

## Verbal and Non-Verbal Pragmatic Communication Patterns for Thai Homestay Staff

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## Abstract

The study aimed to explore the verbal and non-verbal pragmatic communication of Thai homestay staff when interacting with foreigners. The goal was to develop patterns for both verbal and non-verbal pragmatic communication. Tools used for data collection included questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Average mean score, standard deviation and content analysis were deployed to narrate the qualitative data. The findings revealed that six common English pragmatic communication patterns were used by homestay owners and staff verbally and non-verbally. Homestay owners and staff's pragmatic communication pattern followed communication functions; nevertheless, the pragmatic competence of homestay was aware solely of politeness via non-verbal communication, for example, body gestures, signs, and other media. Regarding the suggested pragmatic communication expressions, several competencies were developed and acknowledge based on communication functions, Grice's cooperative of maxims, and principles of politeness. However, non-verbal communication was offered among language formats to reemphasize the meaning of verbal communication, fix misunderstandings and uncompleted messages, and maintain the politeness of speech acts.

**Keywords:** Verbal communication, Non-verbal communication, Pragmatic communication patterns, Thai Homestay staff

## Introduction

The shift of the English language for communication as a lingua franca via native and non-native speakers (Meunchong, 2023) has raised awareness of language usage, in particular the Community Based Tourism (CBT) (Kappina, Charoennaiwongphao & Konchiab, 2021). Moreover, traveling around the globe is close to everybody at all (Jaroensak, 2018). English communication as a medium between people continues the popularity. Besides, interaction-based English in context also shows the power of a community economy, good quality of life, and tourism reputation to maintain the historical, cultural, and natural resources (Kappina, et al., 2021). Recently, several international visitors and explorers have been looking for eco-tourism experiences that contribute to ASEAN homestay standards (Kappina, et al., 2021) to confirm the quality of homestay services and the satisfaction of the following criteria — host, accommodation, activities, management, location, hygiene and cleanliness, safety and security, marketing and promotion, plus sustainability principles (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2016 in Kappina, et al., 2021). Therefore, an influential English language for communication has played a vital role (Meunchong, 2023) for the homestay owners and staff, which require popularity and reputation in the work paths and businesses.

In Thailand, as an EFL context, English is spoken as a foreign language; hence, English communication is considered challenge, especially in the rural areas where the homestay is located (Kappina,

et al., 2021). Accordingly, promoting English communication in the area means empowering local tourism and the country's business growth. However, enhancing the English spoken language in the EFL context is challenging and exceptionally developing pragmatic competence (Helenko & Wang, 2022), which merges in burdensome simple as sociolinguistic—fewer local people in the EFL language context notice (Jung, 2002). Consequently, pragmatic competence partly pre-dominates people's daily communication and interaction (Helenko and Wang, 2022) and the speakers' communicative competence. In contrast, communication patterns are essential in engaging and conveying the interaction. Consequently, pragmatic communication patterns used by homestay owners and staff were determined, and valuable expressions upon pragmatic competence awareness were recommended regarding assisting and easing the communication setting for instant usage.

### **Objective of the study**

The study was determined to explore verbal and non-verbal pragmatic communication of Thai Homestay staff used to communicate with foreigners and to develop verbal and non-verbal pragmatic patterns. Two research inquiries were obtained, “what verbal and non-verbal pragmatic communication patterns that Thai Homestay staff use” and “What pragmatic communication patterns were recommended for Thai homestay staff.”

## Literature review

Verbal communication, regarding Choraih, Loutfi, and Mansoor (2016), is defined as effective interpersonal communication which conveys the utterers' feelings and meaning directly through their interlocutor. While verbal communication, as stated by experts from the University of Minnesota (2016), is referred to as human language, which delivers a meaningful message to each other via sounds. It can use non-verbal communication to minimize ambiguity, obtain quick feedback, enable meaning, attain high levels of understanding, and improve rapport. Non-verbal communication (Choraih, Loutfi, and Mansoor, 2016) shares non-words messages through physical communication. Non-verbal communication is articulating meaning and exchanging information in a meaningful context and aims to convey a message, exchange information, and express feelings, desires, intentions, attitudes, and opinions (Lekhanovaa & Glukhovaa, 2016 in Kappina, et al., 2021). Kappina, et al (2021) affirmed that non-verbal communication (NVC) skills helped the homestay staff express feelings and enhance their interaction with international tourists.

