

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY OF RESTAURANT WORKERS AND FOREIGN TOURIST AT BURGERKING

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ABSTRAK

This study explores the challenges and strategies in cross-cultural communication experienced by restaurant workers at Burger King Waru Sidoarjo when interacting with foreign tourists. As global tourism increases, effective communication becomes essential in service industries. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through questionnaires and observations involving 15 restaurant employees. The results show that workers often face difficulties such as understanding foreign accents, limited English vocabulary, nervousness, and cultural misunderstandings. Despite these challenges, they applied practical communication strategies including using simple English, gestures, code-switching, repetition, and clarification techniques. These strategies helped reduce miscommunication and improved service quality. The findings are analyzed using key theories such as Communicative Competence Theory, High and Low Context Cultures, Politeness Theory, and Communication Accommodation Theory. The study concludes that although workers have not received formal training, they demonstrate adaptive skills in real-life interactions. It is recommended that future training programs focus on improving both language and intercultural communication skills to better serve international customers.

Kata kunci: Cross-cultural communication, Communication strategies, service industry, English for specific purposes (ESP), intercultural communication.

ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi tantangan dan strategi dalam komunikasi lintas budaya yang dialami oleh para pekerja restoran di Burger King Waru Sidoarjo saat berinteraksi dengan wisatawan asing. Seiring dengan meningkatnya pariwisata global, komunikasi yang efektif menjadi hal yang sangat penting dalam industri pelayanan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dan observasi yang melibatkan 15 karyawan restoran. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para pekerja sering menghadapi kesulitan seperti memahami aksen asing, keterbatasan kosakata bahasa Inggris, rasa gugup, dan kesalahpahaman budaya.

Meskipun menghadapi tantangan tersebut, mereka menerapkan strategi komunikasi praktis seperti menggunakan bahasa Inggris yang sederhana, gerakan tubuh, alih kode (code-switching), pengulangan, dan teknik klarifikasi. Strategi-strategi ini membantu mengurangi

miskomunikasi dan meningkatkan kualitas pelayanan. Temuan dianalisis menggunakan teori-teori utama seperti Teori Kompetensi Komunikatif, Teori Budaya Konteks Tinggi dan Rendah, Teori Kesopanan, dan Teori Akomodasi Komunikasi.

Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun para pekerja belum menerima pelatihan formal, mereka menunjukkan keterampilan adaptif dalam interaksi nyata. Oleh karena itu, disarankan agar program pelatihan di masa depan difokuskan pada peningkatan keterampilan bahasa dan komunikasi antarbudaya untuk memberikan pelayanan yang lebih baik kepada pelanggan internasional.

Keywords: *Komunikasi lintas budaya, strategi komunikasi, industri pelayanan, Bahasa Inggris untuk tujuan khusus (ESP), komunikasi antarbudaya*

A. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, communication across cultures has become inevitable, especially in the hospitality and tourism sectors. As the number of international traveller increases each year, so does the frequency of interaction between local service workers and foreign guests. English has become the dominant lingua franca in these interactions, serving as a bridge between speakers of different first languages. In Indonesia, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas like Sidoarjo, international fast-food chains such as Burger King are not only popular among locals but also attract many foreign tourists. This environment creates a unique space where cross-cultural communication regularly occurs, yet it also reveals communication gaps that can hinder service quality.

The case of Burger King Sidoarjo, a well-known international fast-food chain in East Java, serves as a relevant and timely example. With the increasing number of foreign tourists visiting the region, local restaurant staff are required to interact with international guests who may come from different cultural backgrounds and expect different norms of communication. However, many of these employees may not have formal training in English for specific purposes or intercultural communication, which often results in communication gaps.

Restaurant workers are expected to communicate effectively, manage customer expectations, and maintain politeness—often in English, which may not be their first language. These tasks become even more complex when dealing with cultural differences, such as different ways of expressing politeness, interpreting non-verbal cues, or handling customer feedback. For example, a simple misunderstanding of a speech act like a complaint or a request can lead to a negative customer experience, even if the staff member had good intentions. Hence, cross-cultural communication is not just about speaking English—it also involves understanding cultural norms, using appropriate strategies, and showing intercultural sensitivity.

Several theoretical frameworks are useful for analyzing these issues. Hall's (1976) concept of high-context and low-context communication explains how Indonesians, who often rely on indirect communication, might struggle when interacting with Western tourists who prefer directness. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (1984) shed light on how differences in power distance or uncertainty avoidance influence communication styles. Canale and Swain's (1980) model of Communicative Competence also highlights that effective communication is not solely based on grammar, but includes strategic and sociolinguistic competence. Additionally, Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) helps to explore how restaurant workers attempt to maintain face and avoid offending customers through various politeness strategies.

From a practical perspective, several studies have observed similar phenomena. For example, Putra and Santosa (2021) found that hotel staff in Bali frequently used clarification and repetition strategies to manage communication with tourists. Riyanto (2020) revealed that pronunciation issues and vocabulary limitations often led waiters in Yogyakarta to rely on gestures and translation tools. Kusumawati and Ardi (2019) identified specific English language needs for restaurant workers, such as offering menus and handling complaints, while Nurhidayati (2018) emphasized the need for both cultural understanding and language training in hospitality settings.

