



Communication Strategies For Front Desk Agents For Non-English-Speaking Guests Front Desk Agent Communication Strategy Towards Non-English Speaking Guests

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ABSTRACT

Oakwood Premier Cozmo Jakarta is a business serviced apartment, accommodating guests of various nationalities, some of whom are non-English-speaking guests; in this context, a Front Desk Agent is required to be the first point of contact, welcoming guests and responding to all their needs. This study aims to explore the strategies and effectiveness of digital media used by a Front Desk Agent (FDA) when communicating with guests who do not speak English. The theoretical framework employed is Communication Strategies and Media; consequently, a qualitative descriptive method was used, utilising a triangulation of data sources comprising observation, documentation and interviews, with the informants being FDA staff members. The research findings indicate that the strategies employed were satisfactory, as no negative reviews were received via online travel agents from guests, and the digital media used proved to be effective and efficient through the use of Google Translate and a list of pre-translated vocabulary.

Keywords: *Strategy, media, communication, Front Desk Agent, non-English-speaking guests.*

Background (Font size 11)

Communication is one way of ensuring that the information or message one wishes to convey is easily understood by the person with whom one is communicating. We encounter communication frequently in our daily lives. Communication relates to social interactions between people and is facilitated by the use of symbols that share a common meaning. To achieve this shared understanding, there must be a common language used to convey the information. English is an international language that is easy to learn and is at the forefront of developments in the era of globalisation (1).

In the hospitality accommodation sector, guests staying at hotels have a variety of purposes, including relaxation, holidays, *stress* relief and business. Many local and

international visitors seek a place to stay that suits their individual tastes. s are a vital component for tourists as they serve as temporary accommodation where guests can relax and rest after a day's activities. Hotels are businesses that provide a comprehensive range of services, including accommodation, facilities, restaurants and entertainment venues (2).

Oakwood Premier Cozmo Jakarta is a *business serviced apartment* featuring hotelstyle facilities that create an appealing atmosphere; its location in the central business district attracts many business travellers who choose to stay there. *The Front Office Department* plays a vital role in the hotel's day-to-day operations. *Front Office* Staff are the first point of contact for guests and must therefore possess excellent communication *skills* (3). It is evident from the occupancy rates that the majority of guests are business *travellers* of various nationalities. A significant number of guests are *nonEnglish speakers*, which leads to communication difficulties when these guests encounter problems or have requests during their stay.

According to Stephen, communication comprises several essential elements: the communicator, as the individual who conveys a message, whether verbally or nonverbally; the message, which is the subject of the information to be discussed; the medium, as the channel through which the message is transmitted and received by the communicator and the recipient; and the recipient, the individual who receives the content of the message from the communicator. Meanwhile, the effect is the result obtained from the influence received (4). For example, when a receptionist asks a guest to pay for their room or other charges, but the guest is unaware of this because the payment was supposed to have been made by the company that sent them on business. This situation leads to *miscommunication* between the receptionist and the guest.



This is known as one-way communication, which occurs when the communication process initiated by the sender is not correctly decoded by the receiver. Conversely, two-way communication occurs when the feedback sent by the receiver is received by the sender, thereby establishing mutual understanding. Strategy is essential in communication. Communication strategies are divided into two categories: Reduction Strategies, which are used to alter the communication objective, and Achievement Strategies, which are employed by communicators to achieve their communication objectives (5). Achievement Strategies are further subdivided into two categories: *Compensatory Strategies (Non-Cooperative Strategies and Cooperative Strategies)* and *Retrieval Strategies*. A communication medium is an intermediary tool that has a tangible form and can be used to convey information (6).

Meanwhile, communication media can be divided into two categories: by channel and by method of dissemination. Communication media based on their channels are divided into: 1) verbal communication media, which are messages or information conveyed through the use of spoken words; these can be further divided into two categories: oral communication, where the message can only be heard, and written communication, where the message is conveyed using written media so that it can be read and written between the communicator and the recipient; 2) non-verbal communication, which is a message or information conveyed not through the use of spoken words, but through body language (7).

Communication media, based on their mode of dissemination, are divided into three categories: 1) audio communication media, where messages or information are received by the recipient through hearing alone; 2) audiovisual communication media, where information is conveyed using both sound and visual elements, such as *Google Translate*; 3) print communication media, which involve the conveyance of information using written media such as books (8). This study aims to identify the communication strategies and the effectiveness of digital media usage employed by the *Food and Beverage Directors (FDAs)* at Oakwood Premier Cozmo Jakarta. The right strategies will have a positive impact on the company in terms of creating guest satisfaction.

