CHAPTER 2

Review of related literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to discuss some of the topics in researches related to the present study pertaining to the English language needs of the Front Office staff of a business class hotel, in the context of the Malaysian workforce. The focus is on works related to communicative needs and in this respect, the English language needs, because in English-speaking working environment where employees learned English as a second language, there was a general need to use English for communication, study and work (Sifakis, 2003). Other secondary related topics are on ESP (English for Specific Purposes), needs analysis as an important component of ESP and other similar service oriented industries.

For the Front Office staff of this study, ESP is relevant due to the nature of the staff occupational duties. The need for ESP for the Front Office staff is evidence by the needs to use specific language terms normally associated with hospitality. The focus is on the ability to use such language to communicate effectively and the needs to correct the errors committed by the Front Office staff, whether intentionally or otherwise, as observed during the course of this study.

The discussion on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) would focus on its definition, classification and development. This is because one may ask, 'What is the

difference between the ESP and General English?' Hutchinson and Waters (1987:53) answer this quite simply, "in theory nothing, in practice a great deal."

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), focuses on developing communicative competence in specific occupational fields such as those in hospitality, banking and finance, medicine, academics, biology, chemistry, physics, agriculture, law etc. It equips the learners with a certain English proficiency level for a situation where the language is going to be used. It enables the individual to use English to communicate such as the hotel staff who needed English to perform their communicative job tasks (Dovey, 2006).

On the other hand, General English is concerned with the variety of the language used for different purposes such as for introductions, discussing various ideas, exchanging views, socialising, shopping, travelling, telephoning, greetings, reading newspapers and so on.

The other area of discussion covered would be on needs analysis because it is an important aspect of ESP although ESP is not the only educational institution that is related to it. The discussion is to offer some insights on the various meanings of needs analysis and focus on those related to this present study. This is because there are different definitions of needs analysis being debated by different schools of thoughts.

Another area of discussion is on related literature pertaining to hospitality and quality customer service satisfaction, because as noted by Olsen, West and Tse (1998), quality is to be viewed as a process. They pointed out that service is a performance and

every employee has a role to play in the service encounter. Therefore, this will in turn determine the standard of the quality of service rendered to the guest. Thus, it indicates that the English language needs of the Front Office staff and other customer oriented services are closely related and interlinked to a certain extent because of the need to provide the required customer service standards.

2.2 English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

2.2.1 Definition

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is basically, an approach to the teaching or learning of English for specialised subjects with some specific academic and vocational purposes in mind, while taking into account the time constraints imposed by the learners. There are different needs for different purposes for the learners of English language e.g. English for Business, English for Economics, English for Technicians, English for Nurses, English for Hospitality and Tourism and others. However, according to Strevens (1988, pp.109), "a definition of ESP that is both simple and watertight is not easy to produce." This is because there are many definitions of ESP. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, pp.18-19) prefer not to define ESP but rather to show what ESP is not.

Other well-known researchers [Strevens (1988), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) and Robinson (1991)] prefer to state that ESP is an approach rather than a product. Their definitions are based on the primacy of needs of

the learners of ESP, meaning that ESP does not involve a particular kind of language, teaching material or methodology but rather it is goal directed. Therefore, there is no clear cut definition but from the various definitions made by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Strevens (1988), Robinson (1991), and Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), some common characteristics of ESP can be summarised as follows;

i) ESP is goal directed and learner oriented.

ii) ESP is an approach rather than a product.

iii) ESP is language learning based on the specific needs of learners and

iii) ESP is centered on adult learners who have basic knowledge of general English.

Based on the above definitions, the English language needs of the target group for this study (the Front Office staff of a business class hotel), fit the requirements of ESP. This is because;

i)   The goal of the Front Office staff is to communicate effectively in order to achieve "zero complaints" as required by the hotel's mission statement.

ii)   Their English language needs are based on the needs to communicate effectively and efficiently in their working environment.

iii)   They are adult learners with basic knowledge of general English.

2.2.2 Classification

ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is the umbrella term for two main sub-divisions namely EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and EOP (English for

Occupational Purposes). In terms of subject matter, the other main sub-branch of ESP is EST (English for Science and Technology). Thus, simply put, the main sub-categories of ESP are;

a) EAP - English for academic study needs (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

b) EOP - English for work related needs (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987)

c) EST - English for science and technology use (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987)

The purpose of ESP is to enable the learners to function correctly in the target situation. For the Front Office staff, the needs for English at work is more for work related purposes but with some spillovers for social needs and academic study. As such, their English language needs can thus be categorised under the general term of ESP.

