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Analysing the English Communication Needs of Service Technicians in the Pest Control Industry

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the English language needs of service technicians in the pest control industry. The paper aims to provide a detailed understanding of the communication requirements in the workplace in order to develop a language course appropriate for their needs. In the pest control industry, service technicians are known to be the first point of contact with the customers. The nature of their job involves servicing customers' premises either weekly, bi-weekly or monthly. This calls for interaction with customers, which requires the ability to perform communicative functions to address customer inquiries and handle their requests and complaints. This paper utilises a needs analysis questionnaire for data collection. The questionnaire was administered to 20 service technicians in the Klang Valley. The result indicates the service technicians are often involved in communication activities: introduction; describing services, processes and people; telephone communication; responding to complaints and; giving suggestions and providing advice that relates to pest control. The findings also reveal that the essential skills that pest control service technicians need for efficient job performance are listening and speaking skills; thus, any course to enhance English language proficiency among this group of service providers should centre on these two skills.

Keywords: Communication, curriculum design, needs analysis, pest control industry, service technician

INTRODUCTION

The use of the English language is significantly important for workplace communication, especially for a business entity. The English language is used for business purposes (Riemer, 2002) such as

negotiating, presenting and conferencing as well as for daily operations among employees and between employees and employers (Warschauer, 2000). This is very true in Malaysia, where communication skills in the English language are recognised as fundamental and necessary skills in the workplace environment, given that the country is culturally and linguistically plural (Moslehifar & Ibrahim, 2012). English serves as a common language among Malay, Indian and Chinese citizens (among others). The frequency of usage however, varies among employees depending on their work type. The English language is especially utilised by professionals and white-collar executives e.g. doctors, engineers, lawyers and management staff (Kassim & Ali, 2010). This is because it is mainly used for spoken and written forms of communication. It is utilised for communicating with clients, superiors, peers and subordinates. In the pest control industry, the English language is also acknowledged as an important function of communication for service personnel although they may not be performing professional jobs as do doctors, lawyers, and engineers.

There is little in the extant literature regarding reasons that service technicians should communicate in English language. The main reason is the nature of their work. Their primary job function is to control and eliminate pests at customers' premises using tools, machines and chemicals. Because of this, the need for communicating in the English language seems to be less important. However, the customers think

otherwise. Service technicians mainly operate in the field, which means they are at customer's premises, which include homes, restaurants, shops, offices, factories and warehouses, among other environments. Service technicians are the first point of contact with customers, who often have many inquiries and requests. In addition, they may need to seek advice, give feedback or even make complaints when results are not favourable or when matters arise. Thus, service technicians would need to be ready to interact with customers and attend to their needs. Difficulty in speaking English is a major hindrance to customer care and pest control personnel. If they are not able to communicate with customers, they might have to forward queries to colleagues at the office to handle.

In their work, situations may arise when service technicians may not have understood customers' utterances because of their low level of proficiency. In other words, service technicians may find it hard to comprehend customers' speech due to their poor proficiency of the English language. Many times, prior to servicing, service technicians are required to advise customers on their safety and welfare. For example, before fogging is carried out, service technicians are required to advise customers to cover all perishable food, to place children in another room and to put away clothes so that during fogging, they will not be stained by the chemicals used, which can be harmful and is also unhygienic. With limited linguistic competence, in such situations, service technicians will only

be able to utter certain common words and will often resort to code switching, using Bahasa Malaysia instead, during interaction. Although service technicians may understand customers' utterances when they use terminology related to pest control and service, they will not be able to understand queries or statements worded differently and they would not be able to respond even in simple sentences due to poor command of the English language. Service technicians will need to interact with people from different industries such as food and beverage, hotels, logistics, chain convenience stores and supermarkets and hypermarkets, just to mention five, and therefore, will need to acquire a wider vocabulary. This paper aims to provide a detailed understanding of communication requirements for service technicians to develop a language course that would address their needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies have identified the English language as a communication tool that is an essential instrument for success in the workplace (Hynes & Bhatia, 1966; Krizan, Merrier, & Jones, 2002; Sarudin, Zainab, Zubairi, Tunku Ahmad, & Nordin, 2013). Advanced technology has made it possible for more efficient communication, in which the English language continues to play a leading role because it is widely used as the primary means of communication for delivering messages efficiently (Sarudin et al., 2013). This is evident as business leaders spend a significant amount of time communicating,

preparing and presenting reports, writing emails and sending messages that enable them to showcase their skills, and this will eventually land them higher salaries (Fisher, 1999; Krizan et al., 2002; Ober, 2001). The ability to communicate well in the English language can help employees in their professional growth and career advancement (Mehta & Mehta, 2010). Besides this, communicative competence in the English language will also assist them in performing the various tasks of their daily operations competently (Stivers, Campbell, & Hermanson, 2000). Managers especially, will find success slow in coming if they lack efficient communication skills (Wilson, 2005) and their command of English is weak. Managers with good communication skills in English are in demand now, and this demand will continue to rise in the future (Moslehifar & Ibrahim, 2012). Indeed, most job advertisements for management positions highlight proficiency in the English language as a requirement for selection (Moslehifar & Ibrahim, 2012).

In the context of job placement, Stevens (2005) found that employers preferred to hire employees with good communication skills. His finding reveals that candidates with low-proficiency English will face difficulty in getting employment because employers have certain expectations of candidates when it comes to English language proficiency. One of the reasons employers prefer employees with high-proficiency English is that such employers will be able to solve difficult tasks in the workplace (Blair & Jeanson, 1995). Apart from that, competency gives

an employer confidence in employees as the employer can rest assured that employees will be able to fulfil their job function. Therefore, communicating in the English language seems to play an important role in recruitment.

'Language Needs' for Specific People in the Industry

In Malaysia, formal training in English is given to students at primary, secondary and undergraduate levels. However, despite all this training, there seems to be a gap in workers' ability to communicate well in English at the workplace (Smith, 2000). Employers have indeed noticed this gap and recognise that English language needs vary between employees in a workplace, thus additional training should be provided that is customised for the specific job (Kaewpet, 2009; Kassim & Ali, 2010).

The literature shows that in the workplace context, the most crucial communication skill is speaking (Kaewpet, 2009; Kassim & Ali, 2010). This is the main skill called for in meetings, discussions and events (Bhattacharyya, Nordin, & Salleh, 2009). Bhattacharyya et al. (2009) analysed the English language needs of the engineering sector and found that internship students were reporting that the most important factor for success was the ability to participate in meetings and team discussions. This internship experience suggests that good communication skills can lead to promotion and career enhancement. Similarly, Mohamed, Radzuan, Kassim and Ali (2014) found that professional engineers

need to equip themselves with appropriate communication skills that are applicable to their workplace needs. Their findings revealed that professional engineers are often highly involved in communicative events, such as teleconferencing, networking, demonstrating, giving instructions, presentations and engaging in discussion on work-related matters. Their data also revealed the most feedback a professional engineer should possess is convincing skill (Kassim & Ali, 2010). This is because professional engineers are regularly involved in discussions, especially when consultants are making presentations to clients, as these professional engineers can assist consultants in selling ideas to their clients. Kassim and Ali suggested that higher learning institutions should prepare and equip undergraduate engineers in this particular skill to an adequate level to function efficiently in their future workplace.

Sarjit and Hua (2006) investigated the need for the use of English in communication in Information Technology (IT). Sarjit and Hua studied IT graduates and found that the most important tasks of IT employees involved participation in telephone conversations, meetings and social interaction. Telephone conversations received a high rating among the graduates who were involved in the study as it is a quick way to provide troubleshooting or clarification services compared with face-to-face interaction. These findings were supported by Kassim and Ali (2010), who affirmed the need for English among IT

employees as English was used widely in interaction, presentations and interviewing.

Crosling and Ward (2002) studied workplace communication in the business sector as preparation for business graduates. They found that employees in the business environment regularly communicate internally within their own department. These employees frequently participate in meetings, discuss work-related issues and engage in networking. However, this does not fully apply to human resource officers. According to Moslehifar and Ibrahim (2012), feedback from the human resources development trainees and human resource officers stated that their work involved extensive internal and external communication. Human resources officers, for instance, are often needed to speak English fluently at company meetings and discussions and while making presentations and with the public as well as for recruitment (Kassim & Ali, 2010).

Another sector that relies heavily on communication in the English language is the hospitality industry (Chan, 1998). The hospitality industry covers a broad range of services for the public including accommodation, food and beverage, transportation and tourism, to mention only a few. These sub-sectors require employees to communicate in English as it caters for both domestic and foreign guests. Prachanant (2012) analysed the need for English language competency in the tourism industry in Thailand, and found that the speaking skill was the most important of the basic four language skills

(speaking, listening, reading and writing) for work purposes in this industry. In addition, the study found that tourism employees had difficulty comprehending the accent of foreigners, were poor in grammar, had limited vocabulary and often made inappropriate utterances. Tourism industry employees need to communicate well in the English language as they are often required to provide additional information, assistance and services. A study of English communication needs was conducted by Cornwall and Srilapung (2012) among Thai senior flight attendants; the study found that the flight attendants had difficulty in understanding passengers' accent, had limited and inappropriate vocabulary and constructed sentences that seemed to be impolite. Both authors emphasised that a senior flight attendant should have experience in handling passengers in a professional manner, including being polite when speaking. The study also suggested that emphasis on pronunciation skills, intonation and word phrases would enhance Thai senior flight attendants' communication skills.

Wide-Angled vs Narrow-Angled Approach

Needs analysis has long been established as a method and is widely used as a tool in the first stages of developing a language module, in this case for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Hyland, 2006). Because language is constantly evolving and being redefined, a language course can be facilitated using either the wide-angled or the narrow-angled

approach (Flowerdew, 2013). According to Flowerdew, the wide-angled approach refers to a language course that encompasses different sub-fields. For example, Business English, a wide course that comprises the teaching of business writing and business communication, can be used for marketing employees, finance employees and sales employees. Tourism English (Prachanant, 2012) is another example of the wide-angled approach because it covers frontliners, such as taxi drivers, front desk receptionists and theme park operators. The narrow-angled approach, however, narrows down the target audience to a specific profession e.g. English for Air-Traffic Controllers (Paramasivam, 2013), English for Front Liners in the Rail Industry (Shahruddin, Ali, & Rafik-Galea, 2013) or English for Airport Ground Staff (Cutting, 2013), and considers the present situation analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The present situation analysis helps to identify learners' 'lacks' and 'wants' in acquiring the language that would be useful for them in their workplace. In the context of this study, analysing the 'lacks' and 'wants' of service technicians in the pest control industry can contribute towards our current understanding of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), a subfield of ESP.

Workplace Genre

Genre refers to a specific language used not only by individuals but also by a community of people, in this case the community of workers of a particular occupation (Koester, 2012). Workplace genre of language refers to language as it is given special attention in a particular domain. For example, the genre of email communication involves a broad range of different occupational groups, such as customer service, sales, marketing and managers, and is viewed from a general perspective because the features of the language are recurrent (Koester, 2012). Some of the examples of workplace genre can be seen at the general level e.g. business meetings, presentations and negotiations. Other genre focus on a particular occupation e.g. air-traffic controllers (Paramasivam, 2013), rail industry frontliners (Shahruddin et al., 2013) and airport ground staff (Cutting, 2013); these are identified as specific because the language used is specifically designed for the focus occupation and does not cater for other occupational groups. Identifying the specific genre helps researchers in designing and developing a course, content and teaching materials that can be applied among learners for their occupational purposes.

Issues on Specificity

ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is known for its approach to how English is used in the workplace environment and refers to the techniques of gaining information using features of the language, with language practice for a particular group of people or industry. However, it now seems to be moving towards 'generic skills', applying language features across different industries and occupations. Hyland (2002) argued that specific features should go beyond general literacy and 'specificity'

should take note of the understanding of the appropriateness of language and features used for any particular occupation. It should involve literacy skills that are the most appropriate for learners to be used in their working environment. A good example of the specificity approach can be seen in the difference between English for Air-Traffic Controllers and Aviation English. In the former (Paramasivam, 2013), the language features and communication skills cater specifically for air-traffic controllers, while in the latter (Alderson, 2009; Emery, Roberts, Goodman, & Harrison, 2008), the specific language features and communications skills are ideal for pilots and air-traffic controllers. The specificity issues raised by Hyland (2002) may assist ELT (English Language Teaching) practitioners and researchers in acquiring insight into specific discourse features and discourse practice for a particular profession. In this study, the researchers were interested to investigate the issue of specificity in the context of language used by service technicians in the pest control industry.

In brief, studies have acknowledged the importance of communication skills in the workplace and ascertained that the need for English varies among different employees in the industry (Bhattacharyya et al., 2009; Kaewpet, 2009; Kassim & Ali, 2010). Although there are intensive studies on 'language needs' for employees in the workplace, in the Malaysian context, they are still minimal. The focus of research into English language needs in the Malaysian context is on workplace oral communication

needs of IT graduates (Kaur & Lee, 2006), English language needs of human resource staff (Kaur & Clarke, 2009), developing materials for speaking skills for air-traffic controllers (Paramasivam, 2013), frontline employees' use of English in the rail industry (Shahruddin et al., 2013) and interaction during job interviews to discover training needs (Teoh, Rachel, Fauziah, & Choo, 2012), among others. In the pest control industry, however, studies are limited and the need is not yet well understood. However, findings of studies on the needs of English among service technicians in this industry will have implications for other occupations and industries that involve field staff interaction with customers. Therefore, this paper will provide added value to 'language needs' in industry and may be used to assist in developing a course module specifically for the service technicians in the pest control industry. It will also assist in improving their communication skills besides encouraging confidence in speaking.

METHOD

Participants

The participants who were involved in this study were pest control service technicians. There were 20 service technicians from the same organisation located in the Klang Valley. Prior to data collection, the participants completed an English placement test in order to determine their proficiency level. This test was adapted from the placement test provided in *Business Result Intermediate Teacher's Book*, (Baade

& Duckworth, 2014). The placement test consisted of 120 multiple choice grammar questions that covered six levels, Level 1-6, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
English placement test level

Questions	Level	Description	Category
1-20	1	Beginner	Low proficiency
21-40	2	Elementary	
41-60	3	Pre-Intermediate	Mid proficiency
61-80	4	Intermediate	
81-100	5	Upper-Intermediate	High proficiency
101-120	6	Advanced	

The participants were found to be in the low-proficiency level, scoring from 15 to 28. In a breakdown, five participants scored 18, seven scored 15, four scored 21, two scored 24 and two scored 28.

Apart from the grammar test, a short speaking test was conducted to gauge the participants' level of speaking and understanding. The questions administered during the speaking test were: "Tell me about yourself", "Do you need to speak English language to your customers?" and "How can the English language help in your work?". During the speaking test, it was found that most of the participants could not provide answers beyond the first question, and while they understood the question, they answered in the Malay language. An Human Resource officer was present during the speaking test and took note of the participants' difficulty in communicating in English. Upon seeing the results, the HR learning and development department suggested an English language training programme was needed to improve their service technicians' communication skills.

The 20 participants were highly recommended by the learning and development department of the company for participation in the English language training programme. This is because the participants demonstrated good progress at work and a desire and motivation for promotion. Besides this, during the administration of the placement test, the participants expressed the need for communicating in English due to low-proficiency of the language. The participants seemed to have low confidence in uttering basic words and were found to have made little attempt to communicate with customers. As this would bring a negative impact on the organisation, it brought the employer's attention to focus on the communicative needs of the service technicians.
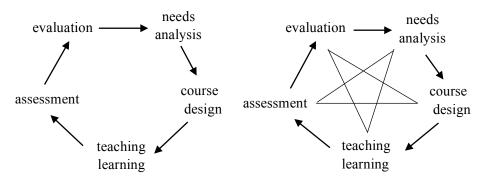
Figure 1. Linear vs. cyclical processes of needs analysis (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 121).

Figure 1 is adapted from Dudley-Evans and St John's framework (1998, p. 121) on needs analysis. The diagram shows how needs analysis is often continuous, giving feedback at various stages. The present study adopted this framework, focussing mainly on the needs analysis stage, in which the findings obtain will inform the next stages of the process: course design, teaching-learning, assessment and evaluation. In the needs analysis stage, the techniques included obtaining information from a particular profession of learners; feedback from organisations; on-the-job description, particularly about the specific language features used by service technicians; content for teaching and learning; and assessment and evaluation. By identifying learners' 'lacks' and 'wants', this stage enables course designers to produce a module that effectively answers the needs of the target group.

Instrument

This study utilised a needs analyses questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire was adopted from the *Business Result Intermediate Teacher's Book* (Baade & Duckworth, 2014) needs analysis questionnaires. The questionnaire was selected because it is appropriate for use for adult learning and training purposes. The questionnaire consists of three sections: Part A – Personal details from participants; Part B – Who the participants communicate with in the English Language; and Part C – The importance and need for use of the English Language (among service technicians in the pest control industry). The participants were required to complete all sections of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed after the participants sat an English placement test and was collected on the same day. The questionnaire assisted in developing a short module of English language enhancement for the service technicians.

Because the proficiency level of the service technicians was low, the questionnaire used bilingual questions; the questions were given in the English language and the Malay language. This

was to enable participants to respond and reflect meaningfully on the questions. The participants were also allowed to ask questions to seek clarification during the administration of the survey.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on Section 1 of the questionnaire, which was on personal details, 18 respondents answered that they had completed secondary school at the level of the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), which is equivalent to the 'O' level in British-based international schools, one respondent had completed higher secondary school at the level of the Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM), which is equivalent to the 'A' level and one participant had completed primary school at the level of Standard Six. In Malaysia, STPM students can immediately further their education to tertiary level, whereas SPM students must complete a Diploma programme before pursuing a degree programme. In this study, none of the participants had obtained tertiary education. All 20 participants were male.

Section 2 revealed that seven respondents viewed speaking as the most important function of communication, while 13 emphasised that speaking and writing were equally important. This showed that service technicians perceived the need to write and speak in the English language as important for the performance of their tasks.

The Use of the English Language in Communicative Functions

Section 3 required participants to respond to what they believed was the importance of the English language in 17 areas that were applicable in their working environment. The results are given in Table 2. The degree of importance was based on a Likert scale of 1-4, with 1= It isn't very important; 2 = It isn't very important for my job, but could be interesting; 3 = It's important and could be useful to practise, and; 4 = It's very important for me and I must practise the use of this language in class.

Table 2
Summary of communicative functions

How important is it for you to be able to…	1 It isn't important	2 It could be interesting	3 It's important	4 It's very important
1. … introduce yourself and describe what you do at work?	1	2	4	13
2. … discuss the project you are working on?	10	2	4	4
3. … explain how something works?	0	1	5	15
4. … deal with customers?	0	0	3	17
5. … welcome customers?	4	14	2	0
6. … explain changes?	12	2	2	2
7. … present and discuss plans?	8	4	6	2

Table 2 *(continue)*

How important is it for you to be able to…	1 It isn't important	2 It could be interesting	3 It's important	4 It's very important
8. … deal with orders?	10	3	4	4
9. … discuss your place of work?	11	4	2	3
10. … discuss and make decisions?	2	0	3	15
11. … give presentations?	12	4	2	2
12. … solve problems?	0	2	2	16
13. … describe processes and make appointments?	0	0	3	17
14. … give feedback and set objectives	0	6	7	7
15. … give reports	0	6	5	9
16. … give suggestions?	0	0	0	20
17. … provide advice?	0	0	0	20

Table 2 above shows the respondents' feedback on the communicative functions required in their working environment. The highest response received was on giving suggestions and providing advice. This is related to pest issues that occurred at the customer's place of service. Being the first point of contact, service technicians are often required to suggest types of service and provide advice regarding the do's and don'ts before, during and after service. For example, the 'Misting' service is for eliminating mosquitos and insects; it is meant for use indoors or in a closed-door environment, and no movement is allowed for two or three hours in the room after misting because of the chemicals sprayed into the air. In addition, all furniture should to be covered to prevent staining. Therefore, when a customer enquires about 'Misting' service, service technicians must be able to advise them adequately, even if only with simple explanations.

The second highest response was for dealing with customers, describing processes, making appointments and solving problems. It is the job of a service technician to make and schedule appointments with customers, taking customers' complaints seriously and attempting to solve problems. 'Solving' problems in this manner refers to solving pest issues. For example, when the 'Rat Trap' service is provided, if there is no carcass found or there is no strong odour afterwards, the customer may not be satisfied. This problem could be aggravated if the customers' pets (e.g. dogs or cats) accidentally eat the bait or destroy the rat trap. In these situations, service technicians are required to identify the root of the problem and make attempts to resolve the issue in a face-to-face environment. Other responses in the questionnaire include the importance of introducing themselves, describing their work, explaining how something works, discussing concerns and

making decisions. These needs are related to internal and external communication (Moslehifar & Ibrahim, 2012).

Self-introduction is ideal for external communication with customers. Service technicians are required to introduce themselves and their company at the first point of contact with customers. Describing work, explaining how something works and discussing and making decisions are akin to internal communication. These functions are quite similar to the study of Moslehifar and Ibrahim (2012), who found that human resources employees often discuss projects, proposals, plans and designs but at a higher proficiency level. Besides interacting with customers, there is also a need to interact with superiors, subordinates and peers. The internal communication for this industry refers to within the company locally, regionally and internationally.

The least important functions reported by technicians in the questionnaire were: discussing current projects, explaining changes, dealing with orders and giving presentations. These functions are more applicable to senior service technicians and supervisors or those with a higher proficiency level of English. This is in line with Kassim and Ali's (2010) findings that Malaysian chemical engineers are highly involved in project discussion and presentations. These findings are further reinforced by Kaewpet (2009) on Thai civil engineers.

The Importance of Communication in the English Language

The study also found that the participants gave positive feedback on the importance of communication skills when interacting with customers.

Table 3
Summary on the importance of communication skills

How important are these communication skills?	1 It isn't important	2 It could be interesting	3 It's important	4 It's very important
1. Social and conversational English	0	3	5	12
2. Making telephone calls	0	4	6	10
3. Attending meetings	0	5	3	12
4. Giving and attending presentations	0	5	4	11
5. Writing emails	0	4	2	14

Table 3 demonstrates the summary of feedback received from service technicians on the importance of English language communication skills. Twelve respondents viewed conversing and socialising in the

English language and attending meetings as being crucial to job success. The need to communicate in the English language in these areas would be beneficial if the language were enhanced, especially

when attending meetings, during which participants are encouraged to express ideas and views that are applicable in their daily tasks. Comprehending the language is equally important so that the task given can be carried out efficiently.

Another set of communication skills considered important is making phone calls and giving and attending presentations. It is common for service technicians to make phone calls to customers, especially to make service appointments, reschedule appointments and communicate delay of service. This skill set is vital because it is done daily and the need to communicate in the English language rather than in the Malay language will have an impact on customers.

Next is giving and attending presentations. Although the results on communicative functions appear to show that giving and attending presentations is not important for their current job tasks, in terms of skills, 11 respondents agreed that giving and attending presentations is very important. Developing such skills is important for them in order for them to enhance their career. This skill requires active listening and the presentations could come in a form of introducing new services, change in machinery or chemicals and change and upgrading of documentation. The medium of communication in these instances is the English language. This skill is shown to be highly necessary for professional engineers (Mohamed et al., 2014) when working with consultants and clients and for human resource officers

(Moslehifar & Ibrahim, 2012). Presentation skills are usually required by professions that employ workers with mid-proficiency or high-proficiency level of English use rather than professions that employ workers with low-proficiency English. Service technicians in the pest control industry tend to find this particular skill 'lacking' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) in terms of their communicative needs but useful for their present situation. Therefore, for the low-proficiency group, lack of communicative competence affects work routine.

The other skill that the service technicians felt they needed was writing emails. The response received from the participants was positive, affirming email writing was a skill they considered important in their daily operations (Kaewpet, 2009). This finding is similar to that found for professional engineers (Kaewpet, 2009) and tourism employees (Prachanant, 2012) i.e. that email writing was an important daily task.

English Language Skills for the Service Technicians

The final part of the questionnaire contained two open-ended questions. The questions were, "Do you speak and listen in other situations?" and "Do you read or write correspondence in other situations?" It was found that 12 respondents to the first question answered that they were required to communicate with customers in order to solve pest issues. This concern was more relevant to non-Malaysian customers. A

greater need was for understanding accent, utterances while listening, responding to customers' questions and complaints, giving suggestions and providing advice. In this aspect, the listening skill was agreed to be an important skill in communication. The second question concerned writing emails; it received eight responses. One respondent stated, "*Saya perlu membaca and menulis email*" ("I am required to read and write emails."), while another stated "*Ya, membaca email pelanggan*" ("Yes, reading customers' emails."). Aside from attending to customers via email, these service technicians also often received emails from supervisors and forwarded emails from customers. Responding to customers' emails is important as the technicians were the ones to inspect and investigate matters the customers' premises, and therefore, customers would be expecting feedback and comments from them. The questionnaire feedback showed that communication was more effective when the technicians constructed simple, short sentences that communicated the main points of the message. Using simple, short sentences is indeed appropriate for email writing. Their response indicated that writing simple emails was an important tool for service technicians.

The findings presented earlier show the areas of communicative needs in terms of 'lacks' and 'wants' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) in using the English language among pest control service technicians. The areas that seemed to be critical for upgrade or enhancement of language

were description (self, company and job), telephone conversation, describing processes, providing suggestions and advice, work discussion and decision making and solving problems. These tasks involve active listening and speaking skills. The other area that they appeared to be lacking in was writing emails. Constructing simple and appropriate sentences is important because this style of writing delivers messages effectively. Based on the findings, it appears that the approach needed for enhancing the language proficiency of service technicians in the pest control industry is the narrow-angled approach (Flowerdew, 2013), which is based on the present situation while on duty.

The results also revealed that the language needs of service technicians in the pest control industry are more specific (refer to *Specificity in ESP*, Hyland, 2002). The features, terminology and language used are specifically for one particular occupation in one particular industry. Although the first part of the needs analysis, 'describing and telephone conversation', may be relevant to different occupations across industries, the other features are integrated with pest issues or pest control terminology that can only be used by service technicians or senior service technicians in the pest control industry.

CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted the feedback and response received from 20 service technicians in the pest control industry as to their needs in the use of the English language. Service technicians must interact

with a broad base of customers of diverse backgrounds daily, and because of this diversity, service technicians would have to be reasonable skilled in using the English language, the most common language used in multi-cultural interaction today. Adequate or good communication skills in English will bring a positive impact on customers, and this is likely to draw more business, a point recognised by employers. Based on the input received from the service technicians in this study, the company agreed that their learning and development department should conduct a 'language needs' programme that would provide suitable communication functions for service technicians. This is a preliminary study; future investigation may include observation of the interaction of service technicians in the pest control industry with customers or an ethnographic study and interviews with the service technicians in order to further understand their communicative needs and language use, which can inform content development of proficiency enhancement module, teaching and learning, assessment and evaluation.

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