

“Can I Take Your Order?”: Analyzing Language Needs in the Restaurant Industry

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the design of an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course tailored for Latin American immigrants, particularly Mexican Americans, with experience in the U.S. restaurant industry. Despite their years of hands-on knowledge, many of these workers face linguistic barriers that restrict their participation in guest-facing roles. To address this gap, the course was developed through a targeted needs assessment combining survey responses from both restaurant managers and waitstaff in casual dining settings. The study identified key communicative challenges, including customer interactions, teamwork, and culturally appropriate service encounters. Drawing on stakeholder feedback and current literature in hospitality communication and computer-assisted language learning (CALL), the course offers a practical, research-informed approach that aligns instruction with real-world workplace demands. This article outlines the survey methodology and highlights how stakeholder perspectives informed each stage of course development. By centering the lived experiences and strengths of immigrant restaurant workers, the ESP course fosters professional advancement through focused, relevant language instruction. The project illustrates how needs-driven ESP design can be used as a tool for linguistic empowerment and social mobility. Implications are offered for educators seeking to create responsive, stakeholder-informed ESP curricula for other vocational contexts.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, adult ELLs, immigrant learners

Introduction

Immigrants represent a vital segment of the dynamic and diverse hospitality workforce in the United States. In 2024, approximately 2.5 million Latin American immigrants were employed in the food service industry (Morales, 2024). Aspiring waiters from Latin America bring the rich cultural heritage of their home country. Their unique cultural background, coupled with linguistic richness and strong work ethic, marks their determination to contribute meaningfully to the thriving American hospitality landscape. These characteristics represent both advantages and challenges in their educational journey. Their language proficiency is understood not only as a personal achievement but also as an asset in the broader context of the American hospitality industry. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses aim to empower learners who may be disadvantaged by a lack of specialized language skills. This course seeks to bridge linguistic gaps for Latin American immigrants, many of whom have professional backgrounds in their home countries but face barriers in the U.S. due to limited English proficiency.

The following ESP course for casual dining was designed with Mexican American immigrants as the target population. The course is best suited for immigrants who have worked in an American restaurant in some capacity for at least a year but are not currently part of the waitstaff. The journey of Mexican immigrants transitioning to work as waiters in American restaurants requires a nuanced and tailored educational approach. Understanding their needs, aspirations, challenges, and triumphs forms the cornerstone of this ESP course. By acknowledging their future role within the industry and recognizing their unique experiences, language instruction is designed to align with their current language abilities and future ambitions. The ESP course supports dedicated students in building the skills they need to succeed as waiters in the competitive environment of American casual dining establishments.

Literature Review

In today's digitally connected world, there are numerous online resources that make language learning more accessible than ever. Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) strategies, such as audio and video integration through role plays and simulations, allow educators to overcome the limitations of asynchronous formats, especially for pronunciation and vocabulary development. Designing an asynchronous online ESP course for casual dining waitstaff requires a review of relevant literature, particularly in hospitality education and CALL. These studies offer valuable insight into effective instructional strategies for EFL learners in hospitality settings, the role of CALL in vocabulary retention, and innovative methods for developing speaking skills. While a significant portion of ESP research focuses on the hospitality and tourism industry, most of it centers on hospitality in general rather than restaurant service specifically (Azizah & Sugirin, 2020; Prabhu & Wani, 2015; Erazo et al., 2019; Amer & Amer, 2023). Additionally, much of this research has been conducted in Asia, primarily addressing the needs of non-native English speakers working in international hospitality settings (Azizah & Sugirin, 2020; Prabhu & Wani, 2015; Amer & Amer, 2023). In contrast, limited attention has been given to ESP instruction for English language learners employed in the U.S. restaurant industry. This project aims to address that gap by integrating needs assessment survey feedback from stakeholders in a local restaurant and current hospitality ESP and CALL literature. The synthesis of those findings will guide the design of an ESP course tailored to those specific communication needs. These recommendations will ensure learners receive practical, research-based training in English communication for restaurant service.