Literatur Review

Communication in Hospitality

Communication is a crucial element in the

hospitality industry because it enables information and messages to be conveyed and understood between individuals. Communication involves social interaction between people and requires symbols or language that have a common meaning between the communicator and the recipient. Susanti (2019) emphasizes the importance of language in the global era, particularly English as an international language that facilitates communication across diverse backgrounds (1).

In the hospitality sector, hotels provide a variety of services, including accommodation, facilities, restaurants, and entertainment. Guests may visit hotels for various purposes, such as relaxation, vacation, stress relief, and business activities. Therefore, effective communication is necessary to support the delivery of hotel services and to ensure that guests can understand the information provided by hotel staff (2).

Communication consists of several essential elements, including the communicator, message, medium, recipient, and effect. The communicator conveys the message through a specific medium to the recipient, while the effect refers to the outcome of the communication process. Misunderstandings can occur when the message conveyed by the sender is not properly understood by the recipient. Conversely, two-way communication allows for feedback between sender and receiver and contributes to shared understanding (4).

In hospitality services, communication is crucial because employees interact directly with guests and are required to respond to their needs. Safitri et al. (2021) highlight the crucial role of the Front Office Department in hotel operations, particularly because Front Office staff are the first point of contact for guests and therefore require strong communication skills (3).

Communication Strategies

Communication strategies are approaches used to address problems that arise during communication. Marsakawati (2012) categorizes communication strategies into Reduction Strategies and Achievement Strategies (5). Reduction Strategies involve modifying communication goals, while Achievement Strategies are used to achieve the intended communication goals. Achievement Strategies are further divided into compensation strategies and recovery strategies.

The use of communication strategies becomes important when the communicator experiences difficulty in



conveying the intended message. Marsakawati (2012) identifies several language-based strategies, including code-switching, foreignization, literal translation, substitution, paraphrasing, and restructuring (5). Literal translation involves translating an expression word-for-word into the target language, while substitution involves replacing parts of an expression with words from another language.

Paraphrasing and restructuring are also considered language-based communication strategies. Paraphrasing involves conveying the same meaning in a different form, while restructuring involves rearranging the message to make it more easily understood by the recipient. These strategies provide alternatives for communicators when the original form of an expression cannot be effectively understood (5).

Marsakawati (2012) also identifies body language-based strategies as part of communication strategies (5). Body language can involve hand gestures, facial expressions, touch, waving, and other physical movements that help convey meaning. Furthermore, cooperative strategies include direct and indirect appeal strategies, with indirect strategies using nonverbal elements such as pauses and vocal intonation to support communication and maintain harmony between the communicator and recipient.

Communication Strategies for Language Barriers

Language differences can create communication difficulties when individuals lack adequate linguistic knowledge. In the hospitality context, this problem can be particularly significant because hotel employees need to communicate with guests from various countries and with varying linguistic backgrounds. Susanti (2019) discusses the importance of language in the global era, where English serves as an international language (1).

One approach to overcoming language barriers is to use the speaker's native language or another language understood by the recipient. Marsakawati (2012) identifies literal translation as a strategy in which the communicator translates an expression word for word into the target or recipient's language (5). Another strategy is substitution, which involves replacing words or components with expressions from a second or foreign language.

Paraphrasing can also be used when direct communication is difficult. Through paraphrasing, the communicator expresses the intended message using

different words without changing the meaning. Restructuring also allows the communicator to rephrase the message to make it more easily understood by the recipient (5).

Another important strategy is the use of body language. Marsakawati (2012) describes body language strategies as the use of physical movements such as hand gestures, facial expressions, waving, and other body movements to convey meaning (5). These strategies can provide additional support when verbal communication alone is insufficient.

Verbal, Non-Verbal, and Digital Communication

Communication can be categorized based on how the message is conveyed. Pohan et al. (2021) differentiate communication media based on their channels into verbal and nonverbal communication (7). Verbal communication involves the use of spoken words and can include both spoken and written communication, while nonverbal communication conveys information without spoken words, including through body language.

Therefore, verbal communication can be delivered through oral communication, where the message is heard, or written communication, where the message is conveyed in written form. These forms allow the communicator to convey information using linguistic expressions that can be understood by the recipient. Pohan et al. (2021) also emphasize nonverbal communication as communication that does not rely on spoken words but uses body language (7).

Communication can also be classified based on its dissemination method. Badriyah (2021) divides communication media into audio, audiovisual, and print media (8). Audio media conveys information through hearing, audiovisual media combines sound and visual elements, while print media conveys information through written materials.

