

Learning English outside the classroom: Case study of tuk-tuk drivers in Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya¹

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This study was an investigation of the educational needs of tuk-tuk drivers when using English to communicate with tourists in Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya, an old capital of Thailand. The samples included 30 tuk-tuk drivers at five famous places where tourists require tuk-tuk drivers' services in Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya, for example at the train station, the bus station, a bus stop in front of the Ayutthaya district office, Hua-Ror and the Chao-Phrom market. Six participants were drawn from each place. Simple random sampling was used to select the participants. The instrument was an interview questionnaire constructed by the researchers. The data were analyzed by frequency, percentage and mean. The problem conditions were analyzed in terms of contrast and similarity. Our study has presented the problems and suggested ways to develop English competency to meet the needs of tuk-tuk drivers in order to improve the tourism industry and assist the tuk-tuk drivers themselves who struggle to earn their lives as poor and low educated citizens. This study has supported UNESCO and Thailand's National Education Act 1999, in the pursuit of lifelong learning for all. Non-formal and Informal Education have been promoted as a way for education to meet the needs of tuk-tuk drivers. It has emphasized the necessary cooperation between government educational institutions and local communities if local people are to benefit from meaningful educational opportunities. Such endeavors will assist the development of the tuk-tuk drivers' English communication competency, so necessary in the tourism industry in Thailand.

English language learning, Thailand, case-study

BACKGROUND

In this world of globalization in economics, politics and education, countries co-operate and seek ways to develop peace and understanding, and education is a means to these goals. UNESCO (2002: p.1) has promoted 'Lifelong learning for all'. It also emphasizes the equality of people in access to higher education with the merit of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights which was accepted by all participating nations including Thailand. According to UNESCO, 'no discrimination can be accepted in granting access to higher education on the grounds of race, gender, language, religion or economic, cultural or social distinctions, or physical disabilities'; together with the core missions of higher education: 'to educate, to train, to undertake research and to provide services to the community'. Moreover, the international community document (UNESCO, 2002: p.1) states clearly that 'higher education institutions must preserve their critical

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functions in the interest of democracy'. The search for quality is also stressed in a policy based on merit. But 'quality must be linked in a given context to relevance and to the solution of problems in the community'.

To support UNESCO's policy, Thailand has approved her National Education Act 1999 which promotes 'lifelong learning for all'. The Act stresses equality in education for all Thai people either in school or beyond school, but especially people in the world of work. A knowledge based society is also promoted in the Act. Knowledge can be acquired in many forms including formal learning (in educational institutions), non-formal (learning outside the educational institutions), and informal education (learning by oneself through media or educational resources) (Thailand National Education Act of 1999: p. 7) All knowledge aims to allow people to develop their careers and professions.

Due to the impact of economic globalization, the Thailand government has displayed a wide vision in opening up free trade in services. They have realized the importance of the tourism industry (Annual Report 2001, p. 21), and much is done to encourage the foreign tourist economy. With the 5 year Corporate Plan (2002-2006), the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) aims at 'being a center of excellence in promoting and developing sustainable tourism, upholding the Thai dignity, and creating equilibrium of economy, society and environment' with a mission of 'push' for the policy and a master plan on the development and promotion of tourism, including coordinating, managing and translating the policy and plan into actions of TAT and sharing it with other concerned government and private agencies (TAT, 2002: p.17). Moreover, the policy aims to support the employment of more Thai manpower in the industry.

Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya (Ayutthaya) is a province in Thailand which provides economic benefits in the tourism industry. It was once a capital of Thailand for 417 years and ruled by 33 kings. After being attacked by the Burmese (people of Myanmar) in 1767, it was burnt down, and has been left in ruins. Notwithstanding, Ayutthaya still sustains a beauty with a long, interesting history. In addition, Eco Tourism has been promoted in the area, and many foreign tourists visit Ayutthaya every year (TAT annual report, 2001: p. 110).

The tuk-tuk (a kind of vehicle used for transporting people and tourists in Ayutthaya) and tuk-tuk drivers are very important for the Ayutthaya tourism industry. They play a large part in welcoming foreign tourists. However, they experience problems because of their lack of fluency in English caused by extreme poverty that denied them access to formal education. As a consequence, they speak English well below the vocational proficiency level. Sometimes cultural misunderstandings occur due to the tuk-tuk drivers' inability to explain the issues in hand to the foreigners. Some tuk-tuk drivers believe that with improved English competency, they would live their lives and earn a living, more comfortably.

