

Language Roles in Internal and External Communication in the Thai Tourism Industry Competitiveness

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Abstract: Language plays important roles in both internal and external communications in the competitiveness of the tourism industry. Communication involves giving, getting, and highlighting information. Communication also enhances understanding and establishing harmonious relationships among people. Effective communication involves nine elements and it is influenced by a multitude of factors, including the use of language by employees, employee involvement and commitment and technological change. Language can be a means in helping maintain competitiveness. The usage of clear and appropriate language and vocabulary-building helps generating effective communication leading to organizational change. Observation and interview are ways of determining the degree of effectiveness of internal and external communications.

Keywords: language roles; communication; tourism industry; competitiveness; assessment communication

JEL Classification: D83; L83; M12

1. Introduction

In the uncertain economic time and political crisis, effective internal and external communication is very important for smooth running of business in tourism industry. The success, the growth of individual executives and professionals and the ability in competitiveness are the aims in internal and external communication (Katz, 2005) (Zamora, n. d.). Internal and external communication build network

(Butler, 2008), establish a reputation for an organization (King, 2008), highlight the positiveness of the tourism industry (Carassalini & Anderson, n. d.), create competence, expand opportunities (Reimers, 2009), and maintain (Parrington, 2009) competitiveness. The internal and external communication can be in different forms and objectives (Tang *et al.*, 2009) such as in forms of talking to someone over the phone, chatting online, and sending message through e-mail, or writing letters to someone. Effective internal and external communication is a matter of discipline and day-to-day conversations (Vass, 2007). The lack of effective internal and external communication skills causes problems and distortion that lead to miscommunication and it creates negative results.

This article, the authors set out to review the definitions of communication, to analyse the differences of internal and external communication, the elements of the communication process, the factors of internal and external communication and the relevance of language to internal and external communication. Finally, the authors state how to assess the internal and external communication through the language which will enhance ability in competitiveness in Thai tourism industry.

2. What is Communication?

The term communication involves giving, getting, and highlighting information (Grunig *et al.*, 1992). It also includes exchanging of ideas, information, and opinions between two or more people (Gudykunst, 2004). Communication is a process of talking to someone, letting someone know how we feel, having comments on what people say or write (Welch *et al.*, 2001; Taylor, 2006). Oncken III (1998) defined communication as the chain of understanding that integrates an organization from top to bottom, from bottom to top and from side to side. However, he emphasized that the chains of understanding are not easy to design or maintain. Whatever it is, language plays an important role in modern communication organization (Melewar *et al.*, 2006). Effective communication enhances understanding (MacPherson, 1997). Particularly, most significant functions of communication are to transmit information and to interpret it. (Gröf, 2001)

Communication can be identified into types such as the mass communication, the wireless communications, the written communication, the spoken communication and the nonverbal communication. The mass communication means the ways of passing information to a large number of people. The wireless communication is

the communication which does not involve passing signals through electrical or telephone wires, for example mobile phones (Summers, 2000). The written communication certainly involves writing. The spoken communication involves speakers and senders (Richards, 1995). Nonverbal communication is related to communication through gestures, eye and body language (Usunier, 1996). Under these types are the modes of communication. These include thinking, action, observation, speaking, listening, writing and reading. However, it is emphasized that communication for tourism industry *vis-à-vis* other industries or organizations, involves internal and external communication.

3. Elements in the Communication Process

People who work in tourism industry should understand the fundamental elements of effective communications. Kotler and Keller (2009, pp. 514-516) pointed out elements of the communication process in Figure 1.

