



P-ISSN 2355-2794
E-ISSN 2461-0275

The Ability to Speak English of the Local Tour Guides for Promoting Tourism at the Aceh Tsunami Museum¹

Sofyan A. Gani*
Cut Intan Damayanti

Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh, INDONESIA

Abstract

This research aimed to find out the English language proficiency of the local tour guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum, Aceh, Indonesia, and the difficulties that they faced in communicating with foreign tourists in English. A quantitative and qualitative descriptive research design was utilized to collect data in which an English proficiency test and an interview were used as instruments. The research subjects were 13 local guides working in the Aceh Tsunami Museum. Based on the results from this research, it was found that virtually all the participating tour guides were in the categories of very good, good and average. However, they still experienced problems with several aspects of speaking EFL, such as expressing ideas verbally, poor collocations i.e. incorrect or inappropriate word choices, poor pronunciation, and lack of confidence when speaking English. It is expected that the results from this research will become a useful input for the management of English Education institutions for improving their instructional systems and for tour guides to continue learning and developing their communication skills, especially their oral English communication skills..

Keywords: English language proficiency, English for specific purposes (ESP), speaking EFL, tour guides, tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

English is considered the lingua franca of the twenty-first century. Everyone needs to have a good command of English today, and the importance of English instruction for professional uses and particularly in the field of tourism is undeniable.

¹ A part of this paper was presented at the 7th Annual International Conference (AIC) on Social Sciences, Syiah Kuala University, October 18-20, 2017, Banda Aceh, Indonesia, and its abstract is part of the conference proceedings published by Syiah Kuala University.

* Corresponding author, email: sofyangani@yahoo.com

English proficiency is required in all professional areas, but it becomes essential in the tourism industry because of its specific characteristics. The English language has played an important role in the development of tourism and has also been used widely for travel, as well as in client contact. English for tourism is one of the most attractive areas of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) because, after all, all of us are tourists on various occasions nowadays (Simion, 2012).

To ensure the quality of hospitality services in the tourism sector, it is necessary to find a common language between the supply and the demand sides. Since English has become an international language, it has become increasingly necessary for employees working in tourism to develop their language skills to be able to fulfill the needs of the tourists. Furthermore, according to Maggi and Padurean (2009), globalization has increased competition in tourism markets, and destinations are exposed to tough price competition with homogenized products provided by rivals worldwide. Given these challenges and the desire by locals for sustainable tourism development, human resource development is critical to the success of tourism in many markets.

Therefore, local guides should be able to use English, especially to speak EFL professionally in the tourism field because communication skills are an important element in the hospitality industry. Bobanovic and Grzinic (2011) said that understanding of performance expectations is one key to the achievement of satisfaction for tourists. Good oral and written communication skills are two of the top skills that are important for hospitality practitioners at different levels. Good English communication skills will add value to the quality of performance of the guides. Accordingly, hospitality training programs must encourage critical thinking and for example problem solving for tourism when it is necessary.

Unfortunately, based on the researchers' observations at the Aceh Tsunami Museum, the local tour guides at the museum have serious problems in using the English language, especially for oral communication, in particular, their lack of mastery of vocabulary is the most significant problem that they have in having good communications with the tourists. Finch et al. (2010) stated that the professionalism of local guides is absolutely important because the better their skill at interaction with their clients the higher the satisfaction the tourist will obtain. Naturally this situation will attract more tourists to visit, study, and inform others, and as a result the world will know about the beautiful objects and satisfying guide services of the Aceh Tsunami Museum.

It is important for the local guides of the Aceh Tsunami Museum to master English communication skills so that they will be able to carry out their duties well. They must have good pronunciation, good speaking skills, fluency and vocabulary, in particular good collocations. However, as local guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum, they find that improving their EFL proficiency in speaking is very difficult. The problems found during the writer's observations are such as, first, the problem concerning the opportunities to speak English. Most of the guides do not have enough opportunities to practice speaking. Opportunities to practice speaking English are necessary for them to be able to improve their EFLs speaking skills. English is regarded as a foreign language in Indonesia because most people in Indonesia speak *Bahasa Indonesia*, and as result they have almost no opportunity to use English in daily conversation. Usually, the only opportunities they have are when foreign tourists visit the museum.