Furthermore, many tuk-tuk drivers have capacity and talent, and the reason they have only primary education is not that they don't have the 'brains', but rather because they did not have the opportunity. If appropriate means can be found to help this vast number of people find ways to improve their productivity and utilize all the talent that they have, then their contribution to the future development of the country will far outweigh the investment cost required.

Additionally, informal education plays a great role in this study. It enables learners to learn by themselves in accordance with their interests, potentialities, readiness and opportunities available from persons, society, environment, media, or other sources of knowledge. The teaching and learning process should be aimed at allowing learners to develop at their own pace and to the best of their abilities. For this reason, tuk-tuk drivers should have access to the knowledge and skills needed in pursuing their career, particularly the knowledge and skills in using a foreign language to communicate with their customers. Non-formal and/or informal educational approaches are most appropriate for them. Therefore, ARU and NSU in their role as local universities ought to

respond to the national education policies by providing opportunities for poor and limitedly educated people like the tuk-tuk drivers to develop themselves. The ARU (Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya Rajabhat University) and NSU (Nakhon Sawan Rajabhat University) should be resources for learning and promoting both community and individual development.

The findings of this study presented the problems that tuk-tuk drivers encounter when they use English with foreign tourists, and provide examples of problem solving strategies they might employ to compensate. The findings will also offer recommendations to the ARU and the NSU, suggesting an appropriate curriculum for the drivers and identifying the benefits. Successful outcomes will come to the tourism industry and Thailand's economic development as a whole.

Informal Education

Culminating in 'learning to be' (The Faure Report, UNESCO 1972), lifelong learning was said to be the master concept that forms educational systems (UNESCO 1972) with the emerging of three types of learning systems: formal education, non-formal and informal education.

Coombs, Prosser and Ahmed (1974: p.2) define informal education as 'the truly lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in his or her environment – from family and neighbors, from work and play, from the market place, the library and the mass media'. Comparing the definition of Thailand's National Education Act with that provided by Coombs et al, there would be little difference in the points highlighted.

The differences identified between formal education, non-formal and informal education involve matters of administration, methods, curricula, duration, assessment, and evaluation. We can conclude from all the definitions we read that formal education links with schools, educational, and training institutions; non-formal with individual groups of learners and organizations; and informal with learners learning by themselves from family, friends, society, work colleagues, environment, media or sources of knowledge. There may be some overlap between non-formal and informal education as according to Fordham (1993) people often shape educational events as part of their everyday experience.

Like all adult learners, tuk-tuk drivers have different learning styles. McKay and Tom (1999) state that some adults feel comfortable when learning by watching and listening, while others learn by taking down notes and analyzing rules. Their preferences for learning may occur through a different sense of modalities such as tasting, smelling, hearing, touching, and seeing. In McKay's and Tom's opinion, adults are required to neither attend classes nor take any assessment. They have motivation within them and realize that what they are learning comes from their interest and their realization of the value of the things learned. Therefore their motivation can be enhanced by providing interesting activities, and making clear the value of what is being taught. The lessons should be relevant to their goals.

Second Language Acquisition

Acquiring a second language does not only concern fluency in communication, but also requires cultural understanding. For instance, if you would like to hire a tuk-tuk, and a tuk-tuk driver unintentionally addresses you impolitely, you may be angry and not want to use his service. Therefore, cultural understanding and language competency should go hand-in-hand.

Apart from the ability to communicate in a foreign language, Kramsch (1996: p.1) declares that 'to understand and be understood by others requires the ability to recognize cultural differences. For example, polite behavior in one language may not be the social equivalent in another language'. According to Kramsch's ideas, the acquisition of a language needs to build a cultural politeness. Therefore the contextual syllabus should be deliberate through which tuk-tuk drivers

can progressively acquire the ability to choose spoken discourse determined by personal relationships, social situations, and cultural presuppositions. Since tuk-tuk drivers play host to the tourists who come to Ayutthaya, their politeness and their English fluency will attract the tourists and this, in turn, will help develop Ayutthaya's tourism industry as well as Thailand's tourism industry.

Additionally, instructors at ARU have to be effective. McKay and Tom (1999) suggest that instructors need to inform their teaching by collecting information about their students' first language knowledge, knowledge of the world, previous learning experience, learning styles and preferences, personalities and personal circumstances, as well as their second language skills and goals. These considerations will be essential in developing an effective curriculum for tuk-tuk drivers.

