

Enhancing tourist experience through interactive speaking: A practical application of English communication skills at the tourist information centre in Banyuwangi

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative descriptive study investigates the application of English-speaking skills in authentic service encounters at the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in Banyuwangi, East Java. Drawing on approximately 10 observed interactions with both domestic and international tourists—including visitors from Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia—the study identifies four key stages of communication: information delivery, feedback provision, negotiation, and agreement confirmation. These stages reveal the strategic use of clarification, turn-taking, and negotiation techniques in real-time exchanges. The findings suggest that effective and adaptive spoken English significantly contributes to improved service quality and tourist satisfaction. By analyzing how TIC staff engage in interactive speaking practices, this research highlights the practical importance of communicative competence in tourism settings and provides insights for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly globalized world, the tourism and hospitality industries rely heavily on effective communication, particularly spoken English, to facilitate smooth interactions between service providers and international visitors. As a global lingua franca, English plays a pivotal role in delivering services, ensuring clarity, and enhancing guest satisfaction in multicultural settings (Thongphut & Kaur, 2023). Frontline staff in tourism must not only possess linguistic fluency but also develop pragmatic and intercultural competence to navigate spontaneous, real-time conversations that often involve inquiries, problem-solving, negotiation, and clarification (Laba et al., 2025).

In the context of vocational education, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) plays a crucial role in preparing students for professional communication in workplace settings. Institutions offering applied English programs are increasingly expected to design curricula that blend linguistic theory with experiential learning, particularly in fields such as tourism and business services (Chen et al., 2022). However, although ESP literature has emphasized the importance of authentic language use, there remains a gap in empirical studies exploring how English is used in unscripted service encounters, especially in Indonesian tourism contexts. This study seeks to address that gap.

Politeknik Negeri Jember (Polije) is a state polytechnic institution in East Java that provides vocational higher education designed to meet industry demands (Directorate General of

Vocational Education, 2020). Within its Department of Languages, Communication, and Tourism, the Diploma 3 (D3) English program emphasizes practical language training, with a strong focus on business and tourism English. As part of its curriculum, students are required to participate in a Field Work Practice program (Praktik Kerja Lapang or PKL) during their fifth semester. This internship component serves as a platform for students to apply classroom knowledge in real professional environments, thus enhancing their employability and workplace readiness.

The department recommends various internship placements, including hotels, tourist attractions, travel agencies, and government institutions relevant to the field of study. For the present study, a government institution—the Department of Culture and Tourism of Banyuwangi Regency—was selected as the internship site. This choice was strategic and grounded in several key considerations. First, Banyuwangi has emerged as a prominent tourism destination in Indonesia, attracting a growing number of both domestic and international visitors. It has gained national and international recognition for its sustainable tourism practices and its rich cultural and natural heritage (UNWTO, 2021). Second, the region offers a wide variety of tourist attractions, many of which are managed directly by the local government, creating opportunities for professional engagement in authentic tourism operations.

Among the activities conducted within the Department of Culture and Tourism, the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) was identified as the most relevant site for the internship. The TIC serves as a public service hub where real-time communication with tourists is essential, making it an ideal setting for students to practice and refine their English-speaking skills. Through their participation, students were expected to perform key communicative tasks such as answering inquiries, delivering travel information, translating messages, and negotiating services. As noted by Putri and Santosa(2018), internships in tourism institutions offer valuable opportunities for students to enhance their oral communication, translation competence, and intercultural awareness—all critical components of workplace readiness in the tourism sector.

The main objective of this study is to investigate how vocational students, serving as TIC staff during their internship, employed interactive speaking strategies in real-world encounters with tourists. Specifically, the study examines how they performed key communicative functions such as delivering information, providing feedback, negotiating services, and confirming agreements. The focus is on the spontaneous and transactional nature of spoken communication, and how students adapted their language use in response to varying levels of English proficiency, cultural expectations, and service demands.

While previous studies have explored language needs in tourism (Anam & Rachmadian, 2020; Ijabah & Amrullah, 2023; Prachanant, 2012), few have documented authentic spoken interactions in the context of Indonesian vocational education. Therefore, this research contributes to the limited body of literature on how language learners in ESP settings operationalize their skills in authentic, high-stakes service encounters. In doing so, the study not only sheds light on the communicative demands of tourism work but also offers practical implications for ESP curriculum design, teacher preparation, and workplace language training.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the real-world application of English-speaking skills by vocational students during their internship at the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in Banyuwangi, East Java. A qualitative descriptive approach was

chosen due to its suitability for capturing naturally occurring phenomena, particularly spoken language use in authentic service encounters (Lim, 2024). The study sought to document and analyze how interactive speaking strategies were employed by the students while serving real tourists, both domestic and international, in a frontline tourism service setting.