The second problem is the guides' lack of vocabulary and collocations. The mastery of vocabulary is very important for the local guides. Most of them do not have enough vocabulary, and thus they find it difficult to speak English. The lack of vocabulary is one of the major problems for them as foreign language learners of English. They need to enrich their vocabulary as much as possible including the use of idiomatic words and collocations, so that they can make a good impression with foreign tourists. The next problem is mispronunciation. The tour guides find it difficult to pronounce the English words because they are not familiar with the words and the way to pronounce them due to lack of chances to speak EFL. Mispronunciation can lead to misunderstandings between speakers. Consequently, it is important for them to be able to learn EFL pronunciation so that they can pronounce English correctly.

In short, the local guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum face many problems in speaking professionally with foreign visitors. Those problems have become obstacles for them to be able to speak fluently, accurately, and properly in English. Based on this reality, the researchers decided to conduct a qualitative research study to find out their English language proficiency especially their speaking skills as this is the main skill needed in the tourism industry, and to find out about the difficulties they encounter in communicating with foreign visitors.

1.1 Research Questions

1. What is the level of English language proficiency of the local guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum?
2. What difficulties are faced by the local guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum in communicating with foreign visitors?

1.2 Research Objective

1. To find out the English language proficiency of the local guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum.
2. To find out the difficulties faced by the local guides of Aceh Tsunami Museum in communicating with foreign visitors.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 English Language Proficiency

One of the basic problems in speaking a foreign language is preparing someone to be able to use the language. For instance, it is obvious that in order to be able to speak a foreign language, it is necessary to know a certain amount of grammar and vocabulary. For instance, to test whether someone can speak English or not, it is necessary to get them to actually say something in English.

In spoken interactions, speakers and listeners not only have to be good processors of spoken words, they also have to be able to produce coherent language in difficult circumstances. It is also useful if they can be very good communicators, that is, good at saying what they want to say in such a way that the listener will find it easily

understandable. To appreciate what is involved, it can be useful to think of communication of meaning as depending on two kinds of skills as discussed below.

Firstly, in many circumstances speakers organize what they have to communicate in typical patterns. These patterns correspond, more or less, to typical kinds of messages, and thus they deal with recurring cognitive problems and have been called routines. Routines can be defined as “conventional ways of presenting information” (Bygate, 1997, p. 3).

Secondly, speakers also develop skills in solving all sorts of communication problems which can be expected to occur in spoken exchanges: These are called negotiation skills. They consist of skills that are used to enable speakers to make themselves clearly understood whatever the interaction and to deal with communication problems that may occur. Negotiation skills are skills that are common to all kinds of communications.

The ability to speak a foreign language is the most needed skill because someone who is able to speak a language will be also able to understand it. Lado (1961, pp. 239-240) defines speaking ability as “the ability to use in essentially normal communication, stress, intonation, grammatical structure, and vocabulary of the foreign language at a normal rate of delivery for native speakers of the language.”

2.2 Tourists and Tourism

Tourism is the pleasure and business activity which involves people travelling to destinations outside their normal place of residence for a short period of time (Chilembwe, 2010). Similarly, The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2009) interprets tourism as activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for no more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of any activity for remuneration from the place visited.

Many people travel to learn about new cultures and places; in doing so they achieve self-fulfillment as travelling contributes to their personal development and elevation of social status. The rising need for travel in the tourism industry has increased the demand for intermediaries to link up travelers with what they want to consume and enjoy on their travels which creates demand for individuals who can make interesting and informative commentaries. As a result, tour guides come to play an important role. Travelling and visiting places becomes more enjoyable when a well-trained guide is present. Tour guides are knowledgeable, like teachers, able to impart knowledge and give travelers interesting information about the places they are visiting. This process satisfies travelers and eventually induces growth in tourism as a whole (Ap & Wong, 2001; European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations, 1998; Mancini, 2001).

Indonesia has great attractions for tourists, because it has beautiful countryside, interesting cultures, fascinating historical remnants, beautiful beaches, and much more. For example, Aceh is one of the oldest cities in the archipelago, as it is more than 810 years old and has lots of history (Martunis, 2015). The tsunami tragedy and experiences faced by the people as well as other landmarks and museums around Banda Aceh City will also attract and interest foreign visitors. The Aceh Tsunami Museum, which was built as a memorial to the tsunami that hit Banda Aceh on Sunday,

December 26th, 2004, attracts many domestic and foreign tourists to enjoy this unique memorial building and the displays from the tragedy within.

