

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH FOR CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL TOURISM AT THE BUDDHIST PARK, PHETCHABUN PROVINCE

Kanokwan Nawawat

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Phetchabun Rajabhat University,  
Phetchabun, Thailand

Corresponding author E-mail: knokwan.naw@pcru.ac.th

Received 12 February 2023; Revised 6 June 2023; Accepted 9 June 2023

### Abstract

**Background and Objective:** A study of Communicative English for Cultural and Spiritual Tourism of Phra Buddha Maha Dhammaraja at the Buddhist Park, Phetchabun Province, aimed to develop the use of English for communication in cultural and spiritual tourism among front officers who with both native and non-native speakers at the Buddhist Park, Phetchabun Province. To achieve this objective, the study was divided into three parts as follows: Firstly, collecting data through in-depth individual interviews; secondly, dividing an informal focus group into three groups, and thirdly, observing and discussing with on-duty officers using open-ended questionnaires.

**Methodology:** This study's sample consisted of twenty-two front officers employed by the Phra Buddha Maha Dhammaraja Foundation at the Buddhist Park in Phetchabun Province. There were three groups of front officers, first, security guards and gardeners, second, maids and administration officers, and third, garland and fish food vendors.

**Main Results:** The results of the research indicated that the most significant challenges for front officers were the following: A lack of basic English language communication ability with both native and non-native speakers; an inability to communicate fluently and correctly with terms and expressions related to cultural and spiritual tourism; and inadequate training that they communicated with foreigners in their mother tongue rather than in English. These challenges applied to all five groups of operatives: Administration officers, security officers, security guards, and security guards. Thus, the research article aimed to categorize and analyze the use of the English language by front officers in a cultural and spiritual tourism setting at the Buddhist Park in Phetchabun Province. The study aimed to examine patterns of English language functions used by both native and non-native speakers, to better understand how English was utilized in this particular context. The study found that the use of the English language by front officers at the Buddhist Park in Phetchabun Province could be categorized into three distinct sections. The first section was English usage for garland and fish food vendors who were involved in selling and buying garlands and fish food. The second section was English usage for gardeners and security guards who were involved in asking and answering directions. Lastly, the third section was English

usage for maids and administration officers who were involved in selling and buying Buddha images.

**Involvement in Buddhadhamma:** After the ASEAN Community was established in 2015, large numbers of people traveled around the world, and the ASEAN member countries were one of the more popular tourist targets. Phetchabun Province became one of these destinations because its landscape was known as the "Switzerland of Thailand" due to its tranquility, serenity, and breathtaking vistas. In addition, international travelers were a rapidly aging society, and the elderly were extremely interested in cultural tourism, live longer and healthier lives, and were able to travel across continents. The English language was used in a cultural and spiritual setting to convey both travel and Buddhism. Local people often acted as mediators, linking the history and culture of the area to tourists using the English language. At the Buddhist Park in Phetchabun Province, the front officers who were on duty played an important role in connecting the knowledge and beliefs of Buddhism with the English language.

**Conclusions:** Based on the evidence gathered through individual interviews, a focus group, and observation of the front officers on duty, it was obvious that 1) There were three groups of the English language to develop for the front officers at the Buddhist Park: English for selling and buying garlands and fish food, English for selling and buying sacred objects of the Foundation, and English for asking and responding to directions in front of and around the Buddhist Park; 2) There were two models of front officers attempting to communicate with foreign travelers in English through the use of gestures, signals, or even broken English while their vocabularies were limited and they responded with inappropriate language. In addition, these two findings would provide the front officers with knowledge of English language usage in order to enhance their English language skills.

**Keywords:** English for Communication, Cultural and Spiritual Tourism, Front Officers, Buddhist Park, Phetchabun Province

## Introduction

Over the past few decades, tourism experienced continued growth and deepening diversification to become one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. Modern tourism was closely linked to development and encompasses a growing number of new destinations. These dynamics turned tourism into a key driver for socio-economic progress. International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) grew 4 percent from January to March 2019, compared to the same period of the previous year, below the 6 percent average growth of the past two years. Confidence in global tourism performance started to pick up again after a slowdown at the end of 2018, according to the latest UNWTO Confidence Index survey. (UNWTO, 2019) World Tourism Organization had previously predicted that tourists who crossed countries would continue to grow rapidly and surpass several billion marks by the year 2020 (UNWTO, 2015), and the most popular region to visit was South East Asia and the Pacific. ASEAN countries were also the main targets of those tourists. Regarding the movement of the ASEAN Community

in 2015, the tourism trends to even the local areas were spread. In addition, tourism development became a particularly important role. As a Buddhist region in Asia, cultural tourism was a top priority in Thailand, not only in major cities but also among locals. Locals must be willing to communicate with travelers who did not speak their language. Rural tourism brought people of various cultures, religions, languages, and lifestyles closer together and broadened their perspective on life. (Mili, 2012) Then, English was used to communicate with native and non-native English speakers, such as Bahasa Malaysia, Myanmar, and Laos, in order to prepare for economic, educational, and tourism efforts. Furthermore, tourism development could be a useful tool for establishing peaceful relationships among all nations. (Nishimura, 2020) Additionally, English seemed to play the most significant role, but locals must be able to convey their knowledge of the local cultural heritage to tourists. Therefore, English language learners needed to communicate as effectively as possible, while it might not be necessary to speak English at the same level as a native speaker but should be able to communicate well enough to be understood. (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016)