METHOD

This study is a qualitative research piece. The population of this study comprises 30 tuk-tuk drivers at five famous places where foreign tourists require tuk-tuk services in Ayutthaya: the train station, the bus station, a bus stop in front of Ayutthaya district office, Hua-Ror and Chao-Phrom market. The information that was sought was divided into two categories: 1) personal information: gender, age, status, years in job, social class, income per month and education levels, 2) Information related to working and using English in each macro skill area: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

For the questionnaire's validity and reliability, the first draft of the interview questionnaire was prepared in consultation with graduate professors. The draft was then submitted to the research adviser for comments and suggestions. The improved draft was presented to a committee for further comments and suggestions. This instrument was pre-tested with a group of tuk-tuk drivers, similar in stature to those who were to be respondents, but who did not take part in the study itself. Improvements were possible as a result of this pilot study. Informal interviews were also conducted and were helpful as a basis for revision of some of the items in the questionnaire.

After that, the subjects were interviewed and tape-recorded. Six tuk-tuk drivers were drawn from each place by simple random sampling. That is, we approached different drivers at random who were waiting for tourists when we arrived. On a number of occasions some of the tuk-tuk drivers we had initially interviewed recommended we speak to specific drivers who they believed were quite good at English. In this way, our sample group became quite diverse. Each of the tuk-tuk drivers had an equal chance of being selected in the first instance. However, once the interviewing began at each site, specific drivers were nominated from within the group. Before the interview, the researchers asked each tuk-tuk driver's permission, together with providing them with information about the interview. Each tuk-tuk driver was given 50 baht as compensation for the valuable working time he/she would lose through their participation in the study. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes. Consequently, six tuk-tuk drivers were interviewed in a day, and the researchers took five days to interview all the tuk-tuk subjects.

The interview was in the form of a questionnaire. Tuk-tuk drivers were interviewed in Thai and then the questionnaires and the answers were translated into English. For personal profile data, all items were given equal importance. This included details of gender, age, education level, economic and social status, and others. All of the data were used in the analysis of the study and included the written answers and comments from the respondents.

We, the researchers, interviewed all the subjects ourselves. The environment was well arranged with a good atmosphere. The subjects were interviewed in a friendly manner without making them feel stressed. The interviewees were free to express their points of view and consequently found the interviews were enjoyable. They were free to express their concerns and withdraw from

the interview at any stage if they no longer wished to participate. No-one took up this option. However, if they had chosen to withdraw, new participants would have been chosen through the same random process used for the initial group of tuk-tuk drivers.

During the interviews, the data were also written down. The researchers did not guide the interviewees directly or indirectly for answers during the interviews, leaving the interviewees free to answer truthfully. This approach lessened the likelihood of researcher bias. When gathering the data, the researchers took care to both tape record and write the information obtained in the interviews. This was an additional way to ensure reliability and enable accurate interpretation during analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data were collected and those parts related to English proficiency were analyzed according to Hall's rubric (2002). Hall's rubric is based on the work of Celce-Murcia et al (1995). It is a model for measuring communicative competency, entitled; "Rubric for Evaluating Student Performance in Situated and Transformed Practice Activities". A copy of the rubric can be found in Table 1. Those parts of the data that were related to the strategies the tuk-tuk drivers employed to manage any lack of English language proficiency and their suggestions for how ARU and NSU could assist them were coded according to themes.

Table 1: Rubric for evaluating student performance in situated activities

Novice	Intermediate	Competent	Distinguished	Expert
Rubric 1 Skills for Discourse Competence				
Displays a limited understanding of the gist of the interaction. Has difficulty making a coherent contribution.	Has difficulty understanding selecting and arranging utterances to achieve a coherent interaction. Can sustain the interaction only with help.	Is able to sustain interaction through the appropriate interpretation, selection, and sequencing of utterances, although may occasionally need some help, especially if the interaction moves away from the expected or conventional means associated with the activity.	Has a clear understanding of the activity and is able to initiate and sustain the interaction through the appropriate interpretation, selection, and sequencing of utterances until the task or activity is completed.	Can understand and use a variety of linguistic resources to create and sustain a cohesive, coherent interaction. Can lead other, less expert interlocutors in sustaining a coherent interaction, providing assistance where needed.
Rubric 2 Skills for Linguistic Competence				
Displays limited understanding of, and ability to use accurately, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and prosodic knowledge and skills associated with the interaction.	Displays understanding of, and can use some, basic vocabulary and grammar, but it is generally not enough to sustain the interaction beyond a fairly basic level. Relies heavily on nonverbal gestures to communicate. Has difficulty pronouncing words and using appropriate international patterns.	Displays understanding of, and can use the, conventional vocabulary and grammatical structures associated with the activity. Pronunciation and international patterns are adequate, and thus do not impede communication.	Can understand, use, and elaborate on conventional vocabulary and grammatical structures. Pronunciation and international patterns are appropriate and accurate.	Understanding and use of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and intonation patterns are precise. Displays understanding of, and can use a variety of, grammatical structures and vocabulary words to construct similar meaning utterances.