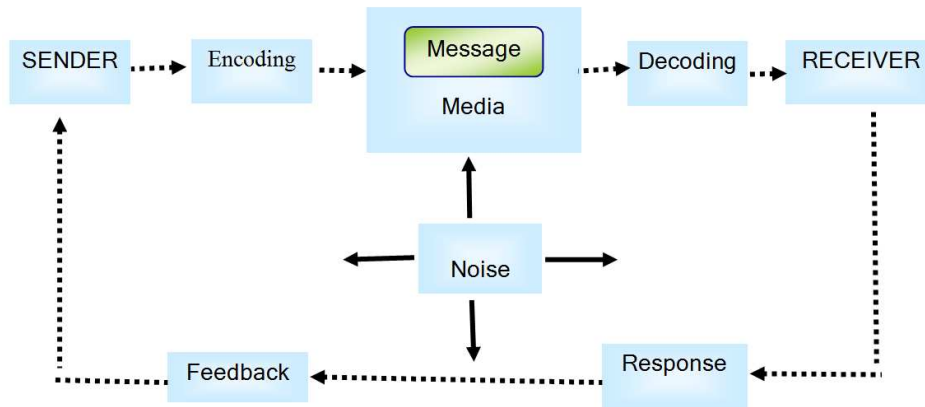


Figure 1. Elements in the Communication Process

Source: Kotler, P. & Keller, K. L. (2009). Marketing Management. 13th Edition. London: Pearson Prentice-Hall, p. 514.

There are nine elements. Two are the major parties in a communication – *sender* and *receiver*, the next two represent the major representation tools – *message* and *media*, four represent major communication functions – *encoding*, *decoding*, *response*, and *feedback*. The last element in the system is *noise* (random and completing that may interfere with the intended communication). The model emphasizes the key factors in effective communication. Sender must know what audiences they want to reach and what responses they want to get. They must encode their messages so the target audience can decode them. They must transmit the message through *media* that reach the target audience and develop *feedback* channels to monitor the responses. The more the sender's field of experience overlaps that of the receiver, the more effective the message is likely to be. Note that selective attention, distortion, and retention processes may be operating during communication.

4. Differences of Internal and External Communication

Internal communication is the first step in a successful (Vass, 2007) competitiveness. It is the first frontier in the battle for the tourists or customers (Chong, 2007). Internal and external communication is the key to get all people together and then inspiring them to deliver the best (King, 2008), and to encourage employees to be active (Buck and Likely, 2009). It has enabled mankind to progress and become advanced organization (Zamora, n. d.). Internal communication is when tourism people need to talk to each other to make others know what they want or what they need. They sometimes want to show their thoughts and to listen to others (Chong, 2007).

Internal communication includes building up the ideas of tourism organization and setting up certain guidelines to follow. It can be a way in building a good relationship between employees inside the tourism organization (Chong, 2007). Actually, internal communication involves all activities of communication that exists within tourism organization. It can be oral, written, face-to-face, virtual, or in groups. Internal communication helps to establish formal roles and responsibilities for employees and it leads to the success of an organization. Figure 2 explains the internal communication.

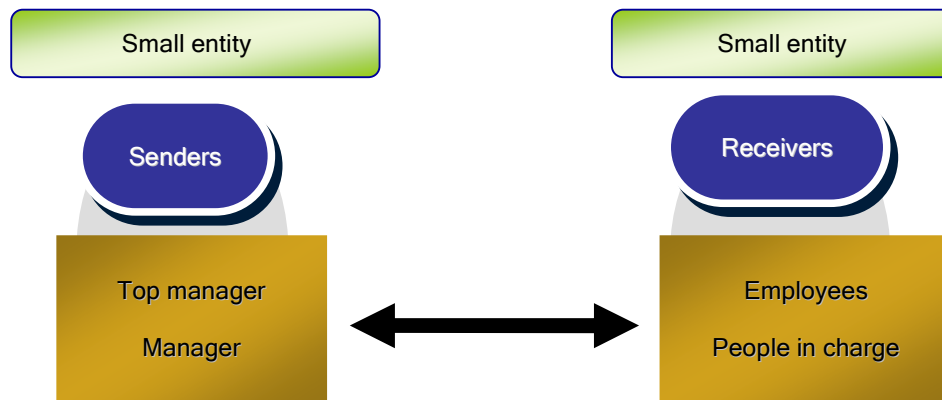


Figure 2. Internal Communication

Source: Adapted from Kameda, N. (2005). 'A Research Paradigm for International Business Communication', from Corporate Communications International Journal, 10 (2), p. 170.

