

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology regarding the population and sample, the procedures employed in the development, and the validation of the research instruments. The steps taken in data collection and data analysis are also illustrated.

3.1. Population and sample

3.1.1 Thai fourth-year university students who majored in the field of hospitality from private and public universities in Bangkok were selected to be the population of the study. There were two main reasons to select the fourth-year university students as the population of the study. First, they all completed the prerequisite courses of English at their universities. As such it could be assumed that their English ability met the university requirements and were able, at least, to understand and perform basic communicative activities. Second, they were required to participate in the internship program with hospitality or tourism companies in Thailand for at least two months in order to gain on-the-job training and hands-on experience. Therefore, they presumably used English in their work-oriented programs and in their future career related to hotel business.

There were three universities in Bangkok randomly selected as the subjects in this study: Bangkok University, Dhurakit Pundit University, and Kasetsart University. These three universities were selected because of the following reasons. Firstly, they offer a four-year bachelor's degree related to hospitality and tourism industry. Secondly, they have long established in providing potential students to enter the hospitality or tourism industry. Lastly, they cooperatively allowed their students to participate in the study and, most importantly, could provide the computer laboratory for collecting the data.

The target subjects from the selected three universities were categorized into three groups: the high language ability group, the average language ability group, and the low language ability group. In the process of sample selection, the stratified

randomly sampling technique was used to select the subjects according to their GPA in English language courses taken from both fundamental and elective courses. Two steps were employed in the stratified randomly sampling technique. First, the students' grade reports were obtained in order to classify them into three language ability groups by computing the means and standard deviations. Second, 10 subjects of each language ability group from each university were randomly selected. Therefore, there were 30 subjects in each language ability level from three universities resulting in 90 subjects in this study.

To conclude, the subjects of this study were selected by the stratified random sampling technique. The number of the universities and the test takers were based on the predetermined sample size and practicality of the administration. Research instruments are presented in the next section.

3.2. Research instruments

Two research instruments were employed in this study: the Front Office Pragmatic-Test (FOP-Test) and a pragmatic questionnaire.

3.2.1 The Front Office Pragmatic-Test (FOP-Test)

The Front Office Pragmatic Test (FOP-Test) was developed to assess the students' pragmatic ability in the context of hotel Front Office Department. The test method of the FOP-Test was typically an oral discourse completion test (ODCT); however, it was designed by the computer software called Adobe Captivate to import images related to situations in the FOP-Test, to provide audio narration of the test items and to control the timing of responding. In other words, the program can facilitate the test face with audio-visual simulation. There are 15 situations of 5 speech acts assessed in the FOP-Test. A slide of each situation is presented into 3 captures: prompted scenario, the speech of a simulated hotel guest, and the slot provided for the test taker's speech to respond to a simulated hotel guest. The 15 situations are ranged based on the degree of difficulty from the least to the most difficult and the test takers responded orally to a prompted scenario along the written script and gave a response by saying aloud what they would respond to the simulated hotel guest related to the given situations. The test takers' speeches were recorded, transcribed and finally rated.

3.2.1.1 The development of the FOP-Test

Conducting the needs assessment questionnaire was the preliminary step in developing the FOP-Test. It aimed to investigate the situations that had potentially high chance of occurrences when communicating with the hotel guests in the Front Office operation. The sample of the needs assessment questionnaire was considered as a convenient sampling and the predetermined sample size for a questionnaire was a constraint because it depended on the hotel's consent. According to the deficiency of determining the desired sample size, the questionnaire was conducted with the hotel Front Office staff from six leading hotels in Bangkok (out of 18 hotels) which allowed the researcher to collect the data on their premises. The six hotels were The Grand Hyatt Erawan Bangkok, The Four Seasons Bangkok, The Landmark Bangkok, The Intercontinental Bangkok, The Novotel Bangkok on Siam Square, and The Conrad Bangkok. The department of human resources distributed the questionnaires to their hotel Front Office staff based on their convenience. Thus, the sample of the questionnaire was considered as convenience sampling. As a result, there were 63 respondents from the six hotels and the results of their responses were used to determine what speech acts would be included in the FOP-Test. The collection procedures, data analysis, and the findings of needs assessment questionnaire were carried as follows.

3.2.1.1.1 Data collected from the needs assessment questionnaire

Firstly, the letters of permission with the questionnaires to the human resources departments were sent to the leading 18 four-starred and five-starred hotels in Bangkok. However, only six hotels consented to the proposal as mentioned earlier. After having the hotel's permission, fifteen copies of the questionnaires were distributed to the department of human resources of each hotel. Besides, the hotel Front Office staff answered the questionnaires at their convenience. However, the members of the human resources staff followed up and collected the questionnaires and mailed them to the researcher afterwards. All 90 questionnaires were distributed to the six hotels by hand; however, 63 copies were returned. The needs assessment questionnaire was written in Thai and consisted of three parts (See Appendix A). The first part was the demographic information of the respondents, i.e. gender, age, position, level of education and working experience. The result is shown in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Summary of demographic information of the hotel Front Office staff