The pedagogical pragmatics field in SLA (Ishihara & D. Cohen in Eslami, 2013) has targeted the attention of linguists for decades. Studies in applied linguistics are the results of its growth. Pragmatics in language study is defined as how language is used upon factors affecting a person's communication (Crystal, 2008 in Choraih, el al., 2016). Pragmatic ability is understanding a person's intention and

what is said and written. The study about pragmatics centers on two literal subdivisions, Pragmalinguistics and Sociopragmatics. Sociolinguistics is defined as going beyond the literal meaning of what is said or written to get the intended meaning. Its field involved appropriate language, politeness, and social conventions. Regarding Pragmalinguistics, it is primarily concerned with how to obey the sociopragmatic constraints in the choice of linguistic tools. (Brown, 2007 in Choraih, et al., 2016).

Owing to pragmatic abilities, especially Grice's cooperative of maxims and the principles of politeness, speakers can use the language to communicate comprehensively and appropriately (Roever, 2009 in Choraih, et al, 2016). According to Betti (2021), the cooperative principle (cooperative of quantity, cooperative of quality, operative of relation, and qualitative of manner) explains how people engage in everyday communication. In other words, it explains how speakers and listeners cooperate and mutually accept that one another is understood in a specific way. It is a matter of fact that four Gricean maxims outline the relationship between the interlocutors' utterances and understanding. Moreover, the flout of communication is easy to maintain when the maxims are applied, while the principle of politeness (Prifanti, 2016) is in need since people's conversational communication does not convey only the message but also the proper way of message delivery.

Communication patterns, especially in English (Anata and Nuraini, 2019), are an ideal model of effective communication or

interaction between the message senders or the speakers and the receivers or the interlocutors. Through Skill Success (2019), communicative patterns are repeated phrases or word groups that state verbal and written exchange and effective communication. English communicative patterns convey a person's ideas and feelings with the flow of communication functions. Regarding Anata and Nuraini (2019), it was assured that effective communication patterns could help an English language classroom convey, negotiate, and handle errors between learners' and teachers' pedagogical activities. It also assisted the quality of language improvement in classroom language learning.

## Research Methodology

### 1. Research design and participants

The mixed-methods design was the focus of this study. Two steps of data collection were determined to gain in-depth information. Initially, the interview was deployed to gain insight into the homestay owners and staff, and the needs questionnaires were distributed to obtain specific communication.

Fifty homestay owners and staff in Chiangmai were located in Thepsadet, Doisaket, and Monjam, Maerim district which are the tourist attraction sites. They were famous for their natural atmosphere and local culture, which brought the gorgeous and energetic eco-tourism type of tour. The sample group was purposively selected to answer the questionnaires while the interview was deployed to ask the

participants as a focus-group interview.

## 2. Research methods

### 2.1. Research tools

Two types of research tools, the five rating scales questionnaire, and the semi-structured interview, were determined to ask the homestay owners and staff. The semi-structured interview was determined to gain deep information about the pragmatic communication patterns the homestay owners and staff used to accomplish in each context from several settings. Guided questions were focused on the following information: English communicative proficiency level, how they dealt with the difficulty of English conversation, and pragmatic communication patterns they used to interact with homestay guests.

The findings from needs questionnaire were described as follows; the first part obtained the demographic data of the participants. The second and third parts of the questionnaire asked the participants to rate the necessity and the frequent usage of each English communication topic from the most important or the most frequent (5 points) to the least (1 point). The last part showed the need to improve their English communication skills. The participants were also required to rate their needs from the most preferred, the most frequent use, and the most confident of language use (5 points) to the least (1 point). Three experts used Cronbach's alpha of reliability to approve the content. Two were in English language

profession and one expert was from the Tourism Industrial Management department. The coefficient of Cronbach's alpha was equal to 0.92, meaning the research materials' consistency was excellent in reliability.

## 2.2. Data collection and analysis

1 Informed consent was undertaken to ensure that all participants fully understood the research's aims and process and their roles and rights. Permission for the site visits was also gained before the visits for the field observation and interviews.

2 The data collection process was accomplished in August 2022. The data from the interview questions were coded, clustered, interpreted, and analyzed based on content analysis (Grice's principles of maxim (Grice, 1968 in Betti, 2021), principles of politeness (Prefanti, 2016; Susanti, Latifa & Sunarsi, 2020) to identify the pragmatic communication patterns the homestay owners and staff commonly used. Statistics use were average mean scores and standard deviations to show 1) the necessity of topic use for communication, 2) the frequency of usage to interact with foreign customers, and 3) the degree of confidence in English skills proficiency. Average mean scores and their levels of interpretation are listed below.

