

A NEEDS ANALYSIS OF ORAL COMMUNICATIVE
SKILLS IN MANDARIN BY MALAYSIAN HOTEL
ATTENDANTS

WONG CHIH KHUAN

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTIC
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR

2020

**A NEEDS ANALYSIS OF ORAL COMMUNICATIVE
SKILLS IN MANDARIN BY MALAYSIAN HOTEL
ATTENDANTS**

WONG CHIH KHUAN

**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF LINGUISTICS**

**FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR**

2020

UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
ORIGINAL LITERARY WORK DECLARATION

Name of Candidate: Wong Chih Khuan

Matric No: TGC140051

Name of Degree: Master of Linguistics

Title of Project Paper/Research Report/Dissertation/Thesis (“this Work”):

A Needs Analysis of Oral Communicative Skills in Mandarin by Malaysian Hotel Attendants

Field of Study: Needs Analysis

I do solemnly and sincerely declare that:

- (1) I am the sole author/writer of this Work;
- (2) This Work is original;
- (3) Any use of any work in which copyright exists was done by way of fair dealing and for permitted purposes and any excerpt or extract from, or reference to or reproduction of any copyright work has been disclosed expressly and sufficiently and the title of the Work and its authorship have been acknowledged in this Work;
- (4) I do not have any actual knowledge nor do I ought reasonably to know that the making of this work constitutes an infringement of any copyright work;
- (5) I hereby assign all and every rights in the copyright to this Work to the University of Malaya (“UM”), who henceforth shall be owner of the copyright in this Work and that any reproduction or use in any form or by any means whatsoever is prohibited without the written consent of UM having been first had and obtained;
- (6) I am fully aware that if in the course of making this Work I have infringed any copyright whether intentionally or otherwise, I may be subject to legal action or any other action as may be determined by UM.

Candidate’s Signature

Date: 2nd June 2020

Subscribed and solemnly declared before,

Witness’s Signature

Date: 2nd June 2020

Name:

Designation:

A Needs Analysis of Oral Communicative Skills in Mandarin by Malaysian Hotel

Attendants

ABSTRACT

Tourism is an important industry in Malaysia, contributing to one-sixth of the national gross domestic product for the past 10 years. Tourists from China made up the third largest group among the foreign visitors in Malaysia. Almost 25% of their expenditure is spent on accommodation, thus the management of many Malaysian hotels are promoting training on communicative Mandarin that focuses on hospitality language to their front-liners, i.e. the service attendants. Therefore, there is a need to identify the challenges faced by hotel service attendants when serving Chinese-speaking guests. The objectives of this research is (1) to identify the Mandarin communication skills needed by Malaysian hotel service attendants when interacting with Chinese-speaking tourists from China, (2) the Mandarin communication challenges in listening and speaking encountered by Malaysian hotel service attendants when interacting with Chinese-speaking tourists from China, and (3) Pinyin phoneme that they faced problem to differentiate or pronounce with. This study utilised the concurrent triangulation methodology to integrate both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) strategies to address the research questions. A total of 54 hotel service attendants from six hotels located in Klang Valley, Malaysia, were enrolled in the questionnaire survey, while 10 service attendants, training and human resource managers were engaged in the semi-structured interview. The results showed that there was a need for the hotel service attendants to learn communicative Mandarin that is specifically designed to serve the Chinese-speaking hotel guests. The service attendants had problems in listening to and speaking Mandarin when communicating with these guests, especially in differentiating and pronouncing difficult sounds like “Zi and Zhi”, “Ci and Chi”, “Si and Shi”. This research filled in a knowledge gap in Business

Mandarin for the hospitality industry and served as a pioneering research for the field of Mandarin for Specific Purposes in Malaysia.

University of Malaya

ABSTRAK

Sektor pelancongan merupakan komponen yang penting dalam ekonomi Malaysia, dimana ia telah menyumbang sebanyak satu per enam kepada Keluaran Dalam Negeri Kasar (KDKNK) dalam 10 tahun yang lepas. Bilangan pelancong dari negara China merupakan kumpulan ketiga besar selepas Singapura dan Indonesia yang melawat negara kita. Hampir 25% daripada perbelanjaan mereka adalah atas penginapan, ini memberangsangkan ramai pengusaha hotel giat mendorong kursus latihan penuturan Bahasa Cina yang memberi fokus kepada bahasa dan kosa kata dalam industri perhotelan terutamanya kepada pekerja baris hadapan mereka. Jadi, mengenal pasti keperluan dan kemusykilan kumpulan ini apabila berdepan dengan pelancong Cina adalah amat diperlukan. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk (1) mengenal pasti Kemahiran berkomunikasi yang diperlukan oleh pekerja-pekerja hotel semasa berdepan dengan pelancong yang menutur Bahasa Cina terutamanya mereka dari negara Cina, (2) Cabaran dalam aspek pendengaran dan penuturan yang dihadapi oleh pekerja-pekerja hotel apabila berinteraksi dengan pelancong dari negara Cina (3) *Pinyin* atau bunyi yang mereka menghadapi masalah untuk menyebut atau mengenal pasti. Kajian ini menggunakan metodologi triangulasi untuk menggabungkan kedua-dua data dari kuantitatif (kajian soal- selidik) dan kualitatif (temu bual) untuk mendapatkan gambaran yang lebih menyeluruh supaya menjawab persoalan kajian ini. Terdapat sebanyak 54 orang pekerja dari 6 buah hotel di sekitar Lembah Klang telah menyertai kajian soal-selidik, selain daripada itu, sebanyak 10 orang yang terdiri daripada pekerja baris hadapan, pengurus bahagian latihan atau sumber manusia telah mengambil bahagian dalam sesi temu janji separa berstruktur. Keputusan kajian ini telah menunjukkan satu kursus latihan yang mereka khas untuk pekerja-pekerja hotel yang memberi fokus kepada kemahiran untuk bertutur dan berhadapan dengan pelancong penutur Bahasa Cina adalah amat diperlukan. Pekerja-pekerja hotel menghadapi masalah dalam pendengaran dan penuturan Bahasa

Cina ketika berkomunikasi dengan penginap kumpulan ini, terutamanya menemui kemusykilan dalam membezakan bunyi “Zi dan Zhi”, “Ci dan Chi”, “Si dan Shi”. Kajian ini telah mengisi jurang pengetahuan dalam Bahasa Cina untuk perniagaan bagi industri perhotelan, dan juga sebagai perintis kepada bidang “Bahasa Cina untuk tujuan tertentu” di Malaysia.

University of Malaya

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My utmost gratitude to the God of the universe and His abundant grace and blessing for the completion of this dissertation.

First and foremost, I must give my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Emily Lau Kui Ling, for her guidance, understanding and help throughout this dissertation. I have learned a lot along this journey, and gained many valuable experience.

I would like to express my sincerest appreciation towards my family members, for sharing familial responsibilities during this time and enabling me to complete this dissertation without many worries. I would like to thank my dearest father, Wong Mok Sang, who is currently fighting with dementia; my mother, Ho KunNien whom I know always watches over me from the Heaven; my brothers, Wong Chih Hon and Wong Chih Yoong; my sisters, Wong Chih Wei, Wong Chin Poh, Wong Chih Chen and their families.

I would like to sincerely thank all my beloved soul mate and best friends who are always there to support me through thick and thin. I will not be able to go through all the challenges and stand strong till the very end without their encouragement and sacrifices. My deepest gratitude to Yeoh Teck Hau and Dr. Alison Wee Kim Shan for walking me through all the emotions and bringing me back on my feet.

My sincerest gratitude to my colleagues, Woon Yee Yin and Tee Lu Yee, for their unconditional support, releasing me from our hectic workload so that I can stay focused on my dissertation.

I would like to thank all my respondents for granting me the chance to understand their thoughts and needs in my research topic. Their corporation and genuine responses make this dissertation a valuable reference for all.

Last but not least, my appreciation to the administrative staff in the Faculty of Linguistics and Languages, University of Malaya, for their help and support in completing the paperwork for this dissertation.

I wish to thank everyone who made this work possible.

University of Malaya

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Abstrak	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Table of Contents	ix
List of Figures	xiii
List of Tables.....	xiv
List of Symbols and Abbreviations.....	xv
List of Appendices	xvi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Background of The Study	1
1.3 Problem Statement.....	4
1.4 Research Objectives.....	6
1.5 Research Questions.....	6
1.6 Significance of the Study.....	7
1.7 Definition of Terms	8
1.7.1 Oral Communication Skills (100)	8
1.7.2 Language for Specific Purposes	8
1.7.3 Business Mandarin	8
1.7.4 Chinese Romanisation Phonetic Scheme (<i>Hanyu Pinyin</i>).....	9
1.7.5 Needs Analysis	9
1.7.6 Service Attendants in Hotels	10
1.8 Conclusion	10

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
2.1 Introduction.....	11
2.2 Communication Skills	11
2.3 Language for Specific Purposes – Business Mandarin.....	12
2.4 Chinese Phonetic Scheme (<i>Hanyu Pinyin</i>).....	15
2.5 Language for Specific Purposes – English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Theory ...	16
2.6 Needs Analysis	18
2.7 Business Mandarin Teaching under the ESP Theory	23
2.8 Chapter Summary	25
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	26
3.1 Introduction.....	26
3.2 Research Design	26
3.3 Research Instruments.....	29
3.3.1 Questionnaire.....	29
3.3.2 Interviews	31
3.4 Research Procedures.....	31
3.4.1 Questionnaire Survey	32
3.4.2 Interviews	32
3.5 Respondents of the Study	33
3.6 Ethical Consideration.....	33
3.7 Data Analysis.....	34
3.7.1 Analysis of Questionnaire Survey.....	34
3.7.2 Analysis of Interviews.....	34
3.8 Narrative Analysis	35
3.9 Thematic Analysis Approach	35
3.10 Chapter Summary	36

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS	37
4.1 Introduction.....	37
4.2 Analysis: Demography	38
4.2.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents.....	38
4.2.2 Mandarin Proficiency of the Respondents	40
4.3 Quantitative Analysis: Communicative Needs.....	41
4.3.1 Needs Analysis: Context	41
4.3.2 Target Situation Analysis: Language Skills	46
4.4 Quantitative Analysis: Speaking and Listening.....	48
4.4.1 Speaking	49
4.4.2 Listening.....	53
4.5 Quantitative Analysis: Pronunciation of “Z/Zh”, “C/Ch” and “S/Sh”	55
4.6 Qualitative Data	59
4.7 Qualitative Analysis: Communicative Needs.....	59
4.7.1 Qualitative Analysis: Speaking and Listening	64
4.7.2 Qualitative Analysis: Pronunciation of “Z/Zh”, “C/Ch” and “S/Sh”	67
4.8 Chapter Summary	69
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	71
5.1 Research Summary	71
5.2 Summary of Findings	72
5.2.1 Communicative Needs	72
5.2.2 Speaking and Listening	75
5.2.3 Pronunciation of “Z/Zh”, “C/Ch” and “S/Sh”	77
5.2.4 Business Mandarin Teaching under the ESP Theory	78
5.3 Proposed Content of Business Mandarin Programme for the Hospitality Industry	78

5.4	Limitations.....	80
5.5	Further Research.....	81
5.6	Chapter Summary.....	82
	References.....	84
	Appendix A: Questionnaire.....	90
	Appendix B: Semi Structured Interview (Questions for Stakeholder/Superior).....	94
	Appendix C: Semi Structured Interview (Questions for Service Attendants).....	95
	Appendix D: Consent Form.....	96

University of Malaya

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.2.1: Gross value added tourism industries (GVATI) and the share to GDP of tourism income, 2005-2017. (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018)	2
Figure 2.6.1: What needs analysis sets to establish according to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) (Figure from Aditya, 2016, p. 13)	21
Figure 3.4.1: Flow chart of research data collection	32
Figure 4.5.1: Response on whether hotel attendants had difficulties in discerning the pronunciation of “Z/Zh”, “C/Ch” and “S/Sh”	57
Figure 4.5.2: Present situation analysis of own ability in discerning the pronunciation of “Z/Zh”, “C/Ch” and “S/Sh”	58

University of Malaya

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.2.1: Advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires and interviews based on the discussion in Kumar (1996)	28
Table 4.2.1.1: Demographic profile of the respondents	39
Table 4.2.2.1: The Mandarin proficiency level of the respondents	40
Table 4.3.1.1: Mandarin communicative needs of Malaysian hotel attendants: motivation and usage frequency. These multiple-choice questions only allowed for a single answer.	43
Table 4.3.1.2: Mandarin communicative needs of Malaysian hotel attendants: channel and content, location and audience. These multiple-choice questions allowed for multiple answers.	45
Table 4.3.2.1: Target situation analysis — Language skills	48
Table 4.4.1.1: Present situation analysis of the Mandarin speaking abilities of hotel attendants.....	52
Table 4.4.2.1: Present situation analysis of the Mandarin listening abilities of hotel attendants.....	54
Table 5.3.1: Proposed content of basic business Mandarin in the hospitality industry ..	79

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

NA	:	Needs Analysis
ESP	:	English for Specific Purposes
MSP	:	Mandarin for Specific Purposes
GDP	:	Gross Domestic Product
TSA	:	Target Situation Analysis
PSA	:	Present Situation Analysis
GVATI	:	Gross Value Added Tourism Industries

University of Malaya

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaire.....	90
Appendix B: Semi Structured Interview (Questions for Stakeholder/Superior).....	94
Appendix C: Semi Structured Interview (Questions for Service Attendants)	95
Appendix D: Consent Form	96

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter discussed the background of the study, problem statement as the reason why the researcher conducted this research, the objectives of the research and questions to be answered by this research, followed by the significance of this study, definition of terms, and ending with a chapter conclusion.

1.2 Background of The Study

China is one of the largest unified economic entities in the world, with its business booming, and consumer affluence on the rise. Meanwhile, Malaysia has been China's top trading partner within ASEAN since 2008. The bilateral trade volume between China and Malaysia in 2013 reached US \$106 billion, making Malaysia China's third-largest trade partner in Asia. As Malaysia's top trading partner, US \$29.4 billion worth of Malaysian shipments were exported to China in 2017, which was 13.5% of total Malaysian exports (Rosli, 2019).

In Malaysia, the total income received from tourism increased from RM56.4 billion in the year 2005 to RM201.4 billion at the end of year 2017, which highlighted the importance of the tourism sector for Malaysia's GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Its importance and share increased from 10.4% in the year 2005 to 14.9% in the year 2017 with an average yearly income of RM119.41 billion (Figure 1.2.1).

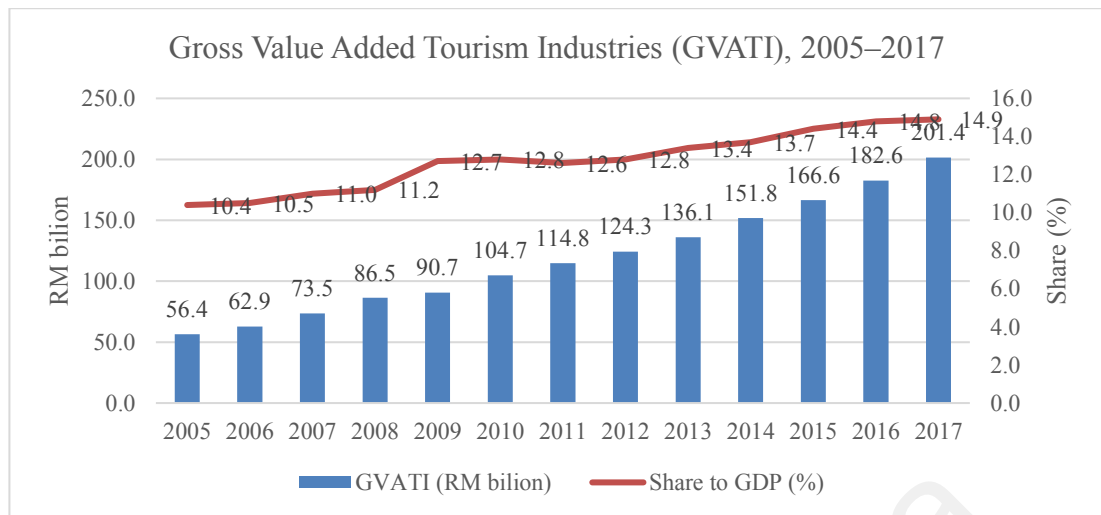


Figure 1.2.1: Gross value added tourism industries (GVATI) and the share to GDP of tourism income, 2005-2017. (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018)

China is the leading contributor of Malaysia’s tourism industry apart from Malaysia’s neighbouring countries. China has consistently ranked within the top five countries of origin of tourists in Malaysia for the past nine years, totalling approximately three million tourists per year in 2018 (Strategic Planning Division Tourism Malaysia, 2019). The influx of Chinese tourists is a direct result of China’s “Open Door policy” in 1978 and its tremendous growth in GDP and per capita income in recent years. This has led to an economic transformation and raised China’s ranking of world export volume from 32nd to 1st, officially replacing the United States with a total for imports and exports valued at US \$4.16 trillion beginning year 2013 (Koleksi, 2017).

Hence, improving the quality of the hospitality industry in Malaysia is a crucial factor to maintain our country’s position as a top Chinese tourist destination. This mainly resides in the provision of the best hospitality experience to guests for recurrent sales or recommendation to potential guests. Communication skills are the essential skills in the hospitality industry. The tourists’ satisfaction can be achieved and measured by the understanding and comprehension level of hotel service attendants towards their guests’ requests and needs. Among all the skills, the top skills required by the hospitality

practitioners of different levels and positions are good speaking and listening skills (Kostic & Grzinic, 2011).

Tourists will automatically turn to hotel attendants, especially those front-liners who are most accessible to them, for help or assistance. The smoothness of the communication process will be essential in ensuring the comfortable stay of a foreign tourist in the country. Language as a tool of communication plays a vital role in this. A common language between hotel employee (the supply side) and the guests (the demand side) is necessary in ensuring the hospitality service provided is at its best (Kostic & Grzinic, 2011). Since Chinese tourists speak little or zero English, there is a rising need for hotel service attendants to develop communication skills in Mandarin to understand and achieve the expectations and requirements of their guests.

It cannot be denied that Mandarin is the second most widely-spoken language in the world, and also one of the five official languages of the United Nations. According to research, there are about 1.2 billion people (around 16% of the world's population) who speak Mandarin or the Chinese language as their first language (Wikipedia, 2019).

Therefore, although historically Chinese has not been widely taught in Malaysian schools, interest is growing dramatically. This can be noted in the number of non-Chinese children who are sent to study in Chinese schools. According to records from the Malaysian Ministry of Education, the percentage of non-Chinese students increased tremendously from 5.5% in the year 1995 to 15.31% in the year 2014 (China Press, 2016).

Among all the states in Malaysia, Klang Valley is ranked at the top for the number of tourists received yearly (Strategic Planning Division Tourism Malaysia, 2019). Accommodation is one the most important considerations for visiting tourists and according to the “Tourism Performance Record January – December 2018” by the Strategic Planning Division of Tourism Malaysia, tourists to Malaysia spent 25.7% of their expenses on accommodation. They are not only spending a quarter of their expenses

on accommodation but also one-third of their time in the place where they will be staying throughout the trip.