Source: Hall's Rubric (2002 : 156-7), based on Celce – Murcia et al (1999)

RESULTS

Analysis of Personal Profile

Results from the personal profiles revealed that the average age of tuk-tuk drivers was 44.97 years old. The youngest was 29 years old and the oldest was 65. Eighty-six point seven percent were

men and only thirteen point three percent were women. All of them were married. Average time in the job was 12-13 years while the longest time in the job was 40 years and the shortest one was two years. With regard to working status, ten percent of the tuk-tuk drivers worked part time and 90 percent work full time. Their lowest monthly income was 1,500 baht and the highest monthly income was 15,000 baht. On average, they earned 6,250 baht per month. With regard to education, most of them finished only Grade 6.

Analysis of Rating-Scaled Questions

With regard to the quantitative data on the problems tuk-tuk drivers faced in using English to foreign tourists, results show that tuk-tuk drivers' listening and speaking abilities were average, but their reading and writing abilities were none.

Table 2 shows tuk-tuk drivers' points of view regarding problems in using English with foreign tourists. This shows that on the whole, tuk-tuk drivers' listening and speaking ability is average, but their reading and writing abilities are almost non-existent.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and results from questionnaire for tuk-tuk drivers' points of view towards problems in using English to foreign tourists

Lists	None %	A Little %	Average %	Much %	V.Much %
1. The number of tourists using the service each day	60.0	20.0	13.3	3.3	3.3
2. Over all, what is your ability in communicating with foreign tourists?	6.7	36.7	46.7	6.7	3.3
3. What level is your understanding of tourists' English?	3.3	36.3	53.3	3.3	3.3
4. At what level can you catch the topics or issues from your hearing?	6.7	30.0	50.0	10.0	3.3
5. At what level can you summarize the content you hear?	6.7	20.0	63.3	6.7	3.3
6. At what level can you assume the foreign tourists' requirements?	6.7	20.0	60.0	10.0	3.3
7. Can foreign tourists understand your English accent?	13.3	26.7	50.0	6.7	3.3
8. Can you make statements in English?	16.7	23.3	40.0	16.7	3.3
9. Can you make refusals in English?	13.3	20.0	46.7	20.0	0
10. Can you ask questions in English?	16.7	20.0	46.7	13.3	3.3
11. Can you make polite requests, eg 'Excuse me, would you like to go somewhere in my tuk-tuk?'	13.3	36.3	36.3	10.0	3.3
12. Can you read words in English concerning your career?	43.3	23.3	26.7	3.3	3.3
13. Can you read documents in English given by foreign tourists?	40.0	23.3	20.0	16.7	0
14. Can you read letters or passages in English?	53.3	23.3	16.7	6.7	0
15. Can you read everyday information in English, eg instructions, notices or basic English newspaper?	50.0	20.0	23.3	6.7	0
16. Can you write English in words or sentences?	46.7	26.7	23.3	3.3	0
17. Can you write English with maps and directions?	60.0	20.0	13.3	0	6.7
18. Can you write polite words or sentences?	56.7	20.0	16.7	3.3	3.3
19. Can you write English for notices, asking permission or forbidding people from not doing something?	56.7	16.7	16.7	6.7	3.3
20. Can you write English to make tourists understand you ?	56.7	20.0	13.3	6.7	3.3

Analysis of in-depth interviews and written statements

Overall, the responses given by the tuk-tuk drivers regarding the problems they faced when communicating with foreign tourists were divided into four macro skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (see Table 3).

To summarize, in listening, most tuk-tuk drivers were unable to keep pace with tourists' normal speed of communicating and problems with glottal sounds. Some of them experienced difficulty when tourists used different words from those anticipated and had difficulty comprehending. In

speaking, most of them had a lack of fluency. Some of them were unable to utter a word and experienced difficulty in communication with tourists due to their Thai accent and intonation.

With regard to reading and writing, in reading, most of them were unable to read English at all. Some of them could read only a few simple sentences in English; a few of them could read only a few words in English. For writing, most tuk-tuk drivers could not write in English. Some of them were able to write a little English. Very few could write if patterns were provided.