ESP for the Hospitality and Tourism Industry

Most ESP research has focused on the hospitality and tourism industry. The reviewed studies indicate several relevant findings for the development of an ESP course for casual dining. Azizah and Sugirin's (2020) study explores the instructional strategies used by English lecturers in university hospitality departments in Indonesia. The researchers gathered data through in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations involving department heads, two EFL lecturers, and 55 students (Azizah & Sugirin, 2020). Their study highlights how EFL instructors in hospitality programs implement approaches that prioritize authentic language use and student engagement. Another strategy that Azizah and Sugirin (2020) noted was "exploring various learning resources so that the students can then understand the form and function of the language" (p. 1721). Authentic materials, such as hospitality training videos, descriptive texts about hotels, promotional posters, and job application cover letters, were used so that students would learn how to use English specifically within a hospitality context. In the context of an ESP course for casual dining, authentic materials, such as menus, order pads, and training manuals, would be invaluable.

Azizah and Sugirin (2020) also noted several challenges in hospitality instruction such as limited vocabulary, insufficient communication strategies, grammar difficulties, pronunciation issues, challenges in appropriately responding to guest complaints, and limited cultural awareness. These are challenges to be aware of when planning an ESP course for casual dining. Similar difficulties related to communication were also reported in Prabhu and Wani's (2015) study, which analyzed challenges in language proficiency for hospitality students in Pune, India. The researchers conducted three separate questionnaires of hotel HR / training heads of five-star hotels in Pune and faculty members and students at the AISSMS College of Hotel Management & Catering Technology. The results of the surveys show that "English communication helps in

securing job placement, promotions and building a personal brand” (Prabhu & Wani, 2015, p. 60). Both hoteliers and faculty members noted that new graduates and students lack proficiency in the following communication areas: spoken English, body language, personality, confidence, tone, and people skills (Prabhu & Wani, 2015). These results underscore the importance of navigating complex interpersonal relationships in English within the hospitality industry. However, despite the concerns of their professors and future employers, the students themselves felt confident in their ability to improve their English language proficiency. Results of the student questionnaires show that “of the challenges that deter students from spending time and effort on improving their English, lack of time was rated the major deterrent” (Prabhu & Wani, 2015, p. 62). The results of this study demonstrate that many non-native English speakers in the hospitality industry struggle with verbal and non-verbal communication strategies and confidence. An asynchronous online ESP course would provide waitstaff with the flexibility to learn at their own pace and bolster their confidence in a low-stakes, familiar environment.

A team of researchers in El Oro, Ecuador completed a similar study, where they interviewed 15 professionals, namely “five owners of tourism establishments, five professionals who graduated from an Ecuadorian University in El Oro, and five professors who specialized in Tourism from an Ecuadorian University in the province of El Oro” (Erazo et al., 2019, p. 159). After observing that many hospitality professionals lacked sufficient English proficiency, the researchers wanted to understand the needs and uses of the English language and its importance within the tourism industry of Ecuador. The results of the interviews revealed that speaking was the most important skill and that English is necessary in the hospitality industry because it is the lingua franca of the business world. The same is true of the restaurant industry in the United States. Looking forward, the researchers hope to develop an English for Tourism Purposes (ETP)

program at the university level so that students can receive specialized language training for a future career in hospitality and tourism.

A similar program is in place at the Higher Institute for Specific Studies-Heliopolis in Cairo, Egypt. Amer and Amer's (2023) study evaluated the effectiveness of speaking strategies, such as gap activities, think-pair-share, and role-play activities. The study evaluated 83 hospitality students that were divided equally into control and experimental groups. The experimental group received targeted instruction incorporating these strategies while the control group did not. Over 10 weeks, the experimental group showed significantly greater improvement in speaking proficiency with an 86% increase from pre- to post-assessment. The experimental group also outperformed the control group by 51% (Amer & Amer, 2023). Amer and Amer (2023) also conceded that speaking instruction presents challenges in asynchronous settings due to limited real-time interaction. CALL may provide key strategies for encouraging pronunciation practice in an asynchronous classroom setting.