Hence, this figure tells us how important the quality of the service provided by the hotel or accommodation provider is to ensure the satisfaction of their guests, especially with the aim to cultivate revisits from the same guests.

With the booming development of the Internet and borderless information, the comfort and cleanliness levels, as well as the quality of the service given by hotel sites will not only be marked online but will also be viewed by others online, subsequently affecting consumer behaviour in deciding on where to book a place to stay.

Therefore, the management of hotels are very clear about this current trend and are trying their best to make their guests feel at home by having a comfortable and enjoyable stay at their place. Besides ensuring all the facilities and services are in place for the guests, smooth communication is of utmost important in high-quality hospitality as this will directly affect their impression of Malaysia. Thus, hotel attendants play an important role in making the tourists feel at home even when they are in another country.

1.3 Problem Statement

Hotels in Klang Valley (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor) received 30.6% or 25.23 million guests from the whole of Malaysia in 2018 (Strategic Planning Division Tourism Malaysia, 2019). With this figure, we can assume 30% of Chinese guests will choose to stay in Klang Valley, and the number will be more than 880 thousand in a year (Strategic Planning Division Tourism Malaysia, 2019).

This is a very encouraging figure and suggests possible revenue for the hotel management to invest in a proper Mandarin programme to enable their staff to communicate and assist their Chinese-speaking guests throughout their stay. Undoubtedly, the hotels might look for a practical communication programme that will

train their service attendants to assist guests in hotel-related matters like check-in and check-out, introducing hotel services and facilities, handling guests' enquiries and complaints, etc.

Due to the rise of both the economical and practical value of the Mandarin language, and the need of hotels to serve an increasing number of Chinese guests, many hotels in Klang Valley are looking to equip their servicing staff (especially the first layer's front-liners) with basic Mandarin communication skills to serve their Chinese-speaking guests better.

Hotel service attendants in Klang Valley have faced issues to deliver necessary information or respond to Chinese-speaking guests' queries or complaints in an accurate way. This has caused a lot of communication errors or misunderstandings that have downgraded the customer experience rating from the respective guests.

The sample group that the researcher chose for this research are hotel employees working in various hotels situated within Klang Valley and who are non-native Mandarin speakers and have little to no foundation in the language, but are often the first point of contact with Chinese tourists. The language set required for hotel service attendants varies from everyday conversational use and it is considered a niche market need. The needs analysis will determine their current language level and implement processes to assist them to accomplish their language learning target.

One of the main challenges faced by hotel employees is their inability to understand the customers and express themselves due to their lack of knowledge in daily conversational and professional or formal Mandarin. Consequently, this prevents the employees from performing their tasks and leads to failure in handling customers' queries and complaints.

This research endeavours to identify the challenges they face when communicating in such a setting and the language skills they lack when handling the customers' needs.

Additionally, the researcher also aims to pinpoint the set of language skills needed by this specific group of people.

To date, there has not been any specific research conducted in Malaysia in relation to the specific Mandarin communication challenges faced by hotel service attendants when communicating with Chinese-speaking guests from Mainland China. It is therefore necessary to identify their communication needs and gaps to help in suggesting the proper curriculum needed at their workplace.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study aims to identify:

- i. The Mandarin communication skills needed by hotel service attendants working in Malaysia when interacting with Chinese-speaking tourists from Mainland China.
- ii. The specific Mandarin communication challenges in listening and speaking (e.g. some pronunciation that might be harder for a non-native speaker to get used to) faced by hotel service attendants in Malaysia when interacting with Chinese-speaking tourists from Mainland China.

1.5 Research Questions

This study aims to identify:

- i. What are the Mandarin communicative needs of Malaysian hotel attendants?
- ii. What are the speaking and listening skills in Mandarin required by Malaysian hotel attendants?
- iii. To what extent do non-native hotel attendants able to pronounce and differentiate sounds “Z/Zh”, “C/Ch”, “S/Sh” and “Z/Zh”?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The main target of this research is to identify the communication challenges faced by hotel service attendants when communicating with Chinese-speaking tourists from Mainland China when they stay in a hotel in Malaysia. After the communication problems have been identified, necessary steps can be taken to ensure the smoothness of the communication process to avoid possible communication errors that might cause uneasy feelings for any party.

In the hospitality sector, straightforward yet comfortable communication is essential in providing good assistance to the guests when necessary. Hotel guests might have different needs or questions when staying abroad. Service attendants in the hotel where they are staying are the ones they will be turning to for assistance. If the service attendants are not equipped with basic Mandarin communication skills, they might not be able to provide help to the guests or might even cause unnecessary misunderstandings which will definitely impact the hotel as well as the country's image.

We can see from the "My tourists profile 2018 by selected markets" by the Strategic Planning Division of Tourism Malaysia that 25.7% of tourist expenditure is spent on accommodation (p. 5). Apart from this, it was also reported that 74.5% of tourists gather information from the Internet before they make up their minds regarding the tours they would like to sign up for (p. 9). Netizens nowadays will be checking online for reviews by previous guests before making the decision on which hotel to choose. Language and communication will be one of the main factors for the decision-making.

By identifying the difficulties and challenges faced by service attendants, then only will we be able to solve it from the root. After knowing the real issues, we can suggest the proper solutions for them. This research hopes to unfold the issues faced with some suggestions to address the Mandarin communicative problems of hotel service attendants serving Chinese-speaking guests from mainland China.

The results of this study will be beneficial for the development of Mandarin for specific purposes and the study of Business Mandarin in Malaysia.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Different definitions will be applied to different research. Hence, we have defined the terms used in this study below:

1.7.1 Oral Communication Skills

Communication skills consist of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Wallace, Stariha & Walberg, 2004, p.7). The listening and speaking skills are the most important for oral communication, as they are the core to understanding speech and conveying a response. When it comes to face-to-face communication like serving hotel guests, listening and speaking skills will be required to communicate effectively.

1.7.2 Language for Specific Purposes

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 54), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) refers to “a language course or teaching plan with specific needs for a specific group of learners in content and goals”. It means a comprehensive approach to design and customise the teaching methodology and is a syllabus driven by learner-centredness. ESP emphasises on the language and knowledge to be learnt as something practical where the learners’ needs can be applied to fulfil specific needs or purposes.

1.7.3 Business Mandarin

Zhang (2007a) defines “Business Mandarin” in “Jingmao Hanyu Kecheng Yanjiu” (The Research of Business Mandarin Programme) as “the professional Mandarin language that is used in the business industry as well as for business-specific purposes.”

This indicates that Business Mandarin is a “language for specific purposes”. According to the definition of “Xiandai Hanyu”, Business Mandarin is “a language with specific usage in specific areas” and it is very practical in solving communication issues in business.

1.7.4 Chinese Romanisation Phonetic Scheme (*Hanyu Pinyin*)

The movement to romanise Chinese characters began in 1952, when a special working committee under the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China was set-up. The suggestion to romanise Chinese phonetics was then accepted in the 5th National People's Congress in 1958. (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2019)

Hanyu Pinyin is the most commonly used Chinese romanisation system for a non-native speaker to learn Mandarin. The *Pinyin* system is used to represent Chinese characters in the early stage of Mandarin learning for many beginners (Bassetti, 2007). It is currently considered a useful tool in teaching basic Mandarin to non-native speaker, as the students are able to acquire the language within shorter period of time.

1.7.5 Needs Analysis

Basturkmen (2010) suggests that Needs Analysis (NA) is actually an analysis to understand the gap between where the learners are currently standing in the language proficiency level or knowledge and what the learners should know to achieve the Target Situation, in this case, to communicate with Chinese-speaking guests in order to provide them with a better hospitality experience during their stay.

1.7.6 Service Attendants in Hotels

This is the group of people working at the front line of hotels including front-desk personnel in-charge of check-in or check-out of the guests, food and beverages personnel, banquet staff as well as housekeeping personnel. They are the first layer to serve and meet hotel guests, and who will literally be carrying the hotel's image and impression and will have direct impact on the guests' experience throughout their stay.

1.8 Conclusion

The researcher introduced and reviewed the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, significance of the study as well as the definition of terms in this study.

The researcher will extend the discussion to review related studies by other researchers in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 will explain the methodology applied in this study in detail. The results and details of the data analysis are in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 will be focusing on the conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher reviewed the article or studies related to Business Mandarin, studies on English for Specific Purpose (ESP), Need Analysis (NA), as well as other literature related to the communicative challenges.

2.2 Communication Skills

Language communication skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing, are essential in giving and receiving information in a particular language (Kay & Russette, 2000). Communication typically occurs in one of three ways: verbal, non-verbal, and visual, and can take place under many circumstances. For example, in the workplace, communication is necessary to exchange ideas, express feelings, and discuss how to complete a certain task.

Oral communication skills, including speaking and listening, are important business world, especially in the hospitality industry (Kay & Russette, 2000; Kostic & Grzinic, 2011; Jasso-Anguilar, 1999, Masoumpanah & Tahririan, 2013). Smooth communication creates an environment of fluency and comfort. Having good communication skills in the workplace helps to maintain an amicable environment. Smooth communication between hotel service attendants and guests requires the presence of good oral skills from both parties (Kostic & Grzinic, 2011).

Hence, in this study, the researcher focuses on oral communication skills, by prioritizing listening and speaking skills. According to previous studies conducted on communication in the hotel setting, oral communication is more important as compared

to writing or reading skills (Kay & Russette, 2000; Kostic & Grzinic, 2011; Jasso-Anguilar, 1999).

Jasso-Anguilar's (1999) showed that the maids in one of the Waikiki hotels (a worldwide hotel chain) had difficulty in English speaking skill and avoided it in their workplace. Unfortunately, this was against the hotel's mission to "be friendly and be a host to everybody" (p. 41). As a result, the hotel received negative comments from the guests about the maids being unable to communicate in English and respond their requests. The researcher thus conducted a needs analysis for the hotel maids using mixed-methods to understand their challenges and suggested a curriculum to be designed targeting their needs.

Similarly, Kostic & Grzinic (2011), conducted a questionnaire survey to understand the level of importance in communication skills among students and employees in the tourism industry. Their results showed that both students and employees agreed that the most effective way to improve their English speaking skills is through speaking with a business partner or friends from abroad. Both Kostic & Grzinic (2011) and Masoumpanah & Tahririan's (2013) researches show the respondents from the above mentioned industry admitted that speaking and listening skills are relatively important among all communication skills.

2.3 Language for Specific Purposes – Business Mandarin

Business Mandarin is a form of LSP used in enhancing communication within a business setting among Mandarin speakers (Zhu, 2003; Zhang, 2007b). It adapts well the LSP theory in planning and designing a specific course for desired learners (Long, 2005). The key features of Business Mandarin are: (1) the amalgamation of business-related terms and conventional Mandarin to serve particular purpose; (2) the incorporation of vast Chinese cultural facts and knowledge into the language; and (3) the usage of formal

and respectful terminology and phrases (Zhang, 2007c). Business Mandarin is generally regarded as a language related to foreign trade, however it lacks a concrete definition and parameters as to what is considered as Business Mandarin. It is important to redefine Business Mandarin specifically for its research field.

Teaching Business Mandarin and basic Mandarin is similar in that both are taught following a set of patterns in teaching Chinese as a foreign language wherein the course design emphasises the training of basic skills — listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, Business Mandarin courses do not have intensive reading training and exercises such as the ones offered in teaching Chinese as a foreign language course. This is because Business Mandarin courses concentrate on building participants' communication skills through meaningful tasks and activities, and not through the understanding of basic language theories such as phonetics and phonology, semantics, morphology and syntax, Chinese characters and more. Teaching Business Mandarin should not be limited to the learning of terminologies of various areas such as trading; it should also encapsulate business management, Chinese business culture and etiquettes and more. At the very least, Business Mandarin should include four key aspects of commerce: (1) daily business activities and social languages, (2) Chinese business culture and etiquettes, (3) practical trading knowledge, and (4) business operation and management (Zhang, 2007c).

Basic Mandarin language courses expose students to different everyday life scenarios, which enables students to master basic daily Mandarin communication skills. In contrast, Business Mandarin courses stress putting students into real-life and daily business situations to strengthen their practical skills and application of the language and at the same time help them to internalise cognitive learning to ensure the practicality of Mandarin language usage in working environments (Xu, 2011). This hopefully will empower the students with the knowledge and experience to understand and answer questions from their corresponding work environment accurately as well as build and

maintain business connections using the newly acquired language. The content of Business Mandarin courses includes a wide range of business aspects and areas such as office life, purchasing and selling, advertising, organisational chart and decision-making, travel, complaints, various business application styles and many more to enhance the students' language ability in different settings and business activities (Zhang, 2006; Lin, 2015).

Li, Zhang (2007c) further explains that the biggest disparity between Business Mandarin and basic Mandarin is that Business Mandarin has its own “language features”. First, Business Mandarin has lower difficulty and smaller gap between language proficiency levels. The language gap between each level of Business Mandarin should not be huge and should be filled with business knowledge to meet the “practical” characteristics of Mandarin for Specific Purpose (MSP). According to “Hanyu Shuiping Cihui Yu Hanzi Dengji Dagang” (2001), the number of vocabularies in each lesson should be limited to a certain amount and should include specific professional terms related to business knowledge to ensure that learners pick up the language as well as the business culture of China (Lu, 2006). This greatly reduces the difficulty level for Business Mandarin students and lighten their stress and burden for the need to master a wide array of words and grammar.

In addition, Business Mandarin has high consistency in overall style. The content does not have to be extensive, complex and tailored for long-term learning. The language emphasises accuracy in expression, clarity of content, and succinctness in the overall learning process. Hence, Business Mandarin is practical and applicable. Business Mandarin language courses usually teach students to describe specific business phenomena in a simple and straight forward manner, and encourage students to communicate with simple, clear and professional terminologies, and focus on developing the ability to solve practical problems with the aid of language tools (Zhang, 2006).

For wider applications, Business Mandarin usually has flexible and diverse sentence patterns. Business Mandarin differs from conventional Mandarin as it has more sentence patterns in its written and spoken form as a result of integrating daily Mandarin listening, speaking, reading and writing. Business Mandarin emphasises contextual understanding of the language by exposing its learners to different contexts and settings (Lin, 2015). This feature allows learners to compare sentence patterns and structures in various contexts, which will help learners comprehend the key meaning of certain words, phrases, and sentences. Moreover, once the learners have mastered understanding various different sentence patterns that essentially denotes the same meaning, learners will eventually be able to identify and select the most suitable method of learning to be it through going through textbooks or doing more language exercises.

Lastly, Business Mandarin has a unique vocabulary composition. There is a high recurrence rate of important terminologies (Ni & Liu, 2006). Important phrases, grammar and business knowledge are repeated many times in diverse contexts and settings to help students absorb the lessons rapidly. Furthermore, it uses contemporary vocabulary (Ni & Liu, 2006). Contemporary vocabulary reflects a modern world lexical situation; It is highly practical and cultivates learners' interests. Business Mandarin blends modern language and business industry-specific terms and knowledge into its teaching course and lessons to ensure practicality.

2.4 Chinese Phonetic Scheme (*Hanyu Pinyin*)

Chinese phonetic or *Hanyu Pinyin*, according to the Ministry of Education of the People Republic of China, was introduced and announced for the first time in the First National People's Congress in 1958 as a standardized spelling system for names of places and people in China, and for academic article in the international context (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2013). Since then, *Hanyu Pinyin* has been

widely used internationally as a romanisation system of Chinese characters. It also serves as a tool in teaching “Mandarin as a Second or Foreign Language” to non-native beginners. However, several studies found that it could create a learning obstacle for intermediate-level beginners (Bassetti, 2007; Koh, Arriaga & Mah, 2013).

Koh, Arriaga & Mah (2013) discovered that the highest percentage of Mandarin learners mispronounced “Z” and “Zh”, “C” and “Ch”, and lastly, “S” and “Sh”. On top of this, Cheun, Hoe, and Ho (2005) found similar results whereby most of Mandarin learners mispronounced the affricate consonant (Z, Zh, C, Ch, J, Q) and the final phoneme “ü”.

2.5 Language for Specific Purposes – English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Theory

Recently, the demand for Business Mandarin teaching is gradually expanding in the field of teaching Mandarin as a foreign language. However, the research output for Business Mandarin is comparatively fewer than basic Mandarin teaching. Researchers believe that Business Mandarin teaching falls under the MSP category, therefore the theory of Language for Specific Purpose—especially English for Specific Purpose — should be applied (Qian, 1997).

English for Specific Purpose refers to “a language course or teaching plan with specific needs for a specific group of learners in content and goals”(Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).It is a variant of English related to a specific occupation, subject or learning purpose, comprising a combination of language skills training and professional knowledge as well as having its own unique vocabulary, syntax and structural patterns. It teaches not only includes the learning and training of English language skills, but it also has a clear objective of helping students to familiarise themselves with industry-specific words, phrases and discourse. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) defined the ESP as a learner-centric methodology of teaching. They emphasise the importance of the contents

and approaches used by ESP practitioner – it should be all design or plan based on the reason of the learners' learning.

In 1997, one of the prominent researchers in ESP, Tony Dudley-Evans spent an hour in his speech to give a clear definition over ESP in a conference held in Japan. He gives an extended definition on “Absolute” and “Variable” characteristic of ESP as follow:

In Absolute Characteristics, ESP is expected to i) defined to meet the specific needs of the learners, ii) makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves, and iii) centred on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse, and genre.

In another way, the Variable Characteristics in ESP means i) it may be related to or designed for specific disciplines, ii) may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English, iii) likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at the secondary school level, iv) It is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students, and last but not least, v) most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems

This definition saw clearly the influence of Stevens (1986), although one of the absolute characteristics - "in contrast with General English" has been removed as a step taken to improving and refining the theory. Besides this, more variables characteristic also added in the aid of resolving arguments and drawing a line between ESP and the others. The definition shows that ESP can be seen at the broader concept that not necessarily targeting a specific discipline, or aiming certain age group or people with certain skill set. ESP should be seen like what Dudley-Evans has suggested: an 'attitude of mind' and an 'approach' in teaching. This similar to the conclusion made by Hutchinson et al. (1987:19) stated: "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning".

ESP is a language teaching method. The course content and teaching methods depend on the learners' learning purpose. ESP theory was developed based on the fundamentals of foreign language teaching, especially foreign language for specific purpose teaching. The rise of ESP can be attributed to the demand for English as a result of political, economic and technological developments; the increase linguistic research and; the development educational research (Kostic & Grzinic, 2011). The ESP curriculum usually comprise of needs analysis, testing and evaluation. In addition, most of the students are adults with practical work experience or professional knowledge; the majority of which have studied conversational English however this may vary depending on individuals. Most students have a clear purpose in learning. The teacher should have a broad knowledge on business-specific terms and high proficiency of the language.

