hand. Yes, you have got it here. ((laughter))
- 17 *Tourist 1*: Back home in Sri Lanka, maybe when the baby is turning one year old, so we have many things put on the floor just like the picture I see in Taiwan; allow them to pick from. (...) Maybe gold, like a rock, maybe a pen, silver things like that. So gold means wealth, so (...) in the future you will be prosperous, if you take the pen, you are creative. If you pick up a ball, that means you’re athletic, like that...
- 18 *Student 16*: I see, we are doing the same thing here. (0.2) We are having pens and stuff, too. Maybe the items are different a little.
- 19 *Tourist 1*: So, maybe you put the jewelry, something you wear.
- 20 *Tourist 2*: Not good if the baby eats it.
- 21 *Student 16*: Exactly ((laughter))

### Extract 3. The Jade Emperor’s Birthday (Tiān Gōng Shēng)

The lower-scoring students had some distinctive interactional behaviors that were different enough to be considered separately as demonstrating poor interactional ability, as captured in Extract 3

regarding the topic of the Jade Emperor. The example shows that S15 lacked sufficient vocabulary; therefore, he mispronounced words and used the wrong words (turns 1 and 3). S15 also paused excessively (turn 3), used no discourse markers, and did not have enough communicative strategies to overcome the problems to achieve a shared communicative goal (turn 8). In turns 4–7, the two tourists appeared to give S15 chances to elaborate on the tradition of the birthday celebration; however, she did not pick up on their cues. She abruptly brought the conversation to an end by asking the tourists to choose the picture.

- 1 *Student 15*: It is the birthday of the Jar em—peror, so people will stay at the Jar em—peror's temple to wor—sip him. It is ninth day of (...) on the<sup>o</sup> Chinese New Year
- 2 *Tourist 2*: It is a birthday celebration?
- 3 *Student 15*: Yes.(0.3) so people will stay at (0.2) at the temple. and (...) because of Jar emperor is very note-able [noble]...is, is, he has a high TOP power.  
So to celebration (...) hhh
- 4 *Tourist 2*: Okay. [Religious birthday celebration.
- 5 *Tourist 1*: ((nodding)) [Yeah
- 6 *Tourist 2*: ((nodding)) Uhm.
- 7 *Tourist 1*: Can you tell us more?
- 8 *Student 15*: Started at seven AM↑. Yes. Can you find the picture
- 9 *Tourist 1*: ok.

#### Extract 4. Shadow Puppetry (Pi Yǐng Xi)

Extract 4 is another example demonstrating that S4 provided a very vague context (turns 1–3). He then added turn 4; however, not having enough details about the legend, *Journey to the West*, the tourists got confused (turn 7).

- 1 *Student 4*: It is usually happen in Tainan or Kaohsiung
- 2 *Student 4*: It is Taiwanese drama (...)
- 3 *Student 4*: It is art. (0.5), traditional drama. Use pu—ppet.
- 4 *Student 4*: You can see XiYouJi
- 5 *Tourist 1*: (h) um.



- 6 *Tourist 2*: (h)  
7 *Tourist 1*: (h)What is the English for↑xi↑you↑ji?  
8 *Student 4*: Uhm. I don't know(...)The money. Monkey?  
9 *Student 4*: And. (pause) use pu—ppet↑?  
10 *Tourist 1*: Ok. ((flipping through the piles of photographs))

Extracts 3 and 4 above demonstrate that these two lower-scoring students had trouble keeping the conversation going.

RQ (2): In developing students' English proficiency to become a local tour guide, what are the perceived challenges and benefits of this CLT tour-guiding task from the students' perspective?"

The second research question delves into how this communicative task might offer learning opportunities and how it might bring challenges. The students perceived several benefits as listed in Table 4. First, verbal and non-verbal communication were mentioned. Over 65% (N = 19) of them stated that they felt their oral communication ability improved. For example, S12 reported, "This semester's tasks got me thinking how to better communicate with others." Along the same line, some students even further stated that they have developed oral communication skills. S2 said, "I think by answering the questions, I learn[ed] how to express myself more clearly." Approximately 6% (N = 2) of the students mentioned that they learned to read the non-verbal signals. As S21 reported, "In face-to-face communication, it is important to read their facial expression before open[ing] my mouth."