This research is important for several reasons. First, it fills a gap in the existing literature by focusing specifically on restaurant workers in a fast-food setting—an area often overlooked in favor of luxury hospitality settings like hotels or resorts. Second, it highlights real-life communication practices in a practical context, contributing to applied linguistics, especially in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Third, the findings can inform training programs for hospitality workers by identifying what kinds of communication strategies are actually used and which areas need further development. Lastly, this research also supports intercultural awareness and sensitivity, which are increasingly necessary in multicultural service environments.

In short, understanding the challenges and strategies in cross-cultural communication among Burger King workers in Sidoarjo is not only academically relevant but also practically beneficial for the hospitality industry, educators, and policy makers. This study aims to offer meaningful insights into how communication can be improved between local workers and foreign guests, ensuring both effective service and positive intercultural engagement.

This study is guided by two main questions:

1. What communication challenges do restaurant workers at Burger King face when interacting with foreign tourists?
2. What communication strategies do the restaurant workers use to overcome those challenges?

This study uses theories such as Communicative Competence by Canale and Swain, Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson, Hall's High and Low Context Cultures, and Communication Accommodation Theory by Giles to understand how restaurant workers communicate with foreign tourists. These theories help explain why workers face certain challenges, like struggling with unfamiliar accents or interpreting direct speech as rude. They also show how workers develop practical strategies—such as simplifying English, using gestures, or repeating orders—to manage these situations. This research aims to highlight that even without formal training, service staff can build effective cross-cultural communication skills. The goal is to suggest ways to improve training and support, so workers can serve international guests more confidently and professionally.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cross-cultural communication in the hospitality industry refers to the interaction between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, where service providers must be able to navigate cultural differences in language use, politeness norms, and non-verbal behavior. These interactions, especially between Indonesian restaurant staff and international tourists, often face challenges due to differing communication styles. Hall's (1976) theory of high-context and low-context cultures explains that Indonesians, as members of a high-context culture, rely heavily on implicit communication, which contrasts with the explicit and direct style commonly

preferred by Western tourists from low-context cultures. These differences can result in misunderstandings during service interactions.

In the context of global tourism, English serves as a *lingua franca*, a common language that bridges communication among speakers of different first languages. Jenkins (2007) asserts that in English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF) settings, clarity and mutual understanding are more important than grammatical perfection. This notion is particularly relevant in fast-food settings like Burger King, where time constraints demand clear and efficient communication. Staff are not necessarily expected to speak perfect English but rather to communicate in a way that is intelligible and functional.

Several challenges are commonly faced in cross-cultural service communication. According to Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence, language proficiency involves not only grammatical competence but also sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Restaurant workers often struggle with limited vocabulary, difficulty understanding various foreign accents, and nervousness when speaking in English. These difficulties can lead to pragmatic failure—situations where the message may be grammatically correct but culturally inappropriate or misunderstood. Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969) further explain how cultural taboos and differing norms of politeness can complicate interactions, potentially leading to customer dissatisfaction.

To overcome such challenges, restaurant workers apply various communication strategies. These include simplifying their language by using short and easy-to-understand phrases, a strategy supported by ELF theory. Other techniques include code-switching—alternating between English and Bahasa Indonesia depending on the context or the perceived language ability of the customer. Non-verbal communication, such as using gestures, body language, and facial expressions, is another essential strategy that aligns with Hall's theory. Visual aids, like menu pictures or translation apps, can support understanding, especially when verbal communication fails. Clarification techniques, such as repeating orders or asking guests to rephrase their statements, also reflect the use of strategic competence.

Previous studies reinforce the significance of these findings. Putra and Santosa (2021) reported that hotel staff in Bali commonly used repetition and clarification as effective communication strategies. Similarly, Riyanto (2020) found that waiters in Yogyakarta relied on gestures and translation apps to address their limited English proficiency. Kusumawati and Ardi (2019) emphasized the urgent need for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs tailored to restaurant staff, particularly to address vocabulary gaps in handling menus and customer complaints. Nurhidayati (2018) highlighted the importance of combining linguistic training with intercultural awareness to promote smoother and more polite service in cross-cultural contexts.

Despite the growing body of research, there remains a notable gap in studies that focus on fast-food restaurant settings, which differ significantly from hotels or fine-dining establishments in terms of pace, formality, and interaction time. Most existing research focuses on broader or more formal hospitality environments, leaving fast-food contexts underexplored. Moreover, limited attention has been given to simultaneously analyzing both the communication challenges and strategies in one cohesive study, particularly within urban Indonesian settings like Sidoarjo. This study seeks to fill that gap by offering a comprehensive look at the real-life communicative experiences of Burger King staff in Waru, Sidoarjo. It contributes to applied linguistics, intercultural communication, and ESP by identifying practical implications for training and improving service quality in multicultural environments.

C. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the real-life experiences of restaurant workers at Burger King Waru Sidoarjo in cross-cultural communication with foreign tourists. According to Yin (2018), a case study is appropriate when the aim is to understand complex social phenomena within a specific context. The qualitative approach was chosen to allow for rich, descriptive data and to provide insight into participants' experiences in their natural working environment.

The research was conducted at the Burger King branch in Waru, Sidoarjo, an international fast-food outlet strategically located near the airport and frequently visited by both local and foreign customers. This location provided a suitable context for examining real-world communication challenges in a fast-paced service setting. The participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling, a method commonly used in qualitative research to select individuals who are considered information-rich and relevant to the research questions. A total of 15 restaurant employees, including cashiers, waitstaff, and supervisors, were involved. The criteria for selection included having worked at the location for a minimum of six months and having direct experience communicating with foreign (non-Indonesian) customers using English.

To collect data, two primary instruments were used: a questionnaire and an observation checklist. The questionnaire aimed to gather workers' self-reported experiences regarding the communication challenges they faced and the strategies they employed. It included both closed-ended items—using scales or multiple-choice formats—and open-ended questions to allow participants to elaborate in their own words. The questionnaire items were developed based on theoretical frameworks such as Communicative Competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), with a particular focus on how staff members used English and demonstrated politeness in service contexts.

In addition to the questionnaire, non-participant observations were conducted to verify how restaurant workers interacted with foreign guests during actual service. The observation focused on verbal and non-verbal behavior such as gesture use, simplified speech, and the use of communication tools like visual aids. These observations were guided by concepts from Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973) and Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969), which explain how people adjust language and perform certain communicative functions in social interactions. By using both questionnaires and observations, the study triangulated data sources to enhance the accuracy and validity of the findings.

The data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process involved reading all responses and notes carefully, assigning codes to significant ideas or recurring terms, grouping those codes into categories, and then developing overarching themes. The thematic analysis helped to identify patterns within the participants' responses, distinguishing between communication challenges and the various strategies used to manage those challenges. These themes were then interpreted in light of relevant linguistic and intercultural communication theories.

To ensure data validity, the study applied triangulation and member checking techniques. Triangulation was achieved by comparing findings from both the questionnaire and observational data to verify consistency. Member checking involved sharing the summarized findings with several participants to confirm that their views and experiences were accurately represented. These strategies follow the credibility standards outlined by Lincoln and Guba

(1985), which emphasize the importance of dependability, confirmability, and trustworthiness in qualitative research.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study based on data collected through questionnaires and observations involving 15 restaurant workers at Burger King Waru Sidoarjo. The focus is on identifying the communication challenges faced by the staff when interacting with foreign tourists and the strategies they used to overcome these challenges. The analysis is supported by relevant theories such as Communicative Competence (Canale & Swain, 1980), Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), English as a Lingua Franca (Jenkins, 2007), Hall's High and Low Context Cultures (1976), and Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973).

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the data collected through a questionnaire and an observation checklist administered to restaurant workers at Burger King Waru Sidoarjo. The findings are organized according to the research objective, focusing on the communication challenges faced by the participants when interacting with foreign tourists and the strategies they used to overcome those challenges. The results are presented and supported by evidence obtained from the questionnaire responses and observation data.

1. Communication Challenges do Restaurant Workers at Burger King Face When Interacting with Foreign Tourists

a. Difficulty Understanding Foreign Accents

Understanding foreign accents emerged as the most frequently reported communication challenge among the participants. Twelve of the fifteen restaurant workers (80%) stated in the questionnaire that they experienced difficulty understanding the pronunciation, speaking speed, and intonation of foreign tourists. This finding was also confirmed through the observation checklist, which showed that several workers frequently asked customers to repeat their orders or speak more slowly before processing transactions.

This challenge indicates that the workers' difficulty extends beyond limited vocabulary. Instead, it reflects a gap in Strategies and sociolinguistic competence, as proposed by Canale and Swain's (1980). Although most participants were familiar with basic English expressions commonly used in restaurant settings, they struggled when English was spoken with unfamiliar accents or at a natural conversational speed. This suggests that communicative competence involves not only knowing linguistic forms but also being able to interpret authentic spoken languages in real communication.

Furthermore, the observations revealed that workers often responded by using repair strategies such as saying "*Could you repeat that, please?*" or "*Please speak more slowly.*" These responses demonstrate that participants attempted to maintain communication despite comprehension difficulties. Such behavior reflects strategic competence, where speakers employ communication strategies to overcome breakdowns in interaction rather than terminating the conversation.

The findings also support the concept of English as a Lingua Franca (Jenkins, 2007). In multilingual service encounters, successful communication depends less on native-like pronunciation and more on achieving mutual intelligibility. Therefore, the main obstacle faced by the workers was not the inability to speak English, but the limited exposure to

diverse English accents commonly used by international tourists. This indicates that practical listening training using authentic international English varieties would better prepare restaurant workers for real live service interactions.

b. Lack of English Vocabulary

Limited English vocabulary was identified as another significant communication challenge experienced by the restaurant workers. The questionnaire responses revealed that most participants found it difficult to explain menu items, food ingredients, promotional offers, and payment procedures in English. The observation checklist supported this finding, as several workers were observed pausing during interactions, pointing to menu pictures, or simplifying their explanations when they could not recall the appropriate English words.