2.6 Needs Analysis

Needs Analysis (NA) as a process has been widely used in various sectors such as education, economics, and manufacturing (Kaewet, 2009; Ni, 2007; Cowling, 2007; Zhang, Z., 2007). Recognising NA's practicality in the area of research, researchers applied it into research methods such as observation, self-reflection, questionnaire, interview, and so forth. Since the 1970s, NA has been recognised and applied in teaching and learning the English language. It was initially used to conduct research in the area of ESP, which was then changed to English for General Purposes (EGP) following the change of focus in English language teaching and learning (Stevens, 1988). Over the years, many pieces of research have been carried out on the aforementioned area and the researcher is now aiming to further contribute to existing researches by offering new insights and findings.

The NA theory is an analysis of the individual needs of English for Academic Purpose (EAP) learners while taking into account the needs of course organisers, employers, and

societies. The Theory is the foundation of the ESP theory and can be divided into two categories—target situation analysis and present situation analysis. The target situation analysis refers to what knowledge and skills should be mastered at the conclusion of learning. The most famous target situation analysis model is the Communicative Syllabus Design by Munby. The present situation analysis is applied to analyse the learners' learning abilities prior to the beginning of the lessons by studying their strengths and weaknesses. The NA consists of three aspects—requirements, priorities and course design, which reflect the content, guiding significance and role of the NA.

Most researchers and scholars often discuss the concept of “needs” before delving deeper into the NA theory. Psychologists believe that “needs” is an objective reflection of the human body's external environment and his/her internality, and it is a state of absence.

Numerous researches have been conducted on the NA theory, but the most notable researchers are Basturkmen, Berwick, Brindley, Dudley-Evans and St John, and Hutchinson and Waters, whose researches became the foundation and framework for many other studies and researches. The results of their findings are as follows:

Berwick (1989) believes that “needs” is the gap between a learner's current level and his/her targeted goal. Additionally, he also categorised “needs” into felt needs and perceived needs. Felt needs refers to the learner's own needs and desires on foreign language learning, while perceived needs refer to the educational goal set by the foreign language educator from the learner's learning ability and learning experience.

Brindley (1989a/b), on the other hand, proposes to divide “needs” into objective needs and subjective needs. He views all objective situations related to learners such as learner's personal information, the current level of foreign language and the difficulties in learning, as objective needs; while the cognitive needs and emotional needs of learners in the

learning process such as learning strategies, attitude, and confidence are categorised as subjective needs.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) classify “needs” into two categories—target needs and learning needs. Target needs can be further categorised into necessities, lacks and wants. Necessities refer to the knowledge and skills that learners should master to achieve effective use of language in targeted situations and it is an objective need determined by the language used in target scenarios in the future. Lacks refers to what the learner’s inadequacies as compared to their existing knowledge, language level and the objective need determined by the language used in the future. Wants refer to what the learner wants to learn, that is, the learner’s own needs. The target needs to solve the problem of what the learner should do, while the learning needs to solve the problem of how the learner learns, mainly through exploring the language learning process.

In Dudley-Evans and St John’s (1998) point of view, need analysis should be a process of discovering what the group of learners want and how to fulfil it in a language course. The needs analysis should comprise of the following according to them: (1) Target Situation Analysis (TSA) or Objective Needs means the information including the field, area, or task which learners needed the language for, (2) Subjective Analysis (SA) is demographic information of the learners such as their level of language, learning background, motivation and expectation in joining the course, and lastly, their thought and attitude towards the language, (3) Present Situation Analysis (PSA) assess their current level of language proficiency, and this is to enable ESP practitioner in having a better understanding of the learners’ lacks, (4) Deficiency Analysis or Lacks means the gap to be filled up between TSA and PSA, and then (5) Learning needs come after the deficiency analysis as the process to work out an effective way of learning the necessary skills and content needed by the learner, (6) Discourse Analysis means the professional communication information needed by the learners and how it may be used in the targeted

situation, while- (7) “Wants” is what is expected from the course. (8) At last, Means Analysis is the information gathered about the environment details where the course will be held.

From the above, we can conclude that NA is a process or tool to have a throughout understanding about where the learner currently are, which area or field of language the learner might need, what is the target of the learner in learning the language, what the learner needs to know to reach his/her target.

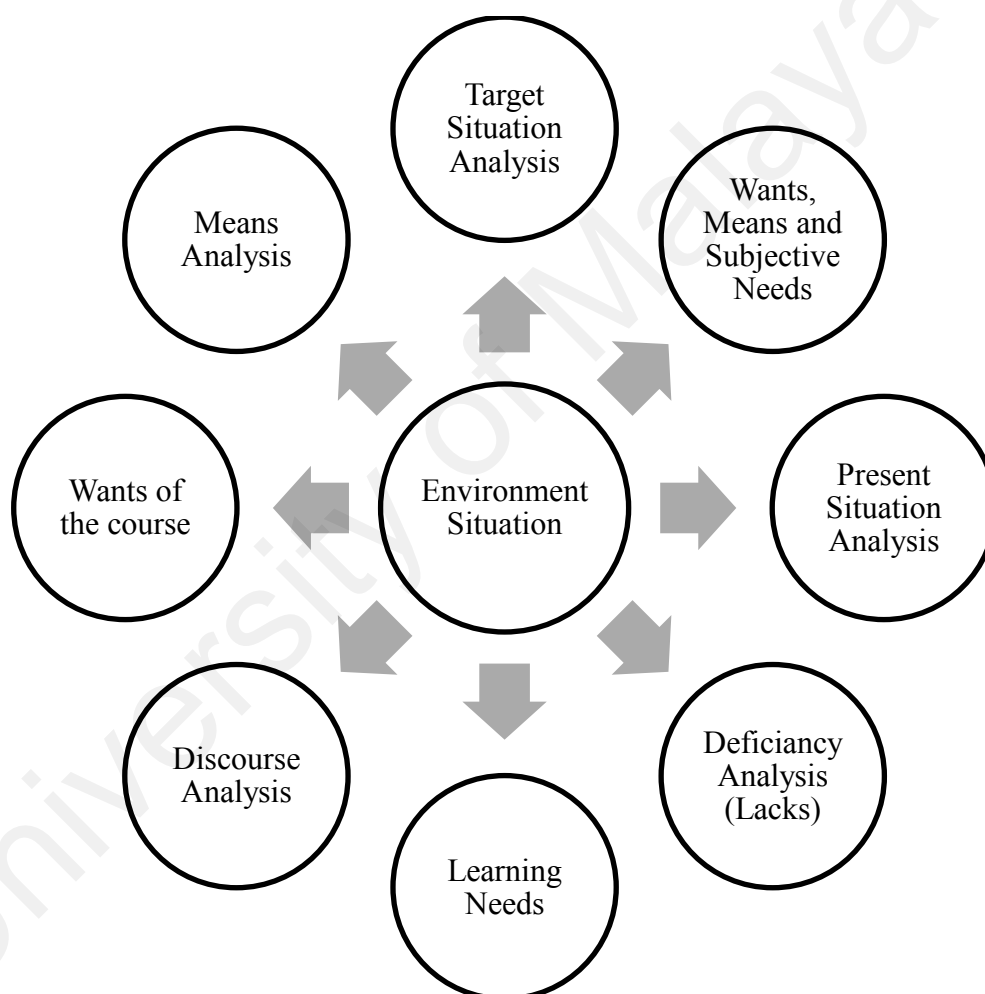


Figure 2.6.1: What needs analysis sets to establish according to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) (Figure from Karuthan, 2015, p. 13)

Basturkmen (2010) draw similar definition on NA as the gap of language between what the learner must know in order to operate in the target situation and what they presently know. For her, NA is a tool to identify and refine the course content and methodology used in LSP course. She simplifies Dudley-Evans and St John’s eight

processes of Needs Analysis into five listed below, which is (1) Target Situation Analysis: To identify the language skills the learners should have known in their specific task, (2) Discourse Analysis: To gather, identify and describe in details the language skills needed in the Target Situation Analysis, (3) Present Situation Analysis: To identify where are the learners currently at in term of the language skills needed to complete their work. This also helps to identify the gap between what they have now and what they can move towards, (4) Learners Factor Analysis is to understand the learner factors further. It is including their motivation of learning, learning style, learners' preferences and their perception towards their language needs, and lastly, (5) Teaching Context Analysis is to have a clear idea of the environment where the course will be held. It is including the condition, facilities and other teaching aids offered. This is to have a realistic idea of what exactly can be fit into the module.

In this study, the researcher aims to identify the Mandarin needs and lacks the hotel service attendants when facing Chinese speaking guests. The above-mentioned process will be taken for in-depth research.

Based on the concept definition of “needs”, the framework of target needs and learning NA is established, which provides a reference for the empirical research of NA. The target NA framework mainly includes the following contents—the motive behind using the target language; the means of using the target language, the field of the use of target language, the intended person to communicate with using the target language, the environment/setting of the use of target language, and the time and place of the use of target language. The content of the learning NA framework is the learner's purpose of learning; his/her learning style; the available learning resources; and the arrangement of the course schedule and the background of the learner. (Dincay, 2011)

As a brief conclusion, the ESP has some differences with general English but still a part of it. Before conducting an ESP course, NA might need to take place for better

understanding and a suitable module for the targeted group to ensure the efficiency of the course.

2.7 Business Mandarin Teaching under the ESP Theory

The ESP theory has been widely applied onto understanding the efficiency of teaching Mandarin as a foreign language in China. Specifically, NA have been developed for this purpose and used in improving teaching methods. The main role of NA in Mandarin teaching was to determine how Mandarin learners can motivate themselves to learn and use Mandarin consciously (Yu, 2002). The needs of Mandarin consisted of six characteristics that differentiated learning one's native language and learning a foreign language (Ni & Liu, 2006). As a result, it is vital to apply the NA analysis to identify the students' needs when learning Mandarin. For example, there would be a limit to how much the students can absorb. A questionnaire survey that aimed to explore the needs of long-term foreign students in China on teaching materials of public course in university revealed that the acceptance of the length of the texts by foreign students for each level of language learning was between 500–1000 words, with 20-50 words taught in one lesson (Liu & Wu, 2009). Respondents also hoped that the content of textbooks was more practical so that they can apply what they learned in their daily lives and they preferred historical and folklore-related topics (Liu & Wu, 2009).

Needs analysis can be conducted via various tools and in multiple settings. A needs analysis conducted on foreign students in China using a host of questionnaire survey, classroom teaching audit and in-depth interviews short-term showed that short- and long-term Mandarin learners in China had significant disparities in their respective target and learning needs (Wang, 2011). At the same time, students from different geographical area would have varying needs. A comparison between the learning needs of Mandarin learners from Japan and Korea found that students and businessmen differ in their

learning needs, indicating that customised teaching methods, course duration, course content is necessary to meet specific needs (Xu, 2011). Furthermore, a mixed-methods study on Japanese and Korean undergraduate students in Chinese universities showed that occupational factors were the main motivation for students to learn Mandarin, hence, learning should be aligned with their future aspirations (Ding, 2012).

Adopting a diversified and ESP-theory-based teaching method would facilitate in providing a guideline or general framework in teaching Business Mandarin. This would allow for regular adjustment and employment of various teaching methods to accommodate the students' needs and ensure effective lesson delivery. Although several universities in China have already launched the Business Mandarin programme for foreign students and have gradually carried out researches in Business Mandarin, the field is still relatively specialised and is slowly becoming more known over the last few years. In contrast, research on the theoretical framework of Mandarin often focuses on Mandarin for academic purpose (i.e. Mandarin), with less emphasis on MSP. Researches on MSP are rare, not systematic and are unable to fulfil the diverse teaching needs in highly multi-cultural Malaysia. Presently, there is no NA on Business Mandarin in Malaysia. Conducting an NA is essential to understand the motivation of Business Mandarin students and the larger industrial factors that promoted it. It is important to increase the research on Business Mandarin teaching to close this knowledge gap.

In summary, the number of NA on Mandarin as a foreign language in China is relatively small compared to NA on ESP. Similarly, due to the small number of researches on foreign language in Malaysia, the research on Business Mandarin is even less than in China. In this research, I conducted questionnaire surveys, interviews and NA on six hotels in Klang Valley to determine the needs of hotel attendants in learning basic Business Mandarin. This research does not aim to define Business Mandarin but rather to

explore the most effective teaching methods for learners to achieve their learning needs and objectives as well as to master the language.

2.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher reviewed relevant and notable literature and research done by the other researchers. Business Mandarin or the Mandarin for Specific Purposes, English for Specific Purposes theory, the Needs Analysis researches done. As this study is researching on the Mandarin language for specific purposes, the researcher included the NA research done by those Chinese researchers in this field to understand the topic further.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we will discuss the research design, the methods and instrument used, as well as the introduction of the respondents in this study, research procedures, ethical consideration, and data analysis procedures.

3.2 Research Design

In this research, a mixed-method approach was used. The researcher uses a “mixed-method” to investigate an aspect of interest with more than one method to increase the accuracy and reduce the possibility of miss out important data. Creswell (2009) suggest that the researcher might be able to further investigation of a phenomenon of interest to minimise the limitations associated to one method and to enhance confidence in the findings (Creswell, 2009).

Creswell (2009) explains that researchers use a mixed-method approach to expand the understanding from one method to another and also confirm the findings from different data sources. The Concurrent triangulation strategy that mixed and uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches to cross verify the date for more reliable and accurate results suggested by Creswell (2009) is adopted in this study. The reason for applying this strategy is “to complement the weakness in one method with the strengths in another method” (Karuthan, 2015, p.12). Hence, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in the process of collecting data. (Robinson, 1991)

Usually, the quantitative approach is applied with a questionnaire survey to have knowledge on the point of view, attitude, thoughts and certain habits toward a group of sample subjects (Cooper and Schindler, 2006). Sekaran and Bougie (2013) believe that a

questionnaire survey will much help in data comparison, and speed up the data processing process as well as increase the accuracy of the research. As the questionnaire is a structured data collection tool designed to elicit desired data precisely on the concerned field compared to the other option.

There are a few reasons why the questionnaire survey chosen to be one of the methods used in this research:

1. Many studies related to learning and teaching or languages chose to adopt a questionnaire survey in their study as a quantitative method able to gather data from a bigger group of respondents. This method is indeed considered as an efficient and at the same time cost-effective method.

Kumar (1996) compared the advantages and disadvantages of both questionnaire and interview in her study. He mentioned about the efficiency of the questionnaire to gather more information on the specific scenario as targeted in a shorter time. It can also be used on a larger number of subjects. On the other hand, the interview (the qualitative approach), is to have an in-depth point of view from the respondents on a certain phenomenon in society. The researcher uses a semi-structured interview together with a questionnaire in this study for an all-around view on the phenomenon the researcher working on. The semi-structured interview was used to gather the complete opinion of the hotel attendants and the management people toward the Mandarin communication needs and specific communicative challenges faced by them. Respondents will be able to draw out a picture about themselves regarding their thoughts, opinions, and views (O'Neill, 2011).

The questionnaire, which is the quantitative method is used to identify the Mandarin communicative needs and challenges of the hotel attendants in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The questionnaire is designed to extract specific information to answer the research questions. It will be the Mandarin communicative needs and challenges of the hotel

attendants in this case. As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire able to gather more information on the specific scenario as targeted in a shorter time on a larger number of subjects. The information on the Mandarin language communicative needs and challenges among hotel attendants were gathered from questionnaires distribution to hotel attendants who are the main subjects of this research.

The qualitative method follows after the questionnaire. A semi-structured interview was conducted to find out the in-depth thoughts on Mandarin communicative needs and challenges in order to complement the research findings. Besides rectifying and explaining in detail on unclear questions and answers, the researcher will be able to elicit in-depth views on the subjects matters in the questions (Kumar, 1996). This certainly helps the researchers to have a clearer picture of the communicative needs and challenges faced by the hotel attendants when handling Chinese speaking guests from China.

The use of both quantitative and qualitative method is important in this study. The triangulation strategy expected to complement each other and provides the information needed in getting a clearer picture of the identified phenomenon.

Table 3.2.1: Advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires and interviews based on the discussion in Kumar (1996)

Questionnaires	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Less time and energy-consuming to administer	Self-selecting bias. Not everyone who receives the questionnaire returns it and those who do may have different attitudes than those who do not.
Offer greater anonymity to respondents	Lack of opportunity to clarify issues
	Do not allow for spontaneous responses
	Respondents may consult with one another before answering

Table 3.2.1, continued

Interviews	
Advantages	Disadvantages
More useful for collecting in-depth information	More time consuming
Opportunity for questions to be explained and responses clarified	Quality of the data obtained depends on the skills of the interviewer
	The interviewer may introduce his or her bias
	Less standardised. For example, the quality of the data may vary when different interviewers are used.

3.3 Research Instruments

A questionnaire designed to extra the needs and problems faced by the hotel attendants when handling and communicating with the Chinese speaking guests especially those from mainland China was used as the quantitative methodology of the research, and a semi-structured interview adapted in the qualitative part of the study.

3.3.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed and developed to identify the Mandarin communicative needs and challenges faced by hotel attendants when handling Chinese speaking tourists from China in Klang Valley, Malaysia (Refer to Appendix A). The researcher developed the questionnaire based on the theory and framework by Dudley-Evan and St John (1998), Basturkmen (2010), and Kumar (1996). Extended questions were created based on the insights given after the interviews with the hotel attendants and the management people on communication issues faced by them when handling Chinese speaking guests from China in Malaysia.

The questionnaire has strategically divided into three sections. Section A recorded 7 questions collecting the basic demographic information of the respondent. They will provide their personal information, such as age range, gender, working experience, mother tongue, education level and Mandarin level in this section. The second section

consists of 10 multiple choice questions and a 5-point Likert Scale to check on respondents' communicative needs and the language level targeted by them. This section collecting data about the Mandarin usage, needs of the respondents on the Mandarin language in their daily task and who will be the receiver for them. This allows the researcher to have a clearer picture of the Mandarin communicative needs, where and who they need Mandarin communication skills with, and lastly, which skills set they needed most. The respondents were asked to rate the importance of each skill to them where 1 is "not at all" and 5 is "very much". The first question in the last section request respondents to rate the speaking and listening skills on specific Mandarin pronunciation. They will rate themselves from 1 to 5, where 1 means "poor" and 5 means "excellent" in speaking of listening to certain Mandarin pronunciation. The section C1 in the questionnaire comprised of 12 statements. This is to identify the difficulty and the confident level of the respondents towards speaking and listening when communicating in Mandarin especially to tourists from China. They were asked to rate their Mandarin speaking and listening skills from 1 to 5. Where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 is "strongly agree" to a specific statement. This is to investigate the difficulties and issues faced by the hotel service attendants when handling Chinese speaking guests from China. The last part of the questionnaire (Section C2) allowing the respondents to rate their level of listening and speaking to the phoneme "Z/Zh", "C/Ch" and "S/Sh" to examine further the challenges faced by this group of people. (Refer to Appendix A)

The pilot test was done with 20 hotel service attendants. The objective of the pilot test is to ensure the appropriateness of the questions and items listed in the questionnaire. A minor fine-tuning on wording was made after the pilot test for better comprehension (Terrel, 2012).