<i>Attributes</i>		<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	22	34.92
	Female	41	65.08
<i>Age</i>	22-24	15	23.80
	25 – 27	16	25.40
	28 – 30	12	19.05
	31 – 33	8	12.70
	34 – 36	6	9.52
	37 – 39	0	0
	40 – 42	0	0
	43 – 45	1	1.59
	46 – 48	1	1.59
	Not identify	4	6.35
<i>Positions</i>	Front Desk Receptionist	37	58.73
	Guest Relation Officer	3	4.76
	Front Cashier	0	0
	Bell Caption	7	11.11
	Concierge	4	6.35
	Butler	5	7.94
	Duty Manager	2	3.17
	Assistant Front Office Manager	1	1.59
	Operator	1	1.59
	Reservation	1	1.59
	Executive Club Officer	1	1.59
	Executive Club Supervisor	1	1.59
<i>Levels of education</i>	Certificate of Vocational Education	1	1.59
	Diploma of Vocational Education	8	12.70
	B.A	46	73.02
	M.A.	3	4.76
	Others (M. 6)	2	3.17
	Not identify	3	4.76

**Table 3.1: Summary of demographic information of the hotel Front Office staff
(cont.)**

<i>Attributes</i>		<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Year(s) of working experience</i>	Below one year	2	3.17
	1 – 3 yr.	27	42.86
	4 – 6 yr.	14	22.22
	7 – 9 yr.	8	12.70
	10 – 12 yr.	4	6.35
	More than 12 yr.	3	4.76
	Not identify	5	7.94

Table 3.1 shows gender, age, position, level of education, and years of working experience of the respondents. Based on the information collected, the majority of the respondents were female (65.08%) while 34.92% of the respondents were male. For age group, the large group of the respondents was between 25-27 years old representing 25.40% followed by 22-24 years old and 28-30 years old representing 23.80% and 19.05% respectively. Considering the position, levels of education, and working experience, more than half of the respondents were front desk receptionists (58.73%). The majority of them had a bachelor's degree (73.02%), and a working experience between 1- 3 years (42.86%).

At the end of the first part, the respondents were asked to state some communication problems in English with foreign hotel guests. This task was optional; however, the problems reflected from the Thai hotel Front Office staff in this study can be grouped below:

1. They did not comprehend the fast speech of native speakers of English. The rapid speech causes misunderstanding.
2. They were not familiar with the different accents and tones of English of foreign hotel guests who are from different countries.
3. It was hard to communicate with foreign hotel guests who were non-English speakers like Spanish, Middle East group, Japanese, or Italian.
4. They had no confidence in writing. They were more concerned with grammatical points.
5. They understood the hotel guest's intention, but could not respond promptly. This may be part of their level of proficiency in English.

6. They were unfamiliar with some vocabulary, idioms, and slangs produced by native speakers of English.

7. Some foreign guests could not communicate in English at all. So, nonverbal language was used and this sometimes caused misunderstanding.

8. The hotel guests did not understand what the hotel staff had said.

The second part of the questionnaire contained closed questions which consisted of 40 situations concerning with eight speech acts of informing, apologizing, handling complaints, offering help, promising, requesting, thanking, and responding to compliments respectively. There were five situations that represented each speech act. The statements required the hotel Front Office staff's opinions on a scale of 1-5 for frequency from Impossible to Most likely possible to indicate what situations would possibly occur in their jobs. The mean scores were interpreted as follows:

- 1.00 - 1.49 The situation is impossible to happen. (1)
- 1.50 - 2.49 The situation is likely impossible to happen. (2)
- 2.50 - 3.49 The situation is potentially possible to happen. (3)
- 3.50 - 4.49 The situation is likely possible to happen. (4)
- 4.50 - 5.00 The situation is the most likely possible to happen. (5)

The result is shown in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: The results of possible situations occurring in the hotel Front Office Department

Speech acts	Scales					\bar{X}	SD	Interpretation
	Impossible (1)	Likely impossible (2)	Potentially possible (3)	Likely possible (4)	Most likely possible (5)			
Informing								
1.inform the condition of the room type	-	18 (28.57%)	15 (23.81%)	20 (31.75%)	10 (15.87%)	3.35	1.06	3
2.inform the price of late check- out	-	5 (7.94%)	25 (39.68%)	19 (30.16%)	14 (22.22%)	3.67	0.92	4
3. inform different types of room rates	16 (25.40%)	9 (14.29%)	25 (39.68%)	9 (14.29%)	4 (6.35%)	2.62	1.20	3

Table 3.2: The results of possible situations occurring in the hotel Front Office Department (cont.)