Dr. Wisan Kositanont, the head of Phetchabun Provincial Cultural Office, stated that Phetchabun or Phe-Cha-Bu-Ra in the past was a spiritual land that brought prosperity and peace to the people ever since under the Buddhism prestige of Phra Buddha Maha Dhummaraja, the Buddha Image of Phetchabun. The Buddha Image was also a symbolic god of Phetchabun people because the Buddha Image was given as a gift by the King of Khmer. Currently, the image of Phra Buddha Maha Dhummaraja was located in the Buddhist Park and on the Saraburi-Lomsak road, where tourists traveled from south to north on their journey to other tourist destinations, such as Khao Koh, Nam Nao, Lomsak, and Lomkao districts, pass by. In addition, both Thai and foreign tourists could visit the Buddhist Park and pay homage to the Buddha image. Since the Buddha image was as big as a six-story building, it was considered to be the biggest Buddha in the world, and locals called it "the Big Buddha" for short.

Besides paying homage to the Buddha image, the tourists were also willing to learn about the locality and the details of the Buddhist Park as well. Nevertheless, there was no foreign language information at the Buddhist Park except for a few signs of the place to practice. Even though some young people did not practice, they associated spiritual tourism with meditation or self-knowledge. (Caros, 2022) There should be informational signs in the park, as the majority of visitors asked locals for guidance. In addition, neither the locals nor the front officers at the Buddhist Park could provide the information nor had the means to impart the message in other languages. To prevent misunderstanding of information about the Big Buddha in detail, the patterns of using English to communicate with foreign tourists in terms of cultural and spiritual tourism needed to be analyzed in order to form the language to communicate further.

Based on the above principles and reasons, this study to find out "The Study of Communicative English for a Cultural and Spiritual Tourism of Phra Buddha Maha Dhammaraja at the Buddhist Park, Phetchabun Province" aimed to develop English language use in cultural and spiritual tourism of the front officers. Therefore, in order to achieve tourism production, those

front officers were the people that confronted tourists or the first person that foreign tourists met. Especially nowadays, foreign tourists had a tendency to return to the locations that they were willing to visit.

Many key concepts were identified as follows: The problems were found so that the development of the language was: 1) Selling and buying garlands and fish food; 2) Asking directions; 3) Selling sacred objects.

### **Objective**

To develop communicative English in the context of cultural and spiritual tourism of the front officers at the Buddhist Park in Phetchabun Province.

### **Methodology**

The samples for this study, consisting of twenty-two Phra Buddha Maha Dhummaraja Foundation officers, were purposefully selected and categorized according to their respective job descriptions. The methods were as follows:

1. The samples for this study, consisting of twenty-two Phra Buddha Maha Dhummaraja Foundation officers, were purposefully selected and categorized according to their respective job descriptions;

2. The English use data was collected through in-depth interviews with selected Buddhist Park officers, including the administrative officer, flower garland vendors, fish food vendors, guards, and gardeners. The officers were divided into five small groups for discussion: 1) Vendors, 2) Guards, 3) Gardeners, 4) Administrative officers, and 5) General officers. Two rounds of observations were conducted to observe their language use in real situations, and survey questionnaires were also given to all groups to complete the survey;

3. The tools were divided into two categories: 1) Interviews with open-ended questions and 2) General questions, as well as three types of questionnaires on the use of the English language;

4. Data analysis of the English language use of the twenty-two officers tended to reveal three phases of communication: Small talk, presentation of the visit, and long conversations with tourists;

5. The structure of English language use was found from the interview, the small group discussion, and the observation of officers' duties. The results would be discussed to follow up on the use later;

6. When the structure of English language use was found, a curriculum was also developed for each of the five groups of front officers: 1) Selling and buying garland and fish food used by garland and fish food vendors, 2) Asking directions provided for security guards and gardeners, and 3) Selling sacred objects used by administration officers and maids.

## Results and Discussion

The results showed the development of English language use in cultural and spiritual tourism among the front officers at the Buddhist Park, Phetchabun Province. According to the research, there are three categories of English language development for front officers:

1. English for selling and buying garland used by garland and fish food vendors contains patterns as follows:

1.1 Asking the price of a bunch of garlands or a bucket of fish food. The examples of the sentence are:

"How much does it cost?"

