

**ENGLISH COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS AND THE STRATEGIES USED TO
SOLVE PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY CALL CENTER AGENTS AT A
TELECOMMUNICATION ORGANIZATION IN THAILAND**



**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts in Business English for International Communication
at Srinakharinwirot University**

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Project Advisor: Ms. Piyawan Kullamai.

The objective of this study were to identify the English oral communication problems and the strategies used to solve the English communication problems at a telecommunication organization in Thailand. The participants in this study consisted of sixteen English speaking call center agents working in the international call center department. The instrument employed in this study was a survey questionnaire.

It was found that the English speaking call center agents had problems with (a) producing grammatical errors when speaking to customers on the phone, and (b) not using the correct forms of verb tenses. The results also showed that the major common oral communication strategies used by English speaking call center agents were (a) directly asking the customers for what they did not understand, (b) trying to paraphrase or put in other words, using the equivalent to or the same meaning to confirm their understanding with customers, (c) asking customers to spell out the words that they do not understand, (d) using more general words or terms with their customers, and (e) trying to use another word with a similar meaning to help them to understand what the customer has said.

ปัญหาในการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษและกลวิธีที่ใช้ในการแก้ปัญหาของพนักงานศูนย์บริการ
ตอบรับทางโทรศัพท์ขององค์กรโทรคมนาคมสื่อสารในประเทศไทย



เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษา
ตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจ
เพื่อการสื่อสารนานาชาติ
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สารนิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจปัญหาและกลวิธีในการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของพนักงานศูนย์บริการตอบรับทางโทรศัพท์ขององค์กรโทรคมนาคมสื่อสารในประเทศไทย กลุ่มตัวอย่างในงานวิจัยนี้คือพนักงานไทยในแผนกบริการลูกค้านานาชาติจำนวน 16 คน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัยนี้ คือแบบสอบถามให้พนักงานประเมินปัญหาและกลวิธีที่ใช้ในการแก้ไขปัญหาการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของตน

จากการศึกษาพบว่าพนักงานไทยที่รับผิดชอบลูกค้าชาวต่างชาติที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาในการสื่อสารประสบปัญหาหลักในด้านไวยากรณ์ภาษาอังกฤษในการพูดผ่านโทรศัพท์ และ การใช้รูปแบบของกริยาที่ถูกต้อง แต่อย่างไรก็ตามจากการศึกษายังพบว่าพนักงานใช้กลวิธีต่าง อาทิ เช่น การถามลูกค้าโดยตรง การถอดความ การขอให้สะกดคำที่ไม่เข้าใจ และการใช้คำอื่นที่มีความหมายใกล้เคียง

A master's project titled
English Communication Problems and the Strategies Used to Solve Problems
Experienced by Call Center Agents at a Telecommunication Organization in Thailand
by
Somsak Saepung

has been approved by the Graduate School as partial fulfillment of the requirement for the
Master of Arts degree in Business English for International Communication of
Srinakharinwirot University.

..... Dean of Graduate School
Asst. Prof. Dr. Chatchai Ekpanyaskul, M.D.
....., 2016

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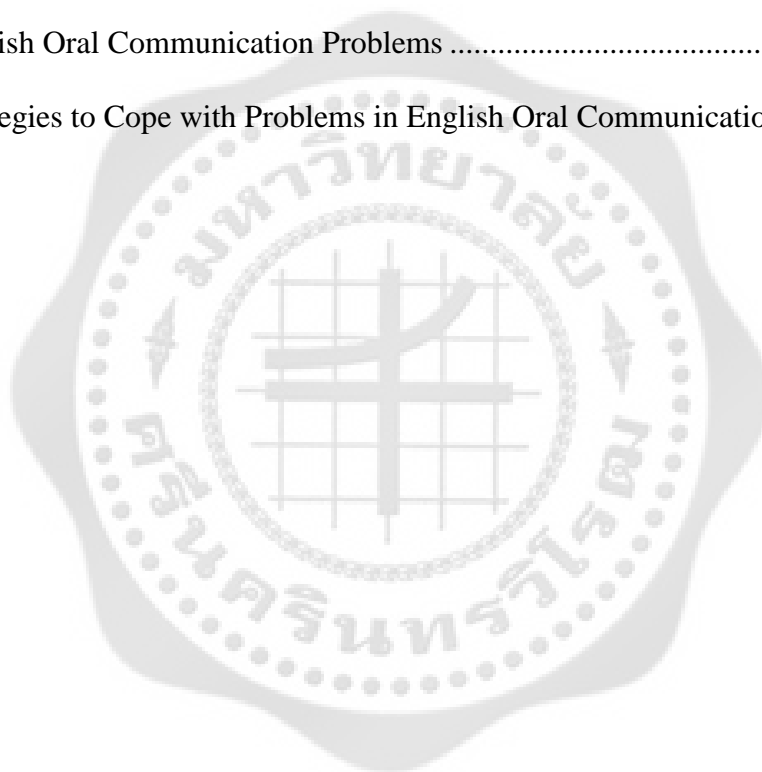
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

In the telecommunication business, the call center is a crucial customer service touch point to serve customers. Without having to travel, the customers can communicate with the call center 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The customers can call anytime that they have any inquiries or any problems. In the telecommunication call center, the customers perform three types of request. First, customers inquire about products and services such as promotion prices, promotion availability, and billing inquiries. Second, customers request problem solving such as phone SIM card delivery, promotion subscription, and mobile service suspension. Finally, customers give complaints or compliments about the product or service.

The organization's business strategy in 2015 states that it delivers quality in four dimensions: devices, networks, applications, and services. The quality of services gains a competitive advantage and encourages customers to stay with the organization.

Accenture (2008) carried out a survey of 4,189 consumers in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, United States, and United Kingdom. Over 67% of respondents confirmed that the core reason for customers to leave an operator was poor customer service. In addition, a survey of 22,052 users of mobile phone in the United States in 2008, the Wireless Phone Users' Satisfaction Index of United States of America declared that the core of service quality included customer satisfaction, billing, and brand

image. So, the organization needs to focus on the customer's perspective in order to gain a competitive advantage and to survive.

In a competitive telecommunication business, organizations need to render good service quality to customers with high commitment, and services need to meet customers' expectations. Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) stated that satisfaction was evaluated by customers after receiving services. Satisfied customers tended to be more loyal, and produced three benefits for organizations; first, the customers will repeat business, second, the cost to acquire new customers such as advertising, promoting, and implementing activities will be higher than the cost to save existing customers, and third, satisfied customers will spread the good news by word-of-mouth to others such as friends, families, and colleagues (Fornell, M., Eugene, J., & Barbara, 1996). These are the reasons why the voices of customers are crucial for the organization.

