

## Communication Problems Faced by Waiters and Waitresses in Serving Guests

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### Abstract

*This study employs a qualitative research design, using observation and interview as collection methods. Observation sheets and interview guidelines served as the main instruments. This study examines types of communication problem and how to handle the communication problem. The findings show that staff faced four to six communication problems, with the first waiter experiencing 50%, the waitress 60%, and the third waiter 40%. From these results, the communication problems faced by three staff were ambiguous or unclear words, problem with listening, distracted concentration, and problem with pronunciation, each of which was experienced equally by all staff. These communication problems are not always caused by the staff themselves, but they can occur due to the crowded situation of the restaurant, the sound of music and the voices of many guests. In addition, the problem occurs due to the factor of guests who cannot speak English and the small voice of the guests. They handle communication problems by using the LEARN model of complaint handling techniques. In addition to applying various communication techniques, staff are also required to bring problems to their manager for appropriate solutions. Communication problems encountered include serving non-English speaking guests with the help of Google Translate and showing photos of the food, as well as dealing with ignorant guests in a professional manner by reconfirming the order until it is correct.*

**Keywords:** *Communication Problem, English, Waiters, Waitresses.*

### INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in communication. English is a language that is widely used around the world to communicate, both in everyday conversation and in areas such as education, business and technology. As an international language, English helps people from different countries to understand each other, share information and work together. English is used as an important communication tool to interact with people from different countries, both in everyday life and in professional settings. As an international language, English makes it easier to exchange information and build relationships with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

English is also used in the tourism industry, as used by waiters or waitresses as a means of communication with guests. Previous research conducted by Pongganta (2020) found that listening to customer questions is the most needed. Listening and speaking skills to waiters and waitresses were shown to be the highest level of need for language skills and language functions. Effective communication is essential to ensure that every guest request can be fulfilled accurately and in a timely manner, thus creating a satisfying dining experience. Arun (2017) stated that hospitality employees communicate by asking guests'

origin, explaining facilities, coordinating with other departments, serving guests, and saying greetings.

Eppler, (2007) and Pratama (2019) explain that communication problems in the work environment especially in the hospitality industry can appear in various forms. Communication problems are common in the hospitality industry, especially in restaurant services, where ineffective service delivery or the presence of language and cultural barriers can lead to misunderstandings between staff and guests. Challenges and barriers such as accent and cultural differences can occur if we have not fully mastered the language of the culture. As said by Jhaiyanuntana and Nomnian (2020) defines the challenges and approaches to intercultural communication faced by Thai hotel interns working in training centres in hotels. In addition, (Clarah et al., 2023) find that the majority of the front office hotels have techniques to deal with the challenges of communicating in English with foreign guests.

This research provides exploration on communication problems faced by hotel staff when serving guests in the hospitality industry. This topic is still rarely researched, so the results of the study are expected to provide new insights into the factors that cause communication problem and solutions that can be applied to improve service quality. This research aims to analyze whether there are communication problems encountered in the guest service process at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort. This Study identifies what factors can cause communication problems when serving guests and how the waiters and waitresses at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort handle the problems.

## METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative method. To collect data, researchers used observation and interview techniques with waiters and waitresses. Three waiters out five were selected as the respondents of this study. They were selected because of their willingness to be observed and interview sharing their experiences. Observation was done to collect data about communication problems faced by waiters and waitresses in serving at Courtyard by Marriot Bali Seminyak Resort. Observation was done in the restaurant when the respondents were performing their duties, serving guests. A list of guidelines was used to help the researcher in collecting data. The next step the researcher use interview to collect the data. The interview was about how the Courtyard by Marriot Bali Seminyak Resort staff handles communication problems when serving guests. The researcher asked pre-designed questions and use interview guide to support collect the data, while the waiters and waitresses provide answers based on their experience, views, or understanding of the topic under study. The aspect included how to handle the problems when the staff served the guests.

This data consists of two parts, namely, observation data and interview data. Observation data analysed descriptively, while interview data was analysed through theme analysis. Data from observation was analysed by calculating the occurrence of problems listed in the observation guide and calculated the frequency. Additionally, interview data was analysed by first transcribing it and then analyses the content based on thematic analysis. The researcher identified themes dealing with communication problem faced. The researcher grouped the data based on those themes. Similarly, the researcher interpreted the data to analyse the meaning of the interview results that appear in the research subjects.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that there are indeed communication problems faced by waiters and waitresses when serving guests at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort. The following table is the result of the observation that has been done by the researcher directly to Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort.