Table 3. Summarizing of open-ended questions displaying problems tuk-tuk drivers faced when communicating with foreign tourists

Topic	Answers	Amount
Listening	1. Experience difficulty when tourists use different words from those anticipated.	9
	2. Lack knowledge of tourist vocabulary.	1
	3. Have difficulty comprehending.	8
	4. Unable to keep pace with tourists' normal speed of communicating and problems with glottal sounds.	12
Speaking	1. Unable to utter a word.	9
	2. Have a lack of fluency.	15
	3. Experience difficulty in communication with tourists due to Thai accent and intonation.	6
Reading	1. Cannot read English at all.	16
	2. Can read a few simple sentences in English.	11
	3. Can read a few words in English.	3
Writing	1. Cannot write in English.	22
	2. Can write a little English.	6
	3. Can write if patterns are provided.	2

Descriptions of ways to solve the problems

In accordance with ways in solving the problems tuk-tuk drivers faced when communicating in English; cleverly, most of them found someone to assist with translation when problems in listening occurred (see Table 4). With problems in speaking, nearly all of them (25) used maps and pictures to provide clarification. With problems in reading, most of them sought help with reading information in tourists' brochures. In writing, most of them used maps to accompany explanations, while some others sought help with translation from peers who spoke English.

Table 4. Ways in which tuk-tuk drivers solved the problems they faced when communicating in English

Topic	Answers	Amount
Listening	1. Use maps in accompany explanations.	6
	2. Guides tourists to the sites or target places.	1
	3. Takes tourists to tourist police.	1
	4. Find someone to assist with translation.	11
	5. Have tourists repeat requests slowly.	7
	6. Use body language including gestures.	4
Speaking	1. Use maps and pictures to provide clarification.	25
	2. Unable to solve communication problems.	4
	3. Uses guidebooks as aids.	1
Reading	1. Seek help with reading information in tourist brochures.	24
	2. Use pictures to accompany explanations.	4
	3. Use mime and gestures.	2
Writing	1. Seek help with translation from peers who speak English.	11
	2. Use maps to accompany explanations.	14
	3. Walk away to avoid interaction.	4
	4. Has tourists communicate what they want in writing and then seeks help with translation from peers who speak English.	1

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING ENGLISH COMPETENCY

Tuk-tuk drivers showed ways to learn English and gave their suggestion to ARU to help them in gaining their English competency (see Table 5). Twelve of them learned English from friends or people who can speak English. Eleven of them learned English from books. Only seven people listened to lessons via tape/cassettes. With regard to ways in improving their English, most of them (20) suggested that ARU provide them with short courses. Five of them suggested providing English lessons via cassettes, and the other five people wanted to learn English via pocket books or stickers containing the specific technical language needed for tourism.

Table 5. Description of ways in which tuk-tuk drivers suggested they might have improved their English competency

Topic	Answers	Amount
Learning English	1. Read books.	11
	2. Listen to tape cassettes.	7
	3. Learn some sentences from friends or people who can speak English, then practice speaking.	12
Ways for improvement	1. Attend short courses.	20
	2. Learn English via tape cassettes.	5
	3. Learn English via pocketbooks or stickers containing the specific technical language needed for tourism.	5

In response to the research questions, all the data were collected without bias, but it must be noted that because most of the tuk-tuk drivers had limited level of education, lots of explanation had to be made in order to get responses. To clarify some responses, we needed to go back and question the tuk-tuk drivers again. The results of this study will lead to the writing of special curricula and syllabuses to help tuk-tuk drivers develop their skills in using English.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed the problems tuk-tuk drivers faced when they spoke English to foreign tourists, the ways they solved the problems, and the means they felt they needed to develop their English competency.

Firstly, the personal profiles revealed that tuk-tuk drivers had a limited level of education and existence is a struggle for them. The followings were their comments:

“I have a wife and three children, and I have to take care of them.”

“My wife has to look after the family. Only I earn for the family.”

“All my children are in schools. I have to work for their food, their clothes, and their tuitions.”

“I am low-educated. Driving tuk-tuk is the only means that I can earn for my family.”

“When I was young, my family was very poor. I could finish only Prathom 4 (Grade 4). The only career that I have been able to do is driving a tuk-tuk.”

English competency is an indicator of good income. From the interviews, the drivers who earned low incomes told us that often, they were unable to serve the foreign tourists because they could not communicate with them while those who spoke quite good English could earn much more money.

