

THE USE OF VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION BY FRONT OFFICE STAFF TO GUEST AT DOUBLE-SIX LUXURY HOTEL SEMINYAK

N.M. Nenty Sudantari¹, N.N. Padmadewi², K. Sintya Dewi³

Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha
Singaraja, Indonesia

nentysudantari@outlook.com, nym.padmadewi@undiksha.ac.id, sintyadewi@undiksha.ac.id

Abstract

Verbal and non-verbal communication is important for hotel staff to communicate with the guest, thus ensuring their satisfaction. This study aimed at (1) finding out the forms of verbal and non-verbal communication used by front office staff, (2) describing the function of verbal and non-verbal communication used by front office staff, and (3) analyzing the difficulties faced by front office staff in using verbal and non-verbal communication. The subject of this study were the front office staff in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak. The main instrument used in gathering the required data was the researcher and the data were obtained through observation, audio recording, and interview. Four steps were done in analyzing the data, namely: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The result of the study showed that, the verbal language mostly used by front office staff in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak in handling guest related to the guest needs and SOP provided by the hotel. There were also non-verbal language used in the form of showing interest and happiness. The reason that verbal language is used according to the study is to make the communication run well and avoid misunderstanding among staff and guests. The language barrier led the staff to use non-verbal language but they were aware that using non-verbal language could lead to some politeness issue.

Key words: communication, front office staff, guest, non-verbal, verbal

Abstrak

Komunikasi verbal dan non-verbal sangat penting untuk pegawai hotel dalam berkomunikasi dengan tamu untuk memastikan kepuasan tamu. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah (1) mencari jenis-jenis komunikasi verbal dan non-verbal yang digunakan oleh staf kantor depan, (2) menjelaskan fungsi komunikasi verbal dan non-verbal yang digunakan oleh staf kantor depan, dan (3) menganalisa kesulitan yang dihadapi oleh staf kantor depan. Subyek dari penelitian ini adalah staf kantor depan di Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak. Instrumen utama yang digunakan dalam mengumpulkan data adalah peneliti sendiri dan data diperoleh melalui observasi, perekaman suara, dan wawancara. Empat langkah yang dilakukan dalam menganalisis data adalah: Data Collection, Data Reduction, Data Display, dan Conclusion Drawing. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa staf kantor depan lebih banyak menggunakan bahasa verbal di Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak dalam melayani keperluan tamu dan tugas-tugas yang disiapkan oleh hotel. Bahasa non-verbal juga digunakan dalam menunjukkan ketertarikan dan rasa senang. Berdasarkan penelitian ini, alasan bahasa verbal digunakan adalah untuk memastikan komunikasi berjalan lancar dan untuk menghindari kesalahpahaman antara pegawai dan tamu. Keterbatasan bahasa membuat pegawai menggunakan bahasa non-verbal, tetapi mereka juga sadar bahwa menggunakan bahasa non-verbal juga mengarah kepada masalah kesopanan.

Kata kunci: komunikasi, non-verbal, staf kantor depan, tamu, verbal

INTRODUCTION

Language is portrayed as a powerful tool to communicate. Language is used to express feelings, ideas and information towards others, which is used everywhere in our daily life. Wardhaugh (2006) explains that language is a code, which exists when two or more people communicate with each other in a speech. As the application of language, communication is the most fundamental thing that must be mastered by every individual to survive and to interact with the surrounding environment. Communication, which is used in everyday life from greeting a stranger to touching a lover, is an ongoing process of sending and receiving messages that enables human to share knowledge, ideas, thoughts, information, feelings, emotions, and attitudes.

