

# Grammatical Competence of Tourism Frontliners in an Eco-adventure Tourist Destination: Basis for Competency Development Project

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## Abstract

With tourism as engine for socio-economic growth and investment, stakeholders in the tourism industry have considered the need to improve the competencies of its frontliners, such as the skills in English communication which have been identified by studies from non-English speaking countries. With this premise, this study aimed to determine the English language competence, specifically grammatical competence, of tourism frontliners when considered as an entire group, and when grouped according to some variables. Moreover, this study also sought to find out the competency development project that may be proposed. This study involved the 37 tourism frontliners in an eco-adventure tourist destination in Tibiao, Antique, Philippines. The result of the study revealed the following: 1) when considered as an entire group, the tourism frontliners were fairly competent in grammar, as revealed by their scores in the 30-item grammar test; 2) when grouped as to sex, the males were fairly competent while the females were competent; 3) when grouped as to age, those who were 20 years old and below, and those who were 21-30 years old were competent; and those who were 31-40 years old, and those who were above 40 years old were fairly competent; 4) when grouped as to educational attainment, those with elementary, and those with high school education were fairly competent; and those with technical/vocational education, and those with college education or advanced studies were competent; 5) considering the frontliners' other tourism service-related qualifications, those with TESDA certificate were fairly competent, while those without TESDA certificate were competent; 6) when grouped according to their type of job, those with eco-adventure related job, those with food and accommodation-related job, and those with transportation-related job were competent; while those with health and wellness-related job, and those having two or more types of jobs were fairly competent; and 7) considering the length of tourism-related experience, those with less than a year of experience, and those whose experience is 11 years and above, were fairly competent, while those who have one to ten years of experience were competent. Moreover, no significant difference was found between and among the grammatical competence of the tourism frontliners when they were grouped according to the identified variables in the study. Based on the result of the study, the researcher proposed for a language training to the frontliners, specifically on spiel making, and a project on training materials preparation.

Keywords: Tourism frontliners; grammatical competence; eco-adventure tourist destinations

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## Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

In many parts of the world, especially in developing countries, tourism is considered as a means to overcome poverty (Naylon, 1967, and Cater, 1987, in Oppermann & Kye, 1997; Yunis, 2009). In the Philippines, Republic Act 9593 legislates tourism as engine for socio-economic growth and investment. Moreover, Tourism-Related Services is one of the priority sectors in the twenty-five year long-term vision for the Philippines stated in *AmBisyon Natin 2040*.

Stakeholders in the tourism industry have considered the need to improve the competencies of its frontliners. The need to develop and improve the skills in English communication have been identified by studies from non-English speaking countries (Kuosuwan, 2016; Hassan, et al, 2015; Fatmasari, 2013).

Tour guides as the critical members in tourism industry, and their services are mainly based on their professional competencies identified as professional knowledge, professional skills, and professional attitudes. Professional skills include communication skills and language fluency (Lin, Lin and Chen, 2017).

Considering the importance of competence in communication, some studies revealed that tour guides wanted to learn how to use English well in greeting the tourists, in telling the story about the tourist destination, and in explaining the events related to such destination; to know more the vocabulary and expression which are commonly used in guiding and how to use them correctly; and they would like to improve their English proficiency through the activities dealing with vocabulary, pronunciation and the grammar points (Fatmasari, 2013).

However, few literature and studies, especially in non-English speaking countries, have looked into the factors affecting the competencies of tourism frontliners. Moreover, language competence is seldom found in tourism-related studies, although the industry has considered its significance to service quality.

It is with the aforementioned premise that the researcher would like to determine English language competence, specifically the grammatical competence, of the tourism frontliners, and the factors affecting such competence.

This study is anchored on the interaction theory of language development that states that language is acquired from an interaction of a human's innate biological capabilities to acquire language with exposure to language in the environment. The interactionist assumes that language, cognitive knowledge, and social interaction are interrelated in a unidimensional way. Language is seen as derived from, or strongly influenced by cognitive and social factors; there are cognitive prerequisites for the acquisition of some parts of the language system; and socialization is needed for language growth.

Considering the factors such as sex, age, educational attainment, other tourism service-related qualifications, type of job, and length of tourism service-related experience, the researcher would like

to assess the English language competence, specifically the grammatical competence, of the tourism frontliners in an eco-adventure tourist destination in the province of Antique, Philippines; thus, this study.

A graphic presentation of the conceptual framework of the study is shown in Figure 1.