Digital communication media are highly relevant to contemporary hospitality services because technology can provide additional means to convey information across language barriers. Within the framework discussed in this article, audiovisual communication includes digital translation applications such as Google Translate, which combine visual and textual information to support communication (8).

Front Desk Agent-Guest Communication



The Front Office department plays a crucial role in hotel operations because front office staff interact directly with guests. Safitri et al. (2021) identified front office staff as the first point of contact for guests, meaning employees in this department require effective communication skills to provide service and respond to guest needs (3).

The communication role becomes even more crucial when front desk staff interact with guests from various countries. Hotel guests may have different language backgrounds, and language differences can make it difficult for employees and guests to understand each other. Consequently, front desk staff require appropriate communication strategies to ensure that guest information and requests are communicated effectively.

Interpersonal communication is also relevant to interactions between front desk staff and guests because the communication process involves a sender, message, medium, receiver, feedback, and mutual understanding. Triningtyas (2016) explains that communication can be one-way when the message is not interpreted correctly by the recipient, while two-way communication occurs when feedback is successfully exchanged between the sender and receiver (4).

Therefore, communication between front desk staff and guests requires employees to adapt their communication style to suit the circumstances and characteristics of each guest. The right combination of language, communication strategies, nonverbal communication, and communication media can support the process of creating mutual understanding between receptionists and guests.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, which is used to describe or explain social conditions, situations and phenomena within society as the subject of the research; this method is also used to describe the results of the interviews conducted (9). The data collection method used by the author is source triangulation through observation, interviews and documentation. Furthermore, during the interview stage, five key informants (KIs) were used as sources of information and characteristics, namely the *FDAs* (10). The interviews were conducted using a semistructured approach. Documentation is defined as the compilation, collection and management of all documents recording human activities that are useful as evidence or information (11).

Results and Discussion

Interview Findings Regarding the Use of Communication Strategies

Question 1	:	“What is your opinion on reduction strategies?”
IK3’s Answer	:	<i>“A front-line staff member must be prepared to deal with guests who come to us, whether they speak English or not.”</i>
Question 2	:	<i>“When we deal with Arab guests who do not speak English, they become confused when asked about the deposit, so we front-desk agents use the Arabic term ‘Tamin’. ‘Tamin’ is not a special code, but rather Arabic translated using Google Translate. So, when asked if there is a special code, the answer is no. We have no choice but to look it up on Google Translate and use their language so that they understand.”</i>
Question 3	:	“When is the ‘Second Language’ strategy used?”
IK4’s Answer	:	<i>“When we are dealing with Arab guests and asking for a room deposit, we use the phrase ‘May I have a Tamin?’”</i> <i>“But you can also use the paraphrasing strategy, where you use the target sentence without changing its meaning, such as changing ‘May I have your credit card?’ to ‘Credit card’ or ‘May I have your room key?’ to ‘Room key’ – getting straight to the point with the words you want.”</i>
Question 4	:	“How is the Cooperative Strategy used?”
Answer IK1	:	<i>“Pauses and tone of voice are very important because if we speak too quickly, especially given our limited language skills, they will understand even less. So it’s better to pause so that they can also understand what we’re trying to</i>



		<i>say. We understand, and they understand too"</i>
IK3's answer	:	<i>"Tone of voice is how we express ourselves to others."</i>
IK4's answer	:	<i>"As an FDA, we must not raise our voices at guests when dealing with them face-to-face, as this may suggest that we lack respect, a willingness to serve, and concern for the guest. For example, when dealing with a non-English-speaking guest who is unable to control their emotions, we must speak in a in a polite yet easily understandable manner, as the guest may become frustrated whilst communicating. If we raise our tone of voice, the guest will feel disrespected and their emotions will escalate further."</i>

Interview Findings Regarding the Use of Communication Media

Question 1	:	"How effective is Google Translate?"
IK1's answer	:	<i>"We can explain it; we can search on Google and ask the guest if this is what they meant. So we also confirm this with the guest."</i>
IK5's answer	:	<i>"Using a translator is also very efficient and effective. Furthermore, using Google Translate is very helpful as there are various languages to choose from."</i>

Discussion

When communicating with non-English-speaking guests, it is vital to have a strategy in place to ensure that communication runs smoothly and that no misunderstandings arise between the guests and the FDA. Given its location in the Mega Kuningan business district, there are naturally a great many foreign nationals staying at Oakwood Premier Cozmo Jakarta. Guests often come not only from companies; during the holiday season, many also arrive with their families. The Front Desk Staff (FDA) at Oakwood Premier Jakarta state that guests from China, the

Arab world, Korea, Japan and other countries are non-English-speaking guests.

Table 1.