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in ESP Literature

CALL has grown considerably in the last few decades due to advancements in technology and digital media. Currently, language instruction does not exist solely within a traditional classroom setting but “has put thousands of language learning applications (or apps), electronic dictionaries and e-books in reach of everyone’s pocket” (Thomas, Reinders, & Warschauer, 2014, p. 24). In asynchronous ESP classroom settings, CALL strategies, such as audio and video integration, can support pronunciation and interactive practice. Masuram and Sripada (2020) emphasized that speaking involves planning, editing, and simplifying utterances, all of which can be modeled and practiced through video-based activities and comprehension checks. To address the limitations of asynchronous environments, such as lack of real time

interaction, Davies and Pearce (2008) recommend role plays and simulations as useful instructional tools. Similarly, Lourdunathan and Menon (2004) advocate for restaurant-based task simulations involving dialogues with simulated coworkers and managers. While traditional think-pair-share activities are difficult in asynchronous settings, alternatives include partially completed scenarios, which require learners to use resources like glossaries and visuals to solve communication challenges. These activities promote real-world problem-solving skills relevant to the hospitality field.

As Azizah and Sugirin (2020) noted, adequate vocabulary retention remains a persistent challenge for English Language Learners. Loucky's (2006) study, "Maximizing Vocabulary Development by Systematically Using a Depth of Lexical Processing Taxonomy, CALL Resources and Effective Strategies," provides insight into the CALL strategies to address the issue of vocabulary retention. The study supports the use of structured vocabulary learning strategies for enhancing long-term retention and productive vocabulary use. Loucky (2006) identified 40 vocabulary strategies most used by the highest achieving cohort of 112 Japanese EFL learners divided into 5 groups. The study confirmed that the learners with the highest gain in vocabulary knowledge were those who engaged in deeper levels of lexical processing and demonstrated better vocabulary recall. Among the most utilized strategies were consulting English-Japanese and English-English dictionaries, inferring word meanings from context, and seeking clarification from instructors in the learners' native language (Loucky, 2006). Loucky (2006) also highlighted the value of learner-generated glosses, notes, and visual aids, particularly within CALL environments.

Further guidance on course design for asynchronous settings is provided in Scida and Jones' (2016) study. Their research highlights the benefits of self-pacing, daily exposure, repeat

submission opportunities, interaction with native speakers, video grammar tutorials, and immediate feedback. The study showed a 55.4% average improvement in listening comprehension (Scida & Jones, 2016). Drawing on the work of Adair-Hauck et al. (2000) and Bañados (2006), the authors emphasized the need for authentic oral, written, and visual input. The course design prioritized task-based learning through video and text, offering grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary practice with immediate feedback. Student feedback emphasized the benefits of daily immersion and the ability to track progress. One student noted, “I did notice an improvement in my learning because I was immersed in Spanish every day. It was easier for me to retain the information” (Scida & Jones, 2016, p. 189). The authors concluded that delivery format, constant reinforcement, and audio-visual content contributed the most to strong gains in L2 listening comprehension (Scida & Jones, 2016). Audio-visual content, such as video lectures and role-play skits, would be the foundation of an asynchronous online ESP course for casual dining. Additionally, an online Learning Management System (LMS) (i.e., Canvas) would provide learners with the opportunity to repeat assignment submissions, view feedback, and track progress.

Sato et al.’s (2017) study, “Integrating Digital Technology in an Intensive, Fully Online College Course for Japanese *Beginning* Learners: A Standards-Based, Performance-Driven Approach,” also gives suggestions for online course design. The course was built using the ACTFL 5Cs (communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, communities). The study compared face-to-face and online cohorts, using integrated performance assessment rubrics to evaluate language function, text organization, communication strategies, comprehensibility, and grammar control. The online group outperformed the face-to-face cohort by 27% in communication strategies (Sato et al., 2017). The course applied task-based language teaching

and integrated observation of authentic texts, followed by problem-solving tasks. Post-course surveys revealed insights from learners and instructors regarding their experiences with digital tools. One instructor noted, “VoiceThread inherently promoted aspects of second language acquisition. Video recordings clearly illustrated that students unintentionally adopted gestures and suprasegmental phonological elements from their instructor and peers, thereby achieving natural intonation and tempo” (Sato et al., 2017, p. 767). One student commented, “Creating a video or audio recording feels less intimidating than spontaneously speaking face-to-face as a beginner,” and another shared, “Practicing aloud through recordings was very beneficial since face-to-face class time often did not allow enough opportunity to hear myself speaking other languages” (Sato et al., 2017, p. 767). Sato et al. (2017) also noted the benefits of material being delivered through digital tools such as Google Docs, VoiceThread, and Google Hangouts. Instructors considered these tools effective in fostering inductive learning. Additionally, interactions and conversations were facilitated through video presentations, wherein instructors prepared learners by introducing grammar, vocabulary, and discourse tools, such as interjections and sentence-final particles. This approach provided learners with extensive input and shaped the curriculum development of an ESP course for casual dining waitstaff.