2.2.3 Growth and development of ESP

There are notably three reasons common to the emergence of ESP: the demands of a Brave New World, a revolution in linguistics, and focus on the learners (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987 : 6-8). The two key historical periods that led to the emergence of ESP were the end of the Second World War and the Oil Crisis of the early 1970s, that resulted in Western money and knowledge flowing into oil-rich countries. As such, "Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need," became the guiding principle of ESP (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987 : 8).

Its rapid development after the 1980s is reflected in the increasing number of universities and colleges offering degree courses to students in English speaking countries like Malaysia. It has also led to a rapid growth in English courses aimed at specific disciplines which emphasize the importance of the learners and their learning attitudes (e.g. English for Hospitality instead of the more traditional 'General English' courses).

In Malaysia, there are numerous private institutions of higher learning such as INTI college, HELP institute, Taylor's college, Stamford College, Olympia college, Kolej Damansara Utama (KDU), Kolej Bandar Utama (KBU), Tunku Abdul Rahman College, SEGi Group of Colleges, Open university et cetera offering accredited English for hospitality courses to aspiring students.

2.3 Needs Analysis in ESP

Broadly defined, needs analysis (NA) is a procedure to collect information about learners' needs (Richards, 2001). The importance of NA is emphasized in English for Specific Purpose (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) and English for Academic Purposes (Jordan, 1997), and also in general language courses espousing learner-centered curricula (Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996), task-based curricula (Long & Crookes, 1992), as well as performance-assessment (Norris, Brown, Hudson, & Yoshioka, 1998).

The advent of ESP gives rise to the prominence of needs analysis as a tool of inquiry because ESP is learner oriented. In General English, all the four language skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing, are stressed equally but in ESP, it is the

needs analysis that determines which language skills are most needed by the respondents. Needs analysis is thus an important feature of ESP because it helps to determine the needs of the respondents through a survey. However, defining the staff needs is a complex issue. This is because different staff would have different needs. Therefore, the question is, "What is needs analysis?" Graves (1996) says that needs analysis involves finding out what learners know and can do and what they need to learn or do, so that the answers can bridge the gaps (problems). Chambers (1980) refers to needs analysis as "target situation analysis" (TSA) and Brown (1996) states that needs analysis is;

> *"the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information, that is necessary to satisfy the language learning needs of the students within the contexts of the particular institution(s)."*
>
> Brown (1996 : pp 270)

Simply put, needs analysis arises when an employee lacks the knowledge or skill to perform an assigned task satisfactorily as required of his or her job. When there is a variation between what the staff can and is expected to do, and what the actual job performance requires him or her to do, then there is a need for needs analysis to determine the source of the problem. Therefore, needs analysis helps to establish the Front Office staffs' needs in the occupational environment that they are in. However, there may be some spillovers into other areas because there are no specific boundaries to demarcate their actual needs to be proficient in the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. This is because, there may tend to be some overlapping where the needs to use the language is concerned.

Ideally, the yardsticks for determining the communicative needs of the Front Office staff would be the organisation and the management involved that are directly related to the issue. Thus, a needs analysis is performed to determine what is needed and what is it that is causing the problem (gap). In other words, the "needs" of the job requirements minus the present performance level equals the gap. When the gap is determine, then learning resources can be employed to help the staff to increase their language competencies and hopefully to fill the gap. Thus, if the job of the Front Office staff requires a certain level of language competence in handling the guests and the current level of competence in that area is low, then there is a need to bridge the gap.

Assessing the needs enabled the researcher to obtain more reliable information which can be useful in targeting the specific problems of the learners (Chambers, 1980). The need assessment will be able to provide a mean by which remedial steps could be taken to adjust and adapt to the requirement of the particular industry. According to Richards (2001), the assessment will be able to allow the researcher to find out what language skills a learner need in order to perform a particular role and to determine who require language skills training.

Munby (1978), Mackay (1978), Richterich and Chancerel (1980), Chambers (1980), and Hutchinson and Waters (1987) refer to needs analysis as target situation analysis (TSA). It enables the researcher to obtain information about the communicative problems faced by the learners in their working environment and to identify what the learners are able to do and what they need to be able to do to perform

their job tasks. For analysing linguistic needs, most researchers would refer to the well-known Munby's model.

Munby's model consists of two stages and the heart of the model is the Communicative Needs Processor (CNP) and the interpretation of the profile of needs. Information about the respondent identity and language competency are input into the CNP which consists of a number of parameters (purposive domain, setting, interaction, instrumentality, dialect, communicative events and keys, and target level). After the data gathered under these various variables have been analysed, a profile of needs is obtained to determine what the respondent actually required to perform his or her job requirements.