This finding suggests that the participants' communication difficulties were not caused by a lack of general English proficiency but also by insufficient English for Specific Purposes (ESP) vocabulary related to the restaurant industry. While the workers were generally able to use basic conversational English, they often struggled with specialized terms required to describe menu items or respond to customers' questions accurately. As a result, communication became less fluent and sometimes relied on non-verbal support.

From the perspective of Canale and Swain's (1980) Communicative Competence theory, this challenge reflects limitations in both grammatical competence and strategic competence. Grammatical competence refers to knowledge of vocabulary and language forms, whereas strategic competence involves the ability to compensate for linguistic limitations during communication. The observation data demonstrated that workers attempted to overcome vocabulary gaps by paraphrasing, using simple expressions, pointing to menu illustrations, or combining verbal explanations with gestures. These compensatory strategies enabled communication to continue despite their limited lexical knowledge.

The findings also support Jenkins' (2007) concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which emphasizes intelligibility rather than linguistic perfection. Rather than producing grammatically complex sentences, the workers focused on delivering messages that foreign customers could easily understand. Their use of simplified English and visual cues indicates that successful communication in fast food service settings depends more on achieving mutual understanding than on demonstrating advanced language proficiency.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of developing ESP-based language training specifically designed for restaurant employees. Providing workers with practical vocabulary related to menu descriptions, ingredients, customer requests, and promotional information would enhance their communicative competence and increase their confidence when serving international customers. Therefore, vocabulary development should be viewed not merely as language learning but as an essential component of improving service quality in multicultural hospitality contexts.

c. Lack of Confidence and Fear of Making Mistakes

Lack of confidence emerged as another important challenge influencing the workers' communication with foreign tourists. The questionnaire responses indicated that many participants felt anxious when speaking English because they were afraid of making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes. This finding was further supported by the observation checklist, which showed that several workers tended to provide very short responses, avoided initiating conversations, and relied on simple expressions such as "Yes," "Okay," or "No problem" instead of engaging in longer interactions with customers.

These findings suggest that the participants' communication difficulties were influenced not only by their linguistic ability but also by psychological factors. Although many workers possessed sufficient basic English to complete routine transactions, their fear of making mistakes often reduced their willingness to communicate. Consequently, communication became limited to essential exchanges rather than developing into more effective and interactive service encounters.

This finding can be interpreted through Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory. The workers appeared to avoid situations that could threaten either their own positive face or that of the customer. Making grammatical errors or failing to understand customers was perceived as potentially embarrassing and unprofessional. Therefore, many participants minimized verbal interaction as a strategy to reduce the risk of communication failure while maintaining polite service. Their preference for short, safe expressions demonstrates an effort to preserve harmonious interactions despite their limited confidence.

The findings are also consistent with Canale and Swain's (1980) concept of strategic competence. Rather than remaining silent, the workers adapted their communication by selecting familiar vocabulary, limiting sentence complexity, and using non-verbal cues to support meaning. These strategies enabled them to continue serving customers despite feeling uncertain about their English proficiency. Such behavior illustrates that communicative competence involves not only language knowledge but also the ability to manage communication difficulties effectively in authentic situations.

Furthermore, the observation findings indicate that confidence develops through practical communication experience rather than linguistic knowledge. Workers who had more frequent interactions with foreign tourists appeared more willing to initiate conversations and respond spontaneously, suggesting that regular exposure to intercultural communication contributes to greater confidence in using English. Therefore, workplace training that combines language practice with authentic communication scenarios could help reduce anxiety and improve employees' confidence in serving international customers.

d. Cultural Misunderstandings

Cultural misunderstandings were another significant challenge experienced by the restaurant workers when interacting with foreign tourists. The questionnaire responses indicated that many participants had difficulty interpreting customers' tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, and communication styles during service encounters. The observation checklist also revealed several situations in which workers appeared uncertain about how to respond to customers whose speaking style was more direct than they were accustomed to. In some cases, employees initially interpreted direct requests or firm intonation as signs of dissatisfaction or anger, even though the customers were simply expressing their preferences in a straightforward manner.

These findings suggest that communication barriers extended beyond language proficiency and involved differences in cultural communication norms. Although workers generally understood the literal meaning of customers' requests, they sometimes misinterpreted the communicative intention behind those messages. This indicates that successful cross-cultural communication requires not only linguistic competence but also intercultural awareness, enabling speakers to recognize that communication styles vary across cultures.

The findings can be explained through Hall's (1976) High-Context and Low-Context Culture Theory. Indonesian communication is generally characterized as high-context,

where meaning is often conveyed indirectly through shared understanding, politeness, and non-verbal cues. In contrast, many foreign tourists, particularly those from Western countries, tend to communicate in a low-context manner by expressing their opinions and requests explicitly. Consequently, when foreign customers delivered direct statements such as “*No sauce*” or “*I need this now*” some workers perceived these expressions as impolite or confrontational, although they represented culturally acceptable communication styles in the customers’ cultural backgrounds.