2.3 English in the Tourism Industry

Communication skill in an intercultural context is an important requirement for people working in the tourism industry (Gonzalez-Pastor, 2013). In such a context, the role of the English language has become increasingly necessary since it has been recognized as the global language commonly used as the tool for communication by native and non-native speakers of English all around the world. English plays an important role in the tourism industry as a tool for tourism workers to communicate, negotiate and execute transactions with tourists (Prachanant, 2012). As a result, workers in the tourism sector are required to communicate effectively in English as most foreign visitors can speak English as it is widely spoken around the world (Cohen, 2004).

Blue and Harun (2003) have said that English is the language most commonly connected with host-guest interactions in service businesses can be termed as the language of hospitality in English-speaking parts of the world e.g. in South and South-East Asia, which refers to all expressions of language related to and represented in hospitality concerns. The ability of local guides to use English thus becomes an important element for the local hospitality industry. Good oral and written communication skills are the skills which are of great importance to hospitality practitioners at all different position levels. Moreover, good English communications by local guides will add value to their performance and quality. According to Bobanovic and Grzinic (2011) in the tourism industry both supply and demand sides need to communicate well to ensure quality and also the required performance standards. In the tourism industry, the use of spoken communication is more common than written communication; however both oral and written communications are highly rated (Bobanovic & Grzinic, 2011).

2.4 English for the Local Guides

The role of the English language is a very helpful tool to increase and support the ability of the community to promote their unique technologies, ideas and philosophies. Therefore it is quite important to improve the language skills of local guides whose work is crucial for the community.

According to Mancini (2001), a guide is someone who takes people on sightseeing excursions of limited duration. Whereas Collins (2000, p. 22) defines a guide as an individual who directs the way, one who heads others in a guiding process, and one who directs or serves as the model for another in his conduct. Looking at a related perspective, a guide is seen as someone who leads groups of visitors and gives them information about displays or scenes in museums, cultures, towns, or any other place of interest.

In this regard, it describes the job of the tour guide as leading, interpreting, inspiring and entertaining in an unambiguous geographical or environmental setting in which their specialized knowledge of various languages and cultures is applied, and therefore this is the definition that this research follows. However, other definitions

put their central focus on the importance of the personality and the conduct of the guides as essential ingredients that constitute the work of the guiding process.

The local guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum need practical guidance at work, which involves their language skills, in order to facilitate their professional work with confidence. Each skill in English which may be required by these guides has different values in terms of their usefulness in that specific field in order to enable guides to function more effectively in their workplace (Ekici, 2003).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research focused on the oral English language proficiency of the local guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum. For this study, the researchers employed a qualitative descriptive method which was organized to find out the level of the English language proficiency of the local guides and the difficulties that they faced in communicating with foreign visitors. According to Best and Kahn (1998, p. 290), a qualitative method, as the name indicates, is a method that does not involve measurement and statistics. In short this means that qualitative research is a way of collecting data which is concerned with describing meaning, rather than with drawing statistical inferences.

This research was conducted at the Aceh Tsunami Museum, which is located at Jalan Sultan Iskandar Muda No. 3, Banda Aceh. The number of staff is currently 46, consisting of 14 guides, 7 administration staff, 5 engineers, 10 cleaning service, and 10 security staff. In this research, the researchers only focused on the 14 local guides as the research respondents. The researchers only chose the guides as respondents because they are the only staff who give explanations and promoted tourism at the Aceh Tsunami Museum.

To collect the research data, the researchers used a test as the instrument. The kind of test was an interview. As stated by Batdulam (2012), interview is one testing method which can be used to evaluate speaking skills. For this research, the interview was in the form of asemi-structured interview. Patton (2002) explained that a semi-structured interview involves a series of open ended questions based on the topic areas a writer wants to cover. The open ended nature of the questions defines the topic under investigation but provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail. These interviews were aimed at gathering data and information required from the local guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum about their English language proficiency and speaking skills, and the difficulties they faced in communicating with the foreign visitors. In addition, the researchers also used an interview guide as an instrument. Audio recording equipment was also used as a tool to record the interviews during the process of gathering the data.

Regarding the procedure for data collection, the data was collected from the natural setting of the speaking interviews; this meant that the writer did not manipulate any variables of the data and did not give any treatment to the variables. The writer interviewed the guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum when they were on duty. There were a number of questions asked to each local guide based on the interview guide. The interviews were carried out face to face between the writer and each respondent. The interview technique applied in this research was informal where it was expected that the guides would answer each question honestly.