To gain customer satisfaction, the recruitment process is also important to hire the right person to work in a position. For the recruitment process of English speaking call center agents, candidates must present the results of a test in English for International Communication, the TOEIC, which focuses on measuring listening and reading skills in general. The minimum TOEIC score required is 550. The candidate who achieves the TOEIC requirement will have an interview in English with a human resource and call center manager.

Statement of the problems

At this organization, the customer satisfaction was surveyed by both internal and external sources. This research focused on the survey results done by an external source because it would be unbiased and more reliable. This customer satisfaction survey from the external source was done quarterly. In fourth quarter 2015 customer satisfaction survey results, the customer satisfaction score remained the same. But the item “Language used is comprehensible” dropped by 2%. The feedback from the customers mentioned that the call center should have ongoing English training for the agents. So, the English speaking call center agents have English communication problems when serving the English speaking customers. This organization also used interactive voice response (IVR) as an internal survey to push outbound calls to the customers after receiving the services for 15 minutes. This was done randomly for 10-20% of total inbound calls, on a daily basis.

The customer satisfaction survey results in 2015 illustrated the problems in effective English communication of English speaking call center agents. The customer satisfaction survey collected customer feedback with deep analysis to make into an actionable plan to improve the service quality, in order to meet the customers’ expectations and needs. It is not known to what extent English speaking call center agents are aware of effective English language when they are serving the English speaking customers. So, this study explored communication problems of English speaking call center agents, and also the strategies used by English speaking call center agent while they are facing communication problems.

Objective of the study

The organization is attempting to increase its customer satisfaction scores. For many years, customer satisfaction was perceived to determine whether customers would leave or stay with the organization. Dissatisfied customers may move to competitors as they might believe that the competitors could provide a better quality of service. Customers also expect to receive information or solutions to their problem in a polite and timely manner. The customers also want efficient, well trained people to deal with them. Being impolite outspoken, getting disconnected or refusing to listen to customers does not reflect positively on the organization. The focus will always need to remain first on the customers and their needs, to make them feel valued. So, the service quality should be improved consistently in response to the customers' needs and expectations.

The customer satisfaction score in 2015 decreased by 2 percent for “Language used is comprehensible” which was mainly caused by ineffective English communication by the call center agents. To increase the customer satisfaction score, the call center agents must improve their customer service quality by ongoing training following the feedback from customers in 2015. This study will explore the English communication problems that English speaking call center agents have to deal with. The study also seeks to investigate the communication strategies used to solve the communication problems between English speaking customers and call center agents. Effective communication not only results in quality work, it also results in customer service quality.

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate the communication problems encountered by English speaking call center agents.
2. To find out the strategies used by English speaking call center agents when they encounter communication problems.

Research Questions

1. What are the communication problems of English speaking call center agents when they provide services to English speaking customers?
2. What strategies do English speaking call center agents use to solve communication problems when they provide services to English speaking customers?

Significance of the Study

This study explored the English communication problems that English speaking call center agents had to deal with. This study also sought to investigate the communication strategies used to solve the communication problems.

Obtaining call center agents' insight can facilitate English development programs and narrow the achievement gap. The findings could help the executives at this organization to recognize the need for English development programs. This will enhance English communication proficiency, as well as improve the customer satisfaction scores.

Scope of the Study

The call center in the telecommunication business provides services to both Thai and English speaking customers with dedicated groups of call center agents. This research will focus only on English speaking call center agents who serve English speaking customers.

This study focused only on verbal communication by phone, as the customer satisfaction results provided by the external source surveyed only by verbal communication channels. Emails, Line and Facebook, which are non-verbal channels are not included in this research.

This study examined the communication problems of English speaking call center agents and the strategies used to cope with communication problems. A set of questionnaires was distributed to 16 English speaking call center agents who serve English speaking customers by phone at a telecommunication organization in Thailand.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are specifically defined in this study:

1. Call center

Call center in this study is a unit of customer service at a telecommunications organization which provides services to customers by giving information, solving problems, and receiving the customers' complaints only by phone.

2. Customer satisfaction

Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1993) advised that customer satisfaction was a function of customer's assessment of service quality, product, and price. In this research, customer satisfaction will refer to the degree of customers' positive feelings towards services delivered by English speaking call center agents.

3. English speaking call center agents

English speaking call center agents are the participants of this study. They provide services to English speaking customers over the phone. The main functions of the job are answering questions, providing information, solving problems, and handling complaints.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Definition of communication

Communication is important for the competitive world nowadays. Tubb & Moss (2003) stated that people spent 75% of each day on some forms of communication as part of their daily life. The main purpose of communication is to deliver the message from the sender to listener (Somsai & Intarapasert, 2011). Communication is declared by Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel (2007, p. 17) as “a dynamic process in which people attempt to share their internal states with other people through the use of symbols.” Likely, Seiler and Beall (2002, p. 6) advised that communication is “the simultaneous sharing and creating of meaning through human symbolic action, a process by which verbal and non-verbal messages are sent, received, and given meaning”. Pearson and Nelson (1997, p. 5) advised that “communication requires understanding, perceiving, interpreting, and comprehending the meaning of the verbal and non-verbal behavior. Communication also involves sharing, interaction between people in order to exchange meaning.” Pruksanubal (2006) claimed that the communication is to deliver message to others and the ability to understand what information and feelings to share with. Hybels & Weaver (2001) indicated that the communication is a kind of process to share the information, ideas, and feelings with the other people. The communication process for call center agents is starting when the customers call to a call center. The customers will inquire the information or request for problem solution. The call center agents will provide the customer with the requested information, offer the problem solution with

options, or show the caring to serve the customers to their satisfaction. The good or bad experiences encountering with the call center would be shared by words of mouth to friends and families. Therefore, the definition of the communication in this study is a process of sending and receiving the key messages between senders and receivers by phone.