Tem commented on how he had been unable to assist the foreign tourists, and had to turn them away:

“I only say, ‘No.....no.....no’, and wave a hand to tell them to use another tuk-tuk.”

Lerd talked of Kriang who got much more income than he did,

“I can serve only Thai passengers because I can’t speak English. On the contrary, Kriang can get much more money from foreign tourists because he can speak English. I think he can’t speak English very well, but he can make the foreigners understand him.”

Lerd’s comment also indicates that even a small amount of English will assist the drivers. Sak showed his intention to improve his English,

“Well, if only I speak English, I will have a better life because I can serve foreign tourists and get more money. If your university provides an English course for us, I will try to attend it so that my English will be improved.”

Most tuk-tuk drivers had finished only the compulsory levels of education (Prathom 6) and this was due to the fact that the tuition was free to this level. Since they were born into poor families, they didn’t have any chance to continue with further education which would have required fee payment.

Lerd told us,

“I finished only Prathom 4 because my parents were very poor. They didn’t have any money to support me for my further education.”

Duan expressed her feeling about the inequality she received from her parents,

“Because I am the eldest daughter in the family, my parents told me to stop my education at only Prathom 4 so that I could help them do the housework and look after my brothers and sisters because they have to work for the family.”

Dam gave a similar account of what he confronted because of his family’s poverty,

“How could I know English? I had to stop my education and help my parents work and earn for the family.”

Secondly, the rating-scaled answers displayed the levels of their English ability which need to be developed in all the four macro skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The results show that the tuk-tuk drivers did not have high level of English listening skills. They were not able to understand the tourists’ English. Equally important, they could not even summarize the gist of what they heard. This affected the number of foreign tourists they served per day. Similarly, for speaking skills, foreign tourists could not understand them when they tried to utter English words; the words they thought were in English. They could not make words into sentences to communicate with the foreigners. Misunderstandings occurred frequently between them and the foreigners. Furthermore, they could not make polite requests, such as, “*Excuse me, would you like to go somewhere in my tuk-tuk?*” The results also show that the tuk-tuk drivers did not have competence in reading English. They could not read words involving their career. Furthermore, they were not able to read any documents such as passages, brochures, or letters that the tourists showed them. Moreover, they could not read everyday information in English, for example instructions, notices, or basic English newspapers. This became a problem if foreign tourists showed them the names of their destination such as the names of the roads, hotels, guest houses, restaurants or other interesting places. Writing was likewise a great problem for the tuk-tuk drivers. The results show they could not write English in words or sentences. They were unable to write to communicate and develop better understanding.

Thirdly, responses to the open-ended questions show that problems occurred during their English communication in all the four macro skills. Interestingly, the tuk-tuk drivers used many strategies to help solve problems when they talked to foreign tourists. This shows that they are resourceful people with a sense of agency. Their strategies have been developed to ensure that they can earn a

living in the struggle to survive. They know they can make more money if they are able to serve the tourists.

When problems in listening occurred, most of the tuk-tuk drivers looked for someone who was good at English speaking to help them. Tem revealed that:

“One of my friends can speak a little English, so I always ask him to help me.”
(OEQ3.1.2)

Sak declared his resolution:

“I served very few tourists a day, so when a problem happened; I asked a student who was around there. If I couldn’t find anyone for help, I would guess the meaning.”
(OEQ 3.1.2)

Cleverly, some of the tuk-tuk drivers showed the tourists maps of Ayutthaya’s interesting places and made a gesture to invite the tourists to point to the destination where they wanted to go to on the map.

Don told us of his resolution:

“It’s not difficult. I only showed them maps and made a gesture to ask them where they wanted to go.” (OEQ 3.1.2)

Surprisingly, Yord used an impressive visual aid to help him when he did not understand the tourist’s requirements:

“I have a set of postcards of the interesting places in Ayutthaya with pictures and English subscriptions under them. I would ask them where to go and they would point at the pictures so that I understood them by this way.” (OEQ 3.1.2)

Just as with problem resolution in listening, when the tuk-tuk drivers did not know how to speak or explain the interesting places, they used maps and brochures which contained pictures and captions under them instead of speaking. Generally, they could find the maps and the brochures freely at the tourist information centers in Ayutthaya.

Sorn revealed his strategy:

“I only said, “Where?”, open the maps and the brochures and have them point at their destination.” (OEQ 3.1.2)

However, some tuk-tuk drivers did not know how to solve their communication problems. They could not even utter any words and had to refuse the tourists rather impolitely. Tem only said,

“No, no, no. I don’t know.” (OEQ 3.1.2)

Then he would make finger language to tell the tourist to ask another tuk-tuk driver who was better at English.