**Table 1** Mean scores and their levels of interpretation of the questionnaire

| Ranges    | Levels of importance | Levels of frequency | Levels of confidence      |
|-----------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 4.51-5.00 | The most important   | The most frequent   | Having the most confident |
| 3.51-4.50 | More important       | More frequent       | More confidence           |
| 2.51-3.50 | Important            | Frequent            | Confident                 |
| 1.51-2.50 | Less important       | Less Frequent       | Less confident            |
| 1.00-1.50 | The least important  | The least frequent  | The least confident       |

## Results

### 1. The pragmatics communication patterns questionnaire

This part obtains the questionnaire results which detailed four parts of the survey.

Fifty participants who were 41 homestay staff and nine homestay owners responded to the survey questions. They were aged between 20 and over 50 years old. Their education levels ranged between lower than Bachelor's degrees and Master's degrees. Except for nine homestay owners, their positions were managers, housekeepers, baristas, waiters and waitresses, receptionists, assistant staff, homestay staff, guards, and technicians. Their working experiences were from only ten days to more than 30 years.

The results from the survey part two revealed two topics regarding the necessity of usage: important and less important. "Greeting, welcoming, and farewell the guests." ( $\bar{X} = 2.96$ ), "Making conversation with daily communication topic" ( $\bar{X} = 2.92$ ), "Giving homestay information and co-creation activities" ( $\bar{X} = 2.92$ ),

“Offering helps and dealing with the request and complaints” ( $\bar{X} = 2.76$ ), “Describing process” ( $\bar{X} = 2.76$ ), “Giving tour itinerary and making an appointment with guests” ( $\bar{X} = 2.72$ ), and “Giving directions and instructions” ( $\bar{X} = 2.64$ ) were ranked the most important. While the following topics, “Giving information about community products or souvenir” ( $\bar{X} = 2.44$ ), “Giving information about local food” ( $\bar{X} = 2.44$ ), and “Giving history information of the homestay” ( $\bar{X} = 2.24$ ) were chosen at less important.

Part three of the survey results were categorized in two levels of frequency: frequent and the least frequent topics usage. The frequent usage topics communication was “Greeting, welcoming, and farewell the guests” ( $\bar{X} = 3.00$ ), “Giving homestay information and co-creation activities” ( $\bar{X} = 2.96$ ), “Making conversation with daily communication topic” ( $\bar{X} = 2.92$ ), “Offering helps and dealing with the request and complaints” ( $\bar{X} = 2.80$ ), “Describing process” ( $\bar{X} = 2.80$ ), “Giving directions and instructions” ( $\bar{X} = 2.68$ ), and “Giving tour itinerary and making an appointment with guests” ( $\bar{X} = 2.48$ ), respectively. The ranks of less frequent topics were “Giving information about community products or souvenir” ( $\bar{X} = 2.48$ ), “Giving information about local food” ( $\bar{X} = 2.40$ ), and “Giving homestay history information” ( $\bar{X} = 2.28$ ).

It was found that the level of homestay owners' and staff's confidence in English skills proficiency was described by two rankings. There were six topics which the owners and staff felt assured that they could communicate with foreign tourists as in “Greeting,

welcoming, and saying farewell to the guests." ( $\bar{X} = 2.92$ ), "Making conversation with daily communication topic" ( $\bar{X} = 2.92$ ), "Giving homestay information and co-creation activities" ( $\bar{X} = 2.90$ ), "Offering helps and dealing with the request and complaints" ( $\bar{X} = 2.83$ ), "Giving directions and instructions, and "Describing process" ( $\bar{X} = 2.79$ ). Four topics of communication skills in which the sample group felt less confident were "Giving tour itinerary and making an appointment with guests" ( $\bar{X} = 2.40$ ), "Giving information about community products or souvenir" ( $\bar{X} = 2.30$ ), "Giving homestay history information" ( $\bar{X} = 2.28$ ), and "Giving information about local food" ( $\bar{X} = 2.20$ ).