Communication process

Communication process consists of various elements: sender, receiver, message, channel, noise, feedback, and setting. Senders send the message to receivers via channels such as voice phone, email, memo, SMS, line. The message could be disturbed or interfered by noise (Tubb & Moss, 2003). The setting is important and impact to the communication process. For example, the formal setting would be recommended for the formal presentation (Hybels & Weaver II, 2007). Figure I showed the communication process as per below:

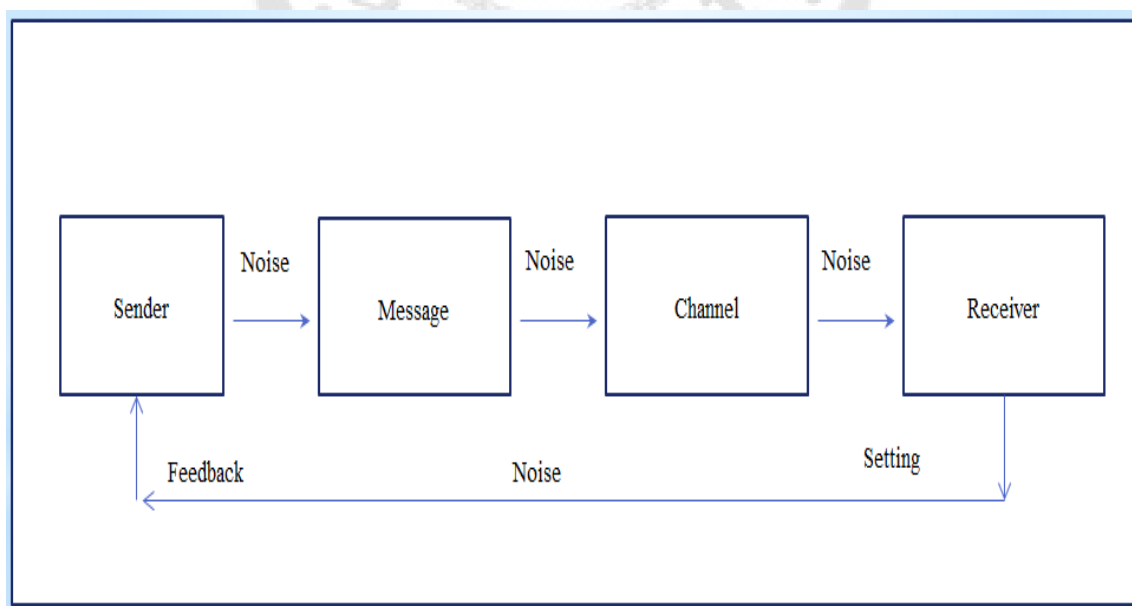


Figure 1 Communication Process

1. Sender and receiver. Customers and call center agents are involved in communication because they have information, ideals, and feelings to share each other. Communication is not a one way process. So, customers and call center agents could play at both roles of senders and receiver. Hybels & Weaver II (2007) advised that people can perform both of sending and receiving message at the same time.

2. Message. The message could be in the form of symbols to represent ideas, feelings, gestures, body language, pitch, and touch (Pearson & Nelson, 1997). Gamble & Gamble (1996) advised that people send and receive both of verbal and non-verbal messages. Verbal messages are in the form of spoken communication and verbal messages are basically used for human communication. Tubb & Moss (2003) indicated that verbal messages are used to communicate with others. It can be either with or without a conscious effort. Non-verbal messages are communicated without using words. When people deliver the verbal message, people attach non-verbal messages as one kind of meaning to others too.

3. Channel. Gamble & Gamble (1996) claimed that the messages would be delivered by five senses of hearing, sight, and touch which are basic channels for interpersonal communication. And the channel is the route to deliver the message from the sender to receiver (Hybels & Weaver II, 2007). Therefore, the channel in this research is the telephone.

4. Feedback. The feedback could be both of verbal and non-verbal messages that receiver sent back to senders (Gamble & Gamble, 1996). Feedback is the kind of response made by the receiver. It begins when the receiver respond to the message and ends when the response has been decoded by the sender. If the feedback does not exist, the sender might never know that the messages have been clearly understood by the receiver. Therefore, the feedback is crucial important in communication process.

5. Noise. Tubb & Moss (2003) advised that noise could distort the message or information delivered to the receiver. The existence of noise could degrade the quality of the communication between sender and receiver. Noises are classified into three forms as following:

5.1 External noise. Hybels & Weaver II (2007) declared that external noise can interfere the message from being understood or heard and it comes from the atmosphere such as heat, cold, or the odor of cigarettes or a strong perfume.

5.2 Internal noise. Hybels & Weaver II (2007) claimed that internal noise happens in mind of the sender or receiver when they are not focused or concentrated on the present.

5.3 Semantic noise. Tubb & Moss (2003) advised that semantic noise is anything that decreases the clarity, accuracy, meaning, and understanding of a message.

6. Setting. Hybels & Weaver II (2007) advised that setting is the environment which communication occurs. Setting can be attitudes, feelings, perceptions, and relationships (Seiler & Beall, 2002).

Effective communication

Ross (2006) defined the effective communication as the balance of intended message delivery from sender to receiver without meaning change. And Campbell (1989) claimed that effective communication is to assist or create the outcome for interpersonal communication as goal-oriented.

According to Faerch and Kasper (1983, p. 36), a communication strategy is a “potentially conscious plan for solving what to do if an individual experiences problems in reaching a particular communicative goal.” Furthermore, Canale (as cited in Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011, p. 85) defined communication strategies as “verbal and non-verbal strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to limiting conditions in actual communication or to insufficient competence in one or more other areas of communicative competency, and to enhance the effectiveness of communication.”

Related previous research and communication strategy

Recently, researchers conducted several studies concentrating on the different aspects of English listening, English speaking, and English communication. Orisa S. (2006) conducted a study of “*A survey of English speaking problems of nurses at Rajavithi Hospital.*” The speaking problems were found for nurses at Rajavithi hospital which was caused by grammatical errors, difficulty in self-expression, not being able to use the right words, inappropriate use of intonation and stress, mispronunciation, and lack of self-confidence.

Seong (2007) conducted a study focusing on English for tourism. It was found that English oral communication skills were the most valuable source to communicate with foreign visitors. By increasing the understanding level of conversation, grammatical modification, negotiation, and providing feedback, Seong suggested that learners needed to be actively involved in language learning.

Forey and lockwood (2007) conducted a study in the call center contexts of customer service representatives in Philippines. The finding showed that the main problems for the non-native English employees were grammatical knowledge and English pronunciation. The problems were also concerned to an inability to understand a complex text, and a lack of awareness of the country and the culture of their customers. In the call center context, English oral communication is not only seen as the heart of call center job, but it is also a vital part for success. The communication quality improvement and increasing of English standard are both of the factors that help to maintain and enlarge the non-native English speaking call center agents to be an international level.