The overall idea behind Munby's concept is to identify the profile of needs such as the communicative needs of Front Office staff when dealing with guests' problems or enquiries. An evaluation (measurement instrument) is then build to identify the objective that is required to achieve the needs and the "why" of the selection. The model aims at exploring detailed and complex aspects relating to learner's profile of needs under the various variables that affect communication. The outcome of the processing data identifies what the learner needs to know in order to function effectively in his or her target working environment (Munby, 1978 : pp 32-42). A simplified view of the model is as shown in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1. The Munby's model.
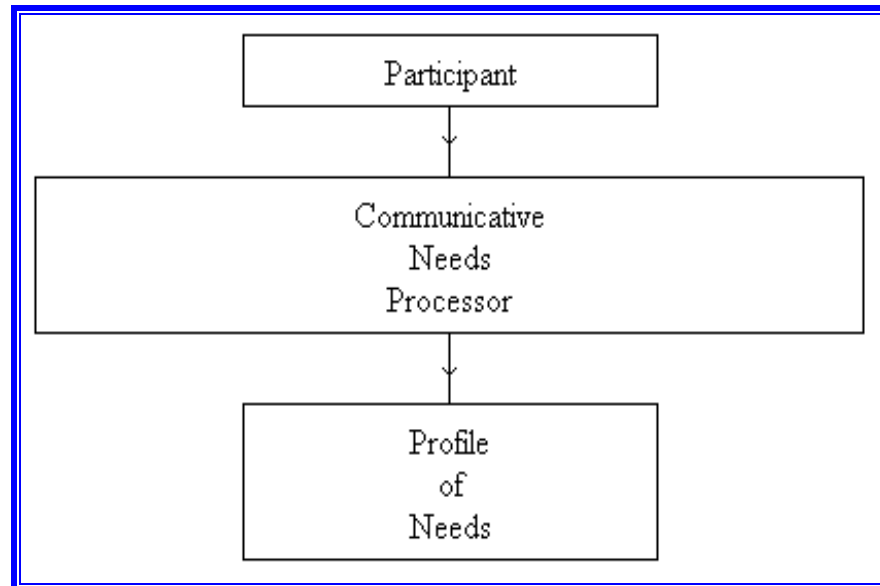
Critics viewed the model as being too rigid, complex and complicated, and time consuming (West, 1994 : pp 9-10). To pinpoint the needs of the Front Office staff is a challenging task since needs have been defined from various perspectives. In this respect, for this study, the more manageable questions of TSA categorised under the three key areas of necessities, lacks and wants as proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987 : pp 59-60) are used and referred to.

Hutchinson and Waterss (1987) proposed a distinction between "target needs" and "learning needs." Targets needs indicate "what the learner needs to do in the target situation" (p.54) and learning needs means "what the learner needs to do in order to learn" (p.54). Necessities are determined by "what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation, which includes the linguistic features such as

functional, structural, lexical and discourse features. Lacks are the gaps between what the learners already know about the necessities and what the learners lacks. Furthermore, the learners might have some ideas of what their needs are and these needs are called Wants.

Assessing needs enabled the researcher to obtain valid and reliable information which can be useful in targeting the specifics in language (Chambers, 1980). Hence, the importance of the needs analysis stage is as discussed by St. John (1996:6) whereby a profile of language skills and abilities could be established, needs prioritized and purposes clarified. According to St. John (1996), needs analysis is about understanding the learners and the communicative events in which they will participate in. Thus, knowing the respondents vocational needs, their workplace culture and the changes that are taking place will improve the communicative skills of the respondents in their workplace as stated by Leung (1994).

2.4 Needs required from industry perspective

Competition in the hospitality industry is increasing pressure on hotels to improve the quality, productivity and cost effectiveness of their operations. Today's challenging work environment requires the hotel employees to have all the basic necessary job requirements to meet the guests' service expectations. Therefore, it is important to examine the service needs of the hospitality industry and the Front Office staff communicative competencies and skills (or lack of it) because the researcher is of

the opinion that these two areas are interrelated. This is because the objective is to delight the guests and to minimize critical encounters by providing efficient communicative service guarantees to improve the service quality standards.