## 2. The semi-structure interview results

The data decoded and interpreted from the interview reviewed as four main guided questions —English communicative proficiency level, how they dealt with the difficulty of English conversation, most frequent topics used to communicate with the customers, and pragmatic communication patterns they used to interact with homestay guests. Regarding the first question, the most challenging topic of conversation the studied group mentioned was giving information about community culture and community history. Due to the difficulty of dealing with English spoken, they tried to use body language, gestures, and media, e.g., a hotel leaflet, a brochure, printed information, a catalog, a menu, signposts, a sculpture, and board card, to help them communicate to homestay customers. However, they did not use any smartphone or online application to

assist with their interaction.

Regarding the most common topics, six topics were often used to interact with the customers; for example, “Greeting, welcoming, and saying farewell to the guests,” “Making daily communication,” “Giving homestay information and co-creation activities,” “Offering helps and dealing with the request and complaints,” and “Giving directions and instructions.” It was concluded that the last question asked about pragmatic communication patterns the homestay owners and staff used was described as two types of communication. There was verbal and non-verbal communication, represented in the following item 3.

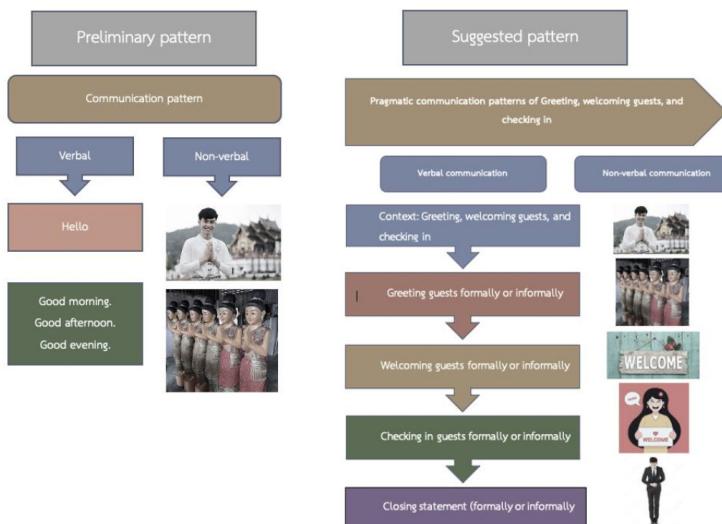
### **3. The communication patterns used by Thai homestay owners and staff and the suggested pragmatic communication patterns**

There were five most used communication patterns of Thai homestay owners and staff in Doi-Saket and Maerim District, namely “Greeting, welcoming, and saying farewell to the guests,” “Making daily communication,” “Giving homestay information and co-creation activities,” “Offering helps and dealing with the request and complaints,” and “Giving directions and instructions.” as shown from Figure 1 - 5. It was found that verbal and non-verbal communication were deployed during the interaction. However, the finding from the semi-structured interview indicated that Thai homestay owners and staff tried less verbal interaction with their foreign customers. Instead, communication non-words were

conveyed almost all of the time.

Therefore, verbal and non-verbal pragmatic communication patterns were recommended to improve their interaction in the proper way-based communication functions (University of Minnesota, 2016) and incorporated to Grice's cooperative of maxims (Kevin et al., 2012) and principles of politeness (Lakoff, 1972; Leech, 1983; Brown and Levinson, 1978: 1987 in Prifanti, 2016).

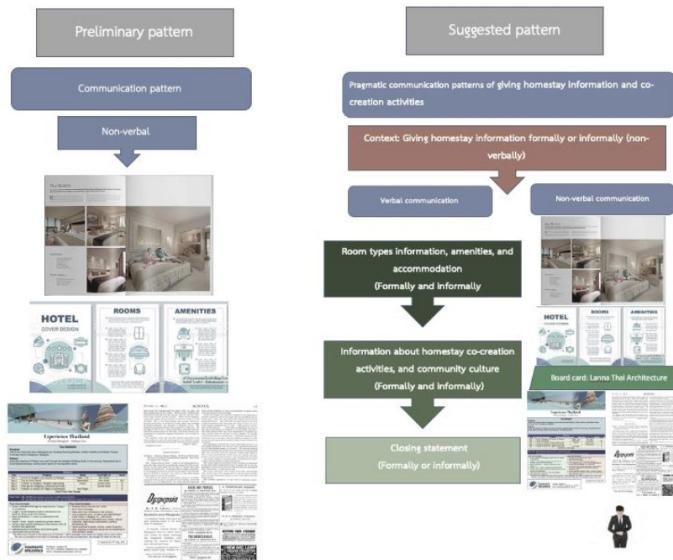
As shown in Figure 1, the previous communication pattern was obtained only greeting expressions (e.g., 'hello' and the greeting expressions regarding time periods "Good morning.", etc.) or non-words communication. Nevertheless, there was no sign of checking in or out pragmatically. The suggested pragmatic communication pattern of "greeting, welcoming, doing check-in, and saying farewell to the guests" were offered as initial, the conversation pattern started with greeting and welcoming guests to the living place (s); it was common for guests to check in to confirm their staying, and finally, the closing conversation was expressed. The chat sometimes encountered errors and misunderstandings due to vocabulary knowledge; non-verbal communication was delivered to convey the meaning. It was possibly cleared that body language as postures and media like posters could precisely represent the greeting. However, messages could also send, both verbal and non-verbal, simultaneously.



