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## Oral English Communication Problems and Solutions of Long-Tail Boat Crews in Phang Nga Province

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### Abstract

Pang Nga province has many famous sea tourist attractions in Southern Thailand, so a lot of foreign tourists visit there. Consequently, longtail-boat crew, namely key local personnels of tourism, need to verbally communicate in English for guiding and facilitating the tourists. However, they seem to face certain problems. This study aimed to investigate the problems of oral communication in English that long-tail boat crews faced and to identify the strategies used by long-tail boat crews to solve such problems. This qualitative study employed semi-structured interview. The sample consisted of 10 longtail boat serving tourists from the *Koh Klang* and *Khlong Khian* communities, *Takua Thung* district, *Phang Nga* province. The researchers used a content analysis method to analyze the recorded oral interview data. The results showed that the long-tail boat crews faced specific main problems related to oral English communication, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, accents, feelings of difficulty in speaking English, challenges with foreign tourists who speak English as second and native languages, cultural differences, speaking rapidly, long sentences, and slang. Additionally, the crews employed particular strategies to address these problems, which included adjusting their speech, managing misunderstandings caused by misuse of terminology, understanding long and complex sentences, communicating with non-proficient English speakers, learning about cultural differences, using translation applications, employing body language, and developing their English communication skills. This research reflects grassroots-level English communication among local tourism workers in southern Thailand. It also indicates a readiness of English communication of tourism personnels for increasing the income to their communities.

**Keywords:** Problems and Solutions, Oral English Communication, Long-tail Boat Crew, Foreign Tourists, Phang Nga Province

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## Introduction

Phang Nga is a province with rich natural tourist places. It earns the nickname “The Land of Forested Islands.” The province comprises many famous and scenery tourism sites. The most famous place is *Phang Nga Bay* located in Phang Nga National Park, which attracts domestic and foreign tourists. Moreover, the province is known for its vibrant local lifestyle, with diverse ethnic groups such as Thais, Chinese, and Muslims living in traditional communities like *Koh Panyee*, *Koh Yao*, and *Moken* villages. Phang Nga is globally recognized for its unique natural resources, making it a top destination for travelers (Kapook, 2024).

Among many islands in Phang Nga, various types of tour boats are used. According to an anonymous informant (a local resident) (July 7, 2024), in communities such as *Koh Klang* and *Khlong Khian*, there have been long-tail boats for tourists due to their affordability and the convenience they offer in docking on different islands. Unlike larger boats, requiring disembarking from the rear, long-tail boats allow passengers to easily board and disembark at various points (JC Tour Phuket, 2024). In relation to the anonymous informant (the local resident (July 7, 2024), most tourists in Phang Nga chose long-tail boat services, as taking the boats provided unobstructed scenic views. Foreign tourists often booked the tours directly via Google Maps. Moreover, the long-tail boat is a distinctive Thai symbol of tourism, as it is rarely used in other countries.

*Koh Klang* village is located near *Khao Tapu*, Phang Nga's most famous attraction since 1974, after it was featured in the Hollywood film “James Bond: The Man with the Golden Gun”, attracting tourists to this island (Department of Mineral Resources, 2024). Thus, it has been called ‘James Bond Islands’. Moreover, *Khlong Khian* village is a peaceful natural destination which is ideal for relaxation or immersion in nature (Smt Jmn ‘kat, 2021). This area is also close to *Samet Nangshe* Viewpoint, often compared to scenes from “Star Wars”, further enticing tourists to book long-tail boat tours online through Google Maps (the anonymous informant (the local resident) (July 7, 2024). As a result, long-tail boat crews must communicate in English with tourists, although they often struggle with language barriers (MGR Online, 2023). According to the anonymous informant (the local resident) (July 7, 2024), language challenges were the main obstacle for these Thai boat crews, who often lacked English proficiency, making communication with foreign tourists difficult. Additionally, they struggled to understand what the tourists were saying, leading to misunderstandings and difficulties in conveying information. Another obstacle was accent and pronunciation. Even when the crews could speak English, the diverse accents of tourists, such as British or American, could be difficult to understand. This resulted in their complication of mutual comprehension.