### *Types of Communication Problems*

Based on observations made to three service staff at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort, it was found that there were ten subcategories of communication problems observed during the service process to guests. The first waiter each experienced five communication problems and the second waitress each experienced six communication problems, while the third waiter experienced four communication problems. The following is a discussion of the observations from the table above.

Table 1. Types of Communication Problems Faced by Waiters and Waitresses in Serving Guests at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort.

No	Communication Problems	Staff 1	Staff 2	Staff 3
1	Misunderstanding - Ambiguous or unclear word	✓	✓	✓
2	Lack of clarity - Long Utterance	-	✓	-
	- Different accents	✓	✓	-
3	Problem with Listening	✓	✓	✓
4	Miscommunication - Distracted concentration	✓	✓	✓
5	Low English Proficiency - Pronunciation	✓	✓	✓
<b>Total</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Percentage</b>		<b>50%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>40%</b>

If calculated into percentage form, the first staff shows many percentages regarding communication problems of 50%. Then the second staff showed the highest percentage of communication problems at 60% while the third staff showed the lowest percentage of communication problems at 40%. The following is a discussion of the observations from the table above;

#### **1. Misunderstanding (ambiguous word or unclear word)**

Based on observations in the field, an example of a misunderstanding case caused by the use of ambiguous verbal expressions was found. In the observation at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort, this problem was experienced by all waitresses when serving guests. This problem occurs because the words given by guests are not clear in meaning, which causes waitresses to make sure of the meaning given by guests. This communication problem was triggered by ambiguous words such as "take it, finish, to go." Where from the word all refers to the meaning of "take away" which is spoken from different words. The phrase did not explicitly state that the food was to be taken away, so the staff interpreted that the food could be cleared up from the table.

## 2. *Problems with Long Utterance*

This problem is triggered because the message conveyed by the guest is very long which causes waitresses to be able to catch the clue given by the guest. Coupled with the restaurant situation which is quite crowded because of the music and guests. This problem only has experienced by the second staff because in the first staff and third staff no problems such as long utterance was found in their section. This condition becomes even more challenging when the interaction occurs in the middle of a crowded restaurant situation, where there are external distractions such as the sound of audio music, other guests' conversations, and high mobility in the service area.

Nevertheless, through professionalism and good communication skills, waitresses at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort were able to overcome these obstacles. The staff showed proactive responses by clarifying unclear messages and using polite and effective approaches to ensure guests' needs were met.

## 3. *Communication Problems of Different Accent*

This problem was experienced by all staff observed, suggesting that accent differences are a significant communication barrier in multicultural work environments. This difficulty has the potential to cause errors in ordering and service if not anticipated properly. One example of the chronology of communication problems faced by waiters and waitresses is when guests want to order coffee like this next incident. During an observation conducted at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort restaurant, the researcher noted a communication problem between a waitress and a guest of Indian origin that occurred during breakfast time.

The guest was seated at table A10 and was about to order a drink. When the waitress approached to take the order, the guest spoke quickly in a thick Indian accent. He said, "Can I be getting one coffee without too much milk, but not black, and also little sweet no sugar, only jaggery if you have, or brown?" The waitress politely said, "I'm sorry, sir. Could you please speak a little bit slowly, so I can make sure I get your order correctly?" The guest repeated his order more slowly. The waitress then understood the guest's order, but informed the guest that the bar only had plain liquid sugar and powdered brown sugar and offered to serve the milk and sugar separately so that the guest could measure the coffee according to the guest's taste. After the guest agreed to the recommendation given by the waitress, the waitress immediately sent the order to the barista.

## 4. *Problem with Listening*

During the observation, researchers found that the crowded restaurant situation and the sound of music can cause communication problems. From this communication problem experienced by the three staff at the Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort when serving guests where the problems experienced are different but the same type is communication problems due to hearing difficulties such as guest voices not being heard clearly, guests who are old and speak slowly, and difficulty hearing because the restaurant atmosphere is crowded and busy.

### **5. Distracted Concentration**

One example observed showed that the waitress did not fully grasp the details of the guest's order due to the low voice and noisy surroundings, resulting in a mistake in serving the food. However, with the professional and responsive attitude of the waitress in handling the complaint and taking corrective action, the mistake was quickly addressed. This shows that while communication challenges can occur in crowded and complex situations, the ability of staff to maintain professionalism and communication skills remains key in ensuring guest satisfaction.

### **6. Problems with Pronunciation**

This problem arises due to the incorrect pronunciation of words by guests, so that the meaning of the word cannot be accurately understood by waiters or waitresses. Based on observations made at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort, all staff observed experienced this problem, especially when serving elderly guests. Generally, these guests have low voices, unclear articulation, and blurred pronunciation, which makes it difficult for the message to be fully captured. Upon clarification, the staff was able to understand the guest's exact intentions and explained that chicken satay was not available in the breakfast options. The guest accepted the information and opted for another meal. This case shows that unclear pronunciation and the use of local terms without full context can lead to potential miscommunication between guests and service staff.

