Teaching Common English Language Expressions for Hotel Staff: Best Practices

Nurdiana

Universitas Al-Azhar Indonesia
nurdiana.usman@gmail.com

Abstrak *– Industri perhotelan sangat erat kaitannya dengan bahasa Inggris, karena kemahiran berbahasa Inggris sangat penting untuk berkomunikasi yang efektif dalam bidang ini. Namun, banyak staf hotel di Indonesia kesulitan berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris dengan baik sehingga diperlukan peningkatan. Untuk mengatasi hal ini, program pelatihan rutin harus dilaksanakan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan bahasa Inggris dengan fokus pada bahasa Inggris praktis yang digunakan dalam lingkungan perhotelan. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengajaran ungkapan-ungkapan umum bahasa Inggris untuk karyawan hotel. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif-kualitatif dan meninjau pustaka yang relevan, hasil studi menunjukkan bahwa fungsi dan ungkapan bahasa tertentu sering digunakan di bidang perhotelan dan karenanya harus dimasukkan ke dalam program pelatihan untuk staf hotel.*

Kata kunci*: mengajar ungkapan lazim, bahasa Inggris, perhotelan*

Abstract *– The hospitality industry is closely linked to the English language, as proficiency in English is essential for effective communication within this field. However, many hotel staff members in Indonesia struggle to communicate in English appropriately, highlighting the need for improvement. To address this, regular training programs should be implemented to enhance language skills, focusing on practical English used in hospitality settings. This study aims to explore teaching common English expressions to hotel employees. Using a descriptive-qualitative approach and reviewing relevant studies, the findings suggest that certain language functions and expressions are frequently used in hospitality and should therefore be incorporated into the training programs for hotel staff.*

Keywords*: teaching common expressions, English, hospitality.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Indonesia's hospitality industry has experienced rapid growth. Data on hotel occupancy shows a significant rise in the number of foreign guests between 2021 and 2023. The total number of foreign hotel guests was 649,130 in 2021, which increased substantially to 3,027,640 in 2022. By 2023, the figure doubled again to 6,824,950 (*Badan Pusat Statistik*, 2024). This growth underscores the importance of hotel staff being able to communicate effectively in English. However, many Indonesian hotel employees still struggle with English communication skills. Research by Safitri et al. (2022) revealed that staff at a five-star hotel in Malang, East Java, had a low level of English skills. Similarly, studies by Nurdiana (2023; 2024) found that the hotel staff at a five-star hotel had poor English communication skills. Therefore, English language training is essential, with a focus on key expressions used in the hospitality industry. Incorporating role-playing and simulations in the training is recommended, as they provide practical, real-world scenarios and greater opportunities for language practice.

When teaching English to hotel staff, several factors must be considered. One important aspect is the sequence of services, which is commonly used in areas such as the hotel front office and food and beverage services. From a linguistic perspective, the sequence of services involves various language functions. Consequently, hotel staff should learn specific language functions, such as greeting guests, making reservations, taking orders, and processing payments. Ekasani & Lestari (2020) identify the following language functions within the food and beverage service context.

- Handling reservations by phone
- Receiving and seating guests
- Beverages
- Taking orders
- Room service
- Today's specialty

- Serving food
- Handling complaints
- Clearing the tables

- Dessert
- Making tea/serving beverages after meals
- Paying bills

Each language function is linked to specific expressions frequently used in the hospitality industry. For instance, a common phrase used when dealing with reservations is "Do you have a reservation?" But how do we know that "Do you have a reservation?" is a widely used expression? The COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) is a valuable resource that can assist English learners, including non-native English-speaking hotel staff, in identifying common English expressions (https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/). COCA contains an extensive collection of American English and is considered one of the most widely used English corpora (https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/). Therefore, this paper aims to explore several common English expressions that can be taught to Indonesian hotel staff using COCA, along with best practices for teaching these expressions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive-qualitative method. As stated by Braun & Clarke (2013), qualitative research involves the use of words as data, which are collected and analyzed in various ways. The data gathered consisted of common English expressions used in hotel environments. These expressions were analyzed using COCA to determine how often they appear in hotel-related contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are many useful English expressions in hospitality. However, the results and discussion focus on only a few of the most used ones. The findings and discussion primarily concentrate on English used at the front desk and in food and beverage services.

1. Making a reservation

Both hotel staff and hotel guests need to use proper English language when making a reservation. One key expression is 'Do you have a reservation?' which in Bahasa Indonesia means 'Sudah reservasi?' Having been searched on COCA, here is the frequency of 'Do you have a reservation?'

Figure 1. Application Appearance

The red arrow shows the frequency of 'Do you have a reservation.' The bigger the figure is, the more common the expression is. Now, let us compare 'Do you have a reservation' with another expression 'Have you made a reservation?' Here is how it appeared on COCA.

Figure 2. Asking menu

This implies that 'Have you made a reservation' is not a common expression for making a reservation. Thus, it should not be introduced to the hotel staff. Another useful expression when making a reservation is 'How long

are you staying'? and 'How long will you be staying?' The frequency of these two expressions on COCA is as follows.

Figure 3. Check Frequency on Form

Although 'How long are you staying?' appeared more frequently in COCA, 'How long will you be staying?' is more commonly used in hotel settings. The use of 'will' sounds more natural and polite in this context, as it refers to a future action or plan, which is more appropriate when discussing guests' upcoming stays. Therefore, it is recommended to teach 'How long will you be staying?' instead.