3.3.2 Interviews

A semi-structured interview created and conducted to understand the thought and view of hotel service attendants toward the phenomenon in an in-depth way. The interview was conducted among the training managers, head of human resource, and several service attendants. (Refer to Appendix B, C, D) The questions are basically focusing on what the Mandarin communicative needs and challenges of the service attendants in the hotel are when facing Chinese speaking guests from mainland China.

3.4 Research Procedures

The researcher approached the managers of training or human resource from over 20 hotels located in the Klang Valley, 6 of them shows interest in giving their service attendants a comprehensive Mandarin communicative programme to handle Chinese speaking guests and currently having issues in that.

After understanding their basic needs and problems faced, the researcher then runs a research study to have a detail view of this phenomenon. Researcher allowed to conduct questionnaire and interview survey with the service attendants who is positioned as the frontline or the first contacting point of the hotel guests but did not possess Mandarin communication skills and basic language skills to handle Chinese speaking guests.

Researcher runs a preview or Communicative Mandarin programme for these 6 hotels and concurrently conduct the questionnaire or interview research with the participants and their human resource or training managers.

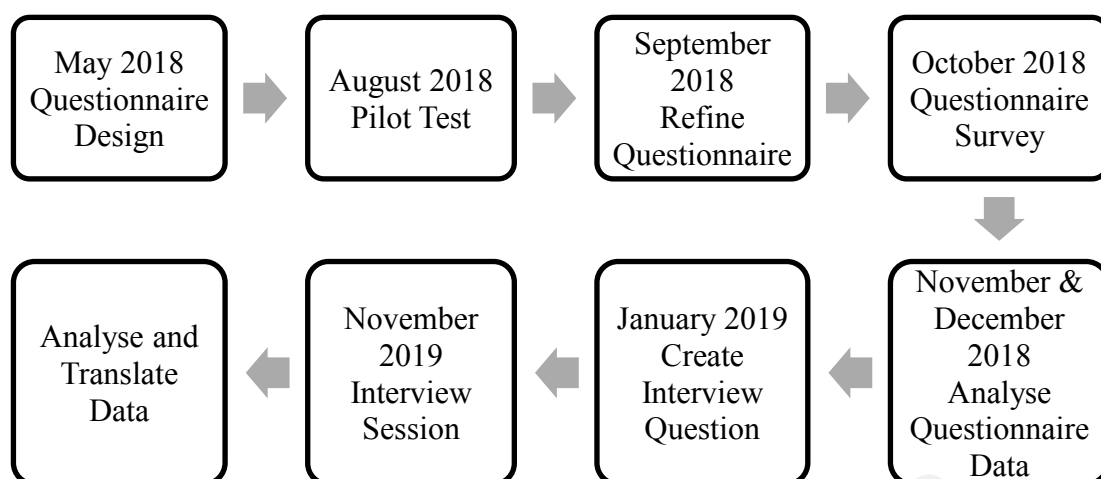


Figure 3.4.1: Flow chart of research data collection

3.4.1 Questionnaire Survey

One hundred questionnaires given to the participants when Basic communicative programme preview or lesson happening, the researcher was there personally and ready to answer their queries if they are not clear about the questions listed in the questionnaire. 54 completed the research and agreed to participate in the study.

The preview or lessons happening in the hotel premise and they were granted permission to join the preview class by the hotel management. The training or human resource managers of these 5 hotels gave full cooperation in coordinating the preview or learning session.

3.4.2 Interviews

After the questionnaire survey have been done, and data have been tabulated and analysed, 6 service attendants and 4 human resources or training managers agreed to participate in a short semi-structured interview session separately. There are 3 hotels - Sunway Clio Hotel, Sunway Pyramid Hotel, and Sunway Resort and Spa are managed under the same human resource and training department as they are hotels built by the same group of a company targeting a different market. Which means, these 6 hotels is managing by 4 management teams. Researcher able to have an in-depth discussion with

the interviewees on their view towards the challenges faced and Mandarin communicative needs at work when facing Chinese speaking guests especially those from mainland China.

The answer and discussion were properly recorded and at the same time, some important point was jotted down as a reference. The basic personal details and position held were also noted down after getting consent from the interviewee.

The researcher transcribed the interviews after that for research and analysis purposes.

3.5 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study consist of service attendants, human resource and training managers from 6 hotels located in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

A total of 54 hotel service attendants completed the questionnaire survey. 6 service attendants and 4 managers (from human resource or training department) were interviewed.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

A consent letter was given to the participants prior to the questionnaire and interview session. Any related information provided is well kept with strictly confidential and are all for the research purposes only as promised. As researchers seeing and conduct the questionnaire survey and interview session personally, the researcher gets to brief the participants on the objective and the confidentiality of the information given personally to the participants. The participants voluntarily joined the research. A copy of “consent note” was attached in the Appendix session of this study (Refer to Appendix D).

3.7 Data Analysis

The methodology discussed here were the tools used in the data analysis process. The results and further detail are written in Chapter 4.

3.7.1 Analysis of Questionnaire Survey

As the sample of this research is not on a big scale, data that has been elicited from the questionnaire survey are compiled, tabulated, and analysed to see the trend and preferences of the participants. The summarized results are to answer the research questions of this study.

3.7.2 Analysis of Interviews

The semi-structured questions were asked in the interview session with interviewees in this research (Refer to appendix B and C). This is to remain the flexibility and being open to the answer from the interviewees. Researcher encouraged interviewees to speak-out their mind on the issues or challenges discussed. Questions were designed to spur the interviewees for more opinion and thought on Mandarin communicative needs and challenges faced by the service attendants working in hotels. All the interviews were transcribed, coded and summarised in the discussion part of this study.

The interviews were conducted after the questionnaire returned and basic analysis made on the data collected from the questionnaire survey. This is to ensure the issues and problem faced identified clearly before appropriate questions set for the interviews to have an in-depth interview session with the interviewees. Interview questions created and piloted together with the questionnaire session and refined after the questionnaire survey and basic analysis done to ensure the quantitative data given by the interviewees are focusing on questions that this research is trying to discover.

Researcher leads the interviewees to narrate their problems and challenges encountered when facing Chinese speaking guests especially those from mainland China and analyse it with Narrative Analysis (Riessman, 2008) and Thematic Analysis (Kellehar & Glikman, 1997) to efficiently group the issues encountered and propose the possible solutions to it after the study.

3.8 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is among the most common methodology used in analyse qualitative research. Interviewees encouraged to narrate their story in 5W1H (Why, When, Where, What, Who, and How) to give a clear picture of the subject of the study. It allowed the interviewees to communicate in a storytelling way.

Riessman (2008) claimed that if the narratives are based on a specific area or topic, the concept of the narrative will be limited and restricted. Which means, although the interviewees express their views based on certain topics, they might be giving the researcher a long story with a number of examples. The researcher might need to organize and group them under the proper title for specific analysis.

There are four methodologies in the narrative analysis, including Thematic Analysis, Structural Analysis, Dialogic Analysis, and Visual Narrative Analysis. In this study, Thematic Analysis had chosen to analyse the answers given by the interviewees. The Thematic Analysis was used to research on the Mandarin communicative challenges faced by the service attendants working in Malaysia hotel when handling Chinese speaking guests especially those from Mainland China.

3.9 Thematic Analysis Approach

After the interview have been conducted, the researcher will tabulate the data received and analysis it with the Thematic Analysis approach which give emphasis on

diagnosing, verifying and identify the themes within data received. In most of the time, themes are just shared views or concept within data surrounding a similar central concept. This is essential in understanding a scenario associated with the research question (Daly, Kellehear & Gliksman, 1997). Some thought that themes are merely the summaries of data gathered through certain aspect or research and not require to organise a shared meaning under one roof. In this study, the researcher decided to associate the information gathered from the semi-structured interview into different group and analysed it based on the theme.

Researcher categorised different information from the interviews to distinct themes and sub-themes for an in-depth understanding and analysis. When most of the interviewees telling the similar story or theme in the research, it means they are experiencing or having the same thought on the same phenomenon observed. This shows that what was told is a “norm” in that industry/scenario and worth more attention to tabulate or explain the phenomenon in a detailed way. This approach helps the researcher to have a throughout understanding of the Mandarin communicative needs and challenges faced by the service attendants when handling Chinese speaking guests especially those from Mainland China.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter gives a details explanation of the research design and methodology used in this study. Researcher detailed the research tools, the respondent’s selection process, and the research process in this chapter. Secondly, the researcher also discussed the data collection and data analysis methodology adopted in the study.

The discussion and results of the data collected are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter contains the Analysis of the data collected for Research Question One, Two and Three from both questionnaire research and interview. The analysis and findings of the data will be presented below.

4.1 Introduction

The data presented here is the result from the compilation of a questionnaire survey conducted between 25th September to 27th October 2018 and an interview session with 10 of the interviewees which took place randomly between 1st to 28th March 2019. Both questionnaire survey and interview processes were conducted with the front desk staff and human resource or training managers from six hotels located at various locations in Klang Valley, Malaysia, including:

- i. Sunway Resort and Spa
- ii. Sunway Clio Hotel
- iii. Sunway Pyramid Hotel
- iv. Palace of The Golden Horses
- v. Ascott Kuala Lumpur
- vi. Somerset Petaling Jaya

The researcher handed over questionnaire to the respondents and aided them in answering it. The respondents were attendees of the Basic Communication Mandarin preview class or the Business Mandarin Programme at their respective hotels. The researcher assisted them by making the questions clearer for the respondents so that the data collected would reflect the real communication issues faced by the front desk staff of those hotels and the Mandarin needs of the service attendants in the hotels. A total of 54 staff participated in the questionnaire survey.

This chapter records the results and findings from each of the following research questions:

Research Question One: What are the Mandarin communicative needs of Malaysian hotel attendants?

Research Question Two: What are the speaking and listening skills in Mandarin required by Malaysian hotel attendants?

Research Question Three: To what extent do non-native hotel attendants able to pronounce and differentiate sounds “Z”, “C”, “S” and “Zh”, “Ch”, “Sh”?

4.2 Analysis: Demography

The data in this section originated from Section A of the questionnaire, which included the demographic profile and the Mandarin proficiency level of the respondents.

4.2.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The researcher distributed 100 questionnaires to hotel attendants and 54 staff agreed to participate (response rate = 54 %).

Most of the respondents were aged 30 and above, (28 persons or 51.85%), 15 (27.78%) of them were between 21 – 25 years old, while 10 (18.52%) of them were aged between 26 – 30. There was only one respondent aged below 21 (Table 4.2.1.1). Almost all respondents were above 21 years old. (53 persons or 98.15%).

Close to half (26 persons or 48.15%) of the respondents were highly experienced hotel attendants with a working experience of more than nine years. Another 11 (20.37%) have been working for five to eight years in the industry. A total of 10 (18.52%) have three to five years of working experience while only seven (12.96%) are rather fresh with only one to three years of experience at work.

The gender ratio was quite equal in this research where 53.70% were male and 46.30% were female with quite a big age range and working experience. Only one respondent was aged 21 and below, 15 of them were aged between 21–25, 10 fell into the group of 26–30 where 28 of them were 30 years old and above. This means that more than half (51.85%) are 30 and above. This was also reflected in the years of working experience of the respondents where 26 (48.15%) of them possessed working experience of longer than nine years which can be considered as senior staff in the industry.

In terms of mother tongue, 64.81% or 36 of them marked Malay language as their mother tongue, 29.63% or 16 of them have been speaking Tamil since young and this was followed by 5.56% or three of them that chose “Other” as their mother tongue. There was no one from the group that came from a family that speaks English since young. Although no one came from an English-speaking background, all of the respondents possessed fair to good English communication skills. From the researcher’s observation, it is a nature for them to speak in English with most of their guests as it is an international language and they were handling guests from all over the world.

48 (88.89%) of the 54 respondents have zero basic knowledge in Mandarin as they marked themselves as “Never taken any Mandarin programme”. Six had taken short Mandarin classes either in the hotel as language training programmes or they had enrolled in external course for their own interest.

The demographic profile of the respondents could be considered random and even.

Table 4.2.1.1: Demographic profile of the respondents

	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Age		
Below 21	1	1.85%
21–25	15	27.78%
26–30	10	18.52%
30 and above	28	51.85%

Table 4.2.1.1, continued

	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Mother Tongue		
Malay	35	64.81%
English	0	0.00%
Tamil	16	29.63%
Other	3	5.56%
Gender		
Male	29	53.70%
Female	25	46.30%
Education background		
SPM	30	55.56%
Diploma	11	20.37%
Degree	13	24.07%
Master/PhD	0	0.00%
I have been working for		
1–3 year(s)	7	12.96%
3–5 years	10	18.52%
5–8 years	11	20.37%
9 years and above	26	48.15%

4.2.2 Mandarin Proficiency of the Respondents

Based on our results, only six respondents (11.11%) had some basic Mandarin language skills while the others (88.89%) had zero basic knowledge of the language (Table 4.2.2.1). Five (9.26%) of the six that claimed they had basic Mandarin were those who joined a short (maximum three months) communicative Mandarin programme organised by the hotel for working purposes while the other one staff (1.85%) did two levels of HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) classes with a language centre.

This showed that most of the respondents were fresh with zero basic knowledge of Mandarin.

Table 4.2.2.1: The Mandarin proficiency level of the respondents

Question	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Have you ever taken Mandarin training/programme?		
Yes	6	11.11%
No	48	88.89%

Table 4.2.2.1, continued

Question	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
If yes, indicate your Mandarin language education level		
UPSR Chinese	0	0.00%
PMR Chinese	0	0.00%
SPM/IGCSE Chinese	0	0.00%
STPM/A Level Chinese	0	0.00%
Special course (HSK)	1	1.85%
Others, please specify:	5	9.26%

4.3 Quantitative Analysis: Communicative Needs

What are the Mandarin communicative needs of Malaysian hotel attendants?

4.3.1 Needs Analysis: Context

The results for this section was extracted from Part I of Section B of the questionnaire. In order to understand the proximate motivation for learning Mandarin among Malaysian hotel attendants, the question “What is your motivation in using Mandarin?” was asked. Most of the respondents (72.22%) claimed that they needed Mandarin for “Communication” purposes (Table 4.3.1.1). A total of 9 respondents (16.67%) gave a sentimental reply “I like it”. This indicated that a sizable proportion of hotel attendants are motivated to pick up a new language despite their tight daily schedule. The other two options, “Want to improve Mandarin” and “Career promotion prospect” only reverberate with a small proportion of the respondents (5.56%).

When asked about the ultimate motivation for learning Mandarin (“Why do you need Mandarin?”), most respondents (81.48%) answered “For work” (Table 4.3.1.1). The other options “Combination of work and study”, “For study” and “Other purposes” were selected by five (9.26%), three (5.56%) and two (3.70%), respectively. The two respondents who chose “Other purposes” revealed that their motivation was to understand the curriculum of their children, who were attending Chinese public schools (SRJK[C]).

When talking about frequency, most of them (35 or 64.81%) rarely used Mandarin at work, and 17 or 31.48% from the group “Sometimes” needed to use Mandarin at work.

In terms of the general importance of Mandarin as compared to other languages, 57.41% of the respondents ranked Mandarin as “Very important”, while 40.74% ranked it as “Similar” to other languages (Table 4.3.1.1). Only one respondent (1.85%) answered “Not so important”. None regarded Mandarin as “Not important at all” as compared to other languages.

As for the usefulness of Mandarin in the future, a whopping 92.59% of respondents perceived it as “Yes, very useful” (Table 4.3.1.1). In contrast, only two respondents, each, selected the option “Yes, but not now” and “I am not sure”. No respondent chose “No, it’s a waste of time”.

The question “Would you like to enrol in a Mandarin course if one is offered in your workplace?” was asked to gauge the interest of the respondents to improve their Mandarin in the future. Almost all respondents (94.45%) replied “Yes” or “Yes, very much” (Table 4.3.1.1). Among these, a high proportion (77.78%) showed high enthusiasm by answering “Yes, very much”. Only three persons (5.56%) answered “Not very much” and none opted for “Not interested at all”. These results showed that most respondents were interested in improving their Mandarin under a work setting.

Despite the high level of interest and perceived future usefulness, the current usage frequency of Mandarin by hotel attendants was mostly “Rare” (64.81%) (Table 4.3.1.1). There were 17 respondents who stated that they “Sometimes” needed Mandarin and only one respondent, each, chose “Always” and “Frequent”. When asked further about the low usage frequency, the respondents cited their incompetence in Mandarin communication. Chinese-speaking guests frequented the hotel almost every day. However, the hotel attendants were unable to serve or communicate with them as the attendants have not taken any Mandarin classes (at the time of the survey). When approached by Chinese-

speaking guests, the hotel attendants would need to ask for assistance from back-office Chinese-speaking hotel staff.

In summary, these results showed that there was a high demand for Business Mandarin customized for hotel attendants. There was an increased need for Mandarin language skills in hotels with the rising number of China tourists visiting Malaysia. However, the lack of basic Mandarin skills could be a crucial hurdle to provide better hospitality service to Chinese-speaking guests and making them “feel at home”.

Table 4.3.1.1: Mandarin communicative needs of Malaysian hotel attendants: motivation and usage frequency. These multiple-choice questions only allowed for a single answer.

Question	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Why (Motivation)		
What motivates you to use Mandarin? (Proximate motivation)		
I like it	9	16.67%
To communicate	39	72.22%
Want to improve Mandarin	3	5.56%
Career promotion prospects	3	5.56%
	54	100.00%
Why do you need Mandarin? (Ultimate motivation)		
For academic purposes	3	5.56%
For work	44	81.48%
Combination of these	5	9.26%
Other purposes	2	3.70%
	54	100.00%
How important do you think Mandarin compared to other languages?		
Very important	31	57.41%
Similar	22	40.74%
Not very important	1	1.85%
Not important at all	0	0.00%
	54	100.00%
Do you think Mandarin will be useful for you in future?		
Yes, very useful	50	92.59%
Yes, but not now	2	3.70%
I am not sure	2	3.70%
No, it's a waste of time	0	0.00%
	54	100.00%

Table 4.3.1.1, continued

Question	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Would you like to enrol in a Mandarin course if one is offered in your workplace?		
Yes, very much	42	77.78%
Yes	9	16.67%
Not very much	3	5.56%
Not interested at all	0	0.00%
	54	100.00%
When (Usage frequency)		
How often do you use Mandarin language in your current job?		
Rare	35	64.81%
Sometimes	17	31.48%
Always	1	1.85%
Frequent	1	1.85%
	54	100.00%

In order to understand the channel and content of Mandarin communication, the hotel attendants were asked to contextualize their Mandarin usage. When asked about the “channel of the communication”, 98.15% selected “Face to face”, 14.81% selected “Telephone”, while 3.70% selected “Email” (Table 4.3.1.2, multiple-answer question). Most respondents selected “Face to face” due to the nature of their work as front desk hotel attendants.