Tourism in *Phang Nga Bay* is very popular due to its numerous attractions with natural beauty and panoramic scenery. According to Tourism Authority of Thailand (2024), “*Phang Nga Bay National Park*, situated in the Andaman Sea in Southern Thailand, has long been a popular destination for travelers from around the world.” *Phang Nga Bay* encompasses several districts. After researching various websites, the researchers identified an interesting



community in the Kalai District, known as the *Koh Klang* and *Khlong Khian* community. Both communities host numerous private businesses, including an interesting Private boat tour to visit the islands. The most popular boat is the long-tail boat, in which crews serve tourists. It is possible that the long-tail boat crews have close interactions with tourists and communicates in spoken English more frequently than other personnels of tourism. Nevertheless, they are similar to other Thais in that they use English as a foreign language for work, so they inevitably face some problems in oral communication. Consequently, this study attempts to investigate longtail boat crews' speaking problems and identify the way they solve such problems. This study will thus lead to the creation of concepts or models for English language teaching that help meet the needs and or solve the problems of local tourism workers who have difficulty accessing English language learning.

### Objectives of the Study

This study consist of two objectives as follows:

1. To investigate the problems of oral communication in English in the foreign tourists that long-tail boat crews faced.
2. To identify the strategies used by long-tail boat crews to solve problems in oral communication in English with foreign tourists.

### Literature Review

Previous studies in problems and solutions of oral English communication of longtail boat crews in Thailand seem to be rare. However, only some studies regarding tourism personnels in Thailand can be found. First of all, Leelaviriyawong (2015, as cited in Hayiwani & Bennui, 2023) investigated the satisfaction of foreign tourists in Bangkok towards English skills of Thai vendors using a questionnaire. The findings revealed that most of them were moderately satisfied with English listening skills of Thai vendors although they were not native English speakers. This study also mentioned the main problems which the tourists faced including pronunciation, confidence, English grammar, and vocabulary. Besides, the speaking speed and the accents of the tourists were problems to the vendors. Moreover, Vansook (2021) studied satisfaction of Thai tour guides who worked with international tourists in central Thailand towards their English abilities through a questionnaire. The respondents had a high perception level of their speaking skills supported by eye contact while grammar was the least supportive aspect. They had a moderate level of perception towards their listening skills. However, they still had problems in using vocabulary, listening to different accents of non-native English speakers, in understanding native English speakers who used slang and dialects. To improve English communication skills, they suggested practicing English listening by engaging with multimedia resources and conversing with foreigners. In addition, Sermsook et al. (2012), examined tourism staff's problems and needs for using English at work and to explore their needs for improving English for their work. In light of listening problems, the hotel staff was not able to understand different accents of foreign customers, especially those



with a British accent. Pertaining to speaking skills, the hotel staff could not speak English correctly as their sentences were ungrammatical and sometimes resulted in foreign customers' misunderstandings. Overall, these studies reflect different dimensions of English communication problems by Thai staff of tourism industry.

To implement the present study, theories are also needed. This study considers theory of oral English communication for non-native English users by some scholars. According to Okoro, 2007, as cited in Ibna Seraj & Habil, 2021, p. 229), EFL (English as a foreign language) learners may face more challenging in mastering oral English communication than other skills – listening, speaking, and reading. In the Fourth Industrial Revolution era, oral communication is increasingly needed in the fourth Industrial Revolution Era. Further, Ellis (2003, as cited in Ibna Seraj & Habil, 2021, p.229) states that oral communication skills is significant for one's mastering a second language. Acquiring second and foreign language requires abilities in applying the phonological and grammatical systems of the language to convey meanings. Such skills can involve face-to-face and long-distance interactions, especially online conversations. Further, theory of oral English communication strategies is also observed. Umrah et.al. (2018) stated that difficulties and strategies of communication seem to be common issues in EFL teaching and learning. Meanwhile, the studies about communication strategies in non-school-based activities are rare. Moreover, Tarone et al. (1976, as cited in Doqaruni, 2013, p. 180) provide some communication strategies, namely transfer from the native language, overgeneralization, prefabricated pattern, over- elaboration, epenthesis, and avoidance. Additionally, Tarone (1977) provides five conscious communication strategies which are avoidance, paraphrase, conscious transfer, appeal for assistance, and mime. These are summarized as follows:

(i) Avoidance consists of topic avoidance and message abandonment. *Topic avoidance* takes place when the learners are not aware of the vocabulary, leading to avoiding to talk about the concept. *Message abandonment* is that the learner starts to talk about the concept but are unable to proceed and start a new sentence;

(ii) Paraphrase comprises approximation, word coinage, and circumlocution. Approximation can be overgeneralization in communication. Word coinage can be the use of innovative words for communicating. Circumlocution is about the use of extended language forms to describe an object;

(iii) Conscious transfer contains literal translation from L1 to L2 and language switching;

(iv) Appeal for assistance can be the use of dictionary and native speaker for correct terms; and

(v) Mime can be the use of non-verbal strategies in communication.

According to Dörnyei (1995, as cited in Umrah, 2018, pp. 118-119), communication strategies comprise of two main ones – “avoidance and compensatory strategies” and an additional one – “stalling or time-gaining strategies”. These include 12 communication strategies of traditional conceptualizations which are (i) message abandonment; (ii) topic



avoidance; (iii) circumlocution; (iv) approximation; (v) use of all-purpose words; (v) word-coinage, (vi) use of non-linguistic means; (vii) literal translation; (ix) foreignizing, (x) code-switching; (xi) appeal for help, and (xii) use of fillers/hesitation devices. They also covered two more communication strategies as conceptualized by the Nijmegen University Group which are (i) conceptual strategies (analytic and holistic strategies) and linguistic/code strategies (morphological creativity and transfer).

As a whole, these theoretical foundations provide valuable guidelines for the researchers in conducting their study.

From the aforementioned background and rationale as well as previous studies and theories, there is a need to study the problems and solutions of English communication of longtail boat crews in Pang Nga Province as there has never been a direct study on this career.

### Scope of the Study

The study focuses on only the problems and solution strategies related to oral English communication among long-tail boat crews in Phang Nga Province, specifically in *Koh Klang Village*, *Kalai Subdistrict*, *Takua Thung District* and *Khlong Khian Village*, *Khlong Khian Subdistrict*, *Takua Thung District*. The participants included only 10 long-tail boat crews from 10 different boat tours that served foreign tourists during the data collection period, with 5 boat tours located at *Khlong Khian Village* and the other 5 boat tours located at *Koh Klang Village*. The research subjects were purposely selected according to the snowball sampling. Further, online interviews serve as the primary method of data collection. This is the inability of the researchers to visit the area due to budget constraints, timing issues, and long distances. This is considered a limitation of the study.

### Definition of Terms

Two important terms need to be defined. For the first, 'oral English communication' refers to the process of using English to convey information, thoughts, or feelings from one person to another through speaking, particularly in face-to-face communication or situations requiring immediate interaction. In the context of this research, the focus is on oral English communication between long-tail boat crews and foreign tourists, which may face obstacles such as unclear pronunciation, lack of appropriate vocabulary, or difficulty understanding the accents of the interlocutors. Another is 'long-tail boat crew'. It involves individuals who work as operators or crews of long-tail boats, responsible for ensuring the safety of tourists during sea or river journeys, particularly in the tourist areas of Phang Nga province. This research focuses on the crews who play a key role in providing services to foreign tourists and face difficulties in communicating in English.

### Significance of the Study

1. This study is significant in that it realizes the importance of longtail boat crews as the career who bring the national income. Their oral English communication is the key



component that leads to the success. Their problems and solutions of English uses can be revealed for a further understanding of the potential of Thais' English proficiency.

2. This study will greatly benefit those interested in pursuing this type of business or career. Whether they are in *Koh Klang* and *Khlong Khian* Village or elsewhere, individuals in similar occupations can use this study to gain insights. They can do a further study to provide the greatest benefit to their work.

3. This study will benefit various organizations, including community enterprises and government agencies, by helping to promote further development within local communities. The further solutions can be done by the relevant organizations' provision of intensive courses of English oral communication training and creating manuals or toolkits to assist them.

## Research Methodology

**1. Research design:** This research is designed as a qualitative study because the researchers studied a small number of long-tail boat crews. This mode of study will delve into a clear answer to particular problems and solutions in oral English communication through the crews' perspectives using in-depth online interviews.