Students gained exposure to authentic language usage when instructors offered spontaneous commentary on cultural and functional objects (e.g., cell phones, Japanese figurines) found in natural contexts. Sato et al. (2017) highlighted that such commentary enriched linguistic input regarding complexity, quality, quantity, variety, genuineness, and relevance, despite utterances occasionally being incomplete, rephrased, or repeated. Moreover, presenting specific phrases in meaningful chunks directed students' attention toward form, encouraging them to notice unfamiliar grammatical constructions, varied intonation, and non-

verbal cues. Additionally, students recorded output based on objects in their own environments, enabling peers to monitor and provide corrective feedback through text comments. For pronunciation practice, students recorded audio files, repeating them while simultaneously recording themselves via the commenting feature. Google Docs was implemented to encourage a sense of community, enhance cooperative language-based activities, and facilitate interaction with course moderators when necessary. Learners also responded to "Guess & Try" questions, prompting them to notice linguistic forms and engage in problem-solving, aligning with the principles highlighted by Lee and VanPatten (2003).

The reviewed studies highlight key considerations for designing an effective ESP course for casual dining, particularly within asynchronous learning environments. While much of the existing ESP literature focuses on hospitality and tourism more broadly, common themes emerge: the importance of contextualized language use, integrated skill instruction, and communication strategies tailored to real-world scenarios. CALL strategies, such as audio and video integration through role plays and simulations, allow educators to overcome the limitations of asynchronous formats. However, there remains a noticeable gap in research addressing the specific needs of English language learners working in the restaurant industry. In casual dining environments in the U.S., frequent and effective communication in English with both guests and coworkers is essential. By combining research-based strategies with input from current restaurant employees, the resulting course design aims to provide targeted, accessible, and practical language instruction that empowers learners to communicate confidently and effectively in the workplace.

Needs Assessment

A comprehensive needs assessment is the foundation of an effective ESP course. As Anthony (2018) states in *Introducing English for Specific Purposes*, "Needs analysis is the starting point of any ESP course because it is an understanding of the learner's needs" (p. 45). For Latin American immigrants working as restaurant waitstaff, a targeted needs assessment will determine their current English proficiency, the specific language skills required for their job, and their own goals and expectations.

Assessing Current Language Skills

The first step in a needs assessment is to evaluate the learners' existing English proficiency (Anthony, 2018). To address these questions, diagnostic questionnaires (Appendices A-C) were provided in English to the three groups of stakeholders for the prospective learners (the learners themselves, management and future coworkers) covering: basic communicative abilities in English, comfort levels with restaurant-specific interactions (e.g., greeting customers, taking orders, handling complaints), and perceived strengths and weaknesses in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The survey questions were based on commonly accepted "steps of service" within the restaurant industry. Information regarding steps of service was taken from Cuboh and Restaurantowner.com. Both sources place emphasis on several key steps of service and provide more detail about their proper execution including: 1) The initial greeting, 2) Description of menu items, 3) Handling customer questions and comments, 4) Taking and confirming orders, 5) Delivering food and confirming accuracy, 6) Checking on customer satisfaction, 7) Presenting and processing the check, 8) Engaging in small talk with customers. While communicating effectively with coworkers, addressing and resolving disputes, and utilizing shorthand for note-taking are not explicitly addressed in either source they were noted

as areas of importance by managers and current servers who completed the needs assessments surveys (see Appendices A and B).

A critical component of ESP course design is ensuring that language instruction reflects real-world use. Upton and Connor (2012) summarize the work of John Swales and explain that an ESP course should align with the following: “A) research into language use should be descriptive; B) focus should be on the real language used by regular people (not famous or literary figures); C) current everyday language should be of primary importance; (D) language as it is spoken or written in specific contexts should be the focus of study” (p. 1). This course will incorporate real-world samples from restaurant settings, including workplace jargon and shorthand abbreviations frequently used for order-taking (e.g., "86" for an unavailable item, "sani" for sanitizer station, "2-top" for a table of two).