Meanwhile, according to the respondents, most of the content of their communication with Chinese-speaking guests would be for “Customer service” (64.79%) (Table 4.3.1.2). Only 26.76% selected “Daily informal conversation” and 8.45% selected “Commerce/business” for the content of their communication with hotel guests. The respondents gave feedback that they needed language skills tailored for customer service as the guests usually require their assistance regarding hotel services and amenities. Some guests would try to strike up a light conversation with hotel attendants, hence, daily informal language was also necessary aspect of Business Mandarin.

For the question that allowed more than one answer which asked them to state their location(s) where they might be using Mandarin, 53 respondents stated that they might

be using Mandarin at the workplace, while only three would be using it at home. The number shows that the respondents are clearly aware that Mandarin skills are becoming essential in assisting them at work and in completing their tasks.

As to the venue of the Mandarin usage, “Working environment” was the most likely location, with 53 votes (86.89%). The other locations, “Home” and “Public places” only garnered 4.92% and 8.19% of votes among the respondents.

The response regarding the targeted audience of Mandarin communication was rather straightforward: most respondents (81.54%) voted for “Hotel guests”. Only six (9.23%) voted for “Colleagues”, while “Friends” and “Family” received three (4.62%) votes each from the respondents.

In conclusion, our results clearly showed that “Hotel guests” were the main target audience for Mandarin communication among hotel attendants. Mandarin could be used to facilitate their daily tasks in “Customer Service”, especially in “Face to face” communications with Chinese-speaking hotel guests.

Table 4.3.1.2: Mandarin communicative needs of Malaysian hotel attendants: channel and content, location and audience. These multiple-choice questions allowed for multiple answers.

Question	Frequency of “yes”	Percentage of “yes”
What (Channel and content)		
What will be your channel of the communication?		
Telephone	8	12.70%
Face to face	53	84.13%
E-mail/Written	2	3.17%
What will the content of the communication be?		
Daily informal conversation	19	26.76%
Commerce/business	6	8.45%
Customer service	46	64.79%
What will the content of the communication be?		
Daily informal conversation	19	26.76%
Commerce/business	6	8.45%
Customer service	46	64.79%

Table 4.3.1.2, continued

Question	Frequency of “yes”	Percentage of “yes”
Where (Location)		
Where will you use Mandarin?		
Home	3	4.92%
Working environment	53	86.89%
Public places	5	8.19%
Who (Audience)		
Who will you use Mandarin with?		
Hotel guests	53	81.54%
Colleagues	6	9.23%
Friends	3	4.62%
Family	3	4.62%

4.3.2 Target Situation Analysis: Language Skills

A target situation analysis was performed to assess the targeted Mandarin level of Malaysian hotel attendants. The respondents were asked to self-rate on a 5-point Likert Scale on the amount of improvement in six aspects of language proficiency (Speaking, Listening, Writing, Reading, Grammar, Pronunciation, and Vocabulary) necessary to meet their professional goals.

Based on the results, the aspects of language proficiency that needed the most improvement were “Pronunciation”, “Speaking” and “Listening”. In contrast, the respondents had a moderate to high eagerness to improve on “Vocabulary” and a moderate eagerness to improve on “Reading”. Across the board, the respondents had moderate to low eagerness to improve on “Writing”.

In the category of “Pronunciation”, as high as 92.59% had a strong urge to improve (“A lot” and “Very Much”) (Table 4.3.2.1). This indicated that pronunciation was considered an essential skill needed at work for hotel attendants.

A total of 29 (53.70%) and 22 (40.74%) of the respondents chose “Very much” and “A lot”, respectively, as their choice in improving the two skills (Table 4.3.2.1). This indicated that 93.70% of the respondents were keen to improve their Mandarin speaking

and listening skills. No respondents felt that their speaking and listening skills do not need to be improved.

The level of eagerness in the respondents to improve on their “Reading” skill was similar with that of writing skill. A total of 79.63% of respondents had either “A bit”, “Some” or “A lot” of interest to improve (Table 4.3.2.1). However, a larger proportion of the respondents (14.81%) felt a dire need to improve on their reading as compared to writing skills.

In the category “Vocabulary”, 23 (42.59%) of the respondents felt that they needed to improve “Very much”, while 19 (35.19%) thought that they needed to improve “A lot” (Table 4.3.2.1). Only 14.81% ranked their needs as “Some”, while “A bit” and “Not at all” received an equal response of two (3.70%) persons. This means that as high as 77.78% respondents had the strong will in improving their Mandarin vocabulary and thought that this was important to them.

The respondents’ eagerness to improve on their writing skills is at a low to moderate level, as 85.19% of respondents had either “A bit”, “Some” or “A lot” of interest to improve (Table 4.3.2.1). A total of 5.56% of respondents felt that no improvement was necessary while 9.26% was highly eager to improve.

There were as high as 94.44% or 51 respondents that found they needed Mandarin listening and speaking skills: “A lot” and “Very much” in the questionnaire survey. The ratio and number of those who stated they needed to improve writing and reading skills were much lower. There were only 27.78% or 15 people that felt they needed to improve their writing skill “A lot” or “Very much”, while 37.03% or 20 people marked this for the reading skill.

Table 4.3.2.1: Target situation analysis — Language skills

What Mandarin skill do you need to improve to meet your professional goals?	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Pronunciation		
Not at all	1	1.85%
A bit	1	1.85%
Some	2	3.70%
A lot	21	38.89%
Very much	29	53.70%
Speaking		
Not at all	0	0.00%
A bit	0	0.00%
Some	3	5.56%
A lot	22	40.74%
Very much	29	53.70%
Listening		
Not at all	0	0.00%
A bit	1	1.85%
Some	2	3.70%
A lot	22	40.74%
Very much	29	53.70%
Vocabulary		
Not at all	2	3.70%
A bit	2	3.70%
Some	8	14.81%
A lot	19	35.19%
Very much	23	42.59%
Reading		
Not at all	3	5.56%
A bit	9	16.67%
Some	22	40.74%
A lot	12	22.22%
Very much	8	14.81%
Writing		
Not at all	3	5.56%
A bit	15	27.78%
Some	21	38.89%
A lot	10	18.52%
Very much	5	9.26%

4.4 Quantitative Analysis: Speaking and Listening

What are the speaking and listening skills in Mandarin required by Malaysian hotel attendants?

The data from this research question was extracted from Section C of the questionnaire. A present situation analysis was conducted to assess the challenges faced

by Malaysian hotel attendants in speaking and listening in Mandarin to understand the speaking and listening skills required. The respondents were asked to rate themselves in their ability in these two areas. Due to the differences in pronunciation among Chinese speakers from different geographic region, the respondents were asked to assess their abilities in communicating with mainland Chinese and Malaysian Chinese speakers separately.

In general, the respondents were not confident in speaking Mandarin. Among the respondents, 88.89% and 83.33%, of them “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” that they could speak Mandarin confidently to mainland Chinese speakers and Malaysian Chinese speakers, respectively (Table 4.4.1.1). Therefore, speaking to audience originating from China or Malaysia did not make a big difference to the confidence of the respondents. However, compared to actively speaking Mandarin to Chinese speakers, the respondents had slightly higher confidence in clearly pronouncing words in Mandarin. Even though 81.48% of them still “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” that they could pronounce Mandarin clearly, 14.81% “Agree” that they had this ability (Table 4.4.1.1). This indicated that there was a slight gap in confidence between being able to pronounce clearly and being able to communicate through speech.

4.4.1 Speaking

After understanding the present situation of the hotel attendants in term of Mandarin communicative skills, the researcher then attempted to sort out the challenges or difficulties they might be facing when handling Chinese-speaking guests. The results are as tabulated in the Table 4.4.1.1.

There was only one person (1.85%) that ticked “Strongly agree”, and four people (7.41%) “Agree” for the statement “I can speak Mandarin confidently to guests from China.” The respondents were generally not confident of their Mandarin speaking skills

especially when facing native Chinese speakers from China. This also showed the number choosing “Strongly disagree” (11 people or 20.37%) or “Disagree” (37 people or 68.52%), which made up a total of nearly 90% (88.89%) of the respondents who were in the state of feeling a high level of uneasiness when they had to speak Mandarin to the guests from Mainland China.

The situation was slightly better when they were asked to rate themselves for the statement, “I can speak Mandarin confidently to other Chinese-speaking people”, although there was still a strong sense of doubt in them. No one stated “Strongly Agree” towards this statement, while five people “Agree” to it while four respondents had the neutral opinion of “Neither agree nor disagree”. The choice of “Disagree” gained the highest vote compared to the other choices where 37 people (68.52%) voted for it. The other eight respondents (14.81%) showed a stronger opinion by choosing “Strongly disagree”.

The above two statements are rather general to check on the respondents’ confidence level in speaking Mandarin to Chinese-speaking guests. A total of 83.33% of the respondents agreed that they had issues when speaking to local Chinese-speaking guests but the ratio of the respondents for “Strongly disagree” shows a drop from 40.74% to 16.67%. The “Uneasy” level of the hotel service attendants was lower when facing local Chinese-speaking guests compared to the guests from Mainland China.

A same high percentage (81.48%) of votes received for both statement “I have difficulties in conveying messages in Mandarin” and “I have difficulties in voicing out my opinions in Mandarin” on the choice of “Agree”. 3 (5.56%) “Strongly Agree” and another 3 of the total opposite opinion of “Strongly Disagree” for the earlier statement while the votes for “Strongly Disagree” and “Strongly Agree” were 2 and 4 for the later. This indicated that the respondents had some hard time while trying to convey or voicing out their opinion in Mandarin.

Respondents were quite neutral when asked “I tend to use words in my mother tongue when I speak or interacting in Mandarin”. Two-third (66.67%) of the respondents answered “Neither Agree Nor Disagree” to this question which means they were not influenced too bad by their mother tongue in Mandarin communication.

The following statement asked them to rate specifically their Mandarin pronunciation to gain knowledge of their confident level in pronouncing Mandarin words correctly. For “I can speak with clear tone and pronunciation in Mandarin”, 12 respondents (22.22%) marked “Strongly disagree” to this statement and 32 of them (59.26%) “Disagree” to it. This means that a total of 44 respondents or 81.48% were not confident regarding their Mandarin pronunciation in general. Two respondents were neutral while eight of them stated “Agree”.

Most of the respondents (38 or 70.37%) “Agree” that they “Do not know the appropriate pronunciation to use while speaking in Mandarin”. And another 3 “Strongly Agree” to it. This make up a total of 75.93% of the respondents have difficulties in using appropriate pronunciation when communicating in Mandarin while 10 of them has neutral opinion to this statement.

There was about 5% difference between respondents who feel uneasy to speak with local Chinese in Mandarin and those from Mainland China. A total of 88.89% of the respondents “Strongly disagree” or “Disagree” that they can speak confidently to Chinese-speaking guests from China. 11 of them were of the view that they strongly disagreed with that statement, meaning that they felt very uneasy to speak Mandarin with guests from China.

When facing Chinese-speaking guests from other places (in this case, mostly local Malaysian Chinese) the data shows the respondents having similar uneasy feelings. Eight was on the extreme side of the spectrum where they felt extremely uncomfortable while

37 of them disagreed that they could speak confidently with Chinese speaking guests from other places besides China.

Table 4.4.1.1: Present situation analysis of the Mandarin speaking abilities of hotel attendants

Speaking:	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
I can speak Mandarin confidently to Chinese speakers from China.		
Strongly Disagree	11	20.37%
Disagree	37	68.52%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	1	1.85%
Agree	4	7.41%
Strongly Agree	1	1.85%
I can speak Mandarin confidently to other Chinese speaking people.		
Strongly Disagree	8	14.81%
Disagree	37	68.52%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	4	7.41%
Agree	5	9.26%
Strongly Agree	0	0.00%
I have difficulties in conveying messages in Mandarin.		
Strongly Disagree	3	5.56%
Disagree	0	0.00%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	4	7.41%
Agree	44	81.48%
Strongly Agree	3	5.56%
I have difficulties in voicing out my opinions in Mandarin.		
Strongly Disagree	2	3.70%
Disagree	3	5.56%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	1	1.85%
Agree	44	81.48%
Strongly Agree	4	7.41%
I tend to use words in my mother tongue when I speak or interacting in Mandarin.		
Strongly Disagree	5	9.26%
Disagree	3	5.56%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	36	66.67%
Agree	9	16.67%
Strongly Agree	1	1.85%
I can speak with clear tone and pronunciation in Mandarin.		
Strongly Disagree	12	22.22%
Disagree	32	59.26%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2	3.70%
Agree	8	14.81%
Strongly Agree	0	0.00%

Table 4.4.1.1, continued

Speaking:	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
I do not know the appropriate pronunciation to use while speaking in Mandarin.		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.85%
Disagree	2	3.70%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	10	18.52%
Agree	38	70.37%
Strongly Agree	3	5.56%

4.4.2 Listening

The first statement in this section is “I cannot understand guests from China’s pronunciation” to determine how much the hotel attendants rate themselves in understanding Chinese speaking guests from China. The results were as high as 79.63% “Agree” to this statement with only 1 “Strongly Disagree” and 3 “Disagree”. This showed that the respondents seriously have issues in understanding what China’s guests spoken to them in Mandarin.

The situation was slightly better when asked about their comprehension level towards Chinese speaking friends’ Mandarin pronunciation with the statement “I cannot understand my Chinese speaking friends’ Mandarin pronunciation” where more than half of the respondents (59.26%) were of the neutral opinion of “Neither Agree Nor Disagree” to it. A quarter (25.93%) of the respondents “Disagree” to this statement and another 9.26% of them is “Strongly Disagree” to it. This showed that the respondents were more comfortable and can understand the pronunciation of their Malaysian Chinese speaking friends better.

“I have difficulty in understanding the requests or queries spoken in Mandarin from the guests from China.” We can see a group of respondents extremely unsure of their own listening skills especially when facing Chinese-speaking guests from Mainland China. 22 people (40.74%) marked “Strongly Agree” to this statement while 30 of the respondents (55.56%) “Agree” to it. This makes up to a total of as high as 96.30% or 52 of the 54

respondents who made this conclusion and had difficulties in speaking with guests from Mainland China. One respondent (1.85%) chose “Neither Agree Nor Disagree” and the last person in the data chose “Strongly disagree” for this statement.

To have a better understanding of the differences of the respondents’ thoughts when facing Chinese-speaking guests from China and local Malaysians, the researcher then asked the respondents to rate their confidence level when communicating with Chinese-speaking to local Chinese-speaking guests. The statement is “I have difficulty in understanding the requests/queries spoken in Mandarin from the Chinese-speaking people of Malaysia”. It shows a slight difference in the results compared to the previous statement. Nine respondents (16.67%) rated themselves as “Strongly Agree” to this statement while 37 respondents (68.52%) “Agree” to this. six (11.11%) chose a rather neutral answer of “Neither agree nor disagree” while “Disagree” and “Totally disagree” obtained one vote (1.85%) each.

Table 4.4.2.1: Present situation analysis of the Mandarin listening abilities of hotel attendants

Listening:	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
I cannot understand guests from China’s pronunciation.		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.85%
Disagree	3	5.56%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	4	7.41%
Agree	43	79.63%
Strongly Agree	3	5.56%
I cannot understand my Chinese speaking friends’ Mandarin pronunciation.		
Strongly Disagree	5	9.26%
Disagree	14	25.93%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	32	59.26%
Agree	3	5.56%
Strongly Agree	0	0.00%

Table 4.4.2.1, continued

Listening:	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
I have difficulty in understanding the request/queries spoken in Mandarin by the guests from China.		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.85%
Disagree	0	0.00%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	1	1.85%
Agree	30	55.56%
Strongly Agree	22	40.74%
I have difficulty in understanding the request/queries spoken in Mandarin from the Chinese speaking people of Malaysia.		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.85%
Disagree	1	1.85%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	6	11.11%
Agree	37	68.52%
Strongly Agree	9	16.67%

4.5 Quantitative Analysis: Pronunciation of “Z/Zh”, “C/Ch” and “S/Sh”

To what extent do non-native hotel attendants able to pronounce and discern “Z”, “C”, “S” and “Zh”, “Ch”, “Sh”?

This section consists of data from the questionnaire regarding the challenges faced by hotel attendants in discerning (listening and speaking) specific Mandarin pronunciation (Section C). There are a few pronunciations in Mandarin that are quite similar in sound and might not be easy for non-native speakers to differentiate. Three pairs comprising six *Hanyu Pinyin* initials were identified to assess the interviewees’ level of comprehension. The six initials are “Z” and “Zh”, “C” and “Ch”, and lastly, “S” and “Sh”.

The respondents were asked whether they agree to the statement “*I have difficulty differentiating or pronouncing the Mandarin sound of Z/Zh, C/Ch or S/Sh*” on a five-point Likert-scale, whereby “Strongly Disagree” was denoted as “1” and “Strongly Agree” was denoted as “5”.

In terms of speaking/pronouncing, the exact same response was obtained for “Z/Zh”, “C/Ch” and “S/Sh”, whereby 85.19% of respondents either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”

that they experienced difficulties in pronouncing these three pairs of *Hanyu Pinyin* initials (Figure 4.5.1). The proportion of respondent who chose the other three options (“Neither Agree Nor Disagree”, “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree”) was also exactly the same across the initial pairs. This indicated that the pairs had the same level of difficulty in pronunciation among non-native speakers; those who found it difficult to pronounce one pair would also find it difficult to pronounce the other pairs.

The response was almost similar when the respondents were asked whether they had difficulties in discerning the sounds of the different *Hanyu Pinyin* initial pairs. Consistently, > 90% of the respondents reported that they either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that they experienced difficulties in (Figure 4.5.1). However, compared to the response regarding pronouncing the sounds, a lower proportion of respondents “Strongly Agree” with having difficulties discerning the sounds aurally, indicating that differentiating the sounds aurally was more difficult than pronouncing them. Among the initial pairs, it was possible that “Z”/“Zh” was more difficult to discern by ear than the other two pairs, because no respondent “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” that it was difficult.

As high as 79.63% or 43 respondents rated themselves as “Fair” or “Poor” when listening to the close pronunciations of “Z” and “Zh”, “C” and “Ch”, and lastly, “S” and “Sh” which showed that most of the respondents were lacking confidence in listening to and differentiating this type of difficult pronunciation correctly. In general, they felt that they had problems in listening to these special sounds of Mandarin. 15 of them marked themselves as “Poor” in this part while 28 found themselves “Fair” in listening to these pronunciations.

They had difficulties in differentiating the above-mentioned sounds no matter when spoken by local Chinese or the Chinese from China. 85.19% of the respondents mentioned that they “Agree” or “Strongly agree” that they would not be able to differentiate when a

Malaysian Chinese was speaking these to them. For Chinese guests, 96.30% of them ticked “Agree” or “Strongly agree” that they could not differentiate or catch the sounds the right way.

If we go into details about the above-mentioned figure, the number of respondents “Strongly agree” that they were unable to differentiate it when facing Chinese tourists’ pronunciation, which was as high as 40.74% or 22 people. When facing Malaysian Chinese, the figure was much lower at 16.67% or only nine people “Strongly agree” that they could not differentiate between these pronunciations when Malaysian Chinese guests were speaking it to them.