**Figure 1** Previous homestay communication patterns and the recommended pragmatic communication pattern of Greeting, welcoming guests, and checking in

Figure 2 indicates the prior patterns which were rarely detailed the room types or the information needed via web-site or a printed media; therefore, the pragmatic communication pattern of giving homestay information and co-creation activities was delivered. The interaction format began with a greeting. Then, room types, the accommodations, and co-creation activities were delivered. It included brief history, community traditions, and ways of life before the closing conversation. It was assured that non-verbal communication was determined via catalogs, printed information

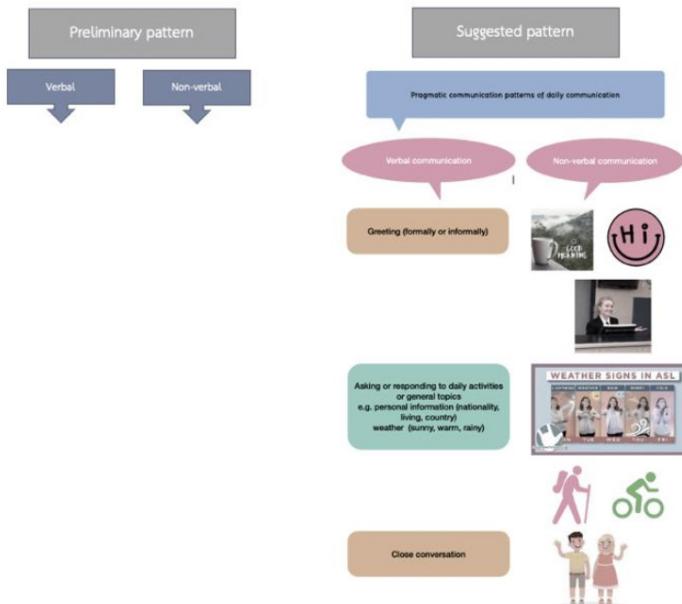
sheets, leaflets, or brochures to reemphasize the understanding as illustrated in Figure 2 .



**Figure 2** Homestay staff pragmatic communication patterns of giving homestay information and co-creation activities

The initial pattern of daily communication by homestay owners and staff did not convey meaningful expressions in this topic. Therefore, the recommended pattern gave suggestions to greet the customers in the following interesting topics e.g., weather, a person's well-being, or the tourists' excursion or errands— and end with closing conversation. Not many people could recognize body language describing the weather. Thus, Non-verbal

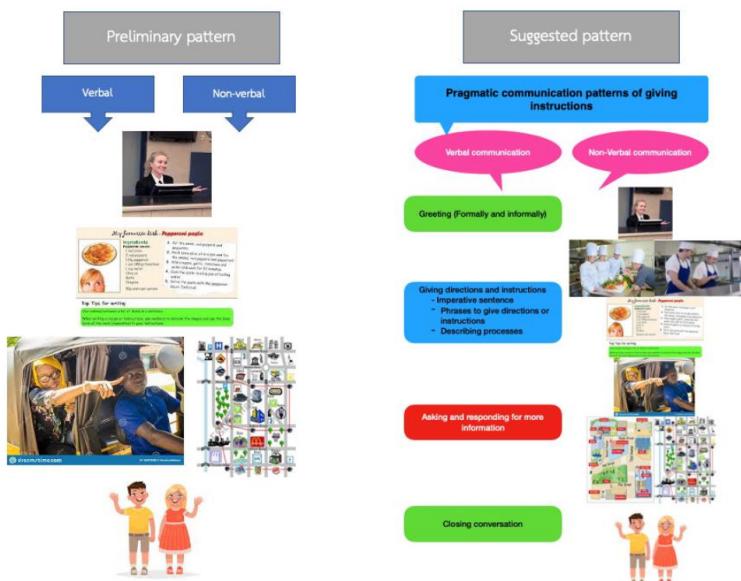
communication guided thumb up for nice weather and thumb down for bad weather, as showed in Figure 3.