**2. Data source.** The major primary data source was the interview data taken from the crews' perspectives. Moreover, the secondary data source was from various reputable websites, with regard to a broad overview of the tourism communities in Pang Nga.

**3. Population and sampling:** The researchers used a snowball sampling as the method of selecting the population or the so-called longtail boat crews. This method is convenient, and one of the researcher teams has a friend living in the selected tourism community in the province. This friend of the researcher teams could be the key person that led to seeking the research participants. The researchers contacted the long-tail boat crews who were familiar with them through a network of acquaintances. These long-tail boat crews were purposely chosen as the sample group due to their willingness, expertise and direct experience in communicating in English with foreign tourists. From the preliminary survey, *Koh Klang* village consisted of 19 entrepreneurs which ran the longtail boat trip business along Pang-nga Bay; however, only 5 entrepreneurs had full-time crews. The rest of them had no crews. *Khlong Khian* village comprised 9 entrepreneurs of this business with 15 crews in a total number. Thus, the researchers selected 5 crews from each village. They could represent the long-tail boat crews in the communities, and they did not convey the researchers' bias. The researchers needed to employ the snowball sampling because it was difficult to access those who work in this tourism industry.

**4. Research instruments:** There were three instruments used in this study.

(1) Online semi-structured interview: It was used due to the geographical distance between the researchers and participants, and budgetary constraints. This could be acknowledged as a limitation of this study. It consisted of three sections. Section 1, personal information, focused on general background information about the participants, such as age, education, work experience, and English proficiency. This helped the researchers understand



the crews' background information. Section 2, about problems of oral English communication, highlighted the first aim of this study. It emphasized the problems the crews faced with oral English communication while serving foreign tourists. This part also covered 10 questions on their personal insights and opinions on the communication difficulties they faced. This provided additional information on areas that require improvement. Section 3, about strategies or techniques the crews used for solving problems in oral English communication in 10 questions, represented the second aim of the study.

(2) Voice recorder: The researchers used a mobile phone recorder to record the oral interviews. Recording the interviews could assure accuracy and clarity, preventing the loss of important details and minimizing the risk of misinterpretation.

(3) Transcription of the oral interview data: This study used transcription as a crucial instrument in the qualitative research process. The researchers transcribed the recorded audio data from the interviews in Thai, and then translated them into English. This process facilitated the researchers' easier analysis and interpretation of the findings.

**5. Pilot study:** This preliminary study aimed to understand the spatial context and address the research objectives. The pilot study proceeded in three processes.

(1) A review of sample questions by the advisor: After the interview questions had been designed, they were reviewed by the advisor. In this regard, the advisor raised a question "Do you think cultural differences between long-tail boat crews and foreign tourists affect oral English communication? If so, what are some examples?" In response, the researchers provided further clarification on this question to ensure that the long-tail boat crews could understand it effectively.

(2) Refinement of questions: The researchers utilized feedback and suggestions from the advisor to refine and finalize the questions, ensuring that they were comprehensive and appropriate for the interviewees in the context of the study.

(3) Trial out of questions: The piloting procedure was conducted on August 22, 2024 through online interview. The interviewers (the researchers) had trialed out the designed questions to interview one of the selected participants through the recorded mobile phone. Only one question which was not understandable to the participant was about 'culture and slang'. Given that 'culture' is a broad topic, it necessitates a more focused explanation. Additionally, the meaning of 'slang' was clarified, as the long-tail boat crews perceived slang to refer to vulgar language.

After this, the interview questions were refined by the researchers and approved by the advisor for the actual data collection.

## 6. Data collection

Prior to the actual data collection, the selected participants were asked to fill in the consent form for their willingness in participating in this study. To support ethical considerations, the participant's data protection and confidentiality procedures necessary for research integrity were pointed out. That is, the chosen participants were informed these considerations before their signing of the consent form. The actual data gathering process was



conducted in September 2024, on the following dates and times: September 6 at 1:00 p.m., 2:14 p.m., and 7:00 p.m.; September 9 at 7:00 p.m.; September 13 at 2:00 p.m., 3:05 p.m., and 4:30 p.m.; September 14 at 9:30 a.m.; September 15 at 10:30 a.m.; and September 18 at 11:00 a.m. In this regard, two interview modes were utilized: one-on-one interviews and group interviews. Each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes per participant. All interview sessions were recorded and subsequently transcribed in Thai. The transcriptions were then translated into English to ensure the accuracy and comprehension for data analysis. The study involved interviews with 10 long-tail boat crews, and the same set of questions was posed to each participant. Because of the use of online interviews, some limitations might arise such as unobservable non-verbal cues such as posture or facial expressions.