In addition, reading was a major problem. Most tuk-tuk drivers said that they could read only a few words. They could not understand the meaning in a sentence or in a passage. As a result, when foreigners showed them some documents in English, they could not understand even the gist of the passage. Therefore, they solved the problem by asking another person to help with reading the passage.

Tem made a complaint about his inability to read:

“Well, sometimes they showed me something to read. I could only understand some words.” (OEQ 3.1.3)

On the contrary, Chai could only refuse when he was asked to read:

“Ah! When they offered me to read and I couldn’t. I said, ‘No.....no no’, I didn’t say anything else.” (OEQ 3.1.3)

Lastly, writing is a great problem for these tuk-tuk drivers because of their limited level of education, not only can they not write English well but they cannot write Thai, their mother tongue well either. Fortunately, it is not necessary for them to write in their career because speaking and listening skills are the most important skills requested in their job. However, severe problems always arise when they do have to write. They mainly solved the problems in two ways. Firstly, they asked other people who spoke English for help. Secondly, they used maps in accompaniment with explanations instead of writing. Most of them avoided writing because this skill was very hard for them.

Chai refused completely when we asked about his ability in writing:

“Surely, I have never written. It’s because I can’t I cannot write. I don’t memorize anything. It wastes my time, so I refuse. I always refuse. That’s the way.” (OEQ 3.1.4)

When Dao was asked to write by a foreigner, she also refused:

“I told him I can’t write. I did something else instead of writing. I made things understandable by speaking instead, ‘where will you go? What will you do?’ Sometimes, I could speak. I explained and he understood me.” (OEQ 3.1.4)

In addition, Yord also showed his inability in writing English:

“I have never thought of writing because I don’t have to write when I serve foreign tourists. I only told them to read the explanation that are provided in tourism brochures.” (OEQ 3.1.4)

Although tuk-tuk drivers are poor and generally have limited levels of formal education, they are always looking for ways to improve themselves in English. When they were asked if they had improved their English, most of them said, “Yes.” We asked them how they had improved their English. Most of them said that they had learned some sentences from friends or persons who could speak English, and then practised speaking with them.

Sak is a person who always improved himself in this way:

“Nowadays, I try to learn more English. Um from some books that I can find. If any official places can help me. That will be nice.” (OEQ 3.3.1)

Chai had never tried to improve his English, but when we interviewed him and asked him this question; he showed his interest in developing his English:

“Well! I think I will buy a book and read it. I will practise during my work. When my friend who is better at English is free, I’ll ask him about things that I don’t know in English, for example, ‘Hey! A few minutes ago, a farang (a word that some Thai people use to call foreigners) talk to me like this. What does it mean? I think that next time I can talk to them if they use that sentence again.” (OEQ 3.3.1)

Sorn, however, learned the language from his community:

“For me, I asked everyone who knows English. Sometimes, I studied from tourists, for example, ‘What does this word mean?’, and, ‘How can I use this word?’” (OEQ 3.3.1)

Finally, we asked them what help they would like to have, to help them improve their English. Most of them said that they would like to be provided with short courses. As we have pointed out their time is money; they have to work long hours for their meager existence. Therefore, any course would need to be short, but informative and effective.

Sak showed his ambition to improve his English:

“I would like to have Er How would it be? Once, I attended a course for a week, but it was too short. Er something like that, learning person to person in a small group.” (OEQ 3.3.2)

Dao also showed her need for training:

“I would likeEr a special course. The time Er one week, one day, or twice a week an hour or two hours a day.” (OEQ 3.3.2)

Cleverly, Yord stated that he would like to have some basic skills first:

“What about a basic training first because we should begin with basic skills, right?” (OEQ 3.3.2)

With regard to the time for training, most of them thought that it should be on weekdays, not on weekends, because they have to work on weekends, and that represents the peak period when tourists generally take trips or tours.

Chai indicated a suitable time for them to attend the English courses:

“It should be on weekdays, on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. Something likes this ... In the afternoon, about 2 hours.” (OEQ 3.3.2)

Dao agreed with Chai:

“I would like Er to have a special course. The time Er about once or twice a week one or two hours a day It should be on weekdays better than weekend because there are a lot of tourists during the weekend.” (OEQ 3.3.2)

Interestingly, some of the drivers would like to enhance their English competency by being provided with lessons via cassette tapes. Some of them would like to be provided with pocketbooks or stickers with specific words or sentences for tourists.