2.4.1 Service needs required of the staff

As the service encounter is the moment of truth for service providers, Bettencourt and Gwinner (1996) assert that the key to customer satisfaction is for Front Office staff to customize delivery of service which include interpersonal adaptive behaviours and service offering adaptations. Research propositions have been provided to questions that relate to customer-staff interaction. As stated by Lovelock, Patterson and Walker (2001), the best approach towards customer retention, is by ensuring the delivery of high quality service, and to commit resources to managing the required customer-staff relationships with existing customers.

According to Lovelock, Patterson and Walker (2001), a service product strategy has to be planned and developed because delighted customers will remain loyal. The process and manner of service delivery need to be critically examined. Ultimately, this would involve communication proficiency and thus, the authors recommend to invest in human resources as service quality is directly influenced by the employees whom, if satisfied with their jobs, will have a positive impact on customer service.

This view is supported by Kandampully and Butler (2001) who state that using a service guarantee will trigger favourable customer behaviour who will remain loyal and continue to support and recommend the firm's service to others. For instance, for the hotel being studied the staff have been empowered to upgrade guests to the next higher category of rooms when the room already booked by the guest is unavailable. However, the staff will need to communicate clearly to the guest that the upgrade is for that particular visit only and is not inclusive of other benefits that come with the particular category of room upgrade. Many a times failure to inform the guest properly of the upgrade of room only often result in unwarranted problems and issues such as issues pertaining to complimentary breakfast, welcome drinks and fruits platter, the venue for the breakfast and other complimentary amenities in the room.

All in all, it can be seen that quality customer service is important to the hotel as with all other businesses and establishments which are monetary oriented. To the hotel, its main objective is to maximize its revenue by achieving a high occupancy and average room rate (ARR). Being a service oriented industry, achieving and maintaining the required occupancy percentage may be possible if the staff communicative proficiency in terms of language competence is up to the required standards because efficient and effective communication is part and parcel of the service industry. Guests who encountered problems will become more irritated when communication is another added issue to their problems. To ensure the success of the hotel's mission statement of achieving "zero complaints," there is thus the need to ensure that communicative issues

should not be one of its main problems in addressing the service needs of the hotel guests.

2.4.2 Communicative needs from the industry perspective

The principle of communication simply states that people are more likely to avoid communicative situations that result in fear or anxiety for the communicator. Within the communicative language proficiency skills is a category called reticence, which is a trait attributed to people who are habitually rather uncommunicative. Burgoon and Hale (1983) refer to this in their "Unwillingness to Communicate" model. This model is composed of two dimensions: an approach-avoidance dimension, which measures the chance of an individual seeking out face-to-face interactions; and a reward dimension, which measures the degree to which an individual finds interaction with others as unprofitable. A reticent person is unlikely to actively use particular forms of communicative skills or derive gratifications from those situations.

Similarly, Miller (1987) advances several ideas concerning the anxiety and fear associated with communicative proficiency. Each seems to hint at some link between distress about communication and negative expectations concerning the outcomes or process of communication. Burgoon and Hale (1983) suggest that people who find communication futile can be identified by the "unwillingness to communicate" approach. The "unwillingness to communicate" concept deals with reticence or quietness in the face-to-face interactions with the guests. The degree of anxiety and

fear a person experiences in the communicative situation is likely to affect the person's use of that particular style of communication.

Imagine a scenario whereby an irate guest was not able to make external calls from his/her room because of insufficient or zero room deposits. This scenario exists when the guest is under the "travel agent rate" (a very low rate as compared to the normal room rate) and the staff is prohibited from revealing the actual room rate to the guest. As such, the phone line is barred and the guest is not able to make external calls from his/her room. Hence, for the staff who is reticent or does not have the required level of communicative proficiency, he/she will have a difficult situation trying to explain the reasons to the irate guest. The guest will ultimately have a negative view of the quality of service rendered because to the guest understanding, the travel agent has already paid for all expenses.

In the hospitality industry, good communications skills are the critical measures of success. Umbreit (1992) noted that communication skills such as interpersonal verbal skills, writing skills, and listening and speaking skills are important subjects in hospitality. According to Sujana (2005), to establish the required language competencies in a particular workplace, there is a need to identify the duties of the workers, translate the needs into competencies, translate the competencies into linguistic and other specifications and develop teaching/learning activities to develop the language competencies.

This view was supported by Stapa (1998) who investigated the needs and expectations of Tourism and Management students with regard to the writing courses offered in three colleges in Malaysia, and sought to see if the writing programmes for hotel management and tourism students reflect the communicative needs required at the workplace. The survey revealed that the need to write formal letters and reports were the two highest communicative skills required to perform the jobs. However, most of the respondents indicated that they were not satisfied with the syllabus offered at the collages and believed that the syllabus did not equip them with good communicative skills in order for them to enter the hospitality workforce and perform their required tasks effectively.