<div>Speech acts</div> <div>Scales</div>	Impossible (1)	Likely impossible (2)	Potentially possible (3)	Likely possible (4)	Most likely possible (5)	\bar{X}	SD	Interpretation
Informing								
4. inform the number of staying guests irrelevant to the reservation record	5 (7.94%)	9 (14.29%)	21 (33.33%)	21 (33.33%)	7 (11.11%)	3.25	1.09	3
5. inform alcohol will not be served on a particular day	-	3 (4.76%)	13 (20.63%)	6 (9.52%)	41 (65.08)	4.35	0.97	4
Apologizing								
6. apologize for not being able to locate the connecting room	-	12 (19.05%)	29 (46.03)	13 (20.63)	9 (14.29)	3.30	0.94	3
7. apologize for not allowing unregistered guests to go up to the room	2 (3.17%)	10 (15.87%)	29 (46.03%)	13 (20.63%)	9 (14.29%)	3.27	1.00	3
8. apologize for not being able to hold the room due to late check-in	23 (36.51%)	21 (33.33%)	9 (14.29%)	5 (7.94%)	5 (7.94%)	2.17	1.24	2
9. apologize for connecting to the wrong guest	18 (28.57%)	22 (34.92%)	7 (11.11%)	8 (12.70%)	8 (12.70%)	2.46	1.37	2
10. apologize for not being able to tell the guest room number to the outsider	1 (1.59%)	3 (4.76%)	13 (20.63%)	22 (34.92%)	24 (38.10%)	4.03	0.97	4
Handling complaints								
11. deal with the complaint of informing an incorrect room price	11 (17.46%)	23 (36.51%)	20 (31.75%)	7 (11.11%)	2 (3.17%)	2.46	1.01	2
12. deal with a complaint of missing the message	17 (26.98%)	21 (33.33%)	8 (12.70%)	11 (17.46%)	6 (9.52%)	2.54	1.34	3
13. deal with a complaint of the noise from the next door	-	13 (20.63%)	29 (46.03%)	12 (19.05%)	9 (14.29%)	3.27	0.95	3
14. deal with the complaint that the hotel guest's has been searched.	21 (33.33%)	14 (22.22%)	11 (17.46%)	10 (15.87%)	7 (11.11%)	2.49	1.39	2
15. deal with the smell of cigarettes in a non-smoking room	-	16 (25.40%)	20 (31.75%)	17 (26.98%)	10 (15.87%)	3.33	1.03	3

Table 3.2: The results of possible situations occurring in the hotel Front Office Department (cont.)

<div>Scales</div> <div>Speech acts</div>	Impossible (1)	Likely impossible (2)	Potentially possible (3)	Likely possible (4)	Most likely possible (5)	\bar{X}	SD	Interpretation
Offering help								
16. offer to order flourish	-	2 (3.17%)	14 (22.22%)	19 (30.16%)	28 (44.44%)	4.16	0.88	4
17. offer to do morning call	-	-	3 (4.76%)	23 (36.51%)	37 (58.73%)	4.56	0.59	5
18. offer to call the hotel doctor	-	1 (1.59%)	4 (6.35%)	22 (34.92%)	36 (57.14%)	4.48	0.69	4
19. offer to contact the embassy	-	3 (4.76%)	11 (17.46%)	15 (23.81%)	34 (53.97%)	4.24	0.95	4
20. offer to keep check-out guest's luggage at the store room	-	-	1 (1.59%)	14 (22.22%)	48 (76.19%)	4.75	0.47	5
Promising								
21. promise to send more room amenities	1 (1.59%)	1 (1.59%)	3 (4.76%)	15 (23.81%)	43 (68.25%)	4.60	0.66	5
22. promise to mail the guest's lost and found item	1 (1.59%)	4 (6.35%)	10 (15.87%)	21 (33.33%)	27 (42.86%)	4.10	1.00	4
23. promise to have an air conditioner in the room checked	-	1 (1.59%)	3 (4.76%)	21 (33.33%)	38 (60.32%)	4.52	0.67	5
24. promise to ask the manager to decode the safe	-	2 (3.17%)	7 (11.11%)	13 (20.63%)	41 (65.08%)	4.52	0.76	5
25. promise to reserve hotel limousine to the airport upon the departure	-	-	4 (6.35%)	27 (42.86%)	32 (50.79%)	4.46	0.62	4
Requesting								
26. request the guest to smoke in the area provided	1 (1.59%)	3 (4.76%)	12 (19.05%)	25 (39.68%)	22 (34.92%)	4.02	0.94	4
27. request check-out guests to pay for the hotel bathrobes	16 (25.40%)	9 (14.29%)	20 (31.75%)	14 (22.22%)	4 (6.35%)	2.70	1.25	3

Table 3.2: The results of possible situations occurring in the hotel Front Office Department (cont.)

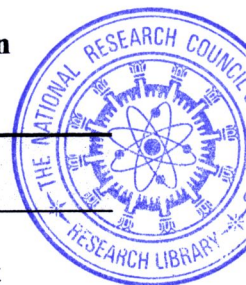
<div> <div>Scales</div> <div>Speech acts</div> </div>						\bar{X}	SD	Interpretation
	Impossible (1)	Likely impossible (2)	Potentially possible (3)	Likely possible (4)	Most likely possible (5)			
28. request the guest not to bring strong smell of food to the room	2 (3.17%)	17 (26.98%)	14 (22.22%)	8 (12.70%)	22 (34.92%)	3.49	1.31	3
29. request the guest not to bring pets up to the room	18 (28.57%)	6 (9.52%)	7 (11.11%)	5 (7.94%)	27 (42.86%)	3.27	1.73	3
30. request the guest to reconfirm the check-out time	-	5 (7.94%)	18 (28.57%)	22 (34.92%)	18 (28.57%)	3.90	0.93	4
Thanking								
31. thanks for tipping	-	-	5 (7.94%)	18 (28.57%)	40 (63.49%)	4.56	0.64	5
32. thanks for the gift	2 (3.17%)	3 (4.76%)	8 (12.70%)	14 (22.22%)	36 (57.14%)	4.25	1.06	4
33. thanks for giving discount coupon	3 (4.76%)	5 (7.94%)	10 (15.87%)	15 (23.81%)	30 (47.62%)	4.00	1.19	4
34. thanks for informing suspected persons	2 (3.17%)	22 (34.92%)	14 (22.22%)	9 (14.29%)	16 (25.40%)	3.27	1.29	3
35. thanks for staying and using services	-	1 (1.59%)	-	6 (9.52%)	56 (88.89%)	4.87	0.46	5
Responding to the compliments								
36. response for nice uniform	1 (1.59%)	2 (3.17%)	16 (25.40%)	15 (23.81%)	29 (46.03%)	4.06	0.98	4
37. response for hotel decoration	1 (1.59%)	-	7 (11.11%)	32 (50.79%)	23 (36.51%)	4.21	0.77	4
38. response for offering efficient services	-	-	3 (4.76%)	25 (39.68%)	35 (55.56%)	4.51	0.59	5
39. response for having a well take care of guest's properties	-	2 (3.17%)	9 (14.29%)	26 (41.27%)	26 (41.27%)	4.21	0.81	4
40. response for having a good command of English	-	1 (1.59%)	5 (7.94%)	33 (52.38%)	24 (38.10%)	4.30	0.69	4