After the data had been collected, the next step was the analysis of data. That from the interviews with the local guides was transcribed and searched for patterns in order to find out the English language proficiency and problems of these local guides and the difficulties that they faced in communicating with foreign visitors. The information from the interviews was very important for the writer in order to provide data. The writer, then scored the guides' performance. The scoring covered three aspects using a scoring rubric for speaking, the aspects are vocabulary, fluency and pronunciation. The data results were interpreted to explain the phenomena studied in the field based on the research objectives. Interpretation, clarification, and description of the data results were prepared in order to make it clear and understandable for various levels of readers.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As local guides at a major tourist attraction, the guides should be able to speak English well in order to promote the Aceh Tsunami Museum. Some of the guides had good ability and performance in speaking English since they came from an English language study background. But the others had low performance in speaking ability. From the interviews, the writer found that 1 of the 13 respondents had major problems with grammar; 3 were able to use EFL accurately and their errors in grammar were quite rare; while 8 others were good at the control of grammar and able to speak it with sufficient structural accuracy. Only one respondent truly demonstrated her mastery of grammar.

4.1 Vocabulary

Two respondents were effective or appropriate in word choice of vocabulary, seven out of 13 were able to speak the language with sufficient vocabulary, three could understand and participate in any conversation, while the last one was able to speak English with sufficient vocabulary. Only two of the respondents were equivalent to native speakers. Three of them could understand any conversation. Seven others had nearly complete comprehension at a normal rate of speech whilst the last one could not connect the ideas discussed and he could not answer the researchers' questions.

4.2 Fluency

Based on their fluency, two of the guides were completely fluent in EFL so that their speech would be fully acceptable by native speaking standards. Three others were able to use the language fluently on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs and were able to participate in any conversation within the range of their experience with a high degree of fluency. Five others were able to discuss particular interests of competence with reasonable ease. While the remaining three were able to handle with confidence but not with most social situations, including introductions and casual conversations about current events, as well as work, family and autobiographical information.

4.3 Pronunciation

Based on their pronunciation, only two of them pronounced words like native speakers, five made a few errors in pronunciation, three made mispronunciation errors but could still be understood while the remaining three were frequently unintelligible in their pronunciation.

To conclude, only one respondent reached the excellent category in all aspects (excellent in grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation), while 12 others were in the category of very good, good, and enough. Most of them found it very difficult to talk with correct grammar about past situations, so when speaking English they would use the simple present tense formula. Hence, they got confused on how to use both types of sentence and sometimes they would misuse the grammar formulae. So they would use the tense marker for simple present in place of that for simple past, and on another occasion they would use the simple past tense formula by mistake for the simple present. These misuses occurred frequently and were usually found in the use of auxiliary verbs and the changing of verbs. And sometimes, they would use 'a' with a plural noun and they would use 'have' with a singular noun.

As for the difficulties in English speaking proficiency, the one most difficulty faced by the guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum was in expressing ideas verbally, so that the guides were not able to give foreign visitors good explanation about the displays in the museum. Then too, lack of vocabulary also made it difficult for them to express their ideas in English. Lack of knowledge about grammar also caused them to have difficulty to follow the rules when speaking. Poor pronunciation also made it hard for them to pronounce words correctly. Plus lack of confidence in speaking EFL was a big problem which gave them difficulty when trying to speak English.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on analysis of the data and the findings presented above, it can be concluded that most of the local guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum faced many problems when speaking EFL. Even though the number of errors varied amongst the guides, they usually occurred when they were speaking English. In addition, errors frequently occurred in all categories. From the 13 respondents, only one was in the excellent category in all aspects (excellent in grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency and pronunciation), while the other 12 were in the categories of very good or good or enough.

Furthermore, as an input for elements of EFL education which are involved, directly or indirectly, with error analysis, some suggestions for future learning and studies that need to be considered are as the following. For the guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum, they should learn and practice more to master the complex rules of grammar particularly with some tenses which are mostly used in daily guiding activities such as the simple present and the simple past tense. To be more successful using EFL, they: (1) can join English training courses, (2) practice speaking English with confidence amongst themselves, (3) practice English everytime and everywhere, (4) listen to a lot of English in the form of internet programs, talking books in English plus relevant television shows, movies and radio programs whenever available, (5)

read aloud articles from English newspapers, (6) never give up practicing speaking English, and (7) keep practicing and improving their speaking every day.