**Figure 3** Homestay staff pragmatic communication pattern of daily communication

Figure 4 shows preliminary pattern of dealing with customers' complaints and requests altogether with proposed pragmatic communication pattern. The preceding forms of interaction of dealing with the complaints and requests were not found. Therefore, it is important to put forward this pattern, since it is really substantial for hotel service and hospitality (Daoust, 2021). The complaint's situation initially began via verbal communication pattern followed the regular dialogue, which was listening to the problems and

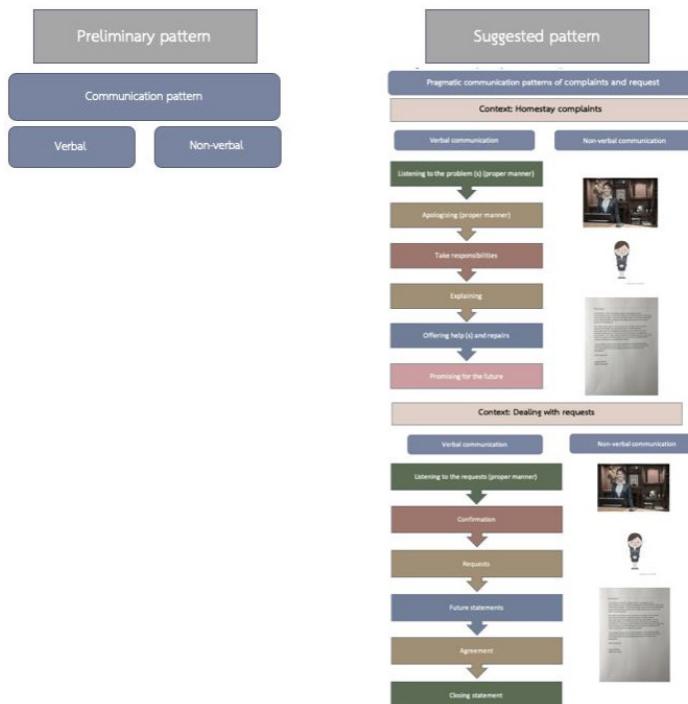
requests, apologizing for an inconvenient incident to take responsibility, then explaining the difficulties that occurred and finally offering help and repairs, and finally promising future issues. While request patterns followed the following steps, listening to the requests, confirming the needs, asking for the things the guests wanted, future statements, agreement, and closing conversation.



**Figure 4** Homestay staff pragmatic communication pattern of dealing with homestay complaints and requests

As shown in Figure 5, the aforementioned pattern used by homestay owners and staff was non-word communication so the printed papers or silent gestures were conveyed. In order to

distribute the meaning information, giving directions and instruction were determined initially with the greeting and then offering helps or giving instruction followed by asking and responding for more information and closing the conversation. While non-verbal communication, indicating and leading the way from the map, will be used to give directions, a manual book was used to describe the process or instruction.



**Figure 5** Homestay staff pragmatic communication pattern of describing process  
(Giving directions or instructions)

## Discussions

Three parts were discussed to prevail the finding based on three research queries: "what verbal and non-verbal pragmatic communication patterns did Thai Homestay staff use to communicate with foreigners, and what were the suggested useful expressions used for homestay owners and staff?

Primary interpretation represented the socioeconomic information of the participants, the topic communication, the essentials of the usage, and the most frequent topic homestay owners and staff use. Secondarily, pragmatic communication patterns were characterized. Finally, the recommended pragmatic expressions were determined.

Due to the initial finding, it was revealed that most of the participants were homestay owners and staff running homestay business in Doisaket and Maerim District, Chiangmai. They were at least ten days to more than thirty years doing homestay business and being staff. Their English proficiency was considered low-beginner, beginner, and elementary level, which most of the staff and owners admitted that their low proficiency directly caused communication problems. Therefore, most of the time, messages were sent improperly and incompletely. However, they fixed it via gestures or body language to solve the problems (Cruz, 2009; Kappina, et al., 2021). It was surprising that only one homestay owner was an intermediate level of English; therefore, cooperation and interaction could never block her from the homestay guests.