In addition, at the end of the second part, the respondents were asked to write the situations related to the speech acts surveyed in the questionnaire that they already encountered in hotel front office operation. Most respondents returned their questionnaires with writing of situations that happened in their operation. The responses were varied; however, they can be grouped in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3: Possible situations occurring in the hotel Front Office operation

<i>Speech acts</i>	<i>Situations</i>
Informing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform hotel services, facilities, the in-room amenities • Inform the room rate • Inform the length of staying in order to confirm the reservation • Inform the operation time of shops and services in the hotel • Inform time and place for breakfast • Inform the confirmation of flight reservation • Inform messages or parcels delivered to the guest • Inform accountable shops for shopping (not in the hotel) • Inform the fire rehearsal schedule • Inform guest benefits e.g. allowance to use the executive lounge for free of charge • Inform the benefits gained from the different types of reservation • Inform the price of facilities
Apologizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologize for keeping the guest waiting for a long queue when checking-in • Apologize for unavailable of some foreign exchange currencies • Apologize for the luggage delay • Apologize for damaging the guest's belongings • Apologize for keeping the arrival guest waiting for an available room due to early check-in or fully booked • Apologize for an unavailable room requested due to the occupancy or fully booked • Apologize for keeping the check-out guest waiting for settling bills • Apologize for the insufficient facility like the internet delay • Apologize for the unavailable size of the bed requested • Apologize the check-in guest for assigning the room which has been occupied • Apologize for disturbance made by the housekeeping • Apologize the walk-in guest for some deposit • Apologize for informing incorrect room price • Apologize for not offering some services which are not included in reservation record e.g. free breakfast or using the executive lounge • Apologize for not giving late check-out due to the fully booked

**Table 3.3: Possible situations occurring in the hotel Front Office operation
(cont.)**



<i>Speech acts</i>	<i>Situations</i>
Handling complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deal with delay of services • Deal with the no-show of airport representative at the airport • Deal with the untidy room • Deal with the noise disturbance from, e.g., hotel refurbishment, T.V. from the next door • Deal with the loss of passport • Deal with some technical problems of room facilities, e.g. room temperature, a water heater • Deal with malfunction of room equipment • Deal with some problems occurring with the room key or key card • Deal with unpleasant smell from refurbishment • Deal with overcharged from taxi service
Offering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer to contact with the police in case of the loss of guest's property such as jewelry, travel cheque, or other valuable items • Offer to do wake up call • Offer to reserve the restaurants in the hotel and the nearby hotel • Offer to contact with the airline in case of the baggage loss, delay, or damage • Offer to pack the guest's parcel • Offer to arrange the hotel limousine to the airport • Offer to keep the check-out guest's luggage in the store room • Offer to make a phone call in case of emergency • Offer to change the flight ticket due to unavailable operation time of airline office • Offer to have the check-out guest wait in the lounge
Promising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promise to have the luggage down when check-out • Promise to have ice cubes sent up to the room • Promise to inform the housekeeper to clean up the room • Promise to arrange a surprise birthday upon the guest's request • Promise to relocate the room for the next day due to the unavailability on the arrival day • Promise to change room if possible • Promise to reconfirm flight • Promise to have a housekeeper send an iron to the guest room • Promise to arrange a van or taxi which is not hotel service • Promise to send more room amenities • Promise to arrange the room on the lower floor/higher floor • Promise to send some enquired information to the guest room such as telephone number or nearby attractions

**Table 3.3: Possible situations occurring in the hotel Front Office operation
(cont.)**

<i>Speech acts</i>	<i>Situations</i>
Request	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request to wear a swimming suit when using the hotel swimming pool • Request to smoke in the area provided • Request to return the room key/key card • Request for the credit card for guarantee or pre-authorization • Request to pay for the hotel's properties which have been damaged by the guest • Request to dress properly to where the dress code is required e.g. restaurants • Request to fill in some information required in the registration card
Thanking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank for giving tips • Thank for staying with the hotel • Thank for cooperating with the hotel • Thank for the gifts • Thank for the guests' comments • Thank for understanding the hotel' policy or regulations
Responding to the compliment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond for having service-mind of hotel staff • Respond for having efficient and prompt services

The last part of the questionnaire asked the respondents' opinion towards the degree of difficulty when performing a certain speech act in English via a scale from 1(the easiest) to 5 (the most difficult). The mean scores are interpreted as follows:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1.00 – 1.49 | The easiest to perform |
| 1.50 – 2.49 | Rather easy to perform |
| 2.50 – 3.49 | Not too difficult or easy to perform |
| 3.50 – 4.49 | Rather difficult to perform |
| 4.50 – 5.00 | The most difficult to perform |

The result and the interpretation are shown in Table 3.4 and Figure 3.1 below.