Tem said,

“Tape cassettes or CDs are better. CDs are for ones who have CD players, but I don’t have one. So tape cassettes are better for me.” (OEQ 3.3.2)

Sak indicated his choice,

“Besides attending a course, tape cassettes with lessons should be given out. Do you think it’s a good idea? For some of us, our time is money. We have no time to attend the course. We can study from the cassette during working.” (OEQ 3.3.2)

Measuring the tuk-tuk outcomes using Hall’s Rubric, tuk-tuk drivers’ discourse competence is at the lowest level (Novice) although the results in Table 1 suggest that the tuk-tuk drivers believe they are quite competent in communicating in English. However, this belief may have developed because the drivers thought the foreigners understood what they were saying when in actual fact the foreigners understood the gist of the interaction, not wholly from their speaking, but rather through the classification provided by the maps or pictures. These visual aids were the main medium that explained things, rather than their speech.

When we asked Tem if foreign tourists understood him when he talked to them, he replied,

“I think they did. Sometimes they did. Sometimes they didn’t.” (RSQ 2.4.1)

In addition, when we asked him whether he could make a refusal if he needed to refuse a foreigner, he answered,

“Yes, I can. I only said, ‘No’.” (RSQ 2.4.3)

Additionally, we asked Tem how he solved a problem if the foreign tourist did not understand him. He said,

“I used finger language for help.” (OEQ 3.2.2)

For Dao, she used special aids to help her:

“I opened a map for help. I always have maps in my tuk-tuk. I asked them where they wanted to go. Supposing, they wanted to go to a restaurant, I would open a map, and say, ‘Restorong (restaurant)?’, something like this.” (OEQ 3.2.2)

In addition, when interpreting Table 2 using Hall’s Rubric, the tuk-tuk drivers’ linguistic competence is also at the lowest level. They cannot write English in words or a sentence. They do not have the ability to write or to explain maps or directions. They are not able to express themselves in words or sentences. Lastly, the foreign tourists are not able to understand them via writing. These outcomes suggest that they need to develop better skills to achieve more effective linguistic competence.

The following accounts from five participants illustrated the tuk-tuk drivers’ difficulty with respect to their linguistic competence:

“I can write a word or words, but not a sentence.” (ChaiOEQ 3.1.4)

“I cannot write in English.” (ChaiOEQ 3.1.4)

“I can read, not much, but I cannot write.” (DaoOEQ 3.1.4)

“I can write very little. Really, I hardly ever mix alphabets into words.” (YordOEQ 3.1.4)

“I can write only some words. Most of the time, I can’t spell them. I studied English a little in school. I know very little about verbs, singular or plural. I only know some of them.” (SornOEQ 3.1.4)

Clearly, the findings revealed that to achieve a better income, it is essential that the tuk-tuk drivers develop their discourse and linguistic competence. For discourse competence, successful interaction with the foreign tourists would bring better understanding between the tuk-tuk drivers and the tourists. Good interaction would lead to enhanced tourist comfort and pleasure. Tuk-tuk drivers would not only be able to take the tourists where they would like to go and be able to tell them the fare, they would also be able to make small talk and provide details about the interesting places they visited.

Equally important, linguistic competence plays a great role in successful interaction. Tuk-tuk drivers ought to have a general knowledge of grammar, especially sentence forms, clause patterns, word order, subject-verb agreement, and simple tenses. This would be helpful when they need to fill in application forms which require the use of spoken and written structures in the technical English terms required for tourism. Proficiency in this communication context would greatly improve their career opportunities. Teaching content should be commensurate with the language that they really use on the jobs. Learning and teaching activities should be suited to their needs and their life styles.

In conclusion, for the simple reason that successful interaction requires competent levels in all skill areas, special curricula and instructions should be provided. The teaching and learning should not take place only in the classroom since workload and time availability influence tuk-tuk drivers’ learning. Classroom practices should be changed to accommodate approaches to learning conducted outside the classroom. The tuk-tuk drivers would value opportunities to learn in order to improve their income and livelihood and as such strategies should be integrated into the courses to ensure success in learning. Moreover, the learners’ individual differences should be

acknowledged. The learning process has to be organized involving the provision of substance and activities in accord with the learners' interests and aptitudes. Language training must be arranged so that learners are able to solve various problems that they face in situations in different environments using a cultivated thinking process. Teaching methodology should be adapted to accord with individual potentiality. Learning should not only occur inside the classroom, but also outside the classroom where learners are able to learn and work at the same time.

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