Boonkit K. (2010) studied the development of speaking skills for non-native English speakers. Most Thai students have studied English for approximately 8-10 years before entering university. However, the level of confidence and English speaking competence are still low. In this study, two interview questions were asked and recorded for the participants' speech. Boonkit advised that English speaking skills should be developed along to the listening skills. If both of English speaking skills and listening skills were integrated, these integrated skills could help enhance communication achievement.

Tanamon B. (2004) studied the improvement of communicative competence on speaking English through the use of role play. The 40 Communicative Arts major-students were participated by the purposive random sampling method. The results showed that the participants studied speaking through role-play got higher scores than before studying it. They viewed that doing role-play improved their communicative competence as well as built them greater confidence to speak English. This role-play increased the students' motivation and interaction in the class room. The students were provided with opportunities to speak in various situations.

Fatimah J. (2012) studied the English communication problems and strategies used by Thai employees in an international workplace to communicate with native and non-native speaking customers. The most common problem findings in both groups of native and non-native speaking customers were listening comprehension and grammatical usage. However, the groups of employees communicating with non-native English speaking customers rated a higher level of agreement relating to English communication problems than the group communicating with native English speaking customers. Moreover, the employees who communicated with non-native English speaking customers also moderately agreed that they had problems understanding foreign accents, low fluency in spoken English, insufficient knowledge of the cultural background of their customers, trouble regulating the volume of their voice, insufficient vocabulary, low confidence, and poor English pronunciation. In terms of the use of oral communication strategies, the achievement strategies employed by both groups were (a) directly asking their customers what they did not understand, (b) seeking a clarification request, (c) making something explicit through paraphrasing, (d) making generalizations by using general words or terms.

Somsai and Intaraprasert (2011) and Fatimah J. (2012) mentioned that communication strategies have two types; achievement strategy and avoidance strategy. Achievement strategy was used to directly cope with communication problem including word coinage, language switching, paraphrasing, or an appeal for help. Avoidance strategy use to change, replace, or reduce the content of intended message.

Jeharsae, F. (2012) summarized that communication strategies could be listed below:

1. Avoidance or reduction strategies, which include avoidance of words, topics or message abandonment.

2. Achievement or compensatory strategies, which include:

(a) Making messages explicit by paraphrasing

(b) Approximation / using a word that means approximately the same

(c) Word coinage / making up a word to substitute for the unknown word

(d) Circumlocution / talking in an indirect way of speaking

(e) Generalization or use of all purpose words

(f) Language or code switching / using a term from another language without bothering to translate

(g) Literal translation / translating word for word from another language

(h) Asking for repetition, seeking for clarification or emphasis to confirm understanding

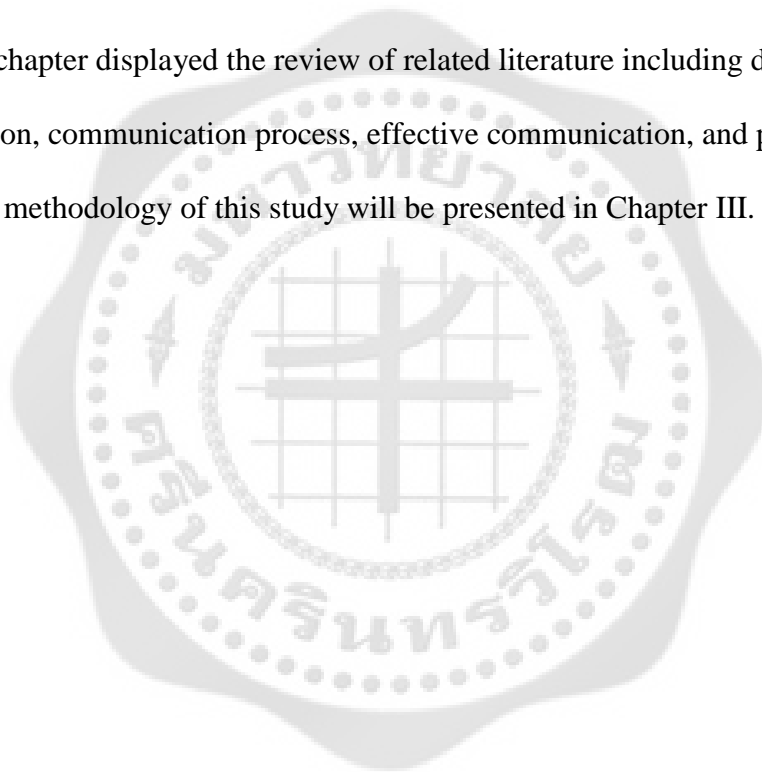
(i) Asking to spelling out the word

(j) Appeal for assistance / asking for the correct item, meaning, or structure.

Communication strategy was used to reach the intended communication objective and it will lead to increase the opportunity to get the higher both of customer satisfaction score and sales revenue.

Summary

This chapter displayed the review of related literature including definition of communication, communication process, effective communication, and previous related studies. The methodology of this study will be presented in Chapter III.



CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of the study were 16 English speaking call center agents, responsible for serving English speaking customers, at a telecommunication business in Thailand with at least six months service time. The participants were selected through the purposive sampling method on the basis of convenience and availability.

Instrumentation

This was a quantitative study. Data was collected through the use of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to gather information from the research questions which were developed from previous and related studies as mentioned in Chapter two. The questions were to examine the English communication problems between English speaking customers and English speaking call center agents as well as the strategies used to solve these problems. The participants were asked about their problems with English use in terms of oral communication and the strategies they used when they had communication problems.

To standardize the questionnaire, three experts were asked to review the adapted questionnaire. Two experts included Ms. Piyawan Kullamai and Assistant Professor Dr. Anchalee Jansem, the researcher's advisors. In addition, Ms. Vaoduen Lamsam, Assistance Vice President at this organization was asked to review the content validity of questionnaire. Their feedbacks and suggestions were used in revision.

There were three parts in the questionnaire as follows:

Part I: Personal information. The first part asked for the call center agents' demographic information including age, gender, educational background, and service year. In order to keep the information anonymous, the questionnaires would not ask for the respondents' names.

Part II: This part focused on the English communication problems of the participants when they communicated with English speaking customers. The questionnaire would address a number of problematic topics including listening comprehension, fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and others.

Part III: The questions concentrated on the strategies the participants used to cope with the communication problems. The participants were asked to the level of frequency by choosing one of five items on a Likert scale- Always, Often, Sometimes, Seldom, and Never.