Table 3.4: Hotel Front Office employees' opinions toward difficulty in performing speech acts

Degree of difficulty Speech acts	<i>The most difficult</i>	<i>Rather difficult</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Rather easy</i>	<i>The easiest</i>	X	S.D	Interpretation
1. Informing	-	-	41 (65.08%)	22 (34.92%)	-	2.65	0.48	Neutral
2. Apologizing	26 (41.27%)	32 (50.79%)	5 (7.94%)	-	-	4.33	0.62	Rather difficult
3. Handling complaints	7 (11.11%)	31 (49.21%)	24 (38.10%)	1 (1.59%)	-	3.73	0.70	Rather difficult
4. Offering	-	-	3 (4.76%)	34 (53.97%)	26 (41.27%)	1.63	0.58	Rather easy
5. Promising	-	-	29 (46.03%)	26 (41.27%)	8 (12.70%)	2.35	0.70	Neutral
6. Requesting	3 (4.76%)	13 (20.63%)	38 (60.32%)	9 (14.29%)	-	3.16	0.72	Neutral
7. Thanking	-	-	2 (3.17%)	17 (26.98%)	44 (69.84%)	1.33	0.54	The easiest
8. Responding to compliment	-	-	4 (6.35%)	44 (69.84%)	15 (23.81%)	1.83	0.52	Rather easy

As shown in Table 3.4, the first five speech acts which got the highest mean scores were considered problematic for Thai hotel front office staff. Figure 3.1 shows the result in order from the most difficulty to the easiest.

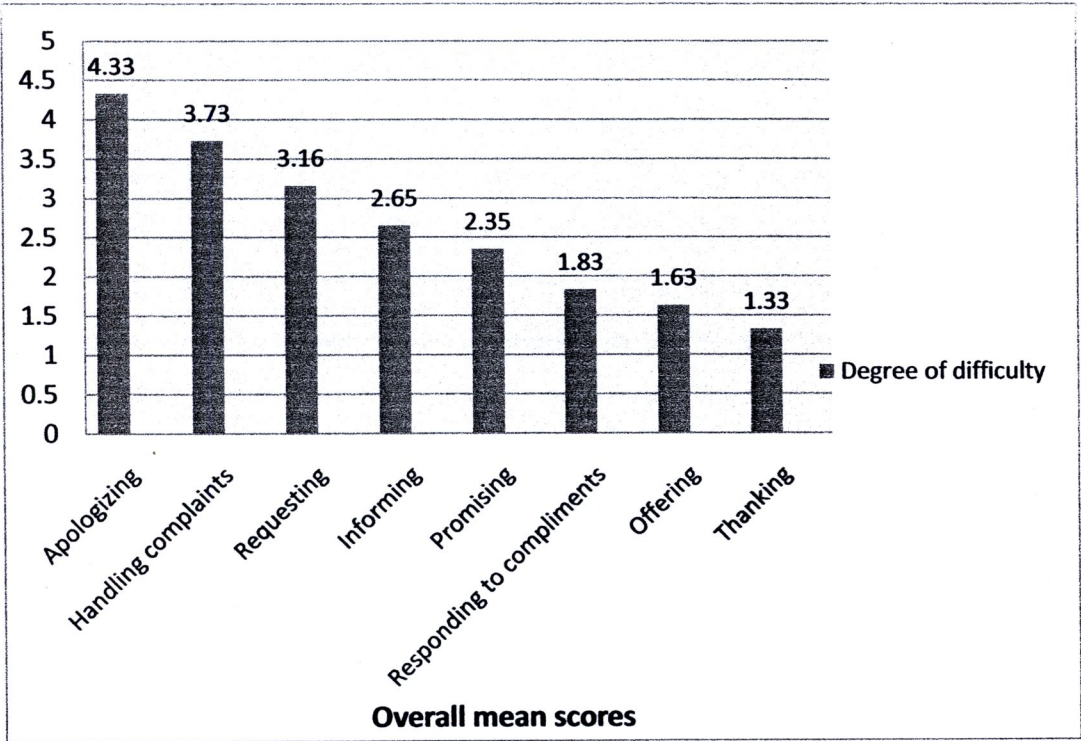


Figure 3.1: The mean scores relating to the degree of difficulty in performing the speech acts in English from the most difficulty to the easiest

Figure 3.1 shows that the top five speech acts are apologizing, handling complaints, requesting, informing, and promising. Considering the mean scores of these five speech acts, it can be seen that “promising” is considered “rather easy to perform” because it obtained the mean score lower than 2.49. However, it was selected to be tested because the number of five speech acts was predetermined to be the suitable number to be tested in this study. Therefore, the other speech acts: thanking, offering, and responding to the compliments which also appeared to be easy to perform were not selected. Thus, the speech acts of apologizing, handling complaints, requesting, informing, and promising were assumed to be problematic for the Thai hotel Front Office staff and they were selected to be included in the FOP-Test.