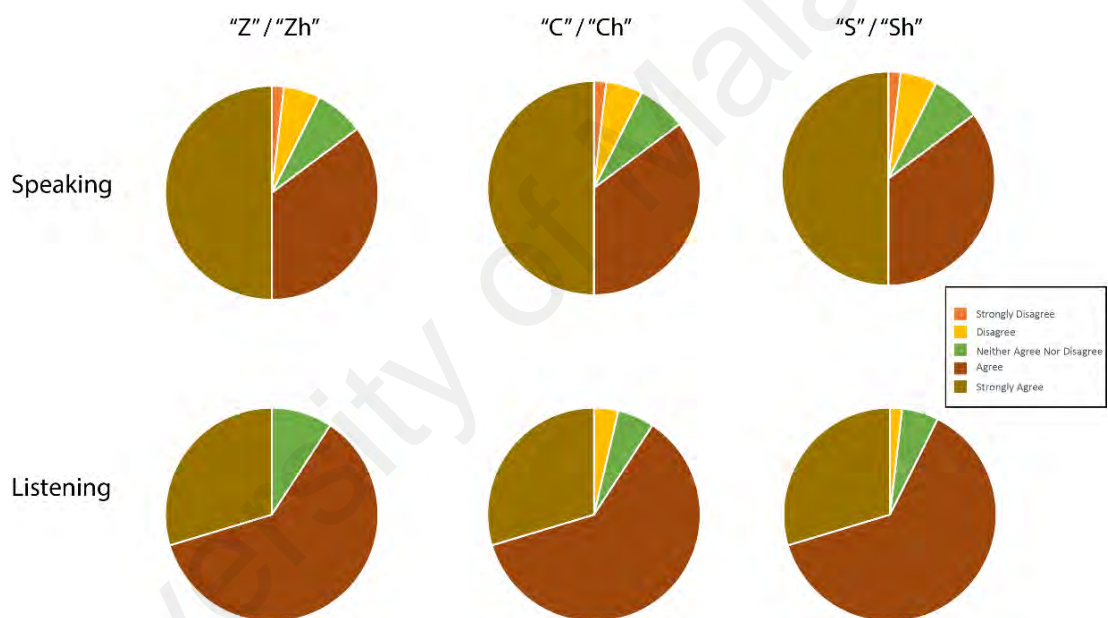


Figure 4.5.1: Response on whether hotel attendants had difficulties in discerning the pronunciation of “Z/Zh”, “C/Ch” and “S/Sh”

The respondents were then requested to rate themselves based on their ability to speak or aurally differentiate the three *Hanyu Pinyin* initial pairs. Across the board, >77% of the respondents rated their abilities as either “Poor” or “Very Poor”, for all initial pairs, no matter whether they were at the providing (speaking) or receiving (listening) end of the conversation (Figure 4.5.2). This reverberated with the trend observed when the respondents were asked whether this was a difficulty they faced (Figure 4.5.2), proving

yet again that the pronunciation of “Z/Zh”, “C/Ch” and “S/Sh” was clearly a significant obstacle to non-native speakers.

Between speaking and listening, the respondents were more confident in their listening abilities, as more individuals (2 – 3 persons) rated themselves as “Good” compared to the number of people who rated the same for speaking (1 – 2 persons) (Figure 4.5.2). In addition, fewer individuals (15 persons) rated their abilities as “Very Poor” in listening as compared to speaking (17 persons).

Notably, there was a high proportion of respondents (14.81 – 18.52%) who rated their abilities as “Average” (Figure 4.5.2). The respondents may have doubts when rating themselves, as they were still new to the language and may not entirely understood the differences between the sounds of the initial pairs.

No respondent chose “Excellent” in any of the scenarios/questions given (Figure 4.5.2).

In summary, the respondents lack confidence in pronouncing or aurally discerning the sounds of the three initial pairs.

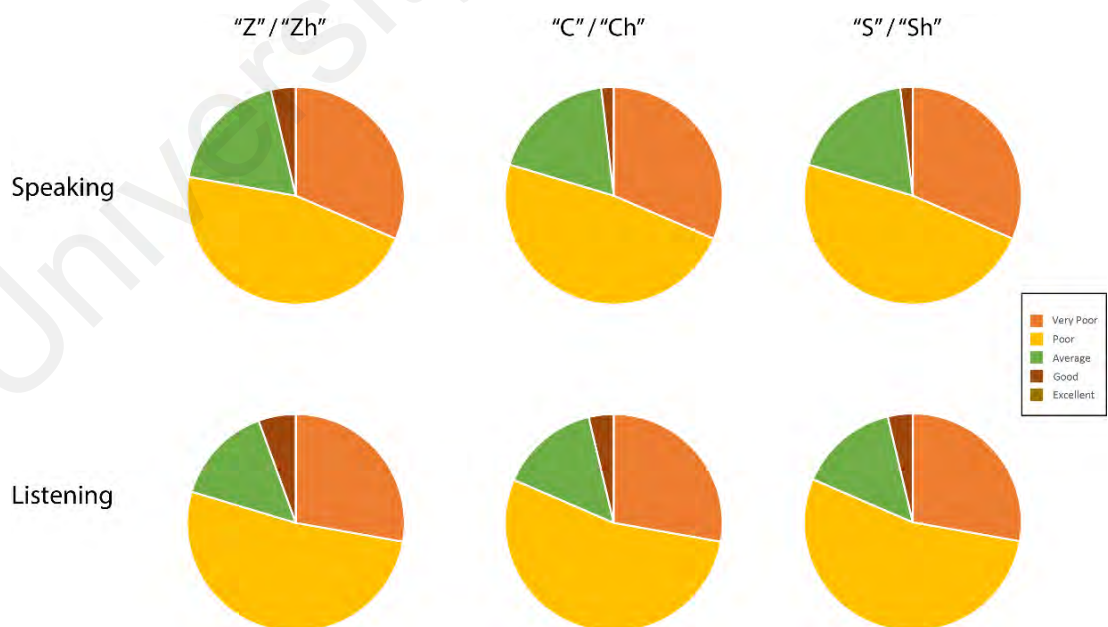


Figure 4.5.2: Present situation analysis of own ability in discerning the pronunciation of “Z/Zh”, “C/Ch” and “S/Sh”

4.6 Qualitative Data

This section presents the findings from the interviews with 10 hotel staff; five of which were service attendants and the other five were human resource managers or training managers. As the triangulation method was chosen to cross reference the data, a semi-structured interview was conducted. The questions used to prompt the interviewees may be similar to that in the questionnaire. The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the issue at hand.

The interviewees were given assurance of anonymity followed by a light conversation as a warmup, before delving into the interview question. The respondents were more willing to share their views after being informed that the outcome of this research could be used to help hotel attendants overcome communicative problems with Chinese-speaking guests.

Three themes recurred throughout the interviews. They were:

- i. There was a need for hotel attendants to pick up basic Mandarin skills to serve Chinese-speaking guests better,
- ii. Hotel attendants were having issues in understanding and speaking Mandarin with Chinese-speaking guests, especially those from Mainland China,
- iii. Hotel service attendants were having issues in differentiating and speaking certain Mandarin pronunciations.

These three themes reverberated with the research questions of this study. The information gathered during the interview was synthesized below.

4.7 Qualitative Analysis: Communicative Needs

The results from the questionnaire survey revealed a clear need to learn basic Mandarin among Malaysian hotel attendants. This needed to be explored further; hence, the researcher encouraged the interviewees to explain their limitations.

This group of interviewees did not possess Mandarin speaking skills: few could speak minimally while most were unable to understand or speak Mandarin. This means that they would have issues when serving Chinese-speaking guests, especially those from mainland China. Most Malaysian guests could communicate with at least some level of English but this was not possible for tourists from China. A large proportion of tourists from China were unable to communicate in English. Often, only the tour guide could communicate in English with the hotel attendants. This could cause communication issues between the hotel service attendants and their guests from China.

All interviewees gave a firm “Yes” or “Of course” when asked “Do you think the service attendants in hotels need to possess Mandarin communicative skills to facilitate their job under the current situation?” To them, Mandarin communicative skills are necessary to assist them in serving their guests better with the rising number of tourists from China. According to the interviewees, the arrival of tour groups from China was increasing and the groups were often large (sometimes up to 200 people in a single delegation). Unfortunately, few service attendants could communicate with the guests in Mandarin.

The interviewees were requested to provide examples on this issue and some of the responses were:

Human resource manager A:

“There is a need for the service attendants to possess a certain level of Mandarin skills in conjunction with the rising amount of Chinese tourists. The hotel for sure wants the tourists to have a wonderful and pleasant stay in our premises; we want to keep them happy. But if the front liners can’t even communicate and understand their requests, for sure we won’t be able to meet this objective (maintain high satisfaction among their guests). In order to do so, we either make sure there is enough Chinese-speaking staff at the front office or give them some training (on Mandarin language).”

Service attendant B responded as below:

“It’s hard. It’s really not easy if we couldn’t speak Mandarin and have to serve Chinese-speaking guests. They are quite vocal, actually. Sometimes they sound angry or not satisfied. We really wish to assist them in solving their issues, but we can’t...because we didn’t speak the same language.”

She then described further:

“There was one time at night, a madam from China came down from her room and said lots of things angrily... like for half a minute... the only thing we knew was that she was unhappy... she needed to be comforted and she required serious attention. We tried to calm her down but in vain. She couldn't understand English. We had to use sign language to cool her down, we tried to make the sign of “wait, hold on” as we were trying to get someone who could speak Mandarin to come over and talk to her, but she became even angrier! She raised her voice and said lots of “alien language” (Mandarin) until the one who could speak Mandarin came, after a few minutes, from the F&B (food and beverage) department. Only then could we understand what had happened. She was unhappy because the water heater was not functioning in her room. She had to bath in cold water so she was not satisfied. That time there were some ongoing wiring and piping upgrading work, and that affected some rooms' wiring and so on. We used to have Chinese-speaking staff in the back office but since it was already after office hours, they had already left. This is one of the many cases that we will have to sort out to handle their complaints or queries. It keeps happening.”

From the responses of the interviewees, the communication barrier between the service attendants and guests were apparent. This could jeopardize the hotel's goal in providing the best hospitality service and make its guests “feel at home”. If the hotel only received complaints from its guests after communication errors had occurred, it would not be able to respond to the issue in a prompt manner. The situation could worsen if the guests gave a bad review online instead of approaching the management office to lodge a complaint or to look for a solution. Many tourists make decisions on their accommodation prior to the trip based on online reviews, as they have little or no idea about their destination. Therefore, bad reviews severely affect the reputation and consequently the occupancy rate of a hotel. This was the motivation for hotels in Malaysia (in this case, the surveyed hotels in Klang Valley) to eagerly look for a Mandarin language programme for their front desk service attendants, so that would be able to provide daily hospitality services to Chinese-speaking guests.

To understand the active steps taken to solve this communication issue, the interviewees were asked “How do you think the service attendants can effectively improve their Mandarin communicative skills to serve the Chinese-speaking guests better?”. All interviewees responded that they needed a language class to learn Business

Mandarin customized for the hospitality industry to help them with the necessary vocabulary.

Human resource manager C described that:

“We are looking to put them into a Mandarin class to learn basic hospitality Mandarin so that they can communicate with the Chinese-speaking guests better, especially guests from mainland China. Our service attendants need some professional help.”

All the service attendants eagerly hoped to enrol in a Mandarin class for this exact purpose. Service attendant C responded that:

“I think a Mandarin class is necessary. We need it very much. To at least learn some basic vocabulary or way of communicating or handling Chinese-speaking guests, especially those from China. If not, we will continue to struggle with the same problems.”

Service attendant E concurred:

“We were hoping for a Mandarin teacher or a Mandarin class to teach us the language. We really have to take up a course or something to sort it out. We have more and more tourists from China coming, especially in May and October of each year. How are we going to serve them if we can't even communicate and understand them? It will be more practical to have some basic Mandarin skills.”

Training manager A had the same point of view:

“China's importance in the world economy is something undeniable. The US and Europe economies are slowing down, they are on the down trend, and only China is at the uptrend. They are where the money is. And practically, one will only think of travelling overseas or flying around the world when you have a certain financial base. This is the reality. We can see that we will have more and more tourists from China coming in the future especially after seeing our new government working very hard to rebuild the country's economy and putting collaboration and all kinds of giant development projects with China on the table... We see a huge market of tourists from China. It started around 10 years ago, we see the numbers increasing, and it will be at the uptrend in the future. We need to keep up with the trend and go along with the market's needs.”

The responses from the interviewees clearly showed that there was an established need among the hotel service attendants for a communicative Mandarin programme focusing on hospitality language to ensure a smooth communication process between them and their Chinese-speaking guests.

Regarding the type or content of the Mandarin programme, both managers and service attendants had similar thoughts to emphasise on hospitality Mandarin. This showed that their main objective in learning the language course was for work purposes. They needed

it to complete their tasks and serve the Chinese-speaking guests better. According to them, the skills they needed most were listening and speaking skills, as most of the time they were serving their guests face to face.

Training manager A gave the following response:

“I think what our staff need most is a comprehensive Mandarin course... and it has to be specially designed for us. (Do you mean hotel or hospitality-specific language?) Yes, hotel or hospitality-specific language. At least to learn some words to assist the guests during check-in and check-out, or a little bit of hotel services and amenities. Just to give them some basics to carry out their tasks.”

Service attendant B described it this way:

“The management knows our problems and concerns. We have talked to them a few times. They know. We need to either have enough Chinese-speaking staff or a Mandarin class for this purpose. To learn some basic Mandarin...so that we can handle Chinese-speaking guests, assist them better, help them address their needs. I think we only need listening and speaking skills. We have to at least understand what their (Chinese-speaking guests) request is, and how to respond before we can really give them the required service or help. I wish that we can have more words or phrases related to our daily tasks. Like how we can assist the guests to check-in or -out, tell them the location of our restaurant for breakfast, and also the basic listening skills to understand their queries so that we can use our professional knowledge to solve their issues.”

Subsequently, the interviewees were asked about the channels through which service attendants could learn Mandarin. They were requested to describe their expected methodology/tools or activities.

Human resource manager C replied:

“As long as the content fits our needs and the trainer can deliver it well to our staff, then we are fine. Of course, we will hope that the class will be more practical and fun, so that our staff will be motivated or attracted to follow and learn necessary knowledge from the class. The training conducted by our hotel should be aligned with the hotel’s objectives and needs; usually we will ensure that the programme is helpful to increase either efficiency or service quality. Timing-wise, we can’t afford to let them have a long duration programme as the hotel is quite busy... And to let a group of them leave their daily tasks to attend class will also require some arrangements as we are under-staffed (lack of manpower). We understand that a full-day programme will not be effective, so we think two hours per session in the low-peak hours of the day (3pm-5pm) for around 20 sessions is something workable and agreeable.”

Training manager A had given a similar opinion for this question:

“We want them to learn some basic Mandarin which can help them to complete their tasks easier. At least some basic communication skills to enable them to provide better hospitality to the Chinese-speaking guests... We would prefer a more interactive learning

session to make sure they can really speak and handle Chinese guests in real life. Of course we will only invest for them to give better service to our guests and increase the satisfactory level of our guests.”

Regarding the duration, he gave the following opinion:

“The duration shouldn’t be too long as we can’t afford to arrange a...like 100 hours’ programme. We are short of hands... And you know, the turn-over rate is quite high in our industry, the longer it takes, the more drop-out issues we will face. It won’t be efficient.”

From the interviews, the hotels and service attendants expressed their desperate need for tailored classes on Mandarin for hospitality and customer service. Specifically, it is to understand and serve the Chinese-speaking guests and ensure that their satisfactory level is high. Without a basic communication skill, it is quite impossible for the service attendants to give hospitality and assistance above a satisfactory level.

4.7.1 Qualitative Analysis: Speaking and Listening

This part discusses the problems faced by hotel service attendants in communicating in Mandarin with hotel guests. Specifically, they have issues in comprehending the requests and enquiries of Chinese-speaking guests. At the time of the interview, the listening and speaking skills of hotel service attendants were equally low; most attendants did not possess any basics in the Mandarin language (very few can marginally understand it). Their limitations in Mandarin comprehension and communication are discussed here.

The interviewees were asked about the problems hotel attendants face when handling Chinese-speaking guests. In particular, they were asked to prioritize the language skills necessary for their daily tasks.

The human resource manager explained as follows:

“Yes, so far we have heard of that issue (service attendants having difficulties communicating with Chinese-speaking guests) and are trying to resolve it. They (service attendants) have difficulties when talking to Chinese-speaking guests, especially those from China. Lots of Chinese tourists can’t speak English...no offense...but really quite a lot of them can’t use proper English to communicate. And most of our front desk staff is non-Chinese; most can’t speak Mandarin, so...this is the problem, the guests and the service attendants are unable to understand each other.”

“The issue that I heard of...are mainly on communication...example...like, the guest (Chinese guest) tried to request for a limo (limousine, the airport taxi) but they were unable to express it to our service attendant, and this was not a single case but reoccurring regularly! So, we really think that our staff needs to learn some Mandarin, at least some basic (Mandarin skills) for work.”

“And, we find that the Chinese people have a different accent... not the same as Malaysian Chinese. Sometimes, even our Malaysian Chinese colleague takes some time to understand their accent! And I was told by my colleagues (Malaysian Chinese), the Chinese accent is not easy to understand, it seems like they like to roll their tongue or make more “shh shhshh” sounds which is different with Malaysian Chinese.”

Despite the different job positions, the same opinion was also expressed by Service attendant A, who worked in the lobby as a front desk assistant, they described:

“...They (Chinese tourists) can't speak English...some can say some simple word like toilet, Wifi, eat, etc. (How do you communicate and assist in their check-in and check-out?) Exactly! Usually the tour leader will register the guests under group check-in and -out, but still...you know, when they need something, they will come to us but the communication just...we can't understand each other... (Then how do you help them?) I try my best to use the easiest word, add some action (signage)... if we still cannot understand, we will call the office (Call office?) Yes, we have Chinese staff in the office, and they will talk to the tourists and let us know their request. Some printed material will be given to ease the communication as well. The management makes most of the material trilingual (Malay, English and Chinese).”

When service attendant A was encouraged to describe further:

“Because usually check-in and -out relates to only a few things, so, with the help of those materials, it's okay. At least we can proceed. Some of them (Chinese tourists) can speak English, at least to communicate. Not all of them can't speak English, just that the number of the Chinese tour group that can only understand Mandarin is high. It is quite common for them to ask for Wifi password and TV controller, actually. We passed them the password together with the room key and it helps, although, still, a few may lose the paper or not notice it. And the TV controller is in the bedside drawer, and there is a notice beside the main switch, maybe they didn't see it...Or some will request for more pillows or toiletries... It could be at night and the officer is off work, then we have to sort it out... (How?) We look for our Chinese staff or use Google translate... Hahaha. I think we really need at least a bit of (Mandarin) communicative skills with the Chinese guests.”