This finding also reflects the importance of sociolinguistic competence in Canale and Swain’s (1980) Communicative Competence Theory. Effective communication requires speakers to understand not only the linguistic content of a message but also the social and cultural conventions that shape its interpretation. The workers’ difficulties demonstrate that possessing basic English skills alone is insufficient for successful intercultural interaction if cultural expectations regarding politeness and communication styles are not fully understood.

Furthermore, the observation data suggest that workers gradually developed greater intercultural awareness through repeated interactions with foreign tourists. Employees with more experience serving international customers appeared less likely to interpret direct communication negatively and were better able to respond appropriately to different communication styles. This finding highlights that intercultural competence can be developed through practical experience but could be strengthened through structured training focusing on cultural awareness, communication styles, and customer service in multicultural environments.

e. Lack of Formal Training

The absence of formal English and cross-cultural communication training emerged as another important factor influencing the workers’ ability to communicate effectively with foreign tourists. The questionnaire responses showed that more than half of the participants had never participated in structured training related to English communication or intercultural customer service. The observation checklist further indicated that most workers relied on personal experience, self-learning, and assistance from colleagues when encountering communication difficulties during customer interactions.

These findings suggest that the workers developed their communication skills primarily through workplace experience rather than systematic instruction. Although this experiential learning enabled them to perform routine service tasks, it did not always equip them with sufficient linguistic and intercultural knowledge to manage more complex communication situations. Consequently, when faced with unfamiliar accents, unexpected customer requests, or cultural differences, workers often depended on trial-and-error strategies instead of applying established communication techniques.

This finding can be interpreted through Canale and Swain’s (1980) Communicative Competence Theory, which emphasizes that effective communication requires the integration of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. The lack of formal training may have limited the development of these competencies, particularly sociolinguistic competence, which enables speakers to use language appropriately according to social and cultural contexts. As a result, workers frequently relied on practical experience to compensate for knowledge that would normally be acquired through structured language and communication training.

The findings are also consistent with Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973). Throughout the observations, workers attempted to adjust their language by simplifying expressions, repeating information, slowing their speech, and using gestures to match the communicative needs of foreign customers. These adaptive behaviours demonstrate that employees naturally accommodated their communication despite having received no formal instruction. However, because these strategies were developed independently through repeated interactions, their effectiveness varied among workers depending on their individual experience and confidence.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that communicative competence in multicultural service settings cannot rely solely on daily work experience. While practical interaction helps employees develop adaptive communication strategies, structured training remains essential for strengthening both linguistic competence and intercultural awareness. Training programs focusing on restaurant-specific English, intercultural communication, and authentic customer-service scenarios would better prepare employees to communicate confidently and appropriately with international customers. Such professional development would not only improve communication effectiveness but also contribute to higher service quality in multicultural hospitality environments.

2. Communication Strategies Used by the Restaurant Workers to Overcome those Cross-Cultural Challenges.

Despite these challenges, the workers developed and used a variety of effective communication strategies, often based on their personal experiences and intuition.

a. Using Simple English Sentences

Using simple English sentences was the most frequently employed communication strategy among the restaurant workers. The questionnaire responses indicated that all participants preferred using short and straightforward expressions when interacting with foreign tourists. The observation checklist confirmed this finding, showing that workers consistently selected concise phrases such as “*Eat here or take away?*”, “*Cash or card?*”, and “*Please wait.*” instead of using longer or more grammatically complex sentences. This approach enabled transactions to proceed efficiently despite the workers' limited English proficiency.

The findings suggest that the workers intentionally simplified their language to ensure that their messages were easily understood by customers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Rather than attempting to produce grammatically sophisticated sentences, they prioritized clarity and effectiveness in communication. This demonstrates that successful interaction in fast-food service settings depends not on linguistic complexity but on the ability to convey essential information accurately and efficiently.

This finding strongly supports Jenkins' (2007) concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which emphasizes that the primary goal of communication among non-native English speakers is achieving mutual intelligibility rather than native-like accuracy. In the context of Burger King Waru Sidoarjo, the workers' simplified language allowed them to communicate successfully with international customers despite variations in English proficiency on both sides. Their focus on comprehensible communication reflects the practical nature of English use in multicultural service encounters.

The findings can also be interpreted through Canale and Swain's (1980) Communicative Competence Theory, particularly the concept of strategic competence. The workers consciously adapted their language by selecting familiar vocabulary, avoiding complicated

grammatical structures, and using short expressions that minimized the possibility of misunderstanding. This adaptation demonstrates their ability to compensate for linguistic limitations while maintaining effective communication. Instead of allowing limited vocabulary or grammatical knowledge to interrupt the interaction, they strategically adjusted their speech to achieve successful service communication.