### **Solutions to the Communication Problem.**

Based on the interview results, there are several ways to handle communication problems faced by waiters or waitresses when serving guests at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort. The results of the interview can be seen through the explained below.

#### **1. Ambiguous Word**

The first communication problem found in guest service is related to the use of ambiguous words, which can lead to multiple interpretations and potentially cause misunderstanding of the message between guests and staff. One concrete example of this problem occurs when a third staff member uses the phrase "take it" to a serving waiter. From the interviews above, the phrase "take it" is ambiguous and can be interpreted in several ways, such as a request to clear up food that has been consumed (clear up), stating that the food no longer be eaten (finish), or a desire to wrap the food (take away). The waiters and waitresses staff handle the problem ambiguous words communication problems is overcome with a professional attitude where hotel staff immediately apologize and ask guests to politely repeat what the guest means. Where staff must ensure what is conveyed by guests who give ambiguous words whether it is a request to clean the dishes, a statement that the food has run out, or a desire to wrap the remaining food (take away).

#### **2. Problem with Long Utterance**

Communication problems about long speech can occur because the discussion is too long. This problem occurs when taking orders because guests give long and detailed orders. In addition, from the results of the research, this problem also occurred because the guest gave his experience about his vacation and spoke at length which made the

waitresses have to be able to catch the clue conveyed by the guest. From the discussion and results of interviews with waiters and waitresses, the way waiters and waitresses do when serving guests who have communication problems is to remain professional. Then the waiter or waitress must try to handle the situation by capturing the clue given to the guest so that the intention conveyed by the guest when taking the order or conversation with the guest can run smoothly and the guest feels happy with the service provided by the waiter or waitress at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort.

### **3. *Handling Guest with Different Accents***

In a service situation, a waitress once experienced a communication barrier with a guest who spoke with a thick British accent. Initially, the guest ordered "butter", but due to the difference in pronunciation, the word sounded like "bak eh," causing a misunderstanding. To handle the situation, the waitress asked the guest to repeat the order to confirm the information. After repeating it, the waitress realized that it was "butter." The waitress then apologized for the misunderstanding. The guest responded kindly and laughed, understanding that the accent was difficult to understand. The interaction continued with a positive situation. Based on the interviews with three waiters and waitresses at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort, it was found that waiters and waitresses handle communication problems encountered when serving guests in almost the same way if they face almost the same problem.

### **4. *Handling Problem with Listening***

The fourth communication problem is a problem with listening, which is caused by the restaurant, which is very crowded due to live music. This problem makes it difficult for waiters to serve guests during the taking-order process. The process of taking orders becomes difficult because the restaurant is crowded, causing waiters not to be able to hear guest orders. It makes waiters must close the room so that the sound from the live music is slightly reduced and ask guests to speak louder and slower. This problem is handled by waiters and waitresses by finding solutions quickly, namely making the room quieter and asking politely for guests to speak bigger. By doing this solution, the service process became smooth and did not cause any further problems. Facing these problems must be done professionally and not panic so that the process of serving guests can run smoothly and guests feel comfortable.

### **5. *Handling Problem with Distracted Concentration***

Communication problems regarding distracted concentration often occur because they are caused by crowded restaurant situations, loud music sounds, and crowded guests. This makes sometimes the concentration becomes unfocused and must have a professional attitude in overcoming these communication problems. From the results of interviews with waiters and waitresses at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort, waiters and waitresses provide ways to handle these problems if they experience such problems. Based on the results of the discussion above, it can be concluded that handling communication problems caused by lack of focus can be done through several steps, namely by apologizing to the guest, refocusing attention to listen carefully to the guest's food request, and repeating the order to ensure the accuracy of the information. This

strategy is also applied by other waiters and waitresses when facing similar communication situations, in order to maintain service quality and avoid misunderstandings. In addition, staff will also use the LEARN model as a reference for how to handle guests when complaining, which must always be applied and guests are satisfied with the handling provided by the staff.