When asked further if the same issues arose when communicating with Malaysian Chinese, they responded:

“A bit. But much less! Usually Malaysian Chinese can at least speak a little or understand a little English or Malay. Some vocabulary at least. Like, restaurant, password, drawer... if not, we will try makan, almari etc (Malay). At least there are more options to resolve the issue. Oh ya, not to mention we really have problems to understand guests from China. Emm... It's not the same. (Not the same?) Yes. Not the same with how our (Malaysian) Chinese speak. (You mean, they have different accent or slang than Malaysian Chinese?) Yes, Yes! The accent or slang. Can't understand it. Hard.”

When asked about the usage of sign language or any other form of communication when trying to communicate with the Chinese-speaking guests, training manager D responded as follow:

“Hahaha, I saw them (our staff) doing whatever they can to communicate... like sign language... finger pointing here and there, making different signs... or even drawing.”

“When it comes to work and they (the service attendants) have to assist the guests the best possible way, they will try their best to help and resolve whatever issues brought up by the guests. But really, we can see the number of tourists from China is increasing, but our staff is not well equipped to serve them yet. The first and foremost issue is the communication problems. We don't have enough Chinese staff to handle the Chinese tourists who can't really speak English. So, they will use all kinds of methods to complete their job in assisting the guests.”

“As they can't speak Mandarin, of course they won't be able to explain to the Chinese-speaking guests... Not to say to guests from China only, but even to local Chinese... Like, our hotel actually has both indoor and outdoor swimming pools, and also a spa service that the guests can pre-book and use with a promotional price. There are facilities and services that they should explain to the guests to up-sale (increase sales besides room rental) and bring us more revenue. This is the hotel target as well. We can see that the Chinese tourists can actually afford those things (the extra services and facilities), but our staff are incompetent in bringing us that sales. At least currently they are unable to.”

Responding to the same question, service attendant B described that:

“Oh, no. I can't... (explain hotel services and facilities to the guests in Mandarin). There are quite a lot we can push to the guests so that we will gain service points and increase our income (this is an incentive system by the hotel management to encourage their staff to promote the hotel's facilities and services to the guests), but I and most of my colleagues can't. We don't speak Mandarin, only some phrases like greeting them “你好” Ok-lah... But to explain the spa, the massage package to them... Wow, it's too much for me. I can't.”

About communication at check-in and check-out, they commented:

“Well, we really need to do whatever we can to deliver the message and get our jobs done lah. (How to do so if you can't speak Mandarin?) Simplify English to one single word, or we can use vocabulary that we learn from our Chinese colleague, but just one or two words, like 护照 (hùzhào), (passport) 房号 (fángào) (room number), or something like that... or finger pointing, making sign language... We even draw if it helps! (burst out laughing).”

The hotel service attendants had difficulties in communicating with Chinese guests when they were not equipped with hospitality Mandarin to handle their daily job. They also had issues in understanding the Chinese accent as it is considered to be “different”

from local, Malaysian Mandarin. But as they were in the position to serve and assist the guests throughout their stay, they had to do it professionally, to the best of their abilities.

A unexpected finding was that all of the interviewees could even differentiate the manner of speech, accent, slang and word choice of guests from Malaysia and China. They also felt that the communicative issues were bigger when facing guests from China. This is because in general, Malaysian Chinese usually know a little English or at least Malay. This enabled the service attendant to communicate in simple English or Malay. But the same could not be applied to guests from China as quite a large number of them did not speak any other languages besides Mandarin.

4.7.2 Qualitative Analysis: Pronunciation of “Z/Zh”, “C/Ch” and “S/Sh”

The researcher read the sounds to the interviewee and asked for their cooperation to repeat them before answering the designed questions.

The first question was to identify whether the interviewee could differentiate between the pair of sounds and whether they were able to pronounce them differently and correctly.

Service attendant C commented after the sounds were read to them:

“Yayaya... This is the issue! This is what I find difficult and confusing in Mandarin! For me, it’s just some alien sounds... How can you tell the difference? No, I mean, I can hear some differences when you are pronouncing it to me just now, but... When Chinese, especially Chinese from China speak it in a phrase, it’s just a bunch of “shh shh shh” sounds to me! And they (Chinese) really like to emphasise and speak with this kind of sounds! When I hear Malaysian Chinese speak Mandarin, I won’t feel or hear it (the sounds) ... or maybe it’s not that obvious to me.”

The above statement clearly showed that the interviewee had no confidence neither in differentiating nor speaking these sounds. It was something strange to them. They described the issue further as below:

“I have tried to learn some Chinese from my friend but it’s not really helping. Erm, maybe a little vocab, (vocabulary) yes, but the real-life communication is just so different! They (the guests) speak very, very fast! (All of them?) No, our locals are still ok. And usually our local Chinese will not approach and speak Mandarin to us as I obviously do

not look like a Chinese. They would go for other Chinese colleagues or those who look like (Chinese)... And most of the time, they will be speaking English or Malay to me, automatically! The Chinese tourists are different, I think it might be due to Mandarin being their first language and they are not confident in or don't know English, so they will speak Mandarin to us."

Service attendant D was of a similar opinion. They commented:

"This is killing me! I thought it is their (guests from China) accent! So, this is really the sound in Mandarin? Because I didn't notice it on Malaysian Chinese speakers. Then Malaysian Chinese really speak very differently from China Chinese... The sounds, the tongue... really very different! (Are you able to speak it differently?) No way, I didn't even know its existence until the last second you told me about it. It's crazy... That's why we find it hard to understand Mandarin."

The responses gathered clearly showed the lack of confidence in hotel service attendants in discerning specific Mandarin pronunciation. Subsequently, the interviewees were asked to comment on the level of confidence in using Mandarin among hotel service attendants.

Human resource manager B answered:

"What I can see is they (attendants) seriously have no confidence to speak Mandarin... One of the reasons is that they can't really speak, and another reason is the speed in which the Chinese guests are speaking is too fast for them, especially those from China. Some of the staff who can speak a little Mandarin also struggle when facing tourists from China. Besides the accent, the low confidence level is also stopping them from opening their mouths."

Service attendant B described that:

"Yes, I am not confident in speaking Mandarin to the guests, especially to those from China. I am afraid if I speak to them in Mandarin, I might not be able to respond to what they say to me. It will be like...oh, my God! I can't understand! That won't be good I think..."

When asked further whether she felt frustrated when speaking in Mandarin, she responded:

"Not really. Although I might be unable to communicate in this language, this is only because I didn't have a chance to learn or pick up the language, I don't think I should be frustrated. We can just stay positive and try our best to do whatever we can to solve the problem. Like, sign up for a course, or get some help."

In contrast, service attendant A had a different opinion:

"Kind of...(frustrated). You know, when people approach you for some help, and you know your task is to provide help but you can't even understand what their concerns and

requests are... I felt sorry for that as well. And the problem is: this keeps happening! More and more of them (Chinese-speaking tourists) are coming. Our duty is to make them feel at home, to serve and to ensure they will have a pleasant stay in our hotel. But most of the time we couldn't have a smooth and proper communication with them. I really think we should do something."

Service attendant F commented that:

"Lack of confidence is real. Not because I'm scared of becoming a laughingstock to others, but I'm afraid that discrepancy and misunderstanding will cause some issues later. That won't be good to the hotel image as well as for the guests. If I was given a choice, I will choose to let the professionals handle it to avoid communication break down or other possible issues."

The interviewees harboured different opinions towards the same issue, but the difficulties in discerning the pronunciation in Mandarin were universal. The lack of confidence was the biggest obstacle for hotel attendants to communicate in Mandarin. Our results showed that the pronunciation was hard for them, especially when they did not have any channel or professional guidance. These few Mandarin sounds are commonly used in the conversation. The lack of ability to differentiate them could cause misunderstanding and issues in communication.

4.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter tabulated and presented the data received from the respondents of the questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. This research pinpointed the communicative challenges faced by the hotel service attendants and basic skills needed when handling Chinese-speaking guests especially those from China. A triangulation method was used in the interview to obtain a better understanding of the language challenges. The response from the questionnaire survey provided a framework for the interview in detailing the full extent of the communicative issues.

In summary, our results showed that (1) there was a dire need for a Mandarin programme customized for hotel attendants, (2) the hotel attendants were highly interested in attending such a Mandarin programme, (3) the inadequacy in

communication, especially with guests from China, stemmed from the lack of Mandarin speaking and listening abilities among the attendants, (4) the language barrier affected the quality of service given to the guests from China, (5) hotel attendants could not differentiate the three pairs of Mandarin sounds, (6) the three pairs of sounds were the main difference in the accent between Chinese guests from China and Malaysia.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Research Summary

Chapter One reported the background of this research, including the research objective, research questions, problem statement, the significance and relevance of this research in Malaysia. The definition of specific terms in the chapter is to clarify the meaning of terminologies used. Some figures extracted from Tourism Malaysia were also revealed to give a clearer picture of the importance and increasing numbers of tourists from China visiting Malaysia year by year. The first chapter also highlighted the research gap to reveal what has been filled up and what was to be done in this study.

The following chapter, Chapter Two reviewed the past research and work done prior to this research by other researchers. The theories of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Needs Analysis (NA), and Business Mandarin/ Mandarin for Specific Purposes (MSP) were discussed in detail after referring to the publication of the experts from the respective fields. The literature reviewed in this chapter included journal articles, research papers, and Master or PhD research dissertations from all over the world. Several Chinese research papers and publications were reviewed and discussed as the main focus of this research is about MSP and the research in this field is booming in China.

Chapter Three presented a detailed discussion on the methodology chosen and the tools used for this research. The reasons for using the triangulation method to conduct this research were also discussed. This chapter included the process of data collection and how the data will be tabulated and discussed in detail.

Chapter Four analysed and discussed the data collected by stages in response to the research questions. The summary of the phenomenon seen from the research results presented in this chapter is in a detailed manner. Besides statistical analysis from the

questionnaire, the responses from the semi-structured interviews were also analysed and presented in this section. The results were tabulated together in order to answer the research questions.

In this final chapter, the results and implications will be discussed. The conclusion of this research will also be presented in detail. The results and conclusion of this research were then put together with the previous studies in the literature review to compare the findings. This is to identify the similarities and differences between different research. This study on communicative challenges faced by hotel service attendants in Malaysia when facing Chinese-speaking guests was the first of its kind and would be able to contribute to the group as future reference and also for further study.

5.2 Summary of Findings

Our results showed that (1) there was a dire need for a Mandarin programme customized for hotel attendants, (2) the hotel attendants were highly interested in attending such a Mandarin programme, (3) the inadequacy in communication, especially with guests from China, stemmed from the lack of Mandarin speaking and listening abilities among the attendants, (4) the language barrier affected the quality of service given to the guests from China, (5) hotel attendants could not differentiate the three pairs of Mandarin sounds, (6) the three pairs of sounds were the main difference in the accent between Chinese guests from China and Malaysia.

5.2.1 Communicative Needs

The gap between the high ratio of respondents that felt they needed Mandarin at work and the frequency of using it was comparatively low due to the respondents having almost no basic knowledge of the Mandarin language. They would try to avoid speaking Mandarin to the guests or pass it on to other Chinese-speaking colleagues to avoid any

possible miscommunication that might worsen the situation. In the study by Jasso-Anguilar (1999), the hotel maids in Waikiki, (a chain hotel group operating hotels mostly along beaches all over the world) avoided using English as they are not confident in the language, resulting in communication issues between the maids and hotel guests.

Similar issues happen in Iranian hotel as well according to the research conducted by Masoumpanah & Tahririan (2013). The hotel receptionists avoid using English due to the lack of confidence in the language although 100% of the respondents agreed that they need to be able to speak and listen in English with specialized hospitality terms.

Almost all (94.45%) of the respondents were eager to join a Mandarin programme if there was one at their workplace. They realised the need to communicate with Chinese-speaking guests with basic Mandarin to assist their guests throughout their stay in the hotel. Most of them stated that they would use Mandarin with the hotel guests face to face and might need customer service/hospitality language to serve their guests better. This showed the eagerness and genuine desire of the hotel service attendants to learn communicative Mandarin in order to enable them to communicate with their guests and complete their tasks smoothly. This keen interest has to be capitalized. The hospitality industry needs to know that their staff is eager to learn. It is known that language is important to perform one's work effectively especially in a face to face setting, researches show that most of the employees agreed that communicative skills, especially the speaking and listening skills, is an important tool to have especially when the task involves direct contact with client or counterparts. (Kassim, H. & Ali, F., 2010; Jasso-Anguilar, 1999; Kaewpet, 2009; Cowling, 2007; Masoumpanah & Tahririan, 2013; Prachanant, 2012)

As we understand from the hotel managers and service attendants, most of them were unable to speak in Mandarin and at the same time, the Chinese-speaking guests, especially those from China, lacked English communication ability. This gap caused communication

breakdowns and was an obstacle in the message delivery process. The hotels' objective is to provide a comfortable place for the guests to feel like home throughout their stay. A smooth and effective communication is indeed important in providing the guests with a warm hospitality experience. The hotel service attendants were very clear on this basic need to communicate and understand the guests' needs.

Most of the service attendants had no issue to communicate in English with their guests from all over the world but many Chinese-speaking guests, especially those from China, were unable to communicate in English and this caused communication issues between the guests and the service attendants. With the rising number of tourists coming from China, the urge to solve this issue is also at a rise. Providing a warm and pleasant service to the guests is a must in the hospitality industry and they are currently facing problems to understand the needs and requests of their Chinese-speaking guests. In order to draw in more revenue and attract more China groups, improving their communicative Mandarin skills is a must. Both hotel management and service attendants have the same point of view regarding this matter.

The hotel attendants had a desperate need to pick up basic communicative Mandarin to unlock the door that blocked them and their Chinese-speaking guests. From the interviews, all of them gave firm answers when asked about the necessity of running a basic Mandarin programme in the hotel targeting basic hospitality Mandarin. This is the unanimous thought and belief of all the interviewees in this research. They were desperately looking for a way to improve or learn basic Mandarin, specifically targeting hospitality language to ensure they could keep the quality of their service for the guests.

My research obtained contrasting results compared to the findings of Wang, (2007), O'Neill (2011) or Karuthan (2015). In these studies, the respondents were able to communicate with limited or simple language or use other tools to complete the given task. Failure in providing a satisfactory hospitality service meant failure in completing

their tasks, and furthermore, they might receive complaints about the service granted to the guests which would affect their KPI (Key Performance Index) and bring bad consequences like lesser increment of salary or bonus, limited promotion chances or reduction in other company benefits. Hence, they had to be very practical in handling guests' requests.

The hotel attendants were very clear that there was a need to improve their Mandarin communicative skills, focusing more on listening and speaking skills when facing Chinese-speaking guests, especially those from China. The responses received from both the qualitative and quantitative data clearly showed that they were generally anxious about facing guests from China because: (1) the speed in which the guests from China were speaking Mandarin was too fast for them, and (2) there was a gap in the pronunciation and way of expression between Malaysian Chinese and guests from China. The pronunciation and way of expression of Chinese guests were something "strange" to the service attendants as this was not something they were used to in their daily life. They needed help in improving their listening and speaking skills, targeting guests from China.

5.2.2 Speaking and Listening

The difference in priority between listening/speaking and reading/writing skills (Table 4.3.2.1) showed where the needs of the hotel attendants lied. They were the front line of the hotel, carrying the hotel image and handling the guests. The promotion leaflets, forms or other documents were usually written trilingually, so they did not have to worry about the reading and writing skills; their position was to assist and respond to the guests' queries and needs immediately face to face or over the phone. The skills they were eagerly looking for were the skills that could solve the immediate issues they faced when handling Chinese-speaking guests. Without a doubt, listening and speaking skills would be the most critical skills they were looking for. Specifically, all interviewees complained about

the difficulties of them listening to the pronunciation of their Chinese guests. They found it hard to understand the slang and accent, and they had difficulties in understanding the needs and requests of the guests. From the interviews, it was apparent that the hotel and service attendants tried many ways to resolve the issue, such as using Google translator, sign language and even drawing.

Most of the Chinese tourists were unable to communicate in English or they only possessed limited English language skills. The gap between the service attendants and the guests was too huge and they might not be able to communicate with each other. This gap caused a number of issues such as miscommunication and misunderstanding that kept on happening and would damage the hotel's image in the long run. Our results showed that the hotel respondents were uncomfortable when they needed to speak to guests from China due to their own incompetency in the language. If there was a choice, they would not use this language to complete their tasks or communicate with their guests, due to their lack of prowess in Mandarin. They were scared of making mistakes or creating miscommunications that might lead to bigger problems later on. Similar results from the researches by Jasson-Anguilar (1999), Kaewpet (2009), Cowling (2007), Masoumpanah & Tahirian (2013), Prachanant (2012), and Wozniak (2010).

Pronunciation of guests from China was more difficult for the hotel service attendants to comprehend and differentiate compared to Malaysian Chinese's pronunciation of the same group of sounds. This phenomenon was expected as the Chinese guests usually possessed different accents than Malaysian Chinese accents. They emphasized more on the pronunciation of each word while Malaysian Chinese did not. Malaysian Chinese usually speak more than one language, and this has caused a language pollution and mixture of pronunciations. This is very common among societies that are well-versed in more than one language.

5.2.3 Pronunciation of “Z/Zh”, “C/Ch” and “S/Sh”

Our results showed that hotel attendants were having issues in differentiating the three pairs of *Hanyu Pinyin* initials, no matter when listening or speaking it. The six sounds seemed largely similar to them. To the service attendants, the initial pairs appeared to be a bunch of “shhhhh” sounds. The pronunciation was confusing, resulting in them struggling to understand the phrases or requests from Chinese-speaking guests. They even described those sounds as “alien sounds”. Besides this, the Chinese diphthongs and triphthongs sounds are also a major challenge for non-native speakers, as they usually find it hard to pronounce these sounds correctly. (Bassetti, 2007)

Besides the nature of these sounds being very similar to each other, the accents of Chinese guests speaking with strong emphasis were also causing issues among hotel service attendants who did not possess good basic communicative skills in Mandarin. The respondents mentioned the speed of the Mandarin speaker when communicating or enquiring something from them. The incompetence of the service attendants in using Mandarin was already a big reason for them to be unable to communicate in Mandarin comfortably, and the native Mandarin speakers that talked too fast worsened the situation and killed their confidence further.

These specific pronunciations were considered challenging even to Mandarin speakers, what more for those who were still incompetent in it. They needed time and proper guidance in this to overcome the issues. Mandarin students should learn the correct way of pronunciation from the proper channel or certified body. To speed up the learning process for beginners, audio/visual learning aids can be deployed, in addition to creating a Mandarin-friendly environment (e.g. listen to Chinese radio station or watching Chinese shows to get used to the pronunciation, gesture and intonation) (Ni, 2007).

5.2.4 Business Mandarin Teaching under the ESP Theory

This research is essentially a Needs Analysis (NA). All RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3 addressed the language needs and challenges of hotel attendants. In summary, the number of NA in Mandarin as a foreign language in China is relatively small as compared to NA on ESP. Similarly, there is limited number of researches on foreign languages in Malaysia. The research on Business Mandarin is even fewer in Malaysia than in China.