Furthermore, the observation findings indicate that simplifying English became a routine communication practice developed through repeated interaction with foreign tourists. Workers who frequently served international customers appeared increasingly confident in selecting practical expressions that were widely understood regardless of the customers' cultural backgrounds. This finding highlights that communicative effectiveness in multicultural service settings is achieved through adaptive language use rather than linguistic perfection. Therefore, English training for restaurant employees should emphasize functional communication skills and authentic workplace expressions that can be immediately applied during customer interactions.

b. Using Gestures and Body Language

The use of gestures and body language emerged as one of the most effective communication strategies employed by the restaurant workers. The questionnaire responses indicated that most participants frequently relied on non-verbal communication, such as pointing to menu items, using hand movements to indicate portion sizes, and employing facial expressions to reinforce verbal messages. The observation checklist supported these findings, revealing that workers consistently combined spoken English with gestures, particularly when they noticed that customers had difficulty understanding their explanations or when they themselves were unable to express certain ideas clearly in English.

These findings suggest that non-verbal communication served as an important complementary strategy rather than merely replacing spoken language. Instead of depending exclusively on verbal explanations, the workers integrated gestures with simple English expressions to ensure that customers understood the intended message. This combination enabled communication to continue smoothly even when linguistic limitations or pronunciation differences created barriers during service interactions.

The findings can be interpreted through Hall's (1976) High-Context and Low-Context Culture Theory, which emphasizes the important role of non-verbal cues in conveying meaning, particularly in high-context cultures such as Indonesia. Although many foreign tourists came from low-context cultures that rely more heavily on explicit verbal communication, the workers' gestures functioned as universal visual cues that helped bridge differences in language proficiency and cultural communication styles. By pointing to menu pictures, demonstrating product sizes, or using facial expressions to indicate agreement or confirmation, workers were able to reinforce the meaning of their spoken messages and reduce the possibility of misunderstanding.

This communication strategy also reflects Canale and Swain's (1980) concept of strategic competence. When workers encountered vocabulary limitations or uncertainty in expressing themselves, they compensated by using gestures and other non-verbal resources to maintain communication. Rather than allowing communication breakdowns to interrupt customer service, they adapted their interaction by combining verbal and visual information. This demonstrates their ability to employ effective compensatory strategies in authentic workplace situations despite their limited linguistic resources.

Furthermore, the observation findings indicate that the use of gestures became an integral part of the workers' daily communication practices through repeated interactions with international customers. Employees appeared to recognize that visual communication often transcended linguistic differences and facilitated quicker understanding in the fast-paced restaurant environment. Therefore, the findings highlight that effective cross-cultural communication in the hospitality industry depends not only on spoken language proficiency but also on the ability to integrate verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to achieve mutual understanding and provide efficient customer service.

c. Asking for Clarification

Asking for clarification was another important communication strategy employed by the restaurant workers when interacting with foreign tourists. The questionnaire responses indicated that many participants frequently requested customers to repeat their statements, speak more slowly, or confirm their intended orders whenever they experienced difficulty understanding spoken English. The observation checklist reinforced this finding, showing that workers commonly used expressions such as *"Could you repeat that, please?"*, *"Please speak more slowly,"* or *"Do you mean this one?"* while pointing to menu items. These clarification strategies enabled workers to verify customers' requests before completing transactions.

The findings suggest that asking for clarification was not merely a response to communication problems but a deliberate strategy for maintaining mutual understanding during service interactions. Instead of making assumptions about customers' requests, the workers actively sought confirmation to ensure that the information they received was accurate. This approach reduced the likelihood of ordering mistakes, minimized misunderstandings, and helped maintain the quality of customer service despite linguistic challenges.

This finding can be interpreted through Canale and Swain's (1980) Communicative Competence Theory, particularly the concept of strategic competence. Strategic competence involves the ability to overcome communication difficulties by employing repair strategies that sustain interaction. The workers demonstrated this competence by requesting repetition, slowing the pace of conversation, and confirming customers' intentions whenever comprehension problems occurred. Rather than allowing communication breakdowns to interrupt the interaction, they actively used clarification techniques to negotiate meaning and ensure successful communication.

The findings are also consistent with Jenkins' (2007) concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which emphasizes that effective communication depends on achieving mutual intelligibility rather than producing linguistically perfect speech. In multilingual service encounters, both speakers share responsibility for reaching understanding. The workers' willingness to ask for clarification illustrates this collaborative process, as communication was achieved through continuous negotiation of meaning between restaurant staff and foreign customers rather than through one-sided language proficiency.

Furthermore, the observation data indicate that clarification became a routine communication practice in the restaurant's daily operations. Workers who regularly interacted with foreign tourists appeared comfortable requesting repetition or confirmation without hesitation, recognizing that verifying information was preferable to risking misunderstandings that could affect customer satisfaction. These findings highlight that effective cross-cultural communication requires active interaction and negotiation rather

than passive comprehension. Therefore, clarification strategies should be incorporated into workplace English training, enabling restaurant employees to communicate more confidently and accurately in multicultural service environments.

d. Code-Switching

Code-switching was another communication strategy employed by the restaurant workers when interacting with foreign tourists, although it was used less frequently than other strategies. The questionnaire responses indicated that several participants alternated between English and Bahasa Indonesia during service encounters, particularly when they perceived that foreign customers understood some Indonesian expressions or when they encountered difficulty expressing themselves in English. The observation checklist supported this finding, showing that workers occasionally combined English and Indonesian words or phrases while explaining menu items, confirming orders, or responding to customers' requests.