"How much is it?"

"How much each garland or each bucket cost?"

"How much is the price?"

1.2 Asking the number of garlands to use to pay respect to the Buddha image. The examples of the sentence are:

"How many garlands must I use?"

"How many garlands should I buy?"

"How many garlands do I need?"

"How many garlands do I use to pay respect?"

1.3 Asking where to use garlands to pay respect. The examples of the sentence are:

"Where do I put the garland?"

"Where to pay respect?"

"Where should I go to place the garland?"

"Where do you usually pay respect?"

2. English for telling directions used by security guards and gardeners contains patterns as follows:

2.1 Asking for the Buddha image. The examples of the sentence are:

"Where is the Buddha image?"

"Where can I go to the big Buddha?"

"Where is the path to the Buddha?"

"The Buddha is this way, isn't it?"

2.2 Asking for a place to park. The examples of the sentence are:

"Where is the parking space?"

"Where is the parking lot?"

"Where can I park?"

"Where should I park my car?"

2.3 Asking for toilets. The examples of the sentence are:

"Where is the toilet?"

"May I ask where the restroom is?"

"Where is the restroom?"

"I want to wash my hands, where can I go?"

3. English for selling sacred objects used by administration officers and maids

3.1 Asking for the price. The examples of the sentence are:

"How much is it?"

"How much does it cost?"

"How much each?"

"How much are these?"

3.2 Asking for price reduction. The examples of the sentence are:

"Can you lower the price?"

"Can you make it lower?"

"Could you reduce the cost?"

"Can you reduce the price of it?"

3.3 Asking for the size. The examples of the sentence are:

"How many sizes?"

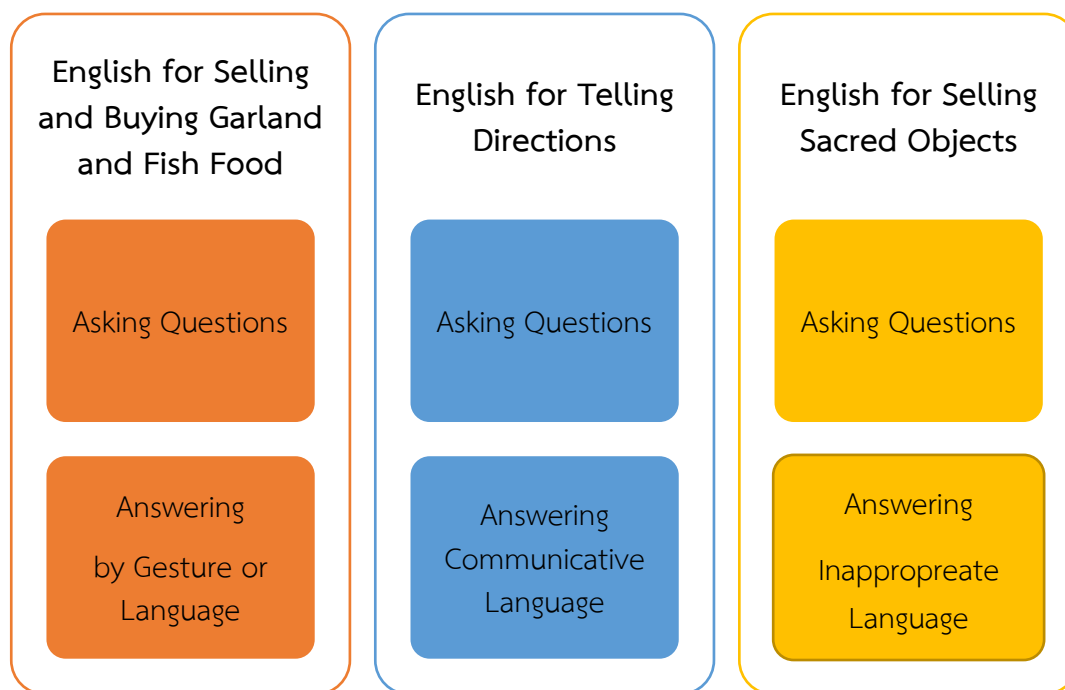
"How many sizes do you have?"

"Do you sell smaller?"

"Do you have bigger size?"