Non-Cooperative Strategies

<i>Language Strategies</i>	<i>Codeswitching</i>	Strategies involving the use of another code or language.
	<i>Foreignising</i>	An attempt by the speaker to use their mother tongue or a language they understand in a way that resembles a foreign language or the target language.
	<i>Literal Translation</i>	An attempt by the speaker to translate word for word into their mother tongue or the target language.
Strategies based on a second language or foreign language (<i>Second Language or Foreign Language Strategies</i>)	<i>Substitution</i>	An attempt to replace one or more components with components from a second or foreign language.
	<i>Paraphrase</i>	The effort to express the target
<i>Language Strategies</i>		sentence in a different way without altering its meaning.
	<i>Restructuring</i>	An attempt to reorganise the text to be conveyed so that it is more easily understood by the audience.
Strategies Based on Body Language		The use of body parts to communicate, through hand gestures, facial expressions, touch, waving, and even foot movements.

Source (quoted in Marsakawati, 2012)

The Reduction Strategy is employed when *non-*



English-speaking guests approach the *Front Desk Agents (FDAs)* to ask for information or to *check in*; the FDAs cannot avoid these guests as their role is to act as an information centre. Meanwhile, *Mother Language Strategies* are employed when communicating with *non-English-speaking* guests; typically, the *FDA* staff will use a *literal translation* strategy, whereby they translate word for word into the guest's mother tongue or the target language.

Strategies based on *a second language or foreign language*. These strategies are employed during communication; where, after a *literal translation* has been attempted, *non-English-speaking* guests still do not understand, the *FDA staff* will use a substitution strategy by employing the words used by those guests to help them understand more quickly. Strategies based on body language. Body language is used more frequently, but only as a supporting factor and has been confirmed or agreed upon by all informants. Body language is always balanced or used in conjunction with other strategies. For example, when asking a guest for their room key, the *FDAs* will show the key card to the guest so that the guest has a clear idea of what is meant.

Table 2.

Cooperative Strategies

<i>Direct Appeal Strategies</i> (Direct Strategies)	The communicator directly expresses what they are thinking at the time of communication. These are typically culturally heterogeneous and emphasise individualism. This heterogeneity means there are no widely held assumptions about the context being discussed.
<i>Indirect Appeal Strategies</i> (Indirect Strategies)	The intended meaning of the communication is conveyed not only through words but also with the aid of non-verbal behaviour such as pauses and tone of voice. This strategy is designed to maintain harmony between the communicator and the recipient.

Source (qtd. in Marsakawati, 2012)

Cooperative Strategies are implemented using, with the aid of pauses and tone of voice, based on the interviewees' responses. Such non-verbal cues help guests, when engaged in conversation, to understand the feelings

of the person they are communicating with. When communicating with non-English-speaking guests, *FDA* staff use Google Translate as a digital tool. In addition, there is also a written resource: a list containing phrases in Chinese and Arabic that can be used during check-in, should guests or the *FDA* staff have difficulty explaining what they wish to convey. However, some guests from China also have translation devices resembling USB sticks; these guests speak in their own language, and the device outputs the translation into Indonesian, and vice versa. There are also pictures of items that guests are not permitted to bring onto the premises, such as durians, helium balloons, portable gas canisters, sharp weapons, animals and others.



Figure 1. Translator 55 Smart Video
Source: Tokopedia

Conclusion

The communication strategies employed by the Front Desk Staff at Oakwood Premier Cozmo Jakarta are effective. This is evident from the fact that there are few negative reviews regarding their communication with non-English-speaking guests. They combine several strategies with the use of body language, which aids in communicating with nonEnglish-speaking guests. The Front Desk Staff also utilise various tools to communicate with non-English-speaking guests, such as Google Translate, other language apps, and lists of phrases that have been translated into Chinese and Arabic, thereby facilitating communication.

Managerial implications for the management of Oakwood Premier Cozmo to improve the communication strategies employed. Language training courses could be organised, enabling Front Desk Assistants (FDAs) to communicate directly with guests. Furthermore, they should recruit staff with proficiency in languages other than English. They should also provide them with practical



translation tools, ensuring greater effectiveness and efficiency, although the results of using such tools may still be affected by internet connectivity.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted at only one hotel establishment, the Oakwood Premier Cozmo Jakarta. Therefore, the findings primarily reflect the communication practices of front desk agents within this specific hotel context and cannot be generalized to other hotels or lodging establishments with different characteristics.

Second, this study involved five front desk agents as key informants. Although these informants provided detailed information regarding communication strategies and media, this study did not directly represent the perspectives of non-English-speaking guests. Consequently, the effectiveness of the communication strategies identified in this study is primarily interpreted from the perspectives of hotel employees and supporting evidence such as guest reviews.