The findings suggest that code-switching was used as an adaptive communication strategy rather than as evidence of inadequate English proficiency. Instead of abandoning communication when they encountered linguistic limitations, the workers utilized all available language resources to maintain the interaction and facilitate understanding. In situations where verbal explanations in English were insufficient, inserting familiar Indonesian expressions or combining them with gestures helped workers continue the conversation and complete the service process effectively.

This finding can be interpreted through Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973), which explains that speakers naturally adjust their communication styles to reduce social distance and achieve mutual understanding. The workers demonstrated accommodative behaviour by modifying their language according to customers' perceived linguistic abilities and the communicative context. Their use of code-switching reflects an effort to negotiate meaning and adapt to real communication needs rather than rigidly adhering to one language throughout the interaction.

The findings are also consistent with Canale and Swain's (1980) concept of strategic competence. When workers experienced lexical gaps or uncertainty in expressing particular ideas, they compensated by alternating between English and Bahasa Indonesia to ensure that essential information was successfully conveyed. This illustrates that communicative competence involves flexibility and problem-solving abilities in authentic communication situations rather than relying solely on complete mastery of the target language.

Furthermore, the observation findings indicate that code-switching was employed selectively depending on the characteristics of the interaction. Workers appeared more likely to switch languages when communicating with customers who demonstrated some understanding of Indonesian or when communication difficulties threatened to interrupt the service process. This suggests that code-switching was not a random habit but a purposeful communication strategy aimed at maintaining interaction and ensuring customer satisfaction. Therefore, the findings highlight that multilingual resources can serve as valuable communication tools in multicultural hospitality settings when used appropriately to support mutual understanding.

e. Repeating and Confirming Orders

Repeating and confirming customers' orders was another important communication strategy used by the restaurant workers during interactions with foreign tourists. The questionnaire responses indicated that many participants intentionally repeated customers'

orders before completing transactions to verify that the information had been understood correctly. This finding was supported by the observation checklist, which showed that workers frequently restated order details using expressions such as “*One Whopper, no cheese, and one Coke, correct?*” or “*So, take away, right?*” before processing the order. This practice helped ensure that both the worker and the customer shared the same understanding of the requested items.

The findings suggest that repeating and confirming orders functioned as a preventive communication strategy rather than simply a routine service procedure. Instead of assuming that they had interpreted customers' requests correctly, the workers actively verified important information to minimize misunderstandings. This approach was particularly valuable when customers spoke with unfamiliar accents, used rapid speech, or requested menu modifications that could easily be misunderstood during busy service periods.

This finding can be interpreted through Canale and Swain's (1980) concept of strategic competence, which emphasizes the ability to employ communication strategies that overcome potential breakdowns in interaction. By repeating and confirming order details, the workers demonstrated their ability to monitor communication continuously and repair possible misunderstandings before they resulted in service errors. This behaviour illustrates that effective communicative competence involves not only conveying information but also ensuring that the intended message has been accurately understood by both speakers.

The findings are also consistent with Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, particularly the maxim of quality and the maxim of manner. The workers' efforts to confirm customers' requests reflected a shared responsibility for achieving accurate and efficient communication. Rather than relying on assumptions, they encouraged mutual verification to ensure that the information exchanged was clear, accurate, and relevant. This cooperative process reduced the likelihood of incorrect orders while strengthening customers' confidence in the service provided.

Furthermore, the observation findings indicate that repeating and confirming orders became a habitual communication practice among experienced workers, especially when serving international customers. Employees recognized that spending a few extra seconds confirming an order was more effective than correcting mistakes after the food had been prepared. Therefore, the findings highlight that confirmation strategies play an essential role in maintaining communication accuracy, improving service efficiency, and enhancing customer satisfaction in multicultural restaurant settings. These results suggest that order-confirmation techniques should be incorporated into English communication training for restaurant employees as an effective strategy for preventing communication breakdowns.

f. Use of Translation Apps

The use of translation applications was the least frequently reported communication strategy among the restaurant workers. The questionnaire responses indicated that only a small number of participants used digital translation tools, such as Google Translate, when communicating with foreign tourists. The observation checklist supported this finding, as translation applications were rarely used during actual customer interactions. Instead, workers generally relied on simple English, gestures, repetition, and clarification to resolve communication difficulties before considering technological assistance.

These findings suggest that translation applications were perceived as a supplementary rather than a primary communication resource. The fast-paced nature of restaurant service required workers to respond quickly to customers' requests, leaving limited time to access

digital tools during transactions. Consequently, participants appeared to prefer communication strategies that allowed immediate interaction and maintained the natural flow of conversation without interrupting the service process.