3.2.1.1.2 Test items selection

After selecting the five speech acts, situations from each speech act were drawn from the results of the needs assessment questionnaire and the Front Office staff’s opinions. Ten situations from each speech act were chosen based on

the situations from the close-ended questionnaire which were interpreted in the range of possible (2.50 – 5.00) as shown in Table 3.2 and they were randomly selected from the practitioners' opinions given in the open-ended part shown in Table 3.3. The number of situations to be tested in each speech act was three based on the Item Objective Congruent (IOC). Nine occupational experts and practitioners related to the hotel Front Office services, i.e. the personnel at the manager level (3), hotel Front Office staff (3), and hotel guests (3) were interviewed in order to identify the situations which were more likely to happen in the Front Office Department. The situations with the degree of congruence more than 70% were randomly selected to be included in the test situations (See Appendix B). Besides, the comments and suggestions given by the experts and the practitioners were used to modify the test situations. Therefore, the content validity of the FOP-Test was based on the expert judgement. Hence, the situations from five speech acts were finally selected to be included in the FOP-Test as shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: The given situations in the FOP-Test

Speech acts	Situations
Apologizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Apologize for ineffective service claimed by the staying guest ▪ Apologize for unavailability of the room asked for upon checking-in ▪ Apologize the arrival guest for a shortage of staff when checking-in
Handling complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deal with the malfunction of a water heater ▪ Deal with noise disturbance from the next door and the housekeeper's duty on the floor ▪ Deal with the no-show of the airport representative as required in reservation
Requesting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Request a walk-in guest for a deposit ▪ Request the check-in guest to give the check-out time due to high occupancy rate ▪ Request the check-out guest to pay for two hotel bathrobes taken from the room
Informing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inform where to get access to the internet ▪ Inform the check-out guest regarding an invalid credit card ▪ Inform the late check-out charge

Table 3.5: The given situations in the FOP-Test (cont.)

Speech acts	Situations
Promising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promise to send more room amenities ▪ Promise to arrange the limousine to the airport ▪ Promise to mail the hotel guest's lost items if found

The stages to validate the FOP-Test can be summarized into the following steps:

Firstly, the test specifications were designed in order to set the content and constructs of the FOP-Test (See Appendix C). Then, three language testing experts and three experts related to hotel services were asked to comment on the content and constructs of the test specifications (See Appendix D for the qualifications of experts related to hotel and services).

Secondly, the narration of the prompted scenarios and the simulated hotel guests was written and related to 15 situations and 5 speech acts obtained from the needs assessment questionnaire. Then, the researcher asked the language experts to express their opinions towards the language used and content relevance of the script. The main revision was to give more elaboration in the language used in prompted scenarios.

Thirdly, after the revision was made, the script was applied to the Adobe Captivate software program which facilitated a screen capture movie. The first capture of each slide appeared with the prompted scenario which described the condition of the situation that the test takers had to focus on in order to predetermine the expected performance. Then, the speech of a simulated hotel guest related to the given situation appeared in order to elicit a test taker's response. The last capture was left for recoding the test taker's speech. Besides, the image related to the given situation and the sound file of the narration were imported to the program.

Lastly, the test was revised again. The major concern was to give the appropriate response time.

3.2.1.1.3 Pilot study

The last step of test development was conducting a pilot study. The objective of the pilot study was to verify the research instruments and the procedures of the test administration. The subjects who participated in the pilot study were 30

Kasetsart University in the first semester of 2009 academic year. The students in the pilot study were excluded from the main study. The procedures of the pilot study were replicated in the main study. Details of the test administration are presented in Section 3.3 of data collection. After taking the test, questionnaires were distributed. Due to the extension of the administration time, all the test takers from the pilot study were asked to have the retrospective semi-structure interview by phone and by appointment. MP 3 was used to record the interview of the test takers' opinions regarding these six aspects: degree of difficulty, familiarity of the test content, quality of sound and image, response time, speaking experiences in the hotel context, and the overall appropriateness.

From the interview, it was found that generally they gave the positive comments to the test. Regarding difficulty and familiarity of the test content, they reflected that the content was very relevant to their background knowledge which was related to hotel operations so the content was not problematic for them at all. However, some revealed that their limited proficiency in English made them very difficult to respond. They thought the overall aspect of the test was very appropriate to their level of education. Besides, the technical quality of the sound and image appeared on a slide did not cause any interference. However, their major concern was the time constraints and the slow pace of their communication due to their limited proficiency in English. Some indicated that they could not complete the response within the given time. They suggested more time should be given for each response.

Apart from the interview of the six aspects, the test takers confined that they had a very little chance to practice speaking in English from the classroom learning. They wished they would have had an opportunity to practice more, especially exploring English in the hotel context. Since having little chance to practice in a particular context, they reflected that the cause of difficulty was not from the test itself, but from their limited proficiency in English and deficit of classroom practice. To conclude, the main adjustment from the pilot study was time allotment which was extended from 30 seconds to 45 seconds.

When considering the responses collected from the pilot study, in brief, there were some points to be raised related to the rating scale. First, it became apparent that the response expected for one speech act consisted of many speech acts. For example, a request initially occurred with an apology. However, such scenario was

not eliminated from the test because it rarely occurred; however, it was brought up to seek an agreement when rating. Next, not only the occurrence of more than one speech act, but few test takers did not include the expected speech act as well. So, the discussion among the raters was made in order to seek an agreement when rating. Therefore, the problematic area found from the speech production related to the rating scale from the pilot study was revised. After the revision and adaptation were made from the validation process, the final version of the FOP-Test was obtained (See Appendix E).