2.2 Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at the Banyuwangi TIC, a government-supported public service unit under the Department of Culture and Tourism. The site was selected due to its central role in handling tourism inquiries and its regular engagement with international visitors.

The participants in this study consisted of approximately 5 domestic and international tourists who visited the TIC during the author's internship period. Around 10 naturalistic service interactions were observed and documented. Tourists represented various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, including from Indonesia, Australia, and Singapore. These interactions occurred spontaneously and were not pre-arranged, in alignment with the study's ethnographic and observational nature. To preserve ethical integrity, no demographic data such as names, ages, or contact details were collected, and all participants remained anonymous.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through direct observation and field notes taken by the author during the observation of internship period. In addition, the author documented real-time spoken interactions with tourists, which were later transcribed and translated to highlight communication strategies and speaking skill implementation. These conversations included clarification exchanges, turn-taking, and negotiation sequences that occurred in service encounters. To enhance the reliability of the data, supporting documents such as the Banyuwangi Tourism Map, internal TIC guidelines, and updates from official tourism sources (e.g., BKSDA announcements) were also used to validate the information provided to tourists.

2.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis, focusing on four key communication stages: (1) information delivery, (2) feedback provision, (3) negotiation, and (4) agreement confirmation. Transcripts were manually coded for instances of each category was examined to identify key features of interactive speaking, such as clarification requests, response appropriateness, fluency, and language accuracy. Special attention was given to the socio-pragmatic competence demonstrated by the author, including how cultural and linguistic adjustments were made depending on the tourist's background and the context of the inquiry. Ethical considerations were also taken into account. Although no personal data from tourists were disclosed, all interactions were anonymized to protect privacy and ensure respectful use of information for educational and academic purposes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are organized into four key stages of spoken interaction that emerged during student engagements with tourists at the TIC: (1) delivering information, (2) providing feedback, (3) negotiating services, and (4) confirming agreements. These stages reflect the dynamic nature of interactive speaking in a professional tourism context and demonstrate the students' developing competence in pragmatic and intercultural. Furthermore, each of these stages

required not only verbal proficiency but also cultural awareness, patience, and responsiveness to diverse visitor needs. communication. Then, speaking for interaction should have a specific purpose, central idea, and main points (Rinda et al., 2019). The interactions involved are best described as interactive speaking situations, characterized by real-time exchanges, clarification requests, and negotiation dynamics (Moodie, 2020; Richards, 2015). In this study, data excerpts illustrate how students navigated these encounters, applying strategies such as clarification, repetition, politeness markers, and cross-cultural adaptation.

3.1 Delivering Information to Tourists

The first and most frequent task was providing immediate and accurate information to tourists. This required the TIC staff to listen carefully to the inquiries, understand the context, and respond using clear and accessible language. Given the varied language proficiencies of international visitors, this task often involved clarifying meaning or repeating responses slowly. The TIC staff also needed to adjust speech based on the tourists' level of English or use gestures and visual aids when language barriers arose (Brown & Yule, 1983). A representative dialogue is shown below:

- [1] *International Tourist: "Would you like to give me a favor?"*
TIC staff: "Sorry, would you like to repeat please?"
International Tourist: "Alright. Would you like to give me a favor?"
TIC staff: "Yes, I would."
International Tourist: "Would you like to tell me how to go to Bali?"
TIC staff: "Sure. So, first you need to get a Grab or take a bus from the station to Ketapang Harbour..."

This example reflects the necessity of listening attentively and confirming understanding before proceeding with detailed information, a practice that aligns with active listening and turn-taking strategies in spoken communication (Nghah et al., 2022; Reincke et al., 2024). Moreover, the TIC staff often relied on tourist maps, mobile applications, or real-time updates from transport and accommodation providers to give the most accurate responses possible.

Frequently asked questions included directions, transportation schedules, ferry crossing details, and general travel safety. For instance, international tourists unfamiliar with the Banyuwangi area often asked about the location of ferry ports or local customs, while domestic tourists tended to inquire about seasonal events or hiking conditions. These patterns required TIC staff to develop a broad base of local knowledge and maintain regular contact with tourism stakeholders such as drivers, hotel clerks, and government agencies.

3.2 Providing Feedback to Tourists

In addition to information delivery, students were responsible for offering accurate and empathetic feedback, particularly when responding to inquiries about unavailable or uncertain services (e.g., closed hiking trails, weather disruptions). For example, when a popular tourist trail was temporarily closed, the message had to be conveyed in a courteous but firm manner. The student responded with both factual clarity and interpersonal sensitivity.

- [2] *Domestic Tourist: "Excuse me, I'd like to ask if the Ijen Crater trail has reopened?"*
TIC staff: "I'm sorry, the hiking trail to Ijen Crater is still closed and currently undergoing cleaning and maintenance..."