Open-ended questions were added to Part II and III to gather more in-depth information on the English communication problems and strategies the participants used during communication with English speaking customers. In this part, the participants could provide specific information concerning their opinions which were not mentioned in the closed-ended questions.

Data Collection

The study was conducted at a telecommunication call center in April 2016. The research participants were 16 English speaking call center agents. The researcher had

requested for the permission from the department manager and the research was allowed to conduct.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed in relation to the research questions regarding English communication problems and the strategies used to solve these problems. The personal information data obtained from Part I of the questionnaire including gender, age, educational background, and working year was analyzed for descriptive information. Therefore, the data concerning the general background was presented as a percentage. Part II was concerned with the English communication problems between English speaking customers and call center agents. A five-point Likert scale was used to score the participants' level of agreement in terms of their English oral communication problems. Part III was focused on the level of frequency for strategies used to solve the problems. A five-point Likert scale would be used to rate the participant's level of frequency in terms of strategies used to communicate with English speaking customers. Part II and part III were analyzed quantitatively for percentage (%), mean score (*M*), and standard deviation (*SD*).

The interpretation of mean score was analyzed by following the criteria introduced by Pisarnbut (2007) as follows:

Scale	Level	Mean Range
5	Very high	4.21 – 5.00
4	High	3.41 – 4.20
3	Moderate	2.61 – 3.40
2	Low	1.81 – 2.60
1	Very low	1.00 – 1.80

Summary

The method of the study was descriptive and quantitative in nature. In this chapter, the participants, instrument, data collection, and data analysis were described. After data analysis completed, the findings were presented in tables followed by explanations in Chapter IV.



CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter reported the findings of the study. The data presented in this chapter were collected from 16 returned questionnaires shown in the tabular forms along with the description.

Part 1: Demographic Data of the Participants

The descriptive analysis was reported concerning the demographic data of English speaking call center agents at a telecommunication business in Thailand.

Table 1 Gender

Genders	Numbers	%
Female	13	81.25
Male	3	18.75
Total	16	100.00

As shown in Table 1, 16 call center agents participated in this study. The majority of the sampled agents in the call center at this organization were female (81.25%). Only 18.75% of the agents were male.

Table 2 Age

Age	Number	%
20-30	10	62.50
31-40	6	37.50
Total	16	100.00

Table 2 demonstrated that 62.50% of participants were in the range of 20-30 years old. 37.50% of them were ranged of 31-40 years old. None was over 40 years old.

Table 3 Educational Level

Educational Level	Number	%
Bachelor	16	100

Table 3 indicated that the educational level of the participants was 100% with bachelor degree.

Table 4 Years of Working Experience in the English speaking call center agents

Years of Working Experience	Number	Percentage
1-5 years	12	75.00%
6-10 years	3	18.75%
> 10 years	1	6.25%
Total	16	100%

In terms of years of working experience at the English speaking call center department in table 4, most of the call center agents had the experience from one year to five years (75%), 6 to 10 years (18.75%), and over 10 years (6.25%).

Part II: English Oral Communication Problems with English speaking customers in workplace.

This part includes a descriptive analysis of the research findings in accordance with the first research question. The data were analyzed and calculated using Mean score (M), and Standard Deviation (SD).

Research Question 1.

What are the communication problems of English speaking call center agents when they provide services to English speaking customers?

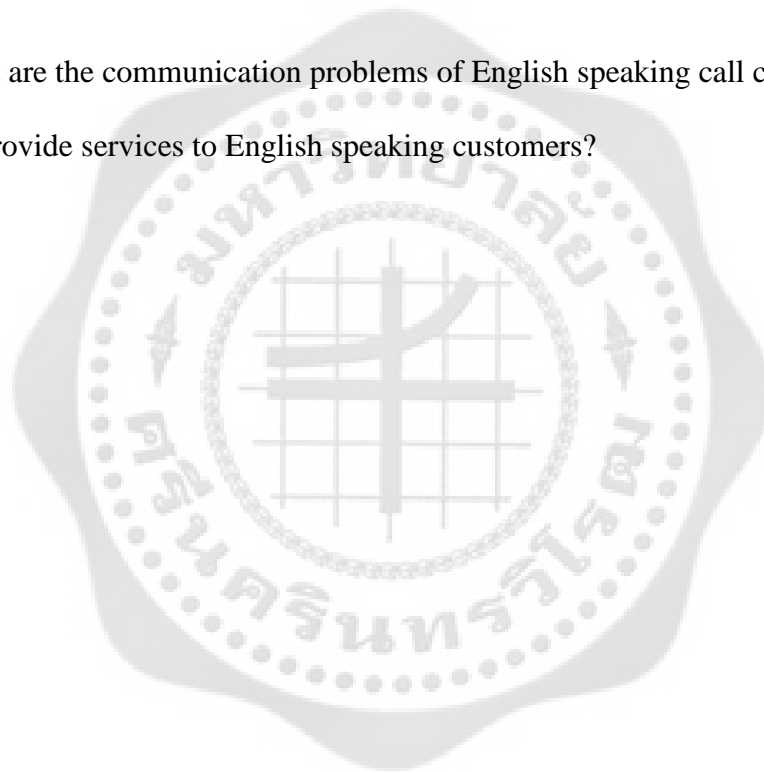


Table 5 English Oral Communication Problems with English speaking customers in workplace ($N = 16$)

Functions	Problems	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Listening Comprehension	1. I have trouble understanding speech during telephone calls.	2.50	1.10
	2. I do not understand words and sentences when foreign customers speak English very fast.	2.50	1.10
	3. I do not know when to pay attention closely when listening to calls from customers.	2.06	1.06
	4. I have trouble with accuracy when listening to customers on phone.	2.06	1.06
Fluency	5. I have low fluency in spoken English.	1.94	0.85
	6. I pause too long when speaking English.	1.88	0.96
	7. I understand, but I am unable to respond.	1.81	0.83
Grammar	8. I produce grammatical errors when speaking to customers on phone.	2.88	1.26
	9. I do not use the plural form of the noun correctly.	2.44	0.96
	10. I do not use the correct forms of verb tenses. (Present, Past, Future tenses)	2.69	1.25

Table 5 (continued) English Oral Communication Problems with English speaking customers in workplace ($N = 16$)

Functions	Problems	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Vocabulary	11. I respond with inappropriate words.	1.88	1.02
	12. I have poor or insufficient vocabulary.	2.56	1.21
Pronunciation	13. I have trouble understanding foreign accents.	1.88	0.89
	14. I produce word stress misplacements.	2.50	1.1
	15. I speak with poor English pronunciation.	1.94	0.93
Quality of Voice	16. I think I have trouble regulating the volume of my voice. (I speak too loudly or too softly)	2.31	1.08
	17. I think I speak so quickly that my listeners cannot keep up.	2.31	1.08
	18. I think I speak so slowly that people lose interest.	1.94	1.18
	19. I think I mumble when speaking since I cannot say or pronounce each consonant clearly.	2.00	0.89
Self-Confidence	20. I have low confidence when speaking English.	1.94	1.06
	21. I feel nervous when speaking English.	1.69	0.79
Cultural Awareness	22. I lack cultural background of foreign customers.	2.00	0.73

Results.