Language can be a means to help tourism people in discussing and to create understanding between communicators. Today's internal communication is focused on challenging and stimulating employees, managing change, and gaining employees engagement and commitment, (Tourish & Hargie, 1998) (Smith & Mounter, 2005) (Chalmers, 2008), and it required more to develop skills and ability. Understanding people in organizations and know how to influence them in terms of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours is important for internal communication. Language plays an important role. Importantly, if nobody communicates within an organization, there might be a problem. The lack of communication will cause working process problems.

External communication is when the people involve speaking face-to-face with the tourists or customers (Samovar & Porter, 2004), marketing tourism products and services, advertising, and working on things like public relations (King, 2008), including businesses dealings with other organizations. It aims at obtaining and transferring information from the environment (Grôf, 2001). Figure 3 explains external communication.

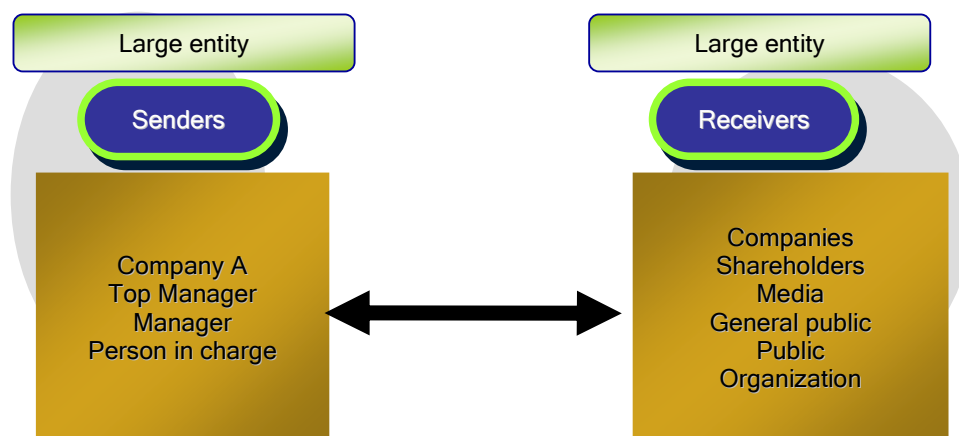


Figure 3. External Communication

Source: Adapted from Kameda, N. (2005). 'A Research Paradigm for International Business Communication', from Corporate Communications International Journal, 10 (2), p. 170.

External communication can also be the written message like some quotes from the important person or legendary person, or advertising billboard that can tell some information about the tourism organization or tourism products. The customers will perceive about the company (Stewart et al., 2005). This shows how the importance of the language roles in external communication can gain profits for tourism organizations. Organizations will get more tourists or customers from the messages and actions that express what the organization truly is. It helps in telling many things to tourists or customers and community. From this point of view, just as internal communication carries information up, down, and across the organizations, the external one carries it into and out of the organization (Thill & Bovee, 2005), language plays important role as a means in communication. Andersen and Rasmussen (2002) referred to two-key-concept definitions: Corporate Communication (Fox, 2006) (Melnik, 2006) and Functional Communication.

Corporate Communication is the communicational which takes place inside the organization. Employees are important (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008). In other words, this kind of communication happens inside divisions, between divisions, between headquarter and subsidiary. Corporate communication also covers an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication. Corporate communication is made up of

three types (Melewar *et al.*, 2006): management, marketing and organizational. Management communication refers to how employers convey information to their employees. Marketing communication is related to spending budget, supporting sales of particular goods or services. Organizational communication is related to sending and receiving messages that create and a system of consciously coordinated activities or forces of two or more people (Tompkins, 1984) (Allen *et al.*, 1996) (Salwen & Stacks, 1996).

Functional Communication is the ability to receive or to convey a message, regardless of the mode, to communicate effectively and independently in a given environment (Miller, 2006). Indeed, effective internal and external communication is important for tourism industry in competitiveness as it affects the ability of strategic managers to engage employees and achieve objectives (Welch & Jackson, 2007). In fact, the roles of language in internal communication and external communication will support each other. If the internal communication works well, the external communication will work effectively too (Grunig 1992). For tourism industry competitiveness, language plays significant role for both internal and external communication.