3.2.2 The FOP-Test rating scale

The scoring scale for the test takers' production from the FOP-Test was adapted from the holistic scale of Hudson et al (1995). It was developed into an analytical rating scale of four descriptors with five level bands of the effectiveness in language use. The four major descriptors are the correct speech act, expressions and vocabulary, amount of information given, and degree of appropriateness (levels of formality, directness, and politeness). It is important to note that intonation, nonlexical intonation signals like *uh*, *um*, or *hum* in English and grammaticality are beyond the scope of the study. After the rating scale was developed, it was evaluated by three testing experts and three experts related to hotel services, revised, and tried out in the pilot study. The rating scale used for the FOP-Test is presented in Table 3.6 below.

Table 3.6: Analytical rating scale for the FOP-Test

Level band	Effectiveness level	The correct speech acts
5	Very effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promptly shows understanding of function or illocutionary force of an utterance in a given situation. • Is able to correctly and effortlessly perform the speech act required in a given situation.
4	Effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears to have only occasional problems in understanding function or the interlocution's intention in a given situation. • Is able to effortlessly convey his/her intended message in the speech act required in a given situation.

Table 3.6: Analytical rating scale for the FOP-Test (cont.)

Level band	Effectiveness level	The correct speech acts
3	Somewhat effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears to be able to understand the function of speech and the interlocutor's intention in a given situation, but he/she hesitates to give a response to the interlocutor's speech. • Is able to perform the required speech act in a given situation somewhat understandably.
2	Ineffective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly has difficulty understanding the function of speech and the interlocutor's intention in a given situation. • Gives irrelevant responses in the given situation even if the intention of the speech act can be identified.
1	Very ineffective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has great difficulty understanding the function of speech and the interlocutor's intention in a given situation. • Is unable to respond to the speech act and/or gives isolated words or short formulaic expressions which cannot be communicated.
Level band	Effectiveness level	The amount of information given
5	Very effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides sufficient information needed in a given situation in a proficient and effective manner with a variety of sentence lengths. • Expands and supports the interlocutor's intention spontaneously. • Adds explanations required in a given situation in a comprehensive manner.
4	Effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is able to give a variety of oral sentence lengths with relevant information needed in a given situation. • Provides moderate responses needed in a given situation fairly well. • Expands explanations when they are required in a given situation fairly well.
3	Somewhat effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides relevant information needed in a given situation even if it is sometimes unnecessary or abrupt. • Attempts to fulfill the interlocutor's intention in a simplistic way by using sentences or words in chunks that can be somewhat understood. • Attempts to add elaboration when it is required in a given situation although it is complete.

Table 3.6: Analytical rating scale for the FOP-Test (cont.)

Level band	Effectiveness level	The amount of information given
2	Ineffective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produces utterances related in a given situation which tend to be very short and communicate only the most essential information. • Provides fairly incomplete information. • Cannot elaborate information when it is required in a given situation.
1	Very ineffective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to give information required in a given situation. • Attempts to provide some information, but it is clearly incomplete and/or irrelevant to the given situation.
Level band	Effectiveness level	Expressions and vocabulary
5	Very effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a wide range of appropriate vocabulary and expressions that precisely enhance the interaction in a given situation. • Has a good command of idiomatic expressions related to the speech necessary in a given situation
4	Effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses an adequate range of vocabulary and expressions fairly well to express the idea related to the speech required in a given situation. • Use effective formulaic phrases or expressions that enhance communication in a given situation. • Has the ability to compensate for speech limitations in expressions and vocabulary.
3	Somewhat effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occasionally selects expressions and vocabulary to express the idea related to the speech act required in a given situation. • Fairly dependent on rehearsed or formulaic phrases with limited generative capacity.
2	Ineffective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selects vocabulary and expressions to the speech act required in a given situation that are frequently inaccurate and sometimes awkward. • Uses formulaic phrases or expressions in chunks that do not enhance the communicative interaction in a given situation.

Table 3.6: Analytical rating scale for the FOP-Test (cont.)

Level band	Effectiveness level	Expressions and vocabulary
1	Very ineffective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly shows difficulty in expressing the idea related to the speech act in a given situation because of the lack of appropriate expressions and vocabulary. Able to only use words in isolation or uncommon expressions that are ineffective to the speech act required in a given situation.
Level band	Effectiveness level	Degree of appropriateness
5	Very effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses word choices, phrases, terms of address and verb forms appropriately and effectively in response to the interlocutor's relationship and the required speech act in a given situation. Demonstrates a high awareness of listener's needs/wants by using polite linguist forms (to show the proper degree of directness and formality) to respond to the speech act in a given situation in highly effective ways.
4	Effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally uses word choices, phrases, terms of address, and verb forms appropriately and effectively to the interlocutor's relationship and the speech in a given situation. Demonstrates a good awareness of the listener's needs/wants by fairly well applying polite strategies to the speech act in a given situation.
3	Somewhat effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses word choices, phrases, terms of address, and verb forms which are somewhat appropriate to the interlocutor's relationship and the speech act in a given situation. Has some awareness of the listener's needs/wants, but has some difficulty in applying polite strategies to save listener's face in a given situation.
2	Ineffective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses word choices, phrases, terms of address and verb forms that cannot enhance the interlocutor's relationship and the speech act in a given situation. Clearly has limited awareness of the listener's needs/wants and is generally unable to select appropriate polite strategies in certain situations in order to save the listener's face.