There has been substantial research on the NA for ESP worldwide since 1980's (Basturkmen, 2010). In contrary, not many studies have been done on the NA of business Mandarin. In Malaysia, as Mandarin serve as a third language after Malay and English, the need for it is relatively low. However, this changed with the rise of economic power of China. The multi-ethnic, multi-cultural with multi-lingual background of Malaysia has an advantage in exploring the needs for business Mandarin. Researchers who are well-versed in both Mandarin and English are relatively easy to find. This would enable them to communicate better non-native speakers and understand the challenges they face.

5.3 Proposed Content of Business Mandarin Programme for the Hospitality Industry

“Due to the limitation of time, the curriculum design for this group of study subjects was not included as a main research objective. Nevertheless, the findings of this study can be used to design a rough curriculum for Business Mandarin in Hospitality. Such a curriculum is tailored to address the needs of the hospitality industry in Malaysia. It could act as a foundation for future studies in this area.

The Basic Business Mandarin in Hospitality curriculum should target the needs of learners with zero language basis. Specifically, time should be allocated to introduce them to basic Mandarin pronunciation, i.e. the *Hanyu Pinyin* phonetic and tones. To enable the learners to communicate with Chinese-speaking guests, the curriculum should also

include an eight-hour content to equip learners with basic business greetings and self-introduction. This will enhance the professional image of the staff and hotel.

The basic content of “Numerals”, “Date & Time” and “Hobbies & Places” should also be embedded with syllabus targeting the needs of hotel attendants, such as incorporating the room price or hotel charges.

One of the most essential content of the curriculum is basic hospitality language, including words and phrases used in assisting hotel guests during the check-in and -out process.

This proposed curriculum is essential and practical for a hotel service attendant, especially the front-end staff. Within the Mandarin training sector in Malaysia, few educators provide business Mandarin programme for zero-basic, non-native speakers targeting their career need. In the ESP field, some researchers have designed syllabus targeting different needs. Cowling (2007) prepared a three-year business English programme for employees of Mitsubishi Heavy Industry (MHI). Similarly, Karuthan (2015) designed a 14-week communication programme for nurses in Malaysia.

Both of their content was designed to target learners with certain level of understanding in English. This differs from the proposed curriculum here that is designed for hotel service attendants with zero basic in Mandarin language. The curriculum guides them from the very basic Chinese phonetic pronunciation and greeting to assisting Chinese speaking guests.

Table 5.3.1: Proposed content of basic business Mandarin in the hospitality industry

Hour(s)	Topics and brief lesson overviews	Description
1	Introduction to Chinese Business Culture and Mandarin learning	Introduction to the program and ice-breaking session with students.
2	Basic Mandarin Pronunciation	The <i>Hanyu Pinyin</i> phonetic and basic tones in the Mandarin language.
8	Business Greetings & Self Introduction	General terminologies used in greetings, enquiring and giving out

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Greetings in various situations and time - Basic personal information - Brief Company background - Talking about one's occupation 	<p>basic personal information in Mandarin.</p> <p>Proper way of introducing oneself and the company.</p>
4	<p>Numerals (1 – 1 million)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Counting in Mandarin - Telephone and room numbers - Age 	<p>Basic in numbers, counting and implicit values carried by each figure.</p> <p>Tongue Twister and Numbers song to facilitate learning process.</p>
4	<p>Date & Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Date - Time - Chinese date system - Days in a week 	<p>Learning and telling about date and time in Mandarin.</p> <p>Exchange basic info like phone number and birth date.</p> <p>Learning the Numbers song.</p>
6	<p>Basic Hospitality Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common phrases and practical sentences for hotel attendants - Common vocabulary in hospitality language 	<p>Learning the basic hospitality language to assist Chinese speaking guests in their check-in and -out process.</p> <p>Understand and respond to Chinese-speaking guests to ensure them having a pleasant stay in hotel</p>
3	<p>Hobbies & Places</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Favourite hobbies and past time - Topics related to hobbies - Name of common places 	<p>Discuss about one's favourite hobby or activity.</p> <p>Learning the names of common places.</p> <p>Making appointment and basic invitation.</p>
4	Final Assessment	
32	(Total hours)	

5.4 Limitations

Firstly, the sample size of this research was rather small as most of the hotel management was hesitant to disclose the issues faced by them or was not confident in allowing their staff to participate in this study. It is not enough for six hotels to represent all of them in Klang Valley as well as Malaysia. Despite much effort put in, most of them still refused to participate in this research by providing the necessary information or respondents. The number of respondents (n = 54) and interviewees (n = 10) might be relatively low to provide a full picture of the problems faced by hotel service attendants in assisting Chinese-speaking guests. Some researches sampling 100 (Yang, 2014), 134 respondents (Quan, 2013), or even extend their study to 505 respondents (Qu, 2015).

Bigger sample will no doubt helping in presenting a clearer picture of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, the data gathered in this study lays a firm foundation for future research on the language barrier faced by this target group.

In this study, the permission to interview or approach Chinese-speaking guests was not granted to the researcher. If given the chance to talk to the Chinese-speaking guests and understand their experience when approaching the service attendants for help, we might be able to have more ideas from different perspectives to complete this study. The interviews with human resource managers representing the hotel management and some front office officers were given the similar aspects and point of views. Interviewing the guests would enable the researcher to collect more information for a comprehensive study.

A real-time observation of the service attendants handling Chinese-speaking guests at work was among the original request sent to the hotel management and was rejected due to their policy. If the observation had been allowed, the researcher might have been able to understand even more clearly the interaction, needs and limitations of the respondents for an in-depth study. Stakeholder and service attendants might have some expectations on what they need to learn in order to better assist the guests, but these could be different from what the hotel guests expect them to know. Participation observation or interview with guests might help in providing a clearer picture from their perspective (Jasso-Anguilar, 1999).

5.5 Further Research

The research for this field and industry should not end here. Hence, the researcher would like to suggest some possible research directions and fields incommunicative Mandarin needs and challenges of service attendants in Malaysia. A bigger sample that involved more hotels at a broader area to get a clearer picture of the needs and challenges

of the hotel service attendants when facing Chinese-speaking guests is necessary, and more samples or respondents should be involved to provide more insights into the research.

The research area should also extend to the other states of Malaysia, especially those tourism states like Malacca, Penang, Sabah and Sarawak to identify whether they are facing the same issues as the findings of this research. With a bigger group of samples and the number of hotels involved, the findings and results will be even more accurate and should serve as the reference to fill up the blanks in the respective research area.

Besides that, the researcher strongly believes that the field observation is essential to have a thorough understanding from different views and perspectives. Interviews or questionnaire surveys with the Chinese-speaking guests and the top management of the hotels might be able to provide other thoughts from different angles. The research with these groups of people might be able to give valuable data and information for in-depth discussion on this topic.

Other than that, a custom design communicative Mandarin programme specifically targeting hospitality Mandarin can be designed for this group of people to help them in handling Chinese-speaking guests and complete their tasks in a better way. A complete curriculum design including expected outcome, course content, methodology and course assessment should be suggested and described in detail. The course schedule including the programme frequency and duration should also be included. This part should be given more attention in future research.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This last chapter discussed the results and findings of the research based on the three research questions. The communicative Mandarin needs and challenges faced by hotel service attendants show some similarities and differences with other research on ESP or

MSP. The needs and challenges faced were explained in detail to identify the root causes of this phenomenon. The data presented here were the data collected from the both questionnaire survey and interview sessions. The data shows that hotel service attendants having hard time with a lot of challenges when communicate with Chinese speaking guests. There is a need to have Mandarin for specific purposes programme which focusing on hospitality language to assist them in providing better service to the guests.

University of Malaya

REFERENCES

- Bassetti, B. (2007). Effects of hanyu pinyin on pronunciation in learners of Chinese as a foreign language. In Guder, A., Jiang, X., & Wan, Y. (Eds.), *The cognition, learning and teaching of Chinese characters* (155–179). Beijing: Beijing Language and Culture University Press.
- Basturkmen, H. (2010). *Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes*. Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Berwick, R. (1989). *The Second Language Curriculum*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Brindley, G. (1989a). *Assessing Achievement in the Learner-Centred Curriculum*. Sydney, Australia: National Centre for English teaching.
- Brindley, G. (1989b). *The Second Language Curriculum*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Cheun, H. H., Hoe, F. T., & Ho W. C. (2005). Strategies aspects of pronunciation teaching Mandarin among students in University Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam. Proceeding paper CHRR UiTM.
- Cooper, D. R., & Schindler, P. S. (2006). *Business Research Method*. London, United Kingdom: McGraw Hill Publishing Company.
- Cowling, J. D. (2007). Needs analysis: Planning a syllabus for a series of intensive workplace courses at a leading Japanese company. *English for Specific Purposes*, 26(4), 426–442.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (9th ed.). Los Angeles, United States: Sage.
- Daly, J., Kellehear, A., & Gliksman, M. (1997). *The Public health researcher: A Methodological Approach*. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2018, September 14). *Tourism Satellite Account 2017*. Retrieved from https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=111&bul_id=YIU1d29XWW1kRUtBVWVuMS9lcUZ3QT09&menu_id=TE5CRUZCblh4ZTZMODZlbnk2aWRRQT09

- Dinçay, T. (2011). Designing a learner-centered ESP course for adults and incorporating the learners' aims into a situational-based syllabus. *Ekev Academic Review*, 15(49), 235–247.
- Ding, G. L. (2012). *Hàn yǔyán (duìwài) zhuānyè rì hán běnkē shēng xuéxí xūqiú diàochá yánjiū [A learning needs analysis of Japan and Korean students majoring Mandarin in China universities]* (Master's Thesis). Fudan University, Shanghai, China.
- Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes* (1st ed.). Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Guójiā hànyǔ shuǐpíng kǎoshì wèiyuánhuì bàngōngshì kǎoshì zhōngxīn. (2001). *Hànyǔ shuǐpíng cíhuì yǔ hànzì děngjí dàgāng [Outline of Chinese vocabulary and characters by proficiency level]*. Beijing: Economic Science Press.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A Learner-centred Approach* (1st ed.). Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Jasso-Aguilar, R. (1999). Sources, Methods and Triangulation in Needs Analysis: A Critical Perspective in a Case Study of Waikiki Hotel Maids. *English for Specific Purposes*, 18(1), 27–46.
- Kaewpet, C. (2009). Communication needs of Thai civil engineering students. *English for Specific Purposes*, 28, 266–278.
- Karuthan, A. (2015). The English language needs of nurses in medical tourism in Malaysia. (Master's Dissertation). University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- Kassim, H., Fatimah, A. (2010). English Communicative skills needed at the workplace: feedback from the industry. *English for Specific Purposes*, 29, 168–182
- Kay, C., & Russette, J. (2000). Hospitality-management competencies: identifying managers' essential skills. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 41(2), 52–63.
- Khor, G. S., Arriaga, L. R., & Mah, B. Y. (2013). Errors analysis in hanyu pinyin pronunciation among the undergraduates from University Sains Malaysia (USM) Engineering Campus. *The Asian Conference on Language Learning Conference Proceedings 2013*. (293–301). Osaka, Japan: The International Academic Forum

(IAFOR). Retrieved from
http://iafor.org/Proceeding/ACLL/ACLL2013_Proceedings.pdf

Koleski, K. (2017). *US-China Economic and Security Review Commission: The 13th Five-Year Plan*. Retrieved from
https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/The%2013th%20Five-Year%20Plan_Final_2.14.17_Updated%20%28002%29.pdf

Kostic Bobanovic, M., & 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.

Kumar, R. (1996). *Research Methodology: A step by step Guide for beginners*. MELBOURNE: Addison Wesley Longman.

Lin, J., J. (2015). *Lái suì hánguó liúxuëshēng hànyǔ xuéxí xūqiú fēnxī [An analysis of the learning needs of Korean learners of Chinese in Canton]*. (Master's Thesis). Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. Guangdong, China.

Liu, F. F. & Wu, S. N. (2009). Lái huá chángqí jìnxiū liúxuëshēng zònghé kèkètáng huódòng xūqiú fēnxī [A needs analysis on the materials of comprehensive course for foreign students studying in China]. *Language Teaching and Linguistics Studies*, (4), 27–31, Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing, China.

Long, M. H (Eds.). (2005). *Second Language Needs Analysis*. Beijing, China: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Lu, Z. (2006). Shāng-màolèi Hànyǔ jiàocái biānxiě hé yánjiū de jīběn qíngkuàng shùpíng [A Review of the Basic Situation of the Compilation and Research of Business Chinese Textbooks]. *Journal of Yunnan Normal University (Teaching and Research on Chinese as a Foreign Language)*, (5), 28–33.

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2019 March 11). *Zhōngguó yǔyán wénzì gàikuàng [Overview of Chinese Language and Characters]*. Retrieved from
http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/wenzi/201903/t20190311_372965.html

Ni, C. B. (2007). Wàiguó liúxuëshēng Hànyǔ de xuéxí xūqiú fēnxī [Need analysis in Foreign Students' Learning Needs in Chinese]. *Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies*, (1), 68–76.

- Ni, C., & Liu, Z. (2006). Wàiyǔ xūqiú de tèxìng fēnxī [Need analysis in Characteristics of Foreign Language]. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, (2), 21–24.
- O'Neill, F. (2007). From language classroom to clinical context: The role of language and culture in communication for nurses using English as a second language: A thematic analysis. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 48(9), 1120–1128.
- Prachanant, N. (2012). Needs Analysis on English Language use in Tourism Industry. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 66, 117–125.
- Qian, M. R. (1997). Kuà wénhuà jīngjì jiāojiè jí qí duì wàiyǔ jiàoxué de yìyì [Intercultural Economic Communication and the Significance on Foreign Language Teaching], *Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press*, 4, 125-137.
- Qu, H. (2015). *Shāngwù hànǔ jiàoxué cúnzài de wèntí jí tíshēng cèlüè yánjiū [Research of the issues faced in business Chinese teaching and strategies of improvement]* (Master's thesis) Shaanxi Normal University, Shaanxi, China.
- Quan, Z. (2013). *Lái huá hánguó liúxuéshēng shāngwù hànǔ xuéxí xūqiú diàochá yǔ fēnxī—yǐ shànghǎi cáijīng dàxué yǔ fùdàn dàxué wéi lì [A needs analysis on foreign students in China on their business Mandarin needs - A case study on Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, and Fudan University]* (Master's thesis). Fudan University, Shanghai, China.
- Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. California, United States: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Robinson, P. (1991). *ESP Today: A Practitioner's Guide*. Hemel Hempstead, United Kingdom: Prentice Hall.
- Rosli, L. (2019, January 30). *China remains Malaysia's largest trading partner, 10 years running*. The New Straits Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/business/2019/01/455955/china-remains-malaysias-largest-trading-partner-10-years-running>
- Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. (2013). *Research Methods for Business: A Skill-building Approach* (6th ed.). West Sussex, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

- Strategic Planning Division Tourism Malaysia. (2019). *My tourists profile 2018 by selected markets*. Retrieved from http://mytourismdata.tourism.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Tourism-Profile-2018-final_02-July-20192.pdf
- Stevens, P. (1988). ESP after twenty years: a re-appraisal. In M. Tickoo (Eds.), *ESP: State of the Art* (pp. 1–11). Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.
- Terrel, S. R. (2012). *Statistics Translated: A Step-by-step Guide to Analyzing and Interpreting Data* (1st ed.). New York, United States: The Guilford Publications, Inc.
- Wallace, T., Stariha, W., & Walberg, H. (2004). Teaching speaking, listening, and writing. *International Academy of Education: Educational Practices Series* 14, 1-14
- Wang, A. (2007). Teaching aviation English in the Chinese context: Developing ESP theory in a non-English speaking country. *English for Specific Purposes*, 26(1), 121–128.
- Wang, J. (2011). *Lái Huá liúxuéshēng de Hànyǔ xuéxí xūqiú yánjiū [Need analysis in Mandarin teaching for of International Students in China]*. (Master's thesis). Zhejiang University, Zhejiang, China.
- Wozniak, S. (2010). Language Needs analysis from a perspective of international professional mobility: the case of French mountain guides. *English for Specific Purposes*, 29, 243–252.
- Xu, P. (2011). *Zài Huá Rì-Hán rénsì shāngwù Hànyǔ xuéxí xūqiú fēnxī [Need analysis in Business Mandarin study of International Students in China]*. (Master's thesis). Nanjing Normal University, Jiangsu, China.
- Xu, Y. L. (2016, August 2). Huáxiǎo dà cíli (dì-1 piān) Guóxiǎo, Huáxiǎo, Dànxiǎo gèzì jīng cǎi 3 yǔwén yī ge kèchéng gāngyào [The Power of National-type School (Chinese) (Part 1) National School, National-type School (Chinese), National-type School (Tamil) share a syllabus in different languages]. *China Press*. Retrieved from <http://www.chinapress.com.my/20160802/華小大磁力（第1篇）國小、華小、淡小各自精彩-3/?variant=zh-hans>
- Yang, L. Z. (2014). *Mǎláixīyà dàxuéshēng hànyǔ yǔyīn xuéxí xūqiú jí jiàocái mǎnyì dù tiáo chá yǔ fēnxī [Investigation and analysis of the Chinese pronunciation learning needs and materials evaluation of Malaysian undergraduates]* (Master's thesis). Zhejiang University, Zhejiang, China.

- Yu, W. H. (2002). Xūqiú fēnxī zài wàiyǔ jiàoxué zhōng de de zuòyòng [The role of needs analysis in foreign language teaching]. *Foreign Language and Their Teaching*, 8, 20–23.
- Zhang, L. (2006). Shāngwù Hànyǔ jiàoxué xūqiú fēnxī [Need analysis in Business Mandarin teaching]. *Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies*, (3), 55–60.
- Zhang, L. (2007a). *Jīng-mào Hànyǔ kèchéng yánjiū [Study on Economic Mandarin Course]*. Beijing, China: The Commercial Press.
- Zhang, L. (2007b). *Jīyú zhuānyè Yīngyǔ jiàoxué de sīkǎo — jīyú jiàoxué fǎ jí “gēnjù yuánlǐ jiàoxué” [Based on Professional English Teaching — Based on Teaching Method and Teaching According to Principle]*. (Master’s thesis). Xidian University, Xi’an, China.
- Zhang, L. (2007c). *Shāngyè Hànyǔ kǒuyǔ yánjiū: Xiànchǎng cùxiāo yǔyán diàochá yǔ fēnxī [Business Mandarin Speaking Study: On-the-spot Promote Language Survey and Analysis]*. Beijing, China: Communication University of China CUC Publishing House.
- Zhang, Z. (2007). Towards an integrated approach to teaching Business English: A Chinese experience. *English for Specific Purposes*, 26(4), 399–410.
- Zhu, H. (2014). *Duìwài hànyǔ xuéxí cídiǎn yònglì wèntí yánjiū [A Study on the examples used in Dictionary of Chinese as a Foreign Language]*. (Master’s thesis). Nanjing University, Nanjing, China.
- Zhu, L. H. (2003). Shāngwù hànyǔ de tèdiǎn jí qí jiàoxué [Characteristics and Teaching of Business Chinese]. *Journal of College of Chinese Language and Culture of Jinan University*, (3), 55-60.