2.4.3 Ethnographic analysis of language needs

According to Denscombe (1998, pp.68-70), ethnographic analysis emphasizes on the needs for the researcher to be involved with the subject being studied so as to obtain first hand data about how they see and understand things. Hence, a brief discussion of past researches conducted by postgraduate students of University Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, pertaining to the ESP and analysis of language needs of different categories of societies, will hopefully help to offer some insights as to whether there are similarities of needs even though they are from different occupational societies. This is to support the belief that ESP is relevant for the different occupational functions as well as for academic use. This is based on the researcher's understanding that different societies here can also refer to the various different occupations of the respondents.

2.4.3.1 Occupational aspect of language needs

The front line staff are the main nerve centre of an institution. They must be able to convey diplomacy, courtesy and warmth. As such, the front line staff need to have good communication skills to make the guest feel welcome and to effect an immediate response to problems or complaints. Past researches on similar service oriented institutions revealed that there is a need for the staff to use the four language skills extensively in order for the respondents to perform their daily working tasks efficiently and effectively.

Huang (1984) did a survey on the use of English in some private organizations to identify the job-related language needs required of the staff. The findings revealed that all four language skills are required in order for the staff to perform their required job tasks regardless of their ethnicity or social background. However, there are instances whereby some language skills are rated as more important than the others depending upon the specific job-related requirements of the said skills. This view was similarly echoed by the local studies conducted by Menon (1999) and Nair (1997). Their studies conducted on the language needs of the front line staff in a private hospital and in a private medical centre respectively, revealed similar findings pertaining to the English language needs of the front line staff.

Findings from studies conducted on other diverse occupational areas such as in the Electronic industries (Ng, 2006) and Banking and Financial services (Gan, 1996), collaborated the fact that the emphasis is on all the four language skills regardless of

social background. The findings made several recommendations to improve all the required language skills due to the demands of the said service oriented industry.

In other occupational settings pertaining to the language needs for effective communication purposes, Mariammal's (1997) research showed that Maritime pilots needed to use the four communicative language skills extensively for effective communication with workers of foreign vessels berthing at the port. Similarly, Cho's (1999) research on the ESP programme for engineers in a multinational company also revealed similar findings pertaining to the occupational needs of the four language skills.

2.4.3.2 Academic aspect of language needs

In the academic field, the findings of the researches showed that there are similar needs pertaining to the language skills. In the research done by Chow (1996) pertaining to the needs of the science matriculation students in Malaysia, the findings revealed that all the four English language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are important to the students from the various group of societies and there is a need to improve them for academic purposes.

More recent research on the language needs in the academic field can be noted through Yoo's (2000) research on the needs of the ESP course for polytechnic students in Malaysia. He noted that the students for the ESP course would require the four language skills to fulfill their academic needs though in varying degree of importance.

Finally, looking at Lim's (1997) academic study of the language needs of Chinese-speaking students in private colleges in Malaysia, the emphasis is also on the needs of the four language skills. However, the main focus of the study stressed more on the need to write efficiently and recommendations were made to conduct more research in the area of writing especially for students for whom English is a second language.

Needless to say, the numerous numbers of studies mentioned above lend testimony to the fact that the English language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are all required for occupational purposes and to a certain extent, also for academic use. Even under diverse occupations and situations, it was found that the four language skills, determined by the needs analysis conducted, were found to be required, although in varying degree of importance regardless of time, place, situation and ethnic background.

2.5 Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, there is a considerably limited amount of local research materials pertaining to the specific subject matter of this study which is the English language needs of Front Office staff of a business class hotel. Most of the available texts focused specifically on the broad topic of hospitality and quality customer service in general. Hence, due to the apparent lack of reference materials focusing on the specific English language needs of Front office staff of a business class hotel, especially

in the context of the Malaysian workforce, this chapter only discussed briefly the topics that are related to this present study.

To summarise, ESP is generally the umbrella term for EAP and EOP. For the Front Office staff of this study, their language needs can be categorised under ESP because although their language needs are mainly for work related purposes, the staff use the language for social and academic purposes as well. The process and purpose of needs analysis including the various aspects of language usage were also discussed.

The review of past studies of different categories of societies revealed similar findings pertaining to the needs of the four language skills, whether for occupational purposes or academic use, although in varying degree of importance. The ethnographic orientation helps to determine the language skills required, that directly or indirectly influence the communicative needs of the respondents, as according to Swales (1985), the emphasis of communication lies on its functional perspective.