**7. Data Analysis:** Upon completion of the transcription, the researchers conducted a content analysis of the interview file to explore the similarities and differences based on the set questions. The analysis commenced with an overview of the background information concerning the crews, utilizing comparison tables. Subsequently, the researchers examined the 10 problems identified during interviews with the 10 participants. Following this, the strategies employed by the crews to address these problems were analyzed, with distinct paragraphs created for each participant. Indeed, these problems and solution strategies were studied with the use of the theoretical foundations as mentioned. Each thematic aspect of the problems and strategies was synthesized by the researchers considering each participant's recorded answers. The overall findings of the 10 participants were thematically summarized. This data analysis process was approved by the advisor before the findings were to be presented. After this, the researchers presented the findings in the paragraph form to further illustrate their similarities and differences. They then summarized all findings and engaged in a discussion, comparing the results with the existing theories and previous studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the context and significance of the data.

## Results

The findings consist of four parts: background information of the participants, problems of English oral communication, strategies for solving problems in oral English communication; and additional information.

### 1. Background Information of Participants: It is revealed in the following tables.

**Table 1:** The participants' general background information

Participant	Gender	Age (years old)	Level of education	Work experience (year/s)
Crew A	F	27	High School (M.6)	7
Crew B	F	20	High School (M.6)	3
Crew C	M	33	Bachelor's Degree	2
Crew D	F	32	Associate's Degree	2



Participant	Gender	Age (years old)	Level of education	Work experience (year/s)
Crew E	F	21	High School	1 year 6 months
Crew F	F	47	High School	3
Crew G	M	47	Junior High School	3
Crew H	F	37	Associate's Degree	4
Crew I	F	31	High School	3
Crew J	F	50	High School	20

Table 1 shows the participants' gender, age, education levels, and work experience. They were 8 females and 2 males, and aged between 20 to 50 years. Their education levels ranged from junior high school to bachelor's degrees. Moreover, their work experience varied from 1.6 to 20 years.

**Table 2:** The participants' background information on English abilities

Participant	English knowledge	Practice English Speaking	Training Course
Crew A	Intermediate	Practice English while providing service to foreign tourists	Never
Crew B	Intermediate	Basic knowledge from high school and self-taught through social media practiced independently	Never
Crew C	Intermediate	Practice English while providing service to foreign tourists	Have, participated in extra lessons
Crew D	Intermediate	Through golf course maintenance	Have, but do not remember the course' name
Crew E	Fair	Social media, watching movies, and listening to music, sometimes foreign tourists teach	Never
Crew F	Fair	Using the translation application, the Duo lingo application, memorize the English words	Have, on Kruwhan YouTube channel
Crew G	Fair	Practicing through a phone	Never
Crew H	Intermediate	Practice from experience and conversations foreign tourists.	Never
Crew I	Fair	Practice speaking with foreign tourists and learn new vocabulary in social media	Never



Participant	English knowledge	Practice English Speaking	Training Course
Crew J	Fair	Learn English by myself, practice speaking with foreign tourists.	Have English for work and English for daily life

Regarding Table 2, the English proficiency of the crews ranged from fair to intermediate, allowing them to communicate while on the job. The crews primarily learned by themselves and used social media to improve their English skills such as vocabulary. Six of the crews received training courses in English while the others did not.

## 2. Problems of English Oral communication

There appear to be ten problems of oral English communication faced by the crews.

(1) Pronunciation: Crews A, B, D, F, G, H, I, and J encountered pronunciation difficulties. These problems led to misunderstandings when communicating with foreign tourists. Crews A, G, and I also felt insecure, shy, or anxious about their pronunciation, fearing mistakes. Additionally, Crew J faced specific challenges with the retroflex 'T' sound in consonant clusters, and Crew C struggled with British English accents.