Understanding Workplace Expectations

Beyond learner self-assessment, input from restaurant management and current waitstaff is crucial (Anthony, 2018). Surveys for managers focused on 1) Key language skills expected for guest-facing positions, 2) Performance benchmarks used in mock service assessments before placing staff on the floor, and 3) Essential soft skills such as politeness, efficiency, and ability to handle guest concerns. Similarly, current wait staff were surveyed on 1) Common phrases used at different stages of service, 2) Communication patterns with customers and coworkers, and 3) Essential skills for effective service. In addition to technical language skills, "there should be an analysis of functional grammar along with the contextual factors that influence language use" (Swales, 2000, p. 60). This analysis of analysis of functional grammar and contextual factors includes an examination of politeness strategies, cultural interpretations of body language, and

common restaurant discourse patterns to ensure learners develop communicative competence beyond vocabulary memorization.

Addressing Learning Objectives and Methodologies

After receiving input from stakeholders, curriculum developers should analyze the language skills used by staff to decide on learning objectives and reasonable goals for the course (Anthony, 2018). Based on TESOL methodologies, the SIOP model will be applied to structure lessons in a way that integrates content and language learning (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2012). The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) framework model consists of eight components: lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, and review and assessment (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2012). This will involve vocabulary building through pre-teaching key restaurant terms, activities to practice customer interactions, and the use of real restaurant menus, sample dialogues, and authentic materials. Ormond (2010) explains that "not only do we need to teach language as it is actually used in specific contexts, but the focus of the instruction should take into account learners' needs and interests within those specific contexts" (p. 3). To support this, learners will have opportunities to provide feedback on the relevance of instructional materials. This democratic approach fosters learner engagement and motivation.

Course Evaluation and Assessment

The last question that Anthony (2018) posits is related to evaluation. He asks, "How will you know if the learners have achieved the goals of the course? How can you assess your own performance in the course as a whole?" (p. 45). Learners will be assessed in two ways: 1) Short quizzes and/or quick checks at the end of each module and 2) A longer cumulative test at the end of the course. After successfully completing the course, learners will have the opportunity to

submit a survey which may include self-reflections on their progress throughout the course and feedback on materials or course design.

Method

In total, the researchers produced three separate surveys. The surveys targeted the perspectives of stakeholders as well as both English-speaking and non-English-speaking restaurant employees. Surveys were collected from two native English-speaking managers, ten native English-speaking servers and six bilingual Spanish/English speaking support staff. The primary goal was to understand which communicative needs are the most important for restaurant staff in an English-majority country. Questions were formulated to determine the background knowledge of learners and their current self-assessed proficiency levels. Questions aimed at prospective learners considered 1) their background experience in the hospitality industry, 2) their confidence relating to several communications contexts that pertain to becoming waitstaff (i.e. Greeting customers, describing menu items, clarifying orders, handling complaints), 3) challenges they currently face when interacting with customers in English, 4) areas they desire the most improvement in, and 5) their perceived level of comfort pertaining to key performance indicators. In addition, questions which addressed language skills for waitstaff employees were included in both the management survey and the “current” waitstaff survey.

Results

Assessing the surveys revealed key findings about stakeholder expectations. Three areas of skill overlapped pertaining to management expectations, learner wants and current waitstaff skill prioritization. Each stakeholder cohort rated the following skills as top priorities in becoming a successful waitstaff employee; the ability to describe (and sell) food and drink items (“understanding food and cooking terms,” “[I would like to learn about] cocktails and special

drinks”), how to use professional language (verbal and nonverbal) to enhance rapport (“[I want to learn about] connecting with guests, make them feel comfortable,” and “[being] observant of body language and changes in energy [is crucial for success],” “have personality/smile and have fun [is crucial for success]”), and knowing how to clarify questions when they arise (“[a big challenge for non-native speakers is] not understanding what someone asked you to do,” “[you can improve communication through] asking clarifying questions,” and “when employees can communicate effectively with each other and guests there are less chances of mistakes and misunderstandings”). The management and waitstaff team also emphasized the importance of clear communication (pronunciation). Management ranked the two most important skills to succeed in the role as, “describing menu items” and “providing accurate service.” They also noted that the