THE ROLE OF ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN GUEST SATISFACTION IN SAMARKAND HOTELS

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Abstract

The article examines the role of English communication skills of hotel staff in shaping the satisfaction of international guests, with particular reference to the hotel industry of Samarkand. Drawing on the expectation–disconfirmation model of satisfaction and the SERVQUAL framework of service quality, the study shows that communication with staff is embedded in the key dimensions by which guests evaluate a hotel: responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Special attention is paid to the status of English as a lingua franca in international tourism, where both staff and many guests are non-native speakers. The article also considers hospitality language as a professional skill and the importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training for hospitality workers. It is argued that in the context of the rapid growth of tourism in Samarkand, English communication should be regarded not as an additional competence but as an integral component of service quality. Practical recommendations for hotels and for institutions training hospitality specialists in Uzbekistan are proposed.

Keywords: *hospitality, English communication skills, guest satisfaction, service quality, SERVQUAL, English as a lingua franca, English for Specific Purposes, Samarkand, international tourism.*

In recent years, tourism has become one of the priority sectors of the economy of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The simplification of the visa regime, the development of transport infrastructure and the active promotion of the country's historical heritage have led to a significant increase in the number of foreign visitors. Samarkand occupies a special place in this process. The historic centre of the city was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2001 as "Samarkand – Crossroad of Cultures", and in 2022 the city hosted the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and opened the Silk Road Samarkand tourist complex. According to the National Statistics Committee, about 11.7 million foreign citizens visited Uzbekistan for tourism purposes in 2025 [3].

The growth of international tourism has created a high demand for hotel staff capable of communicating effectively with guests from different countries. For most international guests, English serves as the common language of communication regardless of their native language [1; 2]. At the reception desk, in the restaurant and in situations requiring the solution of a guest's problem, staff must understand requests, provide accurate information and demonstrate politeness in English. Insufficient communication skills lead to misunderstandings and complaints and may reduce guest satisfaction even when other aspects of service are of high quality.

The aim of this article is to analyse the role of English communication skills of hotel staff in the formation of guest satisfaction and to determine their place within the structure of hotel service quality, with reference to the hotel industry of Samarkand.

In hospitality research, customer satisfaction is most often explained through the expectation–disconfirmation model, according to which guests compare the service actually received with their prior expectations: satisfaction arises when the experience meets or exceeds expectations, and dissatisfaction when it falls short [4]. Expectations of international travellers are shaped by previous stays in other countries, by online reviews and by the image of the destination. For this reason, even small communicative failures, such as a misunderstood request at the reception desk, may lead to negative disconfirmation and lower the overall evaluation of the

stay.

The most widely used framework for measuring service quality is the SERVQUAL model proposed by A. Parasuraman, V. Zeithaml and L. Berry. It describes service quality through five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy [5]. While tangibles refer to the physical environment of the hotel, the remaining four dimensions are realised largely through interaction between staff and guests. Responsiveness requires staff to understand a guest's request quickly; assurance depends on the ability to give clear and accurate information; empathy presupposes the ability to show attention and politeness. In an international hotel, each of these interactions takes place, as a rule, in English. Consequently, the English communication skills of staff are not a separate characteristic of service but a condition for the realisation of most SERVQUAL dimensions.

The importance of human interaction is especially high in hospitality, since the hotel product is to a large extent intangible: the guest buys not only a room but an experience, which is formed through numerous contacts with staff [6]. Check-in and check-out, explaining hotel services, recommending local attractions, handling complaints and responding to special requests are typical situations in which the quality of communication directly influences the guest's impression. A friendly but linguistically unprepared employee may fail to solve a guest's problem, while an employee who communicates clearly and politely can compensate for minor shortcomings in the material base of the hotel.

A specific feature of communication in international hotels is that English is used there mainly as a lingua franca, that is, as a contact language between speakers of different first languages [1]. In Samarkand hotels, both the staff and a considerable part of the guests (for example, visitors from China, Turkey, Russia, Germany, France or Japan) are non-native speakers of English. As B. Seidlhofer notes, in such communication success depends less on conformity to native-speaker norms and more on mutual intelligibility and the ability of the participants to adapt their speech to each other [2]. For hotel staff this means that clear pronunciation,

the use of simple and precise phrases, checking understanding and politeness strategies are more important than grammatical perfection.

G. Blue and M. Harun consider hospitality language as a distinct professional skill which combines linguistic competence with appropriate social behaviour at different stages of the guest's stay, from arrival to departure [7]. This approach corresponds to the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), according to which language teaching should be based on an analysis of the real communicative needs of learners in their future professional activity [8]. Researchers of English for tourism and hospitality purposes also emphasise that students of this specialty need training focused on real professional situations: reservations, check-in, giving directions, describing services and handling complaints [9].

An equally important aspect is intercultural communication. Tourists bring with them different cultural expectations regarding politeness, directness, personal space and the manner of service [10]. Cultures differ, for example, in the degree of formality expected in communication and in attitudes to hierarchy and status [11]. A hotel employee who is aware of these differences and can adapt not only the language but also the style of communication is more likely to create a positive impression. Uzbek national hospitality, which is traditionally an important part of the country's culture, can become a significant competitive advantage of Samarkand hotels if it is supported by confident professional communication in English.

At the same time, the level of English among hotel staff in the region remains uneven. Front-office staff of large hotels, as a rule, have better language preparation, while employees of small hotels and guesthouses, as well as restaurant, housekeeping and security staff, often have limited opportunities to develop their language skills. Written information such as menus, signs and hotel websites is not always available in correct English. These factors indicate the need for systematic language training of hospitality workers, oriented towards ESP principles and the real situations of hotel communication.

The analysis has shown that the English communication skills of hotel staff

are closely connected with guest satisfaction, since communication underlies the key dimensions of service quality: responsiveness, assurance and empathy. In the context of international tourism, English functions as a lingua franca, and therefore clarity, intelligibility and politeness are of primary importance for hotel staff. Hospitality language should be regarded as a professional skill that combines linguistic and intercultural competence.

For the hotel industry of Samarkand, which is developing rapidly as an international destination, the following practical recommendations can be made: to organise regular ESP-based training for staff, focused on real situations of hotel communication; to include not only reception staff but also restaurant, housekeeping and security employees in language training; to ensure the quality of written information in English; and to integrate professional communication tasks, role plays and case studies into English courses for students of tourism and hospitality in Uzbekistan. Thus, English communication should be treated not as an additional skill but as an integral component of service quality and of the competitiveness of Samarkand as a world tourist centre.

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