Meanwhile, for the coordinator of guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum, these are some suggestions for the management: (1) run an English speaking training course, ideally with a highly competent native speaker; by participating in an English speaking language course, the guides from the Aceh Tsunami Museum who do not have an English language educational background can also learn and practice speaking English well. Considering most of the guides cannot speak English well, an English speaking language course is required in the museum, so that they can be more professional at promoting the tourism attractions in the Aceh Tsunami Museum. Then, (2) give the guides more motivation to speak English with their other colleagues. Next, (3) give them opportunities to practice English when foreign visitors come to visit the Aceh Tsunami Museum. And finally, (4) do an English day schedule, at least one day in a week, so that the guides can regularly practice speaking English together.

REFERENCES

- Ap, J., & Wong, K. K. F. (2001). Case study on tour guiding: Professionalism, issues and problems. *Tourism Management*, 22(5), 551 -563.
- Batdulam, S. (2012). Evaluating students' speaking. Retrieved from <http://www.thepetjournal.net/2012/03/evaluating-students-speaking.html>
- Best, J. W., & Kahn, J. V. (1998). *Research in education* (8th ed.). London: Allyn and Bacon.
- Blue, G. M., & Harun, M. (2003). Hospitality language as a professional skill. *English for Specific Purposes*, 22, 73-91.
- Bobanovic, M. K., & Grzinic, J. (2011). The importance of English language skills in the tourism sector: A comparative study of students/employees perceptions in Croatia. *AlmaTourism*, 2(4), 10-23.
- Bygate, M. (1997). *Speaking* (6th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chilembwe, J. M. (2010, 27 September). Tourism day supplement. 'tourism for poverty reduction and biodiversity'. *Malawi Daily Times Newspaper*, 23.
- Cohen, E. (2004). *Language and tourism: Contemporary tourism, diversity and change*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Collins, V. R. (2000). *Becoming a tour guide: The principles of guiding and site interpretation*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Ekici, N. (2003). *A needs assessment study on English language needs of the tour guidance students of faculty of applied sciences at Başkent university: A case study*. (Master), Middle East Technical University, Ankara.
- European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations. (1998). Information brochure Retrieved from <https://www.feg-touristguides.com/>
- Finch, K., Hansen, C., & Alexander, R. (2010). *Internal communications: It's not rocket science*. Nova Scotia: Crown Copyright.
- Gonzalez-Pastor, D. M. (2013). *Developing intercultural competence in English for the tourism classroom through the study of cultural words*. Berlin: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Lado, R. (1961). *Linguistic across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Michigan Press.

- Maggi, R., & Padurean, L. (2009). *Higher tourism education in English: Where and why?* Switzerland: Emerald Group.
- Mancini, M. (2001). *Conducting tours* (3rd ed.). New York: Thomson Learning.
- Martunis, Y. (2015). Tari tradisional Aceh yang mendunia. Retrieved 7 October 2017 from <http://helloacehku.com/5-tari-tradisional-acehyang-mendunia>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Prachanant, N. (2012). Needs analysis on English language use in tourism industry. *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 66, 117-125.
- Simion, O. M. (2012). The importance of teaching English in the field of tourism in universities. *Annals - Economy Series*, 2(2), 152-154.
- UNWTO. (2009). Definition of tourist and tourism. Retrieved from <http://www.worldtourismorganisation.com>

[Received 7 April 2018; revised 27 July 2018; accepted 30 July 2018]

THE AUTHORS

Sofyan A. Gani is a senior English lecturer at English Education Department, Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Syiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. For career and professional development, he had been assigned as the Head of English Education Department of Graduate Program at Syiah Kuala University from year 2008-2016. In his involvement in Professional Associations, he had been appointed as a coordinator for TEFLIN (The Association for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia) for Aceh province from 2009-2017.

Cut Intan Damayanti was born on August 9, 1988 in Lhokseumawe, North Aceh. In 2006, she studied English at the Undergraduate Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Syiah Kuala University. Then, she continued to a Master Program in English Language Education at the same university and obtained her Master degree in 2017. Currently, she is working as a local guide at the Aceh Tsunami Museum in Banda Aceh, in which her main job is to serve and guide local, national, and international visitors who want to know more about the Tsunami tragedy in Aceh.