As indicated in Table 5, the results revealed that English speaking call center agents communicating with English speaking customers moderately agreed that they encountered only two critical problems (9%) out of the 22 problems listed in the questionnaire. The problems encountered by this group at moderate level of agreement included (a) producing grammatical errors when speaking to customers on phone ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.26$), and (b) not using the correct forms of verb tenses ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.25$).



Part III: Strategies to Cope with Problems in English Oral

Communication in Your workplace.

This part includes a descriptive analysis of the research findings in accordance with the second research question. The data were analyzed and calculated using Mean score (*M*), and Standard Deviation (*SD*).

Research Question 2.

What strategies do English speaking call center agents use to solve the communication problems when they provide services to English speaking customers?

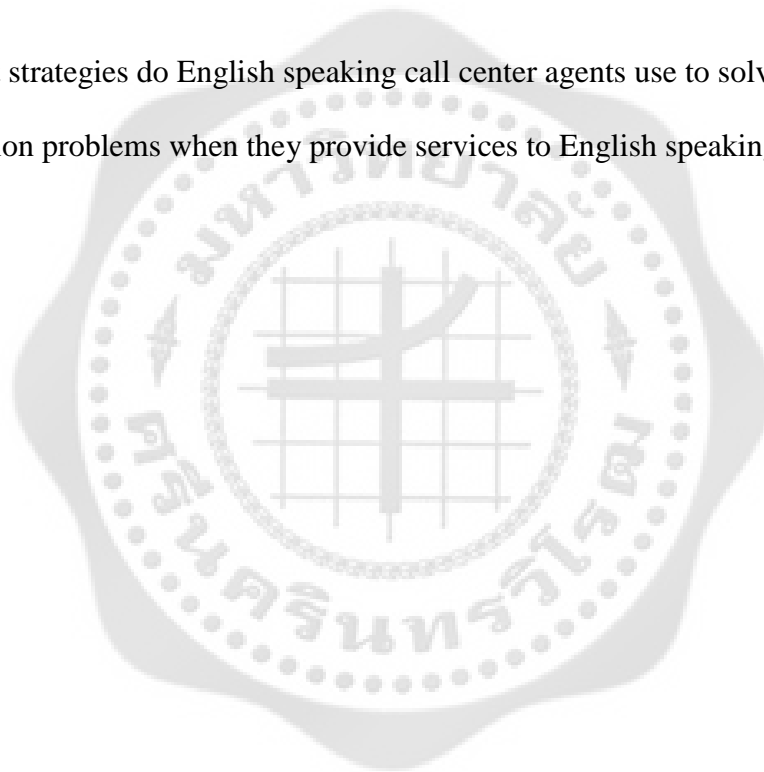


Table 6 Strategies to cope with problems in English Oral Communication in Workplace

(N = 16)

Strategies	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Achievement / Compensatory Strategies		
1. I ask customers to spell words that I do not understand.	3.44	1.21
2. I ask customers to use easy words.	1.88	0.96
3. I ask customers to speak louder.	2.75	0.68
4. I ask customers to speak more slowly.	2.44	0.63
5. I repeat words or phrases with tones of rising or falling.	3.19	1.05
6. I make a clarification request.	3.31	1.01
7. I directly ask my customers for what I do not understand.	4.06	0.85
8. I try to translate what I hear into my first language word by word.	1.88	0.89
9. I use a dictionary to translate unfamiliar words.	2.63	1.31
10. I use indirect words or roundabout expressions to get the customers' messages.	2.63	0.72
11. I use Thai language for words or expressions that I do not know how to say in English.	1.38	0.62

Table 6 (continued) Strategies to Cope with problems in English Oral Communication in Workplace ($N = 16$)

Strategies	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Achievement / Compensatory Strategies (continued)		
12. I make up my own new English words to replace the word that I do not know exactly what is called in English.	1.81	1.28
13. I ask my colleagues to help translate for me.	1.88	0.89
14. I use general words or terms with my customers.	3.38	1.02
15. I try to paraphrase or talk in a different way with equivalent to or the same meaning to confirm my understanding with customers.	3.56	1.03
16. I try to use another word that means almost the same with what customer said, e.g. animal instead of horse.	3.38	1.02

Results.

In terms of achievement strategies, the top five strategies with highest mean score rated by English speaking call center agents who communicated with English speaking customers included directly asking their customers for what they did not understand ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.85$), trying to paraphrase or talk in a different way with equivalent to or the same meaning to confirm their understanding with customers ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.03$), asking customers to spell words that they did not understand ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.21$), using general words or terms with their customers ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.02$), and trying to use another word that means almost the same with what customer said ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.02$).

The English speaking call center agents indicated low frequency regarding the use of achievement strategies included asking customers to speak more slowly ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 0.63$), asking customers to use easy words ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 0.96$), trying to translate what they heard into their first language word by word ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 0.89$), asking their colleagues to help translate for them ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 0.89$), making up their own new English words to replace the word that they did not know exactly what was called in English ($M = 1.81$, $SD = 1.28$), and using Thai language for words or expressions that they did not know how to say in English ($M = 1.38$, $SD = 0.62$).

Table 6 (Continued) Strategies to Cope with problems in English Oral Communication in Workplace ($N = 16$)

Strategies	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Avoidance / Reduction Strategies		
17. I change the topic when I feel that I do not have enough knowledge or understood the customers.	1.88	0.89
18. I only focus on key words to get the overall message.	3.25	1.13
19. I only pay attention to what I have understood.	2.19	0.98
20. I pretend to understand the message.	1.69	1.01

In terms of avoidance strategies, there was one strategy rated at high frequency level by this group, which included focusing on key words to get the overall message ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.13$). The other strategies, paying attention to what they had understood ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 0.98$), changing the topic when they felt that they did not have enough knowledge or understood the customers ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 0.89$), and pretending to understand the message, were rated at low frequency level ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 1.01$).