**Table 4***Benefits of the CLT task*

Theme	Subtheme	General Statement	Frequency
Interaction	Communicate better	I managed to find ways to keep the communication going	19
	Read non-verbal signals	I watched her face closely	2
Culture	Increased cultural understanding	Cultures can impact one's understanding	16
Language use	Translation skills	We detected the language differences when translating	7
	Interpretation skills	We closed the gap between written and oral texts	7
Others	Build teamwork	Learned how to work with others	5
	Problem-solving skills	I used creativity to deal with problems	4

The second-biggest benefit mentioned by half of the participants related to culture; 55% ( $N = 16$ ) of the students believed that they were more confident in sensing cultural differences and adjusting their language to express themselves in English. S3 wrote, “It is necessary to consider the differences in cultures—how to say those things in English so others would understand and [not] feel offended.” The third benefit mentioned by the students was the improvement of their language use. Most of them (49%;  $N = 14$ ) felt that their translation and interpretation skills were enhanced. For example, S2 reported, “I spent a lot of time finding the document that describes a ghost marriage in both languages. Translating a superstition is not easy; the oral interpretation is even harder.” Moreover, 31% ( $N = 9$ ) of the students learned about Taiwanese culture, as S18 mentioned,

“We googled temples to get the information. I fell in love with our heritage.” In addition, the students learned other things such as teamwork and problem-solving skills (34%;  $N = 10$ ).

**Table 5**

*Challenges of the CLT task*

Theme	Subtheme	General Statement	Frequency
Language use	Insufficient lexical knowledge or mispronunciation	I failed to find equivalences between the two languages	21
Interaction	Felt uneasy to get involved	I don't know how to talk to him, our dialogue seems broken	12
	Had trouble responding to tourists	I didn't know how to defend our point	5
	Could not read between the lines	I missed the opportunity to clarify my point	5
Strategy use	Unable to ask what was said or unsaid	I didn't know how to ask him to repeat	5
	Failed to make themselves understood	I didn't know how to explain this in English	3
Others	Not enough time or effort put into the preparation	So much effort is required, so little time	14

The students also wrote about the challenges they encountered while participating in the CLT task (see Table 5). Several themes emerged. In language use, 79% ( $N = 21$ ) of them mentioned the difficulties in translation. S3 wrote, “I was responsible for translating the idiom “married to a chicken, follow the chicken (jià jī suí jī).” If

we just interpret it literally, it is not hard, but, if you explain the agricultural context in Taiwan, it is super hard.” In the interaction, 41% ( $N = 12$ ) of the students claimed that it was difficult for them to start the conversation. S16 stated, “I am a shy person by nature. I know I was supposed to show my friendliness; it was awkward.” S18 noted, “Once I started a conversation, I could not keep the conversation going; it was so hard to build a common ground.” Five students (17%) mentioned that it was not easy to answer the questions proposed by the international students. S10 mentioned that “It was weird. The foreigners did not ask any tough questions, but it was difficult for me to answer on the spot.” Five students (14%) also mentioned that considering their cultural backgrounds, it was not easy to extend the conversation. S9 stated, “I don’t have sufficient cultural background knowledge to lengthen the conversation. As I introduced and criticized our betel-nut-chewing habits in Taiwan, I wondered if it was culturally appropriate to criticize American baseball players who chew tobacco on the bench, too?” In terms of strategy use, 17% ( $N = 5$ ) of them stated that they could not pick up subtle indications. S19 wrote, “There is a long silence when I finished my introduction. They seemed to want me to say things.” Lower-scoring students tended to have more difficulties in breaking the silence after they finished what they have prepared to say. Three students (10%) mentioned that when the foreigners did not understand their points, they struggled. S1 noted, “I think they wanted me to say more, but I only knew one way to say it.” Other challenges included lack of time or insufficient effort (48%;  $N = 14$ ).

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of the present study uncovered the spoken features of more successful and less successful student tour guides in terms of intercultural communication in a tour-guiding task introducing Taiwan. The analysis showed that the more successful student tour guides were able to express themselves more spontaneously and more precisely for professional purposes as a tour guide. Moreover, some student tour guides were able to interact fluently without excessive or insufficient pauses between sentences, thus putting less strain on the native-English speakers. These spoken features support the findings of previous studies on the development of learner’s interactional

abilities, as more proficient EFL speakers were able to manage the interactions, such as managing turn-taking, signaling boundaries with pauses, clarifying meanings by utilizing a variety of interactional resources including verbal and nonverbal cues (Taguchi & Kim, 2018, Youn, 2019, 2020). Therefore, pedagogically, a teacher can explicitly emphasize how to use different interactional resources such as organizing turns naturally and the appropriate use of pauses and discourse markers.

Although the results showed that less successful students failed to demonstrate communicative competencies, in the present study, the struggling participants' reflective notes indicated that they were aware of their own predicament, and some even pinpointed the shortcomings in this intercultural communication task through introspection. These results showed that by observing how the higher-scoring students performed in the task, the lower-scoring students found a direction on how to improve themselves and reflected upon what can be done. Consequently, their speaking competence may continue on the right path alongside their future practice of communicative tasks. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Albino, 2017; Beccia, 2022; Bhandari, 2020), the present study found that a communicative teaching approach specific to the task at hand is beneficial for developing speaking and listening skills. The reflective notes in this study further demonstrated that the participants enhanced their linguistic knowledge and cultural knowledge, thereby supporting the findings of Erazo et al. (2019) and aligning with those of Liu (2021) and Fujita et al. (2017), as these studies emphasize the importance of enriching students' intercultural experiences through communicative tasks.