This scenario demanded the use of empathy and tact, especially when a visitor had traveled far to visit a specific site. In such cases, the TIC staff also tried to offer alternative destinations or recommend nearby attractions to maintain visitor satisfaction.

Tourists often relied on the author to help verify details that were not always available online, such as last-minute changes in ferry schedules or weather-related closures. In these situations, the author utilized reliable sources, including the official Instagram accounts of local tourism authorities or direct communication with travel agents and park rangers. This real-time feedback mechanism is crucial in ensuring customer trust and information transparency (Rane et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

Furthermore, when language barriers existed, especially with tourists from non-English-speaking countries, the TIC staff made use of translation apps or visual aids. In extreme cases, other staff members who spoke additional languages were asked to assist. This practice highlighted the importance of team collaboration in multilingual environments and reinforced the role of the TIC as a bridge between visitors and the local culture.

3.3 Negotiation Between Tourists and the Author

The third communicative function observed involved negotiating with tourists on services. Negotiation became necessary when the services requested involved third parties, such as travel agents or transportation providers. The author's role in these instances extended beyond information delivery to facilitating and mediating expectations between tourists and service providers. Tourists often sought better rates or alternative options, which led to interactive discussions involving time, price, or service scope.

[3] *International Tourist: "Is the driver going to pick us up right now?"*
Author: "Sorry, but the driver is still on the way to pick up another tourist..."

These dialogues reflect pragmatic language use, where both parties needed to balance convenience, cost, and time constraints. The author was required to speak clearly and assertively, yet remain polite and accommodating to ensure the tourist's needs were met without miscommunication.

Tourists also negotiated accommodations, choosing between homestays, hotels, or eco-lodges based on budget and proximity to attractions. In these instances, the author offered personal recommendations based on guest preferences, and occasionally called the accommodations directly to confirm availability or reserve a room. The negotiation process emphasized the importance of cross-cultural communication, since values and expectations regarding service vary greatly by nationality (Clarke et al., 2020).

3.4 Agreement Based on Negotiation

After negotiation, the final step was to confirm and formalize the agreement. This involved reiterating the details verbally and often writing them down in an invoice or itinerary. This not only minimized future misunderstandings but also served as evidence of mutual agreement. The TIC staff was careful to reconfirm each item, including what was included in the package and what payment methods were accepted.

[4] *International Tourist: "So, the fixed cost is 1,450,000 and is it all included?"*
TIC staff: "Yes, it is. So, the package includes everything you need: entrance tickets, hotel, driver, and fuel..."

In this final stage, the author's speaking role became more formal, as it involved setting expectations and ensuring all details were understood. Any ambiguity could lead to disappointment or disputes, so accuracy and clarity were essential (Dosad, 2024; Hoffjann, 2022). Moreover, after the agreement was reached, the TIC staff continued to offer assistance—

such as directing the tourist to the nearest ATM, or helping them wait for a pickup. This after-service engagement reinforced a positive tourist experience and reflected the TIC's commitment to service quality and guest satisfaction.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the real-world application of English-speaking skills by vocational students during their internship at the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in Banyuwangi, East Java. Through direct observation of live service interactions, the study identified four key stages of communication: delivering information, providing feedback, negotiating services, and confirming agreements. These stages reflect the dynamic nature of spoken interaction in tourism settings and reveal how students adapted their language use in response to varying communicative demands. The findings suggest that meaningful exposure to authentic, unscripted service encounters significantly enhances students' communicative competence. More than simply practicing language structures, students engaged in complex acts of clarification, negotiation, and intercultural mediation. Such experiences helped them move beyond textbook knowledge and develop practical skills required in real tourism workplaces, including pragmatic flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and professional responsiveness.

The study also reinforces the value of integrating workplace-based learning into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs. When students are placed in real service environments, they not only apply their language skills but also cultivate interpersonal and problem-solving abilities that are essential in customer-facing roles. This suggests that ESP curricula, particularly in tourism and hospitality, should more intentionally include internship opportunities that allow for meaningful communicative engagement with diverse language users. While the study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The scope of data was limited to one internship site and a specific period of observation. Additionally, the analysis focused on a limited number of interactions within a specific time frame. Future research could expand on these findings by conducting longitudinal studies, involving multiple sites, or applying discourse analysis methods to deepen the understanding of spoken interaction patterns in tourism contexts. In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of preparing language learners not only to speak English, but to do so effectively in high-stakes, culturally diverse service contexts. Internships such as the one examined here serve as valuable bridges between academic learning and professional communication, equipping students with the skills and confidence needed to navigate the real demands of the tourism industry. The use of interactive speaking strategies, coupled with cultural sensitivity and adaptability, contributed significantly to the success of the services provided.

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