Moreover, formal and informal language was delivered to her guests. Although her communication proficiency was considered intermediate, she also emphasized that she would be ready to learn new things if there would be any support from the organization, such as pragmatic strategies or language used for formal communication. Regarding homestay interaction contexts from the questionnaires, there were five most used topics as in "greeting, welcoming, and checking-in and out," "making daily communication," "giving homestay information and co-creation activities," "offering helps and dealing with requests and complaints," and "giving directions and instructions".

Accordingly, a second query revealed that pragmatic communication patterns the homestay owners and staff used to communicate with their tourists were six topics — "greeting, welcoming, and checking-in and out," "making daily communication," "giving homestay information and co-creation activities," "offering helps and dealing with the request and complaints," and "giving directions and instructions" — as shown from figure 1 - 5. Nevertheless, the communication functions were followed from the greeting through the closing statements, dealing with customers' requests and complaints, or following-up the solutions to problems. The expressions were determined incomplete, errors, or silent (which were found from lower beginner level staff and owners) and they neither showed politeness principles (FTAs) (Prefanti, 2016; Susanti et al., 2020) nor Grices' cooperative of maxims (Betti, 2021)

as possible as it should.

Therefore, the interpretation could be drawn from the data that the pragmatic communication expressions from research question three, should underpin the characteristic of communication functions or functional aspects of interpersonal communication (University of Minnesota, 2016), which includes gaining/resisting compliance, requesting or presenting information, asking for or giving support. Verbal and non-verbal communication were interchangeably developed to help eliminate errors, miscommunication (Cruz, 2009; Kappina, et al., 2021), and misinterpretation (Kappina, et al., 2021). Due to maintaining formal interaction verbally, face-treating acts (FTAs) (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Susanti, et al., 2020) should be aware due to show three aspects of social distance, relative power, and absolute ranking (Prifanti, 2016; Susanti, et al., 2020). Respectfulness in hotel and hospitality services (Daoust, 2021) is substantial to show respect and royalty in the social range between the givers (the homestay owners and staff) and the receivers (customers). Non-verbal communication like gestures (Wai) or body language (bow), media, signposts, and printed paper (leaflets or brochures) are essential if communication verbally cannot deliver (Susanti et al., 2020; Kappina, et al., 2021).

### **Conclusions, Implications, limitation, recommendations**

Homestay owners and staff in Chiang Mai, commonly used six communication topics to interact with their customers (foreigners)

verbally and non-verbally. However, almost all homestay owners and staff had lower beginner or beginner-level English language communication proficiency. The principles of politeness were aware and represented as a "bow," which was non-verbal communication and showed respect to the customers. The basic level of a greeting and English interaction language still shows language functions of communication. However, pragmatic communication and complete formal form and informal form of language communication are needed.

To magnify the effective, pragmatic communication patterns of Thai homestay owners and staff in Doisaket, and Monjam, Maerim district, Chiangmai, suggested that they needed to reemphasize the following pragmatics communication; 1) communicative functions which Thai homestay owners and staff should learn, for example, when the question shall deliver and what responses should be replied; 2) Grice's cooperative principles are substantial when meaningful communication between interlocutors are on demand (e.g., more information is required to represent meaningful message — the maxim of quantity— and conveying information only information related to context — the maxim of relation (Chan and Mak, 2012); and 3) speech acts and principles of politeness (Prifanti, 2016) are the emphasis since respect is essential in hotel and hospitality. English communication expressions contain formal language and politeness principles (Prifanti, 2016), showing loyalty to the customers and the customer's most significant impression.

The limitation of this study was due to the small sample size. Although fifty homestay owners and staff were the participants in the research, they were from only two districts in Chiangmai existed. The data was collected from 25 homestays which were not considered the big picture of all homestays around Chiangmai. However, a recommendation for future study will focus on developing a pocketbook of communication patterns and valuable expressions for Thai homestay owners and staff. This pocketbook type helps the staff and owners improve their workplace English communication skills. This pocketbook is also essential for busy staff and owners with fewer classroom learning opportunities. Instead, it is instant and user-friendly (with written Thai pronunciation and translation) which successfully assist communication.

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