Given that the present study was set in a simulated tour guide–tourist interactional environment that most of the university students were not familiar with, it confirmed the benefits of promoting goal-oriented English for tourism courses with a set scenario. During the process of interaction, the student tour guides understood what they need to prepare for to pursue a tourism-related career, as suggested by the work of Chang and Hsu (2010). The participants realized the need to co-construct their knowledge of speaking competently in complex tourism-related scenarios to complete the task.

## **Implications**

Teaching English for student tour guides involves teaching integrated language skills to prepare students for their future career. A complete and clear course design is beneficial to achieve this purpose. In this study, in preparation for the main task of tour-guiding, the participants conducted the pre-task interview with international students. To prepare for this interview, the participants conducted research on Taiwan and foreign countries and learned from this experience. Afterward, to make meaningful content on the flashcards, the students explored local customs and Taiwanese traditions and extensively read bilingual materials to differentiate the finer shades of meanings of words when describing Taiwanese culture. In the main task of tour-guiding, they practiced tackling cultural issues orally. This type of course design allowed students to practice language skills step by step in an integrated manner.

The present study also indicated that the participants' challenges mainly came from three aspects: difficulties in using the English language, trouble with interacting with tourists, and failing to use conversational strategies. In this study, the groups were formed based on mixed abilities; however, it might be better to encourage the students to collaborate more to overcome some of the language difficulties. Moreover, empirical studies (e.g., Pekarek, 2019) have suggested that low-level performers should be given more support if the tasks could not be tiered according to content or language ability, because low-level performers have to put in more effort to achieve interactional competence and learn communication strategies (Newton & Nation, 2021, Nguyen, 2019).

In the actual interactions with the student tourists, the simulated conversational events prompted learners to reflect on their own communicative ability and social skills. The preparation for the CLT task and the engagement during the CLT task increased not only their lexical knowledge in two languages, but also their fluency and accuracy in expressing cultural concepts in English. They made a lot of comparisons, finding similarities and differences between local and foreign traditions. These experiences enriched their intracultural understanding and changed the student tour guides from passive learners to active knowledge seekers. In the end, some student tour guides were able to deal with the difficulties that arose while responding to foreign tourists and produced coherent introduction of cultural topics that interested the tourists.

Interestingly, this study also found a bidirectional flow of intercultural and communicative competence—not only for the local Taiwanese student tour guides, but also for the international students who acted as tourists. Both the participants and the tourists appreciated the component of meeting in class and exchanging information, as the experiences broadened their view of cross-cultural communication and helped the Taiwanese students become effective cultural ambassadors.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

The researcher attempted to provide objective learning outcomes by evaluating the simulated tour-guiding tasks and by providing the subjective viewpoints from students' reflective notes to present evidence of their learning development. The findings of this study are encouraging—along with the language skills, these students developed intercultural awareness as they carried out the CLT tasks. Moreover, the proposed interactional CLT tasks may be used as a diagnostic tool. Because the student tour guides' task-performance process was recorded, the researcher was able to review how each student interacted with the tourists to complete the task and identify what they could improve to achieve communication competency. The rubrics from the raters also revealed how the tourists evaluated the performance of the student tour guides in the actual interaction, with reference to the scales and criteria for the different dimensions.

However, there are some limitations to the analysis of the results. First, although great care was taken to select the raters for this experiment, there is a high chance that these international students may not be as experienced as the trained language instructors. In this study, the instructor scores for the tour-guiding task were eliminated to avoid subjective judgment. The instructor was from the English department and had taught some of the English major participants for years; therefore, because of her prior knowledge of the participants' proficiency levels and speaking performance, the instructor might have misjudged their performances due to her familiarity with them. To improve the design of the experiment in the future, more raters, preferably outside language instructors, should be invited to assign scores that could provide a more comprehensive picture of interactions in the tourism industry.

Second, as the data were collected from a single class, the analysis is based on a relatively small sample size. Therefore, the findings of this study must be viewed with some caution. The development of communicative competence and intercultural awareness should be interpreted carefully. It was evident in the present study that the use of CLT tasks relevant to the students' future careers and aspirations has provided positive outcomes. This suggests that this teaching approach can yield knowledge that is relevant to the calibration of the material design, syllabi, and evaluations in tourism English education.



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**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of the *Taiwan Journal of TESOL* for their constructive comments to help improve earlier versions of this paper.

This study was partially supported by a grant from the MOE teaching practice research program, Taiwan (PGE1090794).

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**PUBLISHING RECORD**

Manuscript received: August 17, 2022; Revision received: December 6, 2022; Manuscript accepted: December 15, 2022.