From the results presented in the discussion, it was found that the use of English language in cultural and spiritual tourism by the front officers at the Buddhist Park, Phetchabun Province, can be divided into two models. Firstly, front officers tend to use gestures instead of speaking English, even though they can understand the questions but lack the ability to answer them due to limited vocabulary and grammar. Secondly, some front officers may be able to answer the questions, but they use incorrect vocabulary and grammar rules that are not suitable for cultural and spiritual settings. In addition, the front officers tend to use the primary English language when communicating with foreigners, both native and non-native speakers. It can also be said that local wisdom is the use of local wisdom or knowledge to develop local communities, resulting in a new set of knowledge. (Singsomboon, 2014) They additionally adopted the language for communications in routine life more than the English patterns for cultural and spiritual tourism, which related to the research of Piriyasilp which stated that the front officers aim to use the language that they have learned in schools or their daily lives to answer questions, but this may not be appropriate for cultural tourism and may cause confusion for questioners. (Piriyasilp, 2014) They are aware of the inappropriate language for communications rather than the use of English in term of service. Because of the limitations of the language use of the officers, the use of language can be easily misunderstood, as highlighted in the research of Abuarqoub. (Abuarqoub, 2019) Additionally, English language contexts of each position are different, thus generating the offer not to employ expressions in English for cultural and spiritual communications.

## Originally and Body of Knowledge



**Figure 1** The model of English use at the Buddhist Park.

The above model shows the 3 groups of front officers at the Buddhist Park and how they decided to use 2 models to answer or not answer foreign tourists' questions. There are 2 results to observe. If the front officers understand the questions but cannot answer them orally, they use gestures to communicate with the foreign tourists instead of answering them in English. The other method that the officers choose to use is when they are able to understand the questions and want to answer them, but they might respond in an incorrect or inappropriate way. That is to say that either way, the front officers' answer would be a response through the use of their own first language. In order to assist the front officers, the English language curriculum for specific purposes must be used to train them. The curriculum should include the 3 groups of language usage and the 2 models of answering typical foreign tourist questions. That may enable the front officers to communicate with foreign tourists more competently.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

To summarize the findings on the development of English language use in cultural and spiritual tourism among the front officers at the Buddhist Park, Phetchabun Province, there are 3 groups of English language usage, including English for buying and selling garlands and fish food, English for buying and selling sacred objects, and English for asking for directions. In addition, there are 2 models of front officers' attempts to use English language with foreign tourists, involving the use of gestures due to limited vocabulary and responding inappropriately. Further research should focus on developing the basic skills of English language communication, such as

speaking, listening, and pronunciation, to help front officers feel comfortable and use the language naturally. Programs should be implemented for self-study in school, as well as for incorporating into lesson planning for teachers. Additionally, personal study programs should be provided to improve listening and pronunciation skills with native speakers. These interventions will support the front officers in communicating comfortably and naturally with foreign tourists while on duty at the Buddhist Park. For further research, it is necessary to include a stage for developing basic English communication skills to instill comfort and natural use of the language in front officers. The next step would be to implement a self-study program in schools and also incorporate it into lesson planning for teachers. Additionally, it would be useful to introduce a personal study program for improving listening and pronunciation skills with native speakers to familiarize them with correct pronunciation. These measures would help front officers communicate comfortably and naturally with foreign tourists while on duty in the Buddhist Park.

### Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Wisan Kositanon, the Head of Phetchabun Provincial Cultural Office, for his continuous encouragement throughout my research project. I would also like to thank Associate Professor Teerapatra Ekphachaisawat, the counselor of this research, for her invaluable guidance. Lastly, I would like to extend my appreciation to my colleagues for their unwavering support. I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to my family, specifically my mother and brother, for their unwavering support. Thank you all so much.

### References

- Abuarqoub, I. (2019). Language Barriers to Effective Communication. *Utopia y Praxis Latinoamericana*. 24(6), 64-77.
- Caros, M. (2022). Cultural, Religious, and Spiritual Tourism Attractiveness Among Youngsters. *Catus Tourism Journal*. 4(2), 70-83.
- Gilakjani, A. P. & Sabouri, N. B. (2016). How can EFL teachers help EFL learners improve their English pronunciation?. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*. 7(5), 967-972.
- Mili, N. (2012). Rural tourism development: An overview of tourism in the Tipam Phakey village of Naharkatia in Dibrugarh District, Assam (India). *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*. 2(12), 1-3.
- Nishimura, M. (2020). ASEAN Tourism Policy and Tourism Development in the Southern Part of the Lao PDR. *早稲田大学大学院文学研究科紀要*. 65, 537-555.
- Piriyasilp, Y. (2014). English Language Needs of Tourism Industries in Khon Kaen Province. *Journal of Thai Hospitality and Tourism*. 9(2), 16-30.
- Singsomboon, T. (2014). Tourism promotion and the use of local wisdom through creative tourism process. *International journal of business tourism and applied sciences*. 2(2), 32-37.



- UNWTO. (2015). Tourism Highlights 2015 Edition. UNWTO World Tourism Organization. June 2015, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284416899>.
- UNWTO. (2019). UNWTO World Tourism Barometer and Statistical ANNEX. UNWTO World Tourism Organization. 17(2). <https://doi.org/10.18111/wtobarometereng>.