(2) Vocabulary: Crews A, D, E, F, G, H, I, and J faced obstacles due to their unfamiliar vocabulary or inability to recall certain words. This hindered smooth communication. Crews B and C reported using incorrect words, which often led to miscommunication. Crews C and E noted that they sometimes forgot the meanings of words, further complicating interactions.

(3) Grammar: Most of the crews (A, B, C, D, F, G, H, I, and J) believed that despite grammatical errors, the tourists could still understand them. Crew D emphasized that the tourists could infer the meaning while Crew I preferred using short sentences. However, Crew E felt that the tourists often struggled to understand him due to grammatical mistakes, and Crews F and G noted that some tourists had difficulty in their speaking with incorrect grammar.

(4) Accents: Crews A, B, C, E, H, I, and J reported that understanding foreign tourists' accents, especially those from England or India, was challenging due to unfamiliar pronunciations. Crew B mentioned that non-native English tourists had more comprehensible accents. However, Crews D and F found accents easier to understand when familiar phrases were used, and Crew G found simple sentences manageable.

(5) Feeling of difficulty in speaking English: While Crews A, B, and C felt excitement and saw communicating with tourists as a challenge, Crews D and E expressed regret over missed communication opportunities. Crews F, G, and H felt confident in handling difficulties through experience while Crews I and J were anxious but determined to overcome their challenges.

(6) Problems with foreign tourists who speak English as a second or a foreign language (ESL/EFL): Crews A, C, D, E, F, G, I, and J experienced difficulties when communicating



with EFL tourists, particularly Russian and Chinese ones. However, Crews B and H did not encounter any significant issues in these situations.

(7) Cultural differences: Crews C, D, and G faced problems related to cultural differences in communication, leading to misunderstandings due to unfamiliar idioms or informal language. Their Southern Thai accents were also challenging. However, other crews (A, B, E, F, H, and J) felt that cultural differences did not affect their communication as they were familiar with the tourists' cultures.

(8) Speaking rapidly: Crews A, B, C, E, F, G, H, I, and J found it difficult to understand foreign tourists who spoke too quickly, particularly when they mixed with unclear pronunciation or unfamiliar vocabulary. Crew D did not have this problem as the tourists she interacted with usually spoke slowly.

(9) Long sentences: This was problematic to most crews. Crews B, C, and H had difficulty identifying key points. Crew J tried to grasp the main points, but Crews G, I, and J struggled to understand them. Crew A and D did not face these problems as they focused on the words they knew or dealt with the tourists using simple sentences.

(10) Slang: Crews A, B, C, F, and G did not understand slang terms, causing their confusion. However, Crew J was familiar with slang, and others (Crews D, E, H, and I) did not encounter this problem.

### 3. Strategies for solving problems in oral English communication

The crew used ten strategies for solving problems in their oral English communication.

(1) Strategies for adjusting speech in communication: Most crews, such as Crews B, C, D, F, G, H, and J, frequently used translation applications to support their communication, aiding in pronunciation, vocabulary translation, and explanation. Other crews, including A, E, I, and J, adapted their speech by adjusting or repeating their words to enhance tourist comprehension. Additionally, body language was a vital tool used to clarify communication, demonstrating a common goal among all crews to make their messages easily understood.

(2) Strategies for managing misunderstandings caused by misuse of terminology: When facing misunderstandings, Crews A, C, E, F, and G prioritized repeating or elaborating on their explanations to aid the tourists' comprehension. A further strategy observed among Crews A, B, D, E, H, and I was the use of translation apps to clarify meanings or explaining vocabulary. Body language was also utilized by Crews A and J to reinforce their verbal communication.

(3) Strategies for understanding long and complex sentences: When listening to long and complex sentences, Crews A, B, C, F, and H opted to ask the tourists to repeat themselves while Crews B and C requested slower speech. Translation applications were also a commonly used tool for Crews A, E, H, and I to assist their comprehension. Crew J chose to redirect conversations that strayed from tour topics whereas Crew D reported not encountering such difficulties, citing the simplicity of tourist speech.



(4) Strategies for communicating with non-proficient English speakers: Most crews, including A, B, E, F, G, H, and J, used translation applications when communicating with non-proficient English tourists. Crews B and E translated into the tourists' native language while Crews B, D, and J supplemented this with body language. Crew C favored using simpler vocabulary or loanwords, and Crew I found success using visual aids, namely pictures and videos, to facilitate location identification.