The results from Table 6 revealed that English speaking call center agents who communicated with English speaking customers used both types of strategies. The most commonly used achievement strategies were (a) directly asking their customers for what they did not understand ($M = 4.06, SD = 0.85$), (b) trying to paraphrase or talk in a different way with equivalent to or the same meaning to confirm their understanding with customers ($M = 3.56, SD = 1.03$), (c) asking customers to spell words that they did not understand ($M = 3.44, SD = 1.21$), (d) using general words or terms with their customers ($M = 3.38, SD = 1.02$), and (e) trying to use another word that means almost the same with what customer said ($M = 3.38, SD = 1.02$). And the most commonly used avoidance strategy was focusing on key words to get the overall message.

For the qualitative data, the participants were asked to provide their other problems and other strategies used to solve problems, if they wished. There were no added communication problems and communication strategies, or any suggestions from the participants due to the questionnaires were included all the problems and communication strategies used to solve problems.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

This chapter contains four main sectors: summary of the study, discussion of the major findings, conclusion, and recommendation for further studies.

Summary of the study

This study was conducted with sixteen English speaking call center agents at a call center of a telecommunication business in Thailand. The objective of this study was to find out about the communication problems of English speaking call center agents when providing services to English speaking customers, and to explore the strategies which the English speaking call center agents use to solve communication problems.

The data from the sixteen questionnaires were analyzed to answer two research questions:

1. What are the communication problems of English speaking call center agents when they provide services to English speaking customers?
2. What strategies do English speaking call center agents use to solve the communication problems when they provide services to English speaking customers?

The findings of the research questions are discussed in the following sections.

Discussion

The results indicated that English speaking call center agents communicating with English speaking customers encountered two problems (9%) at a moderate level of agreement out of the 22 problems listed in the questionnaire. The problems they encountered the most included (a) producing grammatical errors when speaking to customers on phone ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.26$), and (b) not using the correct forms of verb tenses ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.25$).

The results of this study were consistent in some part with the study of Forey and Lockwood (2007), which found that the problem for non-native English employees who worked as call center agents was limited grammatical knowledge. Tubb and Moss (2003) advised in the communication process that semantic noise was defined as distortion and ambiguities in messages that block clear understanding between speaker and listener. Poor English grammar was apparent when an individual attempts to express their ideas with a resulting failure to comprehend the main ideas of the message. The customer satisfaction scores in 2015 decreased by 2 percent for “Language used is comprehensible”, which is consistent with the results of this research. So, the grammatical problem was one of the factors that decreased the accuracy, clarity, and understanding of the message in the communication process which is the heart of the call center job. And it is also vital part of gaining customer satisfaction for long term success.

The findings of Boonkit's study were consistent with this study in terms of the problem of the grammatical structure of English sentences. Most Thai students have studied English for almost ten years before entering university and many of them lack confidence and find communicating with foreigners to be a major problem. However, the

participants in this study disagreed that they had low confidence when speaking English ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 1.06$), and they also disagreed in this study that they felt nervous when speaking English ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 0.79$), following Boonkit's study. The participants in Boonkit's study were 18 students at university but the participants in this study were 16 agents (75%) who had graduated and working experience for 1-5 years as English speaking call center agents. The targeted participants were different between these two studies. The participants who had more working experiences should be more confident and felt lower levels of nervousness than the participants who were studying in university.

In comparison between these two strategies, they employed achievement strategies with a higher level of frequency than avoidance strategies to cope with their English oral communication problems. The achievement strategies commonly used in this study were (a) directly asking their customers for what they did not understand, (b) trying to paraphrase or rephrase with equivalent or same meaning phrases to confirm their understanding with customers, (c) asking customers to spell words that they did not understand, (d) using general words or terms with their customers, (e) trying to use another word that means almost the same as what customers said, (f) making a clarification request, and (g) repeating words or phrases with tones of rising or falling. Furthermore, when they had difficulties during oral communication with English speaking customers, they used avoidance or reduction strategies, which were to focus on key words to get the overall message.

Both the achievement strategies and avoidance or reduction strategies could be used to create guideline scripts for English speaking call center agents to use when they serve English speaking customers. The guidelines could be developed in scenario cases

and the training department at this organization could provide training to both existing and new English speaking call center agents.

The results in this study were consistent with a study by Fatimah J. (2012), in which both groups of Thai employees used achievement strategies more than avoidance strategies to cope with English oral communication problems. The communication strategies were useful techniques for coping with difficulties in oral communication, especially for those who use English as a second or a foreign language. This will enhance communicative effectiveness, and ensure smooth communication. Ross (2006) also advised that effective communication was to deliver the intended message from sender to receiver without changing in meaning. The results showed that all English speaking call center agents of this telecommunication organization were competent in oral communication. They could cope with communication problems without employing effective oral communication strategies. There might have been other factors to make the customer satisfaction under “Language used is comprehensible” decrease by 2 percent. The qualitative method for interview might be used for further study.

Conclusion and Implications

The major problems when English speaking call center agents communicated with English speaking customers were grammar usage: producing grammatical errors when speaking to customers on phone, and not using the correct forms of verb tenses. So, when the call center agents faced communication problems during their service interaction, they were trying to cope with their problematic communication by using both achievement strategies and avoidance or reduction strategies.

Seong (2007) advised that language learning was needed for communication skill improvement. Seong also conducted a study of models of teaching for the improvement of oral communication skills focused on tourism English. It was found that English oral communication was the most important skill for communicating with foreigners. And grammar was one of the factors to increase the level of understanding. Seong advised further that learners needed to be actively involved in language learning. So, the English speaking call center agent should attend English training courses to develop grammatical competency.

Boonkit (2010) suggested that English speaking skills and English listening skills should be developed simultaneously, as these integrated skills could help enhance communication achievement with both native English speakers and those who speak English as a second language. As normal practice, the call center agents will have quarterly competency tests for product and service knowledge. To improve the customer satisfaction score, this organization should include English grammatical tests with product and service tests for English call center agents quarterly and provide training courses to improve English communication proficiency.

Tanamon B. (2004) studied the improvement of communicative competence in speaking English through the use of role-play. Mistakes of language structure were the main problem for the students in her study. The students could not construct complicated sentences, and they could communicate only by using simple sentences or words. The results showed that the students had positive attitudes towards learning English through the use of role-play, and that they had better English scores through using role-play technique. Tanamon B. (2004) advised that doing role-play improved communicative competence, and that role-play proved to be a very powerful technique. Therefore, role-play could be a beneficial instrument for the training of English speaking call center agents.