5. Factors of Internal and External Communication

Effective internal and external communications are influenced by multitude of factors including the use of language (Andersen & Rasmussen, 2002) of employees, the employees' involvement and commitment and technological change (Chalmers, 2008).

The use of language can create both success and failure to tourism organization (Janssens *at al.*, 2004). The employees who are skilful in the language can communicate to achieve the aim of the organization. Language is an important factor in the categorization process (Usunier, 1996) (Lauring, 2007). However, Lauring (2007) claimed that language is ignored by many corporations. In contrast, lacking of skills in language may create negative results which will lead to the failure in communication.

The second factor is the employees' involvement and commitment. This means that the success of internal and external communication depends on the employees' involvement and commitment (Therkelsen & Fiebich, 2003). So, it is important

that tourism organization needs to improve employees' involvement and commitment in order to drive force the business and gain better competitiveness.

Another factor is related to technological change (Zaidman, 2008) (Whelan, 2009). Internal communication where the intranet is available as an example, it increases speed and it facilitates communication. Nevertheless, effective communication is impossible without improving employees' skills and knowledge with the technology (Chalmers, 2008).

Therefore, to fulfil effective internal and external communication, people who work in tourism industry need to understand and have some knowledge of these factors. Employers need to be self-motivated, creative and able to handle all complexity and ambiguity tasks effectively, particularly, by using language as a tool.

6. Relevance of Language for Internal and External Communication

Steinberg (2007) points out that the effectiveness of communication is possible with using clear language, appropriate language and vocabulary building.

Clear language – Using clear language results in clear understanding between people. We need to use more specific and precise words. Using precise words helps to create a meaning in the minds of the others that is exactly the meaning we intend and helps to make meaning clearer. Take the word 'said' as an example. Notice the changes in meaning when we substitute another word such as 'stated', 'indicated', 'recommended', 'answered', 'requested', 'shouted'. Each word invokes a slightly different, but more precise meaning, in the mind of the listener or reader.

Appropriate language – Appropriateness of the language for communication is suitable for the people we want to communicate. Internal and external communication with appropriate words, Steinberg (2007) suggested that consideration of the demographic factors is necessary. This is related to the age, educational level, background, gender and interests.

Vocabulary building – The clarity and the appropriateness of language used for both internal and external communication can be improved by enhancing vocabulary. It is true that the more vocabulary we have at our command, the more precisely we will be able to express ourselves.

Every time we communicate with others, it is possible that misunderstanding can occur. Still, interact with others always helps us improve communication skills.

Language, especially English is a tool for facilitating communication (Dhir, 2005) (Durkin, 2009), transferring knowledge (Freely & Haring, 2003) and skills in various situations for both internal and external communication. Proficiency in the language is required for people who work in tourism industry as a global business environment. Deficiency in the language will create some barriers for both internal and external communication. This will also result in barrier for organizational development and ability in competitiveness. Consequently, the understanding of the role of language in communication is of great importance, and it should be focused (Dhir & Goke-Pariola, 2002) (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999) (Lauring, 2007), as Chomsky (1992) viewed language as internalized set for communication.

7. Assessment Internal and External Communication

In order to determine people's skills in internal and external communication, Buck and Likely (2009) suggested dividing up the people into segments, whereas Gibson (n. d.) recommended talking with tourists or customers. Observations and interview also help to get information for determining the internal and external communication (Lauring, 2007).

8. Conclusion

Internal and external communications are crucial in the Thai tourism industry competitiveness. Language plays an important role as a means and a source of power (Lauring, 2007) in communication, so employers, employees and tourists or customers in today's Thai tourism industry must learn to strategically adapt the communication styles so as to achieve and sustain competitive advantage. Regarding the role of language in communication, in this article, the authors set out to review the definitions of communication, to analyse the differences of internal and external communication, the elements of the communication process, the factors of internal and external communication and the relevance of language to internal and external communication. Finally, the authors state how to assess the internal and external communication through the language which will enhance ability in competitiveness in Thai tourism industry.

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