Third, this study used a qualitative descriptive approach that focused on understanding communication strategies through observation, interviews, and documentation. Consequently, this study did not quantitatively measure the extent to which each communication strategy impacted guest satisfaction, communication effectiveness, or service quality.

Therefore, future research is recommended to involve several hotels of different categories and locations to provide a broader comparison of the communication strategies used by front desk agents when serving non-English-speaking guests. Future studies could also involve a larger and more diverse group of informants, including guests from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, so that communication effectiveness can be examined from both employee and guest perspectives.

Furthermore, future research could employ a mixed-methods approach by combining qualitative interviews and observations with quantitative measures of guest satisfaction, service quality, and communication effectiveness. Such an approach would allow researchers to explore communication practices in depth while simultaneously measuring the contribution of specific communication strategies to the guest experience.

Further studies could also examine the effectiveness of digital translation tools, multilingual phrase lists, and visual

communication in more detail. Particular attention could be paid to translation accuracy, ease of use, internet connectivity, and the ability of these tools to support face-to-face communication. Finally, research on foreign language training for Receptionists is recommended to determine whether systematic language training combined with digital communication tools can improve employee communication competency and the quality of service provided to non-English-speaking guests..

Recommendations

Future research is recommended to expand the scope of the study by involving more accommodation types and front desk staff from different hotel categories and geographic locations. Comparative studies can provide a broader understanding of how communication strategies are implemented when dealing with non-English-speaking guests in various hospitality environments.

Future studies could also involve a more diverse group of informants, including guests from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Incorporating guest perspectives will help researchers evaluate communication effectiveness not only from the front desk staff's perspective but also from the service recipient's perspective.

In addition, further research could use a mixed-methods approach by combining qualitative interviews and observations with quantitative measures of guest satisfaction, communication effectiveness, and service quality. Such an approach could provide stronger evidence regarding the relationship between communication strategies and guest experiences.

Further studies should also examine the role of digital translation technology in more depth. Research could investigate the effectiveness and limitations of applications such as Google Translate, specialized translation devices, and other digital communication tools in real-time hotel interactions. Particular attention should be paid to translation accuracy, internet connectivity, ease of use, and the technology's ability to support culturally appropriate communication.

Finally, future research could explore the development of a systematic language training program for receptionists. Studies could examine whether foreign language training, combined with digital translation tools and standardized multilingual phrase lists, can improve communication performance and guest satisfaction. This



would provide more comprehensive recommendations for hotel management in preparing staff to serve an increasingly diverse international guest base.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study contributes to the development of hospitality communication research by demonstrating how communication strategies can be implemented by receptionists when interacting with non-English-speaking guests. The findings strengthen the application of communication strategy theory in the hospitality context by demonstrating that communication effectiveness is achieved through a combination of linguistic strategies, cooperative strategies, nonverbal communication, and communication media. Therefore, this study enriches the understanding of how communication strategies can be adapted to overcome language barriers in guest service interactions.

This study also contributes to the understanding of digital communication media in hospitality. The use of Google Translate, multilingual phrase lists, translation tools, and visual communication demonstrates that technology can serve as a supporting tool when employees and guests do not share a common language. At the same time, the findings demonstrate that digital technology does not completely replace interpersonal communication, as body language, pauses, tone of voice, and direct interaction remain essential components of effective communication.

From a practical perspective, this study provides implications for hotel management, particularly Oakwood Premier Cozmo Jakarta, in improving communication between receptionists and international guests. Management can provide foreign language training, recruit employees with additional language competencies, and equip front-desk staff with practical translation tools and standard multilingual phrase lists. These steps can help employees respond more effectively to guests with different language backgrounds.

These findings also suggest that communication facilities should not rely solely on digital applications. Because translation tools can be affected by internet connectivity, hotels should prepare alternative communication resources, such as printed multilingual phrasebooks, visual aids, and appropriate non-verbal communication techniques. Integrating human communication skills with digital technology can support more effective, efficient, and responsive hospitality

services.

Contributions by Researchers

All authors actively contributed to the development and completion of this research. The first author was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. The second author contributed to the development of the research methodology, interpretation and validation of the findings, and critical review and editing of the manuscript. The third author contributed to the research process, interpretation of the findings, supervision of manuscript development, and refinement of the final manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in the conduct of the research, preparation of the manuscript, or publication of this article. The research was conducted independently, and no financial, institutional, or personal interests were identified as influencing the research process, interpretation of the findings, or preparation of the manuscript.

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