(5) Strategies for learning cultural differences: The crews demonstrated different approaches to manage the tourists' cultural differences. Crews B and D emphasized direct communication to bridge cultural gaps while Crews G, H, and J saw cultural interactions as opportunities for learning. In contrast, Crews C, E, and I chose to remain polite and quiet, but Crews A and F reported no issues related to cultural differences.

(6) Strategies for grasping words (key points): All crews recognized the importance of identifying key words in conversation, often utilizing translation applications and body language to enhance communication clarity. This approach was particularly effective in bridging the gap caused by language differences.

(7) Strategies for understanding slang: Confronting the tourists' use of unfamiliar slang, Crews A, B, C, and G asked them to repeat or explain the terms. Crews F, G, and H turned to translation applications while Crew J relied on contextual cues. Crew E ignored slang altogether, and Crew I responded to them with a polite smile, but Crew D reported no experiences with slang usage.

(8) Strategies for communicating through translation application: All crews adopted the use of translation applications as a primary tool for facilitating their communication. Crew D used these apps to understand non-proficient English speakers while Crew E combined this with consulting other websites. Some crews (F and I) recognized the limitations of translation apps, particularly in areas with poor Internet connectivity.

(9) Strategies for using body language to convey meaning: All crews employed body language as a key communicative strategy. This included hand gestures, facial expressions, and acting out examples to help the tourists better understand instructions, directions, and safety warnings.

(10) Strategies for developing English communication skills: Crews A, E, G, H, and J used translation applications, but Crews G, H, and J used body language. Crew A also learned from movies and music whereas Crew E practiced speaking. Crews B and I turned to online platforms, namely YouTube and TikTok. In contrast, Crew C did not employ any strategies, and Crews D and F focused on visual aids such as pointing and photographs.

#### **4. Additional Information: There are three additional information provided by the crews.**

(1) Success in English skills: Crews A, B, and J were highly successful in communicating with tourists, receiving positive feedback despite occasional difficulties. Crews C, D, G, and H rated their success as moderate, often relying on translation apps. Meanwhile, Crews E, F, and I felt that their English skills were still insufficient.



(2) Perception of foreign tourists: Tourists generally perceived Crews A, B, C, and G as effective communicators. Crew J particularly noted for preparedness. Crews H and J received the most positive feedback while Crews D, F, and I struggled with this. Crew F managed expectations by informing tourists of their limited English proficiency.

(3) Suggestions: Many crews suggested that additional training in English communication, with a focus on relevant vocabulary and industry-specific phrases, would be beneficial. Crew E highlighted the need for safety-related vocabulary while Crew D emphasized the importance of casual conversations to enhance communication skills.

## Discussion

In light of the problem of oral English communication, firstly the long-tail boat crews faced significant challenges when communicating with foreign tourists, with pronunciation being a critical problem. Many crews struggled to pronounce words accurately, leading to misunderstandings that could frustrate both parties. This aligns with Ibna Seraj and Habil's (2021) findings that pronunciation is a major hurdle for EFL learners. Additionally, anxiety plays a significant role, as the crews often lacked confidence in their language skills, fearing judgment or making mistakes, which could exacerbate pronunciation difficulties. The diverse accents of tourists led to difficult communication, making it harder for crews to convey information clearly. To address these problems, provision of training on pronunciation and a supportive practice environment could enhance the crews' confidence and effectiveness, ultimately improving the experience for foreign tourists and fostering more positive interactions. Secondly, the grammar problems faced by the crews are closely connected to Leelaviriyawong's (2015) work, as both discuss communication challenges in English with foreigners. Some crews believed that foreigners could still understand them despite grammatical errors while others found it difficult to communicate effectively without proper grammar. Similarly, Leelaviriyawong's (2015) study found that foreigners experienced difficulties with grammar and pronunciation when interacting with Thai speakers. Additionally, the crews encountered difficulties in understanding various English accents, which parallels the findings of Sermsook et al. (2021) regarding issues faced by hotel employees in the tourism industry. This highlights the need for focused listening practice to enhance comprehension skills. Cultural differences resulted in complicated communication, particularly when foreign tourists used idioms and specialized terminology. The lack of understanding of slang among many crews revealed a vocabulary gap that could hinder effective communication. Vansook (2021) emphasizes the critical role of cultural context and slang usage in facilitating effective interactions. Lastly, the crews struggled with the rapid speech of foreign tourists, reflecting the comprehension challenges identified by Leelaviriyawong (2015) in fast-paced conversations. This underscores the necessity for clear and slow communication. Overall, these problems illustrate the complexities that the crews face when communicating with foreign tourists.