2. Welcoming guests

When welcoming guests, hotel staff would say 'How can I help you' or 'How may I assist you'? Which one is more frequently used according to COCA?

Figure 4. Welcoming Guest

The figure indicates that 'How can I help you?' is used more frequently than 'How may I assist you?' However, 'How may I assist you? carries a more formal tone because of the use of 'may' and 'assist.' The modal verb 'may' and the verb 'assist' are generally associated with more formal and professional settings. As a result, it is recommended that 'How may I assist you? be taught to hotel staff.

3. Taking an order

One key expression in taking an order is 'Are you ready to order?' or 'May I take your order?' Below is how frequently 'Are you ready to order?' and 'May I take your order?' appeared on COCA.

Figure 5. Taking Order

COCA shows that 'May I take your order' is more commonly used than 'Are you ready to order?'. **'May I take your order?'** is a polite and formal expression. This is due to its function that focuses more on the staff's offer to assist. Compared to 'May I take your order?', 'Are you ready to order?' sounds slightly more casual or less polite because it focuses more on the guest's readiness. Hence, 'May I take your order?' should be introduced first.

4. Paying bills

One of the useful expressions of paying bills is 'How would you like to pay?' or 'How will you be paying?' Having been searched on COCA, here are the results.

Figure 6. Paying Bills

The figure indicates that 'How will you be paying' is more common than 'How would you like to pay?' **'How will you be paying?'** is a more direct and commonly used question in hotel check-out and hotel restaurant scenarios. It sounds more natural and is more typical in this context, as it asks about the method of payment straightforwardly. On the other hand, 'How would you like to pay?' is also polite but can sound more like an option being offered, and it might be used in some contexts, particularly when there is a choice of payment method. However, 'How will you be paying?' is generally more common for transactional purposes in hotels. Thus, 'How would you like to pay?' is not recommended to be taught.

All useful expressions in the hotel context are best taught through role-play and simulation. Earlier studies reported that role-play and simulation are the most effective speaking activities. Research by Mayasyarah (2017) and Pinatih (2021) revealed that role-play enhanced learners' speaking abilities. According to Harmer (2001), role-playing allows students to experience real-life scenarios, such as business meetings, encounters on an airplane, or interviews, as if they were participating in those situations. Additionally, students can take on roles of characters who may not resemble themselves or share the same thoughts and emotions, which positively contributes to the development of their speaking skills.

To benefit from role-play and simulation, here is the step-by-step activity (EFL Cafe, 2024).

- Preparation and planning

Successful role-play activities start with careful preparation and planning. Instructors should consider their students' language skills, interests, and learning goals when designing role-plays that are both engaging and instructional.

- Selecting appropriate scenarios

Selecting appropriate scenarios is essential for the effectiveness of role-play activities. The scenarios should be connected to the students' interests and real-life experiences, while also reflecting the language skills and vocabulary they need to develop. For instance, beginners could practice basic situations like ordering food at a restaurant, whereas advanced learners might engage in role-plays involving a business meeting or a job interview. Scenarios should be diverse to keep students engaged and cover various aspects of language use. Teachers can base scenarios on real-life situations, current events, or cultural contexts that students are familiar with. Using authentic materials like menus, schedules, or brochures can also make the scenarios more realistic and relevant.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, a few of the common English expressions for hospitality that should be primarily learned by hotel employees are those dealing with making a reservation ('Do you have a reservation?'), welcoming guests ('How may I assist you?'), taking an order ('May I take your order?'), and paying bills ('How will you be paying?'). Teaching those expressions would be best by role-play and simulation as they provide real-life situations and context.

REFERENCES

Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research*. London: SAGE

Ekasani, K.A., Lestari,D. (2020). *Basic English for food and beverage service*. Denpasar: IPB International Press

Harmer, J. (2001). *The Practice of English language teaching*. Essex: Longman

Mayasyarah. (2017). The effect of role-play method in teaching speaking for hotel staff. *Proceeding of the 1st INACELT (International Conference of ELT)*, 387-402

Nurdiana. (2023). Promoting effective English language teaching practices for hotel staff: A preliminary study. *Proceeding of UHAMKA International Conference on ELT and CALL (UICELL)*, 284-290

Nurdiana. (2023). Teaching English for hotel staff: Problems and challenges. *Diseminasi Nasional Hasil Penelitian dan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat Universitas Indraprasta PGRI dan Universitas LIA*

Nurdiana. (2024). Teaching English to food and beverage staff: Problems, challenges, and possible solutions. *English Journal Antartika*, 2 (1), 1-7

Pinatih, I.G.A.D.P. (2021). Improving students' speaking skills through role-play technique in 21st Century. *Journal of Educational Study*, 1 (1), 103-108

Safitri, I.N., Nouval, A., Rahayu, E.L., Kartikasari, P.B., Lestari, P.Y., Handayani, T.A.(2022). Peningkatan kemampuan bahasa Inggris bidang *hospitality* untuk waiter dan waitress di the Shalimar Boutique Hotel Malang. *J-ABIDMAS*, 9 (2), 218-225

Badan Pusat Statistik. (2024). *Jumlah tamu asing pada hotel bintang, 2021-2023* https://www.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/2/MzEwIzI=/jumlah-tamu-asing-pada-hotel-bintang.html

Corpus of Contemporary American English https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/

EFL CAFÉ. (2024). *Improving EFL/ESL speaking skills through role-play* https://eflcafe.net/improving-efl-esl-speaking-skills-through-role-play/