In conclusion, the organization should provide English training courses related to the oral communication problems experienced by employees so that they can work more effectively in daily communication with foreign customers.

Recommendation for further studies

1. English speaking customers could be both native and non-native English speakers. A comparison to find out if there is any difference between standard and non-standard English communication with English speaking call center agents is recommended.

2. Further studies should be conducted with larger varieties of telecommunication organizations so that the results will be more reliable and accurate.





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APPENDIX

Part I: Personal information

Instruction: Please answer all questions below by marking a check (✓) for your answer in the appropriate box.

1. Gender

- Male Female

2. Age (Years)

- 20 – 30 years
 31 – 40 years
 More than 40 years

3. Education

- Bachelor's Degree
 Higher than Bachelor's Degree

4. How long have you been working with this current department?

- 1 - 5 years
 6 - 10 years
 More than 10 years

Part II: English Oral Communication Problems with English speaking customers in Your Workplace

Instruction: Please answer all questions by marking a check (✓) for each statement that most accurately reflects the level of your agreement with each of the following English oral communication problems.

(5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Moderately Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree)

Problems	Level of Agreement					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Moderately Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
	5	4	3	2	1	
Listening comprehension						
1. I have trouble understanding speech during telephone calls.						
2. I do not understand words and sentences when foreign customers speak English very fast.						
3. I do not know when to pay attention closely when listening to calls from customers.						

Problems	Level of Agreement					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Moderately Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
	5	4	3	2	1	
4. I have trouble with accuracy when listening to customers on phone.						
Fluency						
5. I have low fluency in spoken English.						
6. I pause too long when speaking English.						
7. I understand, but I am unable to respond.						
Grammar						
8. I produce grammatical errors when speaking to customers on phone.						
9. I do not use the plural form of the noun correctly.						

Problems	Level of Agreement					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Moderately Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
	5	4	3	2	1	
10. I do not use the correct forms of verb tenses. (Present, Past, Future tenses)						
Vocabulary						
11. I respond with inappropriate words.						
12. I have poor or insufficient vocabulary (few choices of words).						
Others						
- Pronunciation						
13. I have trouble understanding foreign accents.						
14. I produce word stress misplacements.						

Problems	Level of Agreement							
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Moderately Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree			
	5	4	3	2	1			
- Self-Confidence								
20. I have low confidence when speaking English.								
21. I feel nervous when speaking English.								
- Cultural Awareness								
22. I lack cultural background of foreign customers.								

23. Other Problems in English Oral Communication (Please specify.)

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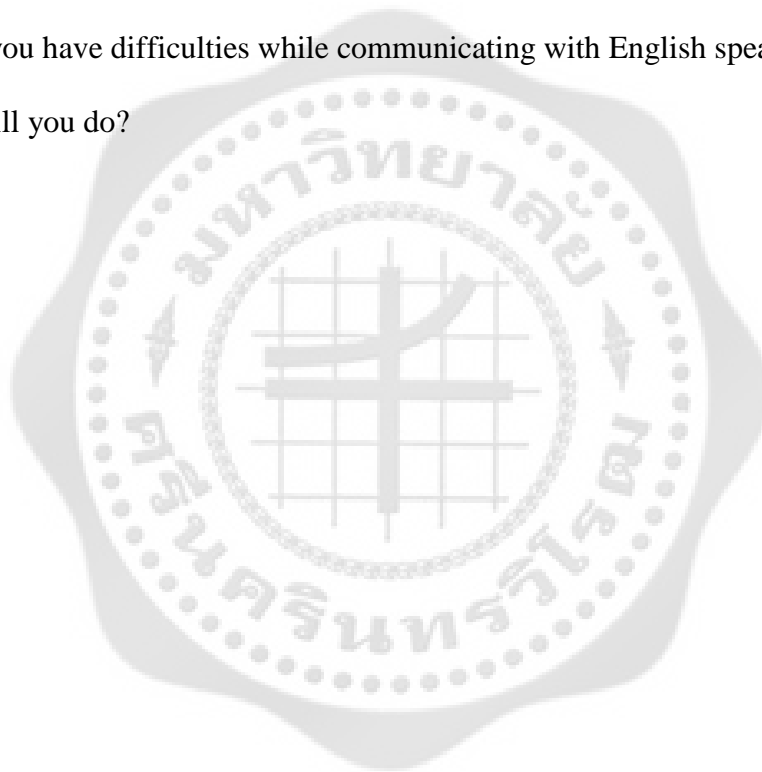
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Part III: Strategies to Cope with Problems in English Oral Communication in Your Workplace

Instruction: Please answer all questions below by marking a check (✓) for each statement that most accurately reflects the level of your frequency with each of the following ways to cope with your English oral communication problems.

(5 = Always, 4 = Often, 3 = Sometimes, 2 = Seldom, 1 = Never)

In case that you have difficulties while communicating with English speaking customers, how often will you do?



Communication Strategies	Level of Frequency				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
	5	4	3	2	1
Achievement or Compensatory Strategies					
1. I ask customers to spell words that I do not understand.					
2. I ask customers to use easy words.					
3. I ask customers to speak louder.					
4. I ask customers to speak more slowly.					
5. I repeat words or phrases with tones of rising or falling.					
6. I make a clarification request.					
7. I directly ask my customers for what I do not understand.					
8. I try to translate what I hear into my first language word by word.					
9. I use a dictionary to translate unfamiliar words.					

Communication Strategies	Level of Frequency				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
	5	4	3	2	1
10. I use indirect words or roundabout expressions to get the customers' messages.					
11. I use Thai language for words or expressions that I do not know how to say in English.					
12. I make up my own new English words to replace the word that I do not know exactly what is called in English.					
13. I ask my colleagues to help translate for me.					
14. I use general words or terms with my customers.					
15. I try to paraphrase or talk in a different way with equivalent to or the same meaning to confirm my understanding with customers.					
16. I try to use another word that means almost the same with what customer said, e.g. animal instead of horse.					

Communication Strategies	Level of Frequency				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
	5	4	3	2	1
- Avoidance or Reduction Strategies					
17. I change the topic when I feel that I do not have enough knowledge or understood the customers.					
18. I only focus on key words to get the overall message.					
19. I only pay attention to what I have understood.					
20. I pretend to understand the message.					

21. Others (Please specify.)

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*****Thank you very much for your attention in completing the questionnaire*****



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