In terms of strategies for oral English communication, the findings revealed that the crews employed various strategies, including topic avoidance or changing the subject of conversation, using body language, and utilizing translation applications to facilitate communication. These approaches align with Tarone's (1977) theory on conscious communication strategies - avoidance, paraphrasing, conscious transfer, appeal for assistance, and mime – which were applied by the crews. Further, the study is consistent with Dörnyei's (1995) framework, which emphasizes the use of non-linguistic signals in communication. Additionally, Tarone et al.'s (1976) strategies such as transfer from the native language and avoidance of certain conversational topics were used by the crews. Overall, these findings highlight the adaptive techniques that long-tail boat crews utilize to enhance their communication effectiveness with international tourists.

The findings seem to reflect a sociolinguistic issue in a Thai tourism setting. Majority of the participants did not understand Chinese and Russian tourists' spoken English. It is normal that Thai speakers seem to be familiar with the accents of native English speakers rather than those of non-native ones. Like other Thai learners of English, these participants were taught English as a foreign language in which native English is the most important model for learning.

This is similar to what Sahrai and Tantiniranat (2024) found that many Thai students in a public school viewed that the American English accent was the model of English pronunciation. When the participants of the present study had to face other non-native English tourists from China and Russia, they did not understand the way these tourists spoke English. This may be because these participants had no linguistic background in Chinese and Russian.

In addition, all the long-tail boat crews revealed that they used body language as a prominent strategy to solve their oral English communication problems. This aligns with a study of Siswanto (2016) who found that Indonesian tour guides in Kuta beach of central Lombok regency employed body language to overcome their English communication problems. From this, the Thai crews in the present study and the Indonesian tour guides are similar in that they are English as a foreign language (EFL users). The easiest way of solving their English-speaking problem relies on the use of humans' instinct, especially non-verbal communication. This can indicate their effort to facilitate their communication with foreign tourists.

### **Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendation**

It can be concluded that the 10 longtail boat crews in the two tourist communities in Pang Nga province had linguistic problems when communicating in English with foreign tourists. Those cover phonetic, lexical, grammatical, culturally semantic, and sociolinguistic aspects. They attempted to solve these problems using different strategies with regard to verbal and non-verbal communication, acquisitional factors, and technological devices.

This study provides some practical implications. As this study revealed the problems and solutions of oral English communication of the long-tail boat crews in the famous tourism



community in southern Thailand, they seem to be the crucial database necessary for training programs, language policy, and community-based tourism. The relevant ministerial organization in Pang Nga province should take into consideration by launching training programs or intensive course for the long-tail boat crews' English communication skills development. Next, the Thai Ministry of Education should pay special attention to language policy in the tourism area, especially the provinces along the Andaman Sea. That is, the use of English as a second language in schools and colleges in those provinces should be considered as the pilot study. Additionally, community-based tourism in English or English for specific purposes (ESP) for tourism should be incorporated into training courses offered by the community or vocational college or the university or tertiary educational institute in collaboration with the Tourism Authority of Thailand in those provinces so that a number of long-tail boat crews can have more chance to improve their communicative English abilities. These implications can be contributions to grassroots' English language use in tourism.

This study focused on oral English communication, but future research could benefit from exploring participants' listening skills as well. This may yield different results that can effectively be compared with this study. Future research should incorporate a diverse range of participants associated with these crews who utilize English, as this may offer valuable perspectives for comparative analysis. While this study focused solely on interviewing the crews, future research should also consider the perspectives of tourists, as their insights might yield clearer or divergent results. Although this study relied on online interviews, subsequent studies should engage directly with the community to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its dynamics. Further, employing a combination of questionnaires and interviews may produce different and more nuanced outcomes.

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