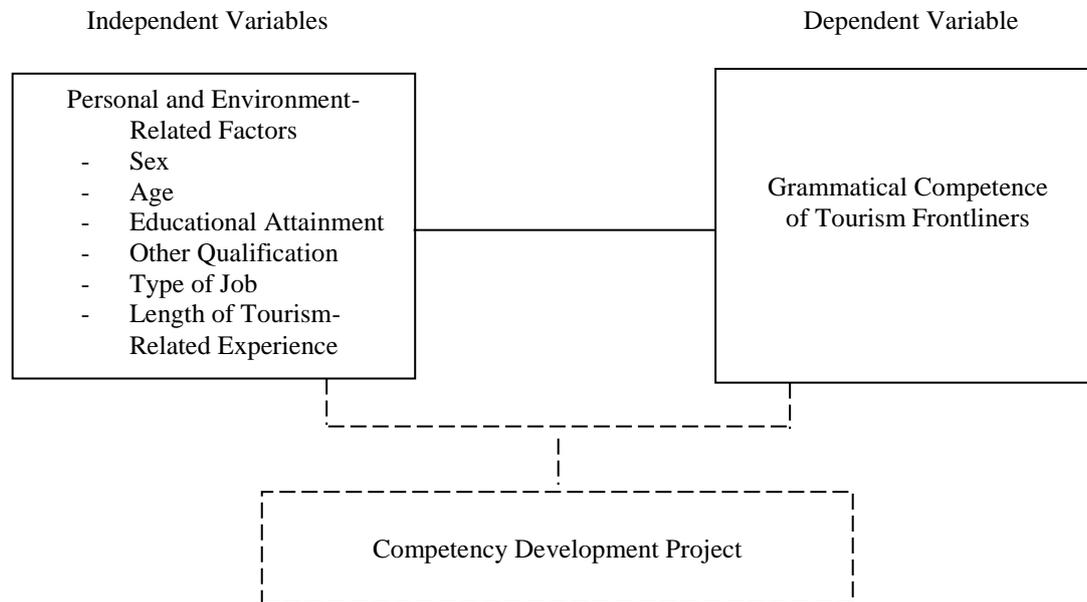


Figure 1. The paradigm showing the relationship among the variables in the study

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem and the Hypothesis

This study aimed to determine the English language competence, specifically grammatical competence, of tourism frontliners in an eco-adventure tourist destination in Antique, Philippines.

Specifically, this aimed to seek answer to each of the following questions:

- 1) What is the level of English language competence of the tourism frontliners when considered as a whole and when grouped according to: a) sex, b) age, c) educational attainment, d) other tourism service-related qualifications, e) type of job, and f) length of tourism-related experience?
- 2) Is there a significant difference in the English language competence of the tourism frontliners when grouped according to: a) sex, b) age, c) educational attainment, d) other tourism service-related qualifications, e) type of job, and f) length of tourism-related experience?
- 3) Based on the result of the study, what competency development projects could be proposed?

On the basis of these problems, this hypothesis is advanced:

- 1) There is no significant difference in the English language competence of the tourism frontliners when grouped according to: a) sex, b) age, c) educational attainment, d) other tourism service-related qualifications, e) type of job, and f) length of tourism-related experience.

## **Methodology**

This descriptive study on the grammatical competence of the tourism frontliners in an eco-adventure tourist destination in the province of Antique, Philippines, considers sex, age, educational attainment, other tourism service-related qualifications, type of job, and length of tourism service-related experience as independent variables, while the level of grammatical competence as the dependent variable.

This involved 37 randomly selected tourism frontliners, specifically the owners, supervisors/managers of, and workers/staff in resorts, inns, restaurants/cafeteria; tour guides and site guides; other service providers such as masseur/masseuse, watchmen, etc.; and drivers.

Table 1 presents the participants grouped according to the selected variables.

Table 1. The Participants

Category	n	Percentage
A. Entire Group	37	100.00%
B. Sex		
- Male	20	54.05%
- Female	17	45.95%
C. Age		
- 20 years old and below	5	13.51%
- 21 - 30 years old	17	45.95%
- 31 - 40 years old	7	18.92%
- 41 years old and above	8	21.62%
D. Educational Attainment		
- With Elementary Education/ Elementary Graduate	5	13.51%
- With High School Education/High School Graduate	12	45.95%
- With Vocational Education/Graduate of a Diploma Course	3	18.92%
- With College Education/ With Bachelor's Degree, or With Graduate Education/ Master's Degree	17	21.62%
E. Other Tourism Service-related Qualifications		
- With TESDA Certificate		
- Without TESDA Certificate	8	21.62%
F. Type of Job	29	78.38%
- Eco-adventure related job		
- Food and accommodation-related	12	32.43%
- Transportation-related	7	18.92%
- Health and wellness-related	3	8.11%
- Two or more types of jobs	5	13.51%
G. Length of Tourism-related Experience	10	27.03%
- Less than one year		
- 1 - 10 years	12	32.43%
- 11 years and above	21	56.76%
	4	10.81%

The data were obtained using the jury-validated grammar test. The 30-item test was pilot tested to the tourism frontliners other than the participants of the study. It is comprised of items on nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections, subject-verb agreement, and verbals.

The quantitative data were processed considering the percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test for independent samples, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA); using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The 0.05 alpha level was used as the criterion to determine the significance of the result.

## The Result

### 3.1 Grammatical Competence of Tourism Frontliners Considered as an Entire Group, and When Grouped According to Variables

When considered as an entire group, the tourism frontliners are fairly competent (17.89) in grammar.

When grouped as to sex, the males (16.95) are fairly competent while the females (19.00) are competent.