This finding can be interpreted through Canale and Swain's (1980) Communicative Competence Theory, particularly the concept of strategic competence. Rather than depending on external technological support, the workers demonstrated their ability to employ internal communication strategies such as simplifying language, asking for clarification, confirming orders, and using gestures to compensate for linguistic limitations. These adaptive behaviours indicate that the participants relied primarily on their own communicative resources to negotiate meaning and complete service interactions successfully.

The findings are also consistent with Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973). Throughout the observations, workers appeared to accommodate customers by modifying their speech, adjusting their communication style, and combining verbal and non-verbal strategies according to the situation. These direct interpersonal adjustments enabled communication to remain efficient without requiring technological mediation. In this context, face-to-face accommodation proved to be a more practical strategy than using translation applications, particularly during busy operating hours when speed and responsiveness were essential.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the limited use of translation applications should not be interpreted as resistance to technology but rather as evidence of the practical demands of restaurant service. Workers prioritized communication strategies that could be implemented immediately while maintaining customer engagement and service efficiency. Nevertheless, translation applications may still serve as valuable support tools in more complex communication situations, such as explaining unfamiliar menu items, addressing special dietary requests, or communicating with customers who share no common language with the staff. Therefore, digital translation tools should be viewed as complementary resources that support, rather than replace, workers' communicative competence in multicultural hospitality settings.

DISCUSSION

1. Communication Challenges and Theoretical Connections

The communication challenges faced by the restaurant workers in this study are closely linked to the theoretical framework of communicative competence. According to Canale and Swain's (1980) theory, successful communication requires grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. The findings revealed that most workers at Burger King Waru Sidoarjo lacked grammatical and discourse competence, as shown by their limited vocabulary and difficulty understanding foreign accents. This deficiency hindered their ability to construct accurate sentences and follow the flow of conversation, especially when customers spoke quickly or used unfamiliar pronunciation. Additionally, many workers experienced anxiety and nervousness, often avoiding full conversations out of fear of making mistakes. These emotional factors relate to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which explains how language learning and use can be blocked by fear, embarrassment, or low confidence. Furthermore, the workers frequently encountered cultural misunderstandings, such as misinterpreting a tourist's direct tone as rudeness.

This aligns with Hall's (1976) concept of high-context and low-context communication. Indonesian culture, as a high-context culture, values politeness and indirectness, while many foreign tourists from low-context cultures communicate directly and explicitly. These differences often led to confusion and discomfort among staff. In addition, the lack of formal training in English and cross-cultural communication among the workers represents a significant institutional gap. Without structured learning, most staff relied on trial and error or peer support to develop their language abilities. This situation highlights the need for practical workplace-based language and cultural training to improve both linguistic and intercultural competence in service settings.

2. Communication Strategies and Theoretical Connections

Despite the challenges, the Burger King staff demonstrated the ability to adapt and use various communication strategies effectively, many of which are supported by communication theories. One of the most widely used strategies was simplifying English. Workers used short, clear phrases such as "Eat here or take away?" instead of more complex sentences. This approach supports the principles of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), where clarity and mutual understanding are prioritized over grammatical perfection. This strategy also reflects the use of strategic competence, as defined by Canale and Swain (1980), where speakers employ techniques like paraphrasing, repetition, and clarification to maintain communication. Another effective strategy observed was the use of gestures and body language, which helped workers convey meaning when words were insufficient.

This practice aligns with Hall's (1976) theory that non-verbal cues are central to high-context communication cultures like Indonesia. Workers also frequently asked tourists to repeat or slow down their speech, demonstrating their use of clarification and repair strategies, which are important elements of strategic competence. In some cases, workers used code-switching, mixing Bahasa Indonesia with English to help express ideas more clearly. This strategy is well explained by Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (1973), which suggests that speakers adjust their language to create understanding and reduce social distance.

In addition, repeating orders for confirmation was commonly used to prevent misunderstandings and ensure accuracy. This behaviour relates to Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, which emphasizes the importance of both parties working together to ensure effective communication. Lastly, although translation apps were rarely used, they represent a potential support tool for future improvement. Overall, the strategies used by Burger King staff reflect strong adaptive behaviour and practical communication skills, despite their limited formal training, and align well with key linguistic and intercultural communication theories.

E. CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that communication competence in this context is not determined by high-level English proficiency, but rather by the ability to adapt, simplify, and use creative strategies to achieve mutual understanding. The restaurant workers' use of simplification, clarification, and non-verbal cues reflects strong elements of strategic competence, even in the absence of formal training. Their flexibility in code-switching and their sensitivity to guest reactions show a level of sociolinguistic awareness essential in multicultural settings.

These practical strategies highlight the value of real-world communicative competence over textbook grammar. While the workers did face anxiety and gaps in linguistic knowledge, their willingness to engage, ask for clarification, and use non-verbal cues contributed to effective service delivery. The study also emphasizes the need for more targeted English for

Specific Purposes (ESP) training programs that incorporate cultural awareness, practical language skills, and real scenarios typical in fast-food service settings.

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