Table 3.6: Analytical rating scale for the FOP-Test (cont.)

Level band	Effectiveness level	Degree of appropriateness
1	Very ineffective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses incorrect or inappropriate word choices, phrases, terms of address, and verb forms in his/her responses related to a given situation. • Is not aware of listener's needs/wants and is essentially unable to respond appropriately in a given situation.

3.2.3 Pragmatic questionnaire

The questionnaire was also expected to provide information about the test takers' pragmatic background knowledge in general, speech acts, and politeness in language used (See Appendix F). The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part included 15 statements concerning background knowledge of pragmatics in general. The statements were knowledge of pragmatics related to the context of hotel Front Office Department. It was a true or false questionnaire. The test takers were asked to read the statements carefully and rated whether each statement was true or false. The second part was composed of five scenarios representing five speech acts assessed in the test. There were five responses of each scenario. A five point Likert scale was given to the test takers to rate the appropriateness of each response statement under the situations. The rating ranged from "very inappropriateness" as "1" to "very appropriateness" as "5" on the scale. The order of 5 statements in each scenario was jumbled. The test takers were asked to read through the scenarios and statements and rated the statements according to their opinions whether the statements seemed to be appropriate or inappropriate. The rating scale could be made just once, not double ratings.

3.3 Data collection

After the development of the instruments and the pilot study, the main study was conducted in the first semester of the academic year 2009. For the main study, the similar procedure of the pilot study was followed. The test administrations with three universities were conducted separately. The subjects from each university were tested outside the classroom on the same day in the computer laboratory of the university. The test was administered under supervised conditions in the university

computer laboratories. The objectives and benefits of the study to the field of language pedagogy were firstly explained. To confirm that the test takers agreed to participate in the study, they were requested to sign in the consent form with an explanatory statement translated in Thai (See Appendix G). A practice session was conducted before the data collection began. The instructions for the test administration translated in Thai were also given to the test takers (See Appendix H). The administration of the FOP-Test took about one hour including the practice session to check the test takers' understanding of the steps in doing the test. The test takers' responses were recorded and saved into the Sound Recorder program. The file sound was transcribed and scored by two raters. After the FOP-Test was completed, the pragmatic questionnaires were distributed. Time for completing the questionnaires took about 30 minutes. For speeches collected, the sound files were transcribed and scored by the two raters afterwards. It is important to note that the transcriptions of the paralinguistic features were included even though they were not counted in rating (See Appendix I).

3.4 Rating for test scores

Two raters rated the responses collected from the FOP-Test. One was an experienced English language instructor who had taught English for a number of years and was interested in cultural communication of non-native English speakers (See Appendix J for the rater's qualifications). The other was the researcher herself. After rater training which took place during the pilot study, there was one point to discuss. The raters reported that they sometimes hesitated between the scale 4 and scale 3. So, the rating scales were adjusted in order to make them clearer and easy to grade. However, if hesitation still occurred, intuition was suggested to make. Besides, the reminder related to the criteria of grading was given to help the raters to keep in track of the descriptors of the scale (See Appendix K for the reminder and grading form).

The statistical method was used to investigate the reliability of the scores from the two raters. The inter-rater reliability was estimated by Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients which were calculated to indicate the correlation of the two raters' scores as shown in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7: Correlations of the two raters' scores for the FOP-Test

	N	Correlation
Correct speech act	90	.922*
Expression and vocabulary	90	.857*
Amount of information	90	.950*
Degree of appropriateness	90	.911*
Total	90	.953*

*The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3.7 presents the correlations between the two raters in rating the FOP-Test of the total scores and each component. The correlation coefficients range between .953 - .857. All are significant at .01 level. This suggests that the two raters rated the test takers' responses consistently both in the total scores and sub scores.

3.5 Data Analysis

To answer the research questions, the following data analysis procedures were employed.

1. With regard to the first research question, *"Can the Front Office Pragmatic Test (FOP-Test) differentiate the students' pragmatic ability into different levels?"*

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and ranges of scores for each component was carried out.

2. The second research question was *"Do levels of English proficiency affect the students' pragmatic ability and what are the similarities and differences of linguistic features produced by the students with different levels of English proficiency?"* F-test or the one-way ANOVA was carried out to test if the means of the three language ability groups were significantly different. In addition, a Scheffé post- hoc analysis was conducted to find the significant differences among the means of the three groups. To answer the second sub-question of this research question in comparing the similarities and the differences, content analysis was employed. The comparison was made from the typical linguistic features found from the test takers' responses. The results were analyzed by comparing the frequency of the pragmalinguistic features that were correspondingly related to the rating scale used in the FOP-Test.

Then, the major features found in both similarities and differences among the test takers' three language ability groups were described.

3. For the third question, "*What are the errors that interfere with the students' pragmatic knowledge?*", from the questionnaire, the descriptive statistics and the one-way ANOVA were computed in order to investigate the test takers' pragmatic knowledge in general and test if the means of the three language ability groups were significantly different. Then, the content analysis of the test takers' inappropriate responses were investigated and categorized based on the descriptors of the ineffectiveness along with the inappropriateness of the FOP-Test rating scale.

Summary

This chapter illustrates the research methodology of the study. The data of subjects selection was presented. The procedures employed in the development of the research instruments were described. The steps taken in data collection and data analysis were also illustrated. The findings of the study and the discussions of the results are presented in the next chapter.