#### **6. *Handling Problem with Pronunciation***

The next problem found in this study relates to mispronunciation or pronunciation of words that do not match the actual form. Pronunciation errors can create confusion between staff and guests when they want to convey something they want. In this research, it was found that guests have difficulty in pronouncing the names of the menu, especially the local menu available at Courtyard by Marriott Bali Seminyak Resort restaurant. Based on the results of the interviews and discussions previously presented, it can be concluded that communication problems in the form of mispronunciation occur due to guests' mistakes in pronouncing menu names, especially local menus available at the restaurant. This problem can be handled through strategies that have been explained in the interview, namely asking back with the guest politely about the intent of the guest's request. In addition, the staff will also help guests if they are still having difficulties by showing photos of the desired food, because the staff has photos of the food from the restaurant menu, where the approach used aims to maintain guest comfort despite pronunciation errors. Such strategies not only help to resolve problems in a professional manner, but also reflect the staff's ability to manage communication situations with calmness and mastery.

#### **7. *Handling Guest with Emotional because ignorant, and impatient***

The communication problem identified is the difficulty in dealing with guests who tend to be emotional, ignorant, impatient, and passive or less responsive, especially when they do not pay attention or clarify the details of the food order that has been submitted. This problem has the potential to cause misunderstandings between guests and service staff, which in turn can lead to miscommunication. communication problems can occur due to a lack of response from guests during the repeat order process which causes miscommunication problems to occur. From the occurrence of these problems waiters handle these problems by using the LEARN model which can be said to be an important thing to apply when experiencing problems at the international Marriott hotel. With the application of this method, it was made guests better and not make the problem longer and have been resolved.

#### **8. *Handling Problem with Foreign Language***

Communication problems with language differences are most commonly encountered by waiters when serving Asian guests. This issue can make it difficult to communicate between guests and staff during the order-taking process or when staff are serving guests. Examples of this problem are guests who do not speak English or do not speak English well. From the results of this study, it was found that Chinese guests lack fluency in English. This shows that communication problems due to guests who do not speak English are a challenge for staff when serving guests and must have a professional

attitude in serving them. Nevertheless, the staff still serves guests professionally and does not discriminate against guests.

Based on the informant's statement, hotel staff must continue to serve guests professionally without discriminating against guests. The way to overcome this problem is by continuing to apologize to guests, then helping guests in the food selection process such as pointing to the menu to further confirm their wishes. In addition, when guests want to get more information about the menu and cannot convey it directly, either due to language barriers or guests' lack of English skills, the use of tools such as Google Translate is a common solution. By serving these guests in a professional manner, guests will feel comfortable and not discriminated against.

Based on the interviewees' statements, it can be concluded that language barriers encourage guests to use non-verbal communication methods, such as pointing at the menu, to convey their wishes. This shows that in the context of order taking, service staff are accustomed to understanding the guest's intentions even if there is no fluent verbal communication. However, when guests want to get more information about the menu and are unable to convey it directly, either due to language barriers or lack of English proficiency from the guests, the use of tools such as Google Translate is a common solution. They handle communication problems by using the LEARN model of complaint handling techniques from Marriott. Where this technique includes all the actions that must be taken step by step to overcome these problems. In addition to these techniques, it is said that telling the manager about the problems faced is something that must be done so that the leader knows the problem and solves the problem that occurs.

This study shows significant differences compared to previous studies, especially in terms of culture and the source of communication problems. In previous research by Pratama (2019) who did not elaborate on the guests' nationality background and Supanee, (2007) who only studied guests from English-speaking countries, this study involved guests from Asian countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea who generally do not have an English background. In addition, the main focus of this study is on communication problems caused by guests, such as long speech, different accents, unclear pronunciation, ambiguous word usage, and distraction. Meanwhile, previous studies have highlighted staff language limitations or lack of menu knowledge. In terms of treatment, this study is also different as it applies Marriott's LEARN model as a communication problem-solving technique, whereas Pratama (2019) study does not offer specific strategies and Supanee (2007) study only suggests improving language competence and cultural understanding. Thus, this study provides a new contribution in understanding and handling communication problems in the context of multicultural hotel services.

## CONCLUSION

In the results of this study staff experienced from a low of four to a high of six communication problems. For example, the first waiter staff experienced 50% communication problems, waitresses staff experienced 60%, and finally the third waiter staff experienced fewer communication problems at 40%. From these results, the communication problems faced by three staff were ambiguous or unclear words, problem with listening, distracted concentration, and problem with pronunciation, each of which was experienced

equally by all staff. This suggests that misunderstanding guests' intentions, distracted concentration during communication, and problems with pronunciation are the main obstacles in the communication process between staff and guests. In addition, other factors such as accent differences and the length of the message conveyed also contribute to the occurrence of communication problem, although not experienced by all staff uniformly. These communication problems are not always caused by the staff themselves, but they can occur due to the crowded situation of the restaurant, the sound of music and the voices of many guests. In addition, the problem occurs due to the factor of guests who cannot speak English and the small voice of the guests. The professional attitude of the staff, these problems can be resolved and guests are happy, comfortable with the services that have been provided.

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