When grouped as to age, those who are 20 years old and below (19.00), and those who are 21-30 years old (19.35) are competent; and those who are 31-40 years old (17.43), and those who are above 40 years old (14.50) are fairly competent;

When grouped as to educational qualification, those with elementary (15.80), and those with high school education (14.83) are fairly competent; and those with technical/vocational education (20.67), and those with college education or advanced studies (20.18) are competent.

Considering the frontliners' other tourism service-related qualifications, those with TESDA certificate (17.25) are fairly competent, while those without TESDA certificate (18.07) are competent

When grouped according to their type of job, those with eco-adventure related job (20.08), those with food and accommodation-related job (18.86), and those with transportation-related job (18.00) are competent; while those with health and wellness-related job (17.80), and those having two or more types of jobs (14.60) are fairly competent

Considering the length of tourism-related experience, those with less than a year of experience (17.66), and those whose experience is 11 years and above (15.00), are fairly competent, while those who have one to ten years of experience (18.57) are competent.

Table 2. Grammatical Competence Level of the Tourism Frontliners when Considered as an Entire Group and When Classified According to Variables

Category	Mean	Description
A. Entire Group	17.89	Fairly Competent
H. Sex		
- Male	16.95	Fairly Competent
- Female	19.00	Competent
I. Age		
- 20 years old and below	19.00	Competent
- 21 - 30 years old	19.35	Competent
- 31 - 40 years old	17.43	Fairly Competent
- 41 years old and above	14.50	Fairly Competent
J. Educational Attainment		
- With Elementary Education/ Elementary Graduate	15.80	Fairly Competent
- With High School Education/High School Graduate	14.83	Fairly Competent
- With Vocational Education/ Graduate of a Diploma Course	20.67	Competent
- With College Education/ With Bachelor's Degree, or With Graduate Education/ Master's Degree	20.18	Competent
K. Tourism Services-related Qualifications		
- With TESDA Certificate	17.25	Fairly Competent
- Without TESDA Certificate	18.07	Competent
L. Type of Occupation		
- Eco-adventure related job	20.08	Competent
- Food and accommodation-related	18.86	Competent
- Transportation-related	18.00	Fairly Competent
- Health and wellness-related	17.80	Fairly Competent Fairly
- Two or more types of jobs	14.60	Competent
M. Length of Tourism-related Experience		
- Less than one year	17.66	Fairly Competent
- 1 - 10 years	18.57	Competent
- 11 years and above	15.00	Fairly Competent

### 3.2 Significance of the Grammatical Competence of the Tourism Frontliners When Grouped as to Sex, and as to Other Tourism Service-Related Qualifications

Table 3 reflects the result of the computer-processed t-test revealing no significant difference on the grammatical competence of the frontliners when grouped as to sex,  $t(35) = 0.287$ ,  $p > .05$ , and as to Other Tourism-Related Qualifications,  $t(35) = 0.727$ ,  $p > .05$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Table 3. t-test Result of the Differences in the Grammatical Competence Test Scores of the Tourism Frontliners Grouped as to Sex, and as to Other Tourism Service-related Qualifications

Category	M	t-value	df	2-tail Probability
Sex	Male	16.95	35	0.287
	Female	19.00		
Other Tourism Service-related Qualifications	With TESDA Certificate	17.25	35	0.727
	Without TESDA Certificate	18.07		

### 3.3 Significance of the Grammatical Competence of the Tourism Frontliners When Grouped as to Age, Educational Attainment, Type of Job, and Length of Tourism-Related Experience

The One-way ANOVA result in Table 4 shows no significant difference on the grammatical competence of the frontliners when grouped as to age,  $F(3, 33) = 0.257$ ,  $p > .05$ ; educational attainment,  $F(3, 33) = 0.052$ ,  $p > .05$ ; type of job,  $F(4, 32) = 0.273$ ,  $p > .05$ ; and length of tourism-related experience,  $F(2, 34) = 0.531$ ,  $p > .05$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Table 4. t-test Result of the Differences in the Grammatical Competence Test Scores of the Tourism Frontliners Grouped as to Other Tourism Service-Related Qualifications

Category	df			Sum of Squares			Mean Squares		F Ratio	F Prob.
	Between Groups	Within Groups	Total	Between Groups	Within Groups	Total	Between Groups	Within Groups		
Age	3	33	36	135.971	1059.597	1195.568	45.324	32.109	1.412	0.257
Educational Attainment	3	33	36	245.964	949.604	1195.568	81.988	28.776	2.849	0.052
Type of Job	4	32	36	172.594	1022.974	1195.568	43.148	31.968	1.350	0.273
Length of Tourism-related Experience	2	34	36	43.758	1151.810	1195.568	21.879	33.877	0.646	0.531

### 3.4 Proposed Competency Development Projects

In order to improve the grammatical competence of the tourism frontliners, the researcher proposed for the following: 1) language training to the tourism frontliners, specifically on spiel making, and 2) preparation of training materials for the tourism frontliners.

## Conclusions

The study found out that tourism frontliners have satisfactory knowledge and skills on the grammar of the English language.

It also found out that the tourism frontliners' sex, age, educational attainment, other tourism service-related qualifications, type of job, and length of tourism-related experience do not affect their grammatical competence.

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