

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF HOTEL AND RESTAURANT MANAGEMENT STUDENTS

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Abstract

Communicative competence signifies an essential element in the hospitality industry wherein good oral and written communication skills are the top skills important to hospitality practitioners at different level positions. The study assessed the communicative competence of freshmen HRM students in terms of grammar, sociolinguistics and discourse. Likewise, it evaluated the profile of the respondents as to language facility, communication practice, educational attainment of the parents, use of language at home and media preference-factors that may affect their communicative competence. The study revealed that respondents were not competent in communication and their profile poorly manifested their motivation to learn the language.

Keywords: *communicative competence, grammar, sociolinguistics, discourse*

1.0 Introduction

The teaching of communication skills in schools reflects the growing importance of communicative competence across the world in the recent years. This is due partly to the focus of language teaching from form to function and partly to the inability of language learners to communicate despite having learned the language and mastered its grammar rules. This is also aligned pursuant to the thrust of today's education which is global competitiveness. Degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management is along this need in developing students' professional and technical competence in preparation for leadership responsibilities in hospitality-related businesses. To prove equal to these tasks, HRM students must acquire communicative competence. Thus, this study assessed HRM students' level of communicative competence by looking into the parameters like grammatical, sociolinguistic and discourse competences.

Communication competence signifies important elements in the hospitality

industry wherein good oral and written communication skills are the top skills important to hospitality practitioners at different level positions (Brunton, 2009). Relative to this, students of hospitality programs benefit immensely from learning foreign language especially English (Casado, 2003). This is because a good facility of language and development of language skills translate into success in the area of hospitality, helping students to hone positive professional attitude which influence teamwork and better service to the clients (Gannon, 2003).

The study endeavored to address the need to come-up with an assessment of HRM students' communicative competence as recommended by the accreditors when Surigao del Sur State University submitted its HRM program for preliminary survey accreditation of Accrediting Agency for Chartered Colleges and Universities of the Philippines (AACUP).

It is, therefore, inevitable for the

educators and school administrators offering this course to emphasize the importance of communicative competence because being proficient in English communication enables them to gain knowledge and skills in various disciplines thus developing their intellectual, social and civic aspects (Fatt, 2000). The study can be used further as baseline data in designing curriculum and instructional materials emphasizing communication competence.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the study of *Communicative Competence* by Canale and Swain (1980). The model was developed to account for the kinds of learning people needed in order to use language meaningfully. The model includes four components: (1) *grammatical competence* which refers to the ability to use the forms of the language correctly; (2) *discourse competence* which describes the ability to understand and create forms of the language that are longer than sentences such as story, conversation or business letter; (3) *sociolinguistic competence* which deals with the ability to use language appropriately in different contexts; and (4) *strategic competence* which is the ability to compensate for the lack of ability in any of the other areas.

Another theory which would help to understand communicative competence was developed by Spitzberg and Cupah (Brown, 2000). The theory is known as *Component Model of Competence* because it comprises three specific dimensions: (1) *motivation* which describes as an individual's approach or avoidance orientation in different social situations; (2) *knowledge* which talks on the plan of action, knowledge of how to act and procedural knowledge; and (3) *skills* which refers to behaviors performed.

The study further considered the *Input Hypothesis* by Krahen (Brown, 2000) which argues that adult second language learners develop L2 competence through one of two ways that he refers to as either acquisition or learning. The model consists of five hypotheses : (1) *acquisition- learning hypothesis* which claims that adults, as children, have the ability to acquire language; (2) *natural order hypothesis* which states that grammatical structures are acquired following predictable order; (3) *monitor hypothesis* which describes that the language we learn either subconsciously and consciously initiates and edits our utterances in the second language. ; (4) *input hypothesis* which answers a language learner develop competency over time, that is level $i + 1$; and (5) *affective filter hypothesis* that asserts that the acquisition of language increases if negativity as anxiety and the like be filtered.

3.0 Research Design and Methods

The study employed descriptive quantitative research design. In order to determine students' level of communicative competence, an adopted survey questionnaire is applied, administered personally by the researchers.

The survey questionnaire was divided into four parts. Part 1 was composed of personal data sheet and items for students' language facility, communication practice, educational attainment of the parents, use of language at home and media preference. These items were adapted from the study of Margarito (1998). Part II tested the knowledge of the students in English grammar and correct usage. Twenty multiple-choice items were presented adapted from TOEFL standardized examination (www.toeflstandardized.com). Part III examined the discourse competence

of the respondents wherein they were asked to write a composition on the subject of their interest. Their compositions were checked using ESL Composition Profile produced by Jacobs et al., (1981). Part IV measured their sociolinguistic competence using an adapted questionnaire from Hudson et al., (1995). Ten situations were presented with three possible responses that were limited on the speech acts as request, apology, greeting and refusal.