Communication requires a media so that the communicated information is understood by both sender and receiver. There are two of them, verbal and non-verbal, which are simultaneously used for communication. To be successful in communication it requires us to be both competent and experienced, not only in verbal communication but also in non-verbal one as well; because much of our communication takes place at the non-verbal level (Negi, 2009). Burgoon, Buller, and Woodall (1996, p.13) limited non-verbal communication to behaviors that are typically sent with intent, used with regularity among members of a social community, typically interpreted as intentional, and have consensually recognized interpretations. Moreover, non-verbal communication is understood as “the sending and receiving of thoughts and feelings via nonverbal behavior” (Ambady & Weisbuch, 2010: 465). Ha, Grafsgaard, Mitchell, Boyer, and Lester (2012) also identify the range of nonverbal cues, such as posture, gestures, eye gaze, and facial and vocal expressions.

Non-verbal communication as well as verbal communication functions powerfully in every context (Lemmer, Meier & Van Wyk, 2012). However, Miller (2005) maintains that as little as 7% of communication takes place through the spoken word; most communication takes place through non-verbal and by means of paralinguistic cues. Under the rubric of non-verbal communication, Miller (2005) includes facial expressions, proximity and closeness, hand gestures, body language and, of great importance to this study, eye contact or the lack of eye contact. Similarly, in their comprehensive taxonomy of non-verbal communicative behaviors, Zoric, Smid and Pandzi (2007) include oculosics, which is the act of intentionally or unintentionally making eye contact with an individual during communication.

Both verbal and nonverbal communication possess vocal characteristics, with verbal vocalic referring to the content of the message and nonverbal vocalic to how the message is conveyed (e.g., voice tone, accent, pitch; Hargie, 2011). Despite the distinction, nonverbal and verbal communication are related in several ways (Richmond & McCroskey, 2004). As mentioned by Bonaccio, O'Reilly, O'Sullivan, and Chiochio (2016), nonverbal behavior can *repeat* verbal discourse (e.g., a nod to show agreement), *substitute* it (e.g., an eye roll instead of a statement of contempt), *complement* it (e.g., reddening while talking to an intimidating person), *accent* it (e.g., a slap on the back following a joke), or *contradict* it (e.g., wiping tears away while asserting that one is fine).

Indeed, communication whether verbal or non-verbal happens in community. It happens in public places and also workplace. Every human being needs to interact as we normally lives in a group. In a literature it is explained that group members need to communicate as they relate to group productivity or efforts to achieve that

productivity. Productivity however, in this modern era is strongly related to economy.

In Bali, tourism is vital for economic growth as it has been one of the major source of income for many Balinese. The increasing growth of hotel industries, particularly in emerging tourist destinations led to intensified competition (Rodríguez-Díaz & Espino-Rodríguez, 2006). As a result, as mentioned by Nickson, Warhurst and Dutton (2005), one of the main challenges faced by the hotel industry is the issue of improving their competitive advantage, in which, part of the concern revolves around the roles of frontline front office staffs in creating high quality service encounters.

This study is intended to find out the verbal and non-verbal communication used by front office staff in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak. The researcher chose Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak due to several reasons. The first is that Double-Six is a five-star hotel in which the hotel has standard procedures qualified for five-star hotels. The second reason is this hotel also has high rate of satisfaction, as reviewed by Trip Advisor (2018), as per February 25, 2018, out of 2080 reviews, this hotel reached 83% satisfaction. This hotel also has some unique outlets which can attract a lot of guests to come in. In line with the number of guests who come to this hotel, it also affects the raise of complaints. Although it may raise some complaints, it does not affect the satisfaction reviews on Trip Advisor. Standardized procedures and qualified communication strategies are the major factors that keep the percentage steady on Trip Advisor.

The front office is chosen by the researcher to represent the front office staffs of Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak because the front office has the most frequent interaction with the guest in terms of explaining the hotel facilities, providing information regarding the hotel and the surroundings, and assisting the guest with

any inquiries. The quality of the hospitality provided by the hotel is indeed can be judged from the front office department. According to Westford School of Management [WSM] (2015), the front office is the first and last point which interact with the client. Front office called so because they are situated at the front near the entrance of the hotels. Any information related to the customer can be obtained from the front office of the hotel. The front desk can assist in giving help to the customers and direct to the correct person for solving the complaints. This require the front office department to have a good communication skill both verbal and non-verbal. In fact, the lack of proper verbal and non-verbal communication during service interaction with customers and other front office staff reduces the likelihood of customers to develop appreciation or emotional connection with the service provider (Kueh and Bagul, 2013). This study is important to be conducted to find out how the five-star hotel uses communication strategy such verbal and non-verbal communication to their guest.

In relation to the explanation above, front office staff in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak were observed in their communication strategies includes verbal and non-verbal. Communication strategies were used in daily communication during work hours. It is very interesting one to analyze what kind of verbal and non-verbal communication used by them.

METHOD

The types of research used to conduct this investigation was a qualitative research type (case study) conducted in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak. The subject of the study were 8 front office staffs. In this study, the subject was selected by using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used intentionally in order to select the individuals in order to learn and understand the central phenomenon. Meanwhile, the objects of this

study were verbal and non-verbal communication used by 8 front office staffs in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak. In this case, the researcher attempted to find out the forms, and the frequency of verbal and non-verbal communication in hotel context. The data were gathered through observation and interview. The observation was done using checklist while the interview was done directly by using audio recorder to get the data.

In this study, the data collected were gained in some sources by using different techniques. The researcher used Interactive Data Analysis Model in order to search and arrange the data systematically. It also helped the researcher to increase the understanding towards the phenomenon that is observed. The data were analyzed by using interactive model analysis which

consists of four components such as data collection, data reduction, data display and conclusion or verifying.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study involved eight front office staffs in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak. They were observed while doing the main task of front office which was: a. guest check-in; b. guest check-out; c. handling guests' complain; d. explaining hotel facilities; e. answering phone calls. The observation sheet in form of checklist was used to find out the kinds of verbal and non-verbal communication used in front office staff in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak. Furthermore, the staffs were also interviewed to gain in-depth information about the reason of using verbal and non-verbal communication as well as the difficulties they faced in using them.

Table 1. Summary of the kinds of verbal and non-verbal communication used by front office staff to guest at Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak presented in percentage.

Communication	Check in			Check Out			Handling guests' complaint			Explaining hotel facilities			Answering phone call		
	O	S	N	O	S	N	O	S	N	O	S	N	O	S	N
Oral	87.5	12.5		75	25		62.5	37.5	12.5	100			100		
Written			100			100		25	75			100			100
Happy Expression	100			87.5	12.5		62.5		37.5	100			50	50	
Surprised Expression	25	75		12.5	62.5	25	25	62.5	12.5		87.5	12.5	25	62.5	12.5
Angry Expression		25	75		25	75		37.5	62.5			100		25	75
Empathy Expression	37.5	62.5		37.5	50	12.5	50	37.5	12.5	37.5	50	12.5	37.5	25	37.5
Thinking Gesture	37.5	62.5		37.5	50	12.5	50	37.5	12.5	37.5	50	12.5	37.5	25	37.5
Interested Gesture	75	25		75	25		50	50		75	25		75	25	
Skepticism Gesture		62.5	37.5		50	50		12.5	87.5		12.5	87.5		50	50
Boredom Gesture		62.5	37.5		37.5	62.5		37.5	62.5		25	75		50	50
Suspicious Gesture	12.5	75	12.5		62.5	37.5		50	50	25	50	25		75	25
Interested Eye Contact	62.5	37.5		62.5	25	12.5	50	50		75	25		37.5	25	37.5
Unhappy Eye Contact		25	75		12.5	87.5		12.5	87.5		25	75		25	75
Bored Eye Contact		25	75		12.5	87.5		25	75		12.5	87.5		25	75

(O=often, S=Seldom, N=Never, all the numbers are in percent '%')

It was found that in using verbal communication, 87.5 % of the staffs often used oral communication meanwhile 12.5% of them seldom used it upon check-in. However, in handling check out, 75% of the staffs often used oral communication and 25% of them seldom used it. Different result came for the use of oral communication used upon handling guest complain, in which 62.5% of the staffs often used it and 37.5% of the staffs seldom used it. As in explaining hotel facilities and answering phone calls, 100% of the staffs often used oral communication. Moreover, 100% of the staffs never used written communication in check-in process, check out process, explaining hotel facilities, and answering phone call. While on handling guest complain, 25% of the staffs seldom used written communication and 75% of the staffs never used it.

Based on the findings above it can be seen that there are two kinds of verbal communication used by front office staff: oral and written. As the task of front office staff were varied, both of the verbal communication were needed. Oral communication is essential for front office staff; for example it was stated that the respondents used oral communication in handling check in, check out, and guest complaint; it was especially important in explaining hotel facilities and answering phone call as there is no other way to do those task. In contrast, written communication was less essential in running the five task stated above. The front office staff seldom used written communication in handling guest complaint, while never used it for the other task. Thus, the verbal communication in form of oral communication was mainly used by front office staff in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak in handling all task related to check in, check out, handling guest complaint, explaining hotel facilities, and answering phone calls. As supported by Lucas (2017), using verbal communication in hotel industry is to inform the guest and to clarify misunderstanding and also provides

missing information in which the guest may be needed.

The kinds of non-verbal communication observed focused in three areas, namely: facial expression, body gesture, and eye contact.

The first was about the facial expression: happy expression. It was found that 100% of the staffs often used happy expression upon check in and explaining hotel facilities. While upon check out 87.5% of the staffs often used happy expression and 12.5% seldom used it. Different result came from the use of happy expression upon handling guest complain, in which 62.5% of the staffs often used it and 37.5% never used happy expression. In answering phone call, 50% of the staffs often used happy expression and 50% others seldom used happy expression.

About surprised expression, 75 % of the staffs seldom used surprised expression while only 25% of them often used it upon check-in. However, while handling check out, 12.5% of the staffs often used surprised expression, 62.5% of the staffs seldom used surprised expression, and 25% of them never used it. Different result came from the use of surprised expression upon handling guest complain and answering phone call, in which 25% of the staffs often used it, 62.5% of the staffs seldom used it and 12.5% of the staffs never used it. As in explaining hotel facilities, 87.5% of the staffs seldom used surprised expression and 12.5% of the staffs never used surprised expression.

About angry expression upon check in, check out, and answering phone call, 75 % of the staffs never used angry expression meanwhile only 25% of them seldom used it. However, while handling guest complain, 37.5% of the staffs seldom used angry expression and 62.5% of the staffs never used angry expression. As in explaining hotel facilities, 100% of the staffs never used angry expression.

About empathy expression, 37.5% of the staffs often used empathy expression leaving 62.5% of them seldom used it upon check-in. However, while handling check out and explaining hotel facilities, 37.5% of the staffs often used empathy expression, 50% of the staffs seldom used empathy expression, and 12.5% of them never used it. Different result came from the use of empathy expression upon handling guest complain, in which 50% of the staffs often used it, 37.5% of the staffs seldom used it and 12.5% of the staffs never used it. However for answering phone calls, 37.5% of the staffs often used empathy expression, 25% of the staffs seldom used empathy expression, and 37.5% of the staffs never used empathy expression.

The second was about body gesture: thinking. It was found that during check in, 37.5% of the staffs often used thinking gesture meanwhile 62.5% of them seldom used it. However, while handling check out and explaining hotel facilities, 37.5% of the staffs often used thinking gesture, 50% of the staffs seldom used thinking gesture, and 12.5% of them never used it. Different result came from the use of thinking gesture upon handling guest complain, in which 50% of the staffs often used it, 37.5% of the staffs seldom used it and 12.5% of the staffs never used it. However for answering phone calls, 37.5% of the staffs often used thinking gesture, 25% of the staffs seldom used thinking gesture, and 37.5% of the staffs never used thinking gesture.

About the interested gesture upon check-in, check out, explaining hotel facilities, and answering phone calls, 75% of the staffs often used interested gesture while only 25% of them seldom used it. However, while handling guest complain, 50% of the staffs often used interested gesture and 50% of the staffs seldom used interested gesture.

About skepticism gesture upon check in, 62.5% of the staffs seldom used

skepticism gesture, while 37.5% of them never used it. However, while handling check out and answering phone calls, 50% of the staffs seldom used skepticism gesture and 50% of the staffs never used it. When handling guest complain and explaining hotel facilities, 12.5% of the staffs seldom used it and 87.5% of the staffs never used it.

About boredom gesture upon check in, 62.5% of the staffs seldom used boredom gesture, while 37.5% of them never used it. However, while handling check out and handling guest complain, 37.5% of the staffs seldom used boredom gesture and 62.5% of the staffs never used boredom gesture. Different result came from the use of boredom gesture upon explaining hotel facilities, in which 25% of the staffs seldom used boredom gesture and 75% of the staffs never used it. However for answering phone calls, 50% of the staffs seldom used thinking gesture and 50% of the staffs never used boredom gesture.

About suspicious gesture upon check in, 12.5% of the staffs often used suspicious gesture, meanwhile 75% of them seldom used it, and 12.5% of the staffs never used suspicious gesture. However, while handling check out, 62.5% of the staffs seldom used suspicious gesture, while 37.5% of them never used it. Different result came from the use of suspicious gesture upon handling guest complain, in which 50% of the staffs often used it and 50% of the staffs never used it. As in explaining hotel facilities, 25% of the staffs often used suspicious gesture, 50% of the staffs seldom used suspicious gesture, and 25% of the staffs never used suspicious gesture. However for answering phone calls, 75% of the staffs seldom used suspicious gesture while 25% of the staffs never used it.

Third was about eye contact: interested. Upon check in 62.5% of the staffs often used interested eye contact, while 37.5% of them seldom used it.

However, while handling check out, 62.5% of the staffs often used interested eye contact, 25% of the staffs seldom used interested eye contact, and 12.5% of them never used it. Different result came for the use of interested eye contact upon handling guest complain, in which 50% of the staffs often used it and 50% of the staffs seldom used it. As in explaining hotel facilities, 75% of the staffs often used interested eye contact and 25% of the staffs seldom used interested eye contact. However for answering phone calls, 37.5% of the staffs often used interested eye contact, 25% of the staffs seldom used interested eye contact, and 37.5% of the staffs never used interested eye contact.

About angry eye contact upon check in, explaining hotel facilities, and answering phone call, 25% of the staffs seldom used angry/unhappy eye contact, while 75% of them never used interested eye contact. However, while handling check out and handling guest complain, 12.5% of the staffs seldom used interested eye contact, while 87.5% of them never used it.

About bored eye contact upon check in, handling guest complain, and answering phone call, 25% of the staffs seldom used bored eye contact, while 75% of the staffs never used it. As in check out process and explaining hotel facilities, only 12.5% of the staffs seldom used bored eye contact and 87.5% of the staffs never used it.

The front office staff of Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak mostly expressed happiness when they were directly communicating with guest especially when handling check in, check out, explaining hotel facilities and answering phone call. Good greeting by showing happiness face to the guest can affect the guest feeling (Lin & Lin, 2011). As also found by Söderlund and Rosengren (2008), the employee that showed happiness by smiling leads to a higher degree of customer satisfaction than the neutral service employee.

Body gestures of front office staff in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak were also investigated in this research. The body gestures involved thinking, interested, skepticism, boredom and suspicious.

The result found that, the body gesture that mostly done by the front office staff in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak was body gesture that shows thinking and interest. Thinking and interested body gestures were found in all activities related with SOP of front office in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak. The staff when communicating with guest tends to nod their head slowly. Slow head nodding is a sign of people being interested with the people they are talking with (Chan, 2010).

One interesting finding from the study is that, when the staff talked with the guest on telephone, they were also moving their bodies. According to Tatti (2016) when talking to somebody on telephone, the body gestures that are used ultimately change the tone of voice and mindset. This body gestures also enabled others to recognize whether the staffs are engaged or not with the guest. In hotel industry, showing a good body language can reveal the hotel service to the guest which indicates that the guests are welcomed. Especially when they just arrive at the hotel. When they leave the hotel, a good body gesture certainly sign that the hotel is thanking the guests. When the guests are able to read these certain of gesture, they will have judgment on the service that is offered by the hotel (Lin, 2014). When the judgment given by the guest is good, it is almost certain that they will come back again to stay and vice versa.

Lastly, from the result in findings above, the eye contact mostly used by front office staff in Double Six Luxury Seminyak was eye contact that showed interest. Eye contact which indicated angry and bored were also identified in this study even the frequency of the appearance is so rare. The guest handling procedures provided by the hotel requires that the staff member to make eye

contact and warmly smile to acknowledge the oncoming guests. It also said that when a staff member is approximately five feet from a guest, a sincere greeting or friendly gesture of acknowledgement should accompany the eye contact and smile.

In relation with hotel business industry, good eye contact can make more than a good impression. In fact, eye contact can help the other person to have a good feeling, and want to enter into business plans (Mujezinovic, 2011). Eye contact can show is a person comfortable in its own skin, is it interested in something, is it honest or confident. Yuksel, Hancer, and Cengiz (2007) also revealed that appropriate eye contact with guest leads to positive emotion and good perception about the hotel employee.

The next finding was about the reason to use verbal and non-verbal communication. About verbal communication, 37.5%, which is most of the respondents, chose to use verbal communication as it is the only way to communicate through telephone, while 25% of the respondents focused more on the importance of using verbal language to avoid misunderstanding among other staffs and guests. 25% of the respondents used verbal language when explaining hotel facilities to the guests since it will make it easier for the guests to understand. Lastly, 12,5% of the respondents used verbal language for daily communication with guest and conveying message. It can be concluded that while verbal communication seems to be the only way to communicate via telephone call, some respondents considered that verbal communication is required to convey meaning and avoid misunderstanding.

However, 12.5% of the respondents used non-verbal communication to support the verbal language. Likewise, 12.5% of respondents rarely used non-verbal communication. While 25% of the respondents used non-verbal

communication mainly to show feeling to build connection with the guest. Most of the respondents, 50% of them used non-verbal communication when there are guests who do not understand the verbal language that is used by the respondents. It can be concluded that while verbal language is important to convey meaning, non-verbal language is equally important. Most of the respondent, 4 out of 8, feel the need of non-verbal communication to make sure that the guest understand them while not speaking the same language.

As to the difficulties face by the staffs, 37.5% of the respondents find it difficult to use verbal and non-verbal communication due to the lack of language proficiency, especially vocabularies upon using verbal communication, and there is no difficulty in using non-verbal communication however it is considered less polite to use. 12.5% of the respondents find it difficult to use both verbal and non-verbal communication upon handling guests who do not understand the verbal and non-verbal communication. Furthermore, 25% of the respondents find it difficult to communicate verbally when they do not know the translation of the word, therefore they use non-verbal communication. Lastly, 25% of the respondents find it difficult to use verbal communication to non-English speaker guests.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The result of the study showed that verbal language in form of spoken language were mostly used by front office staff in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak in handling guest related task. There were also non-verbal language used in form of showing interest and happiness.

The reason of using verbal language, according to the study was to make the communication runs well and avoid misunderstanding among staff and guest. While the reason of using non-verbal language was mostly to help expressing feeling.

The lack of language proficiency of the staff and guests that doesn't speak English made it hard for the staff to use verbal communication. However, when the staff were trying to include body gesture to help their explanation, they were worried about not being polite.

As the study were conducted in Double-Six Luxury Hotel Seminyak, the researcher found that there were different tendency on the non-verbal communication used by male staff and female staff. However, due to circumstances it was not possible to study the difference in details. Therefore, further study is suggested to find out if there is any difference perception towards the use of verbal and non-verbal language in terms of gender. Further study is also suggested to investigate if there is any difference form of verbal and non-verbal language done by staff when dealing with multicultural guest.

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