The researchers considered the universal population of the freshmen HRM students as respondents of this study. Weighted mean was employed in the profile of the respondents as to language facility, communication practice and use of English at home. Percentage count was applied to treat the in educational attainment of the parents, media preference and communicative competence of the students.

4.0 Results and Discussions

A total of 77 respondents were used as a unit of analysis. The table below reflects the profile of the respondents in terms of their language facility, communication practice, use of English at home, parents' educational attainment and media preference. Result reveals that SDSSU language facility of HRM freshmen students is average and their communication practice and language use at home are described as sometimes. These imply that they are not consistent in their use and practice of English both in school and in home. This is not a good indication because this would not reinforce enhance their English language facility or their readiness to use language including overall smoothness continuity and naturalness of their speech.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents

Variables	N	Weighted Mean	Adjectival Rating		
Language Facility	77	3.00	Average		
Communication Practice	77	3.12	Sometimes		
Use of English at Home	77	2.91	Sometimes		
Parents' Educational Attainment	Father		Mother		
		Freq.	Percentage	Freq.	Percentage
	College Graduate	14	18.18	18	29.87
	Graduate of Technical Courses	4	5.19	3	3.89
	High School Graduate	48	62.33	46	59.74
Elementary Graduate	11	14.28	10	12.98	
Media Preferences	Frequency		Percentage		
	Filipino Program in TV	30	38.96		
	English Program in TV	24	31.16		
	Newspaper in English	9	11.68		
	Newspaper in Filipino	6	7.79		
	Filipino Program in Radio	6	7.79		
English Program in Radio	3	3.89			

The table further shows that the majority of the respondents' parents are high school graduates. Record from the Students Admission Office (SAO) and University Information System (UIS) discloses that majority of SDSSU students are from poor to middle class family. Hence, few of their parents graduated college. As a result, respondents' parents could not provide a good learning environment in the home to support their children' communicative competence.

Moreover, Filipino programs in television are the media preferences of the majority of the respondents. This suggests that respondents prefer to watch TV having Filipino programs than reading newspaper and listening to radios. Consequently, their top media preference does not contribute in the development and enhancement of their communicative competence.

Table 2 shows the result of the communicative competence of the respondents as to grammar, sociolinguistics and discourse.

Table 2. Communicative competence of the respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Grammatical Competence	35	45.90
Sociolinguistic Competence	43	54.37
Discourse Competence		
Content		
Excellent—Very Good	4	5.19
Good—Average	22	28.57
Fair—Poor	46	59.74
Very Poor	5	6.49
Organization		
Excellent—Very Good	7	9.09
Good—Average	26	33.78
Fair—Poor	32	41.55
Very Poor	12	15.58
Mechanics		
Excellent—Very Good	13	16.88
Good—Average	24	31.16
Fair—Poor	23	29.87
Very Poor	17	22.07

Grammatical competence includes not only the syntactic structure of the language but also its meaning in context use. The table shows that the respondents' knowledge on grammar and correct usage is poor as reflected in the overall percentage of 45.90.

This implies that the respondents are grammatically incompetent. On the other hand, sociolinguistic competence of the respondents is limited to the assessment of speech acts such as request, apology, greeting and refusal. The table reveals that

respondents' sociolinguistic competence is fair as reflected in the overall percentage of 54.37. This manifests that there is a need to reinforce their learning in sociolinguistics as one of the components of communicative competence.

Along this line, discourse competence under the study refers to the ability of the respondents to use English language in longer sentences through composition writing. In terms of content, majority of the respondents get a rating of fair to poor. This suggests that they have a limited knowledge of the subject, little substance and inadequate development of a thesis as explained in the ESL Composition Profile developed by Jacobs et al., (1981) as a rubric used for analysis. With regards to organization, most of them get a rating of fair to poor. This means that most of them are not fluent and clear in expressing their ideas and they lack logical sequencing and development. As to mechanics, many of them get good to an average rating. This means that they commit occasional errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization; paraphrasing and the meaning are still obscured.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concluded that freshmen HRM students, in general, were communicatively incompetent. This is attributed to their sometimes usage of English in performing various learning activities in school because they were fond of resorting into code-switching and mixing from English to their mother tongue that could be an indicator of a fairly poor language facility. Their media preference and their parents were also insufficient in reinforcing their English communicative competence. If these conditions were not directed properly, HRM students could find difficulty performing

their academic functions like reporting, participating in classroom discussion, answering explanation-typed tests and worsen in carrying out their future job.

In an effort to fully address the issue on communicative competence among HRM students, instructors are recommended to provide these students with opportunities to use English in the classroom. They should create a communication classroom wherein students can freely experience the language use in a meaningful context and provide interactive and enjoyable activities geared to empower and sustain their interest in learning and gaining communicative competence. Parents should also encourage their children to patronize English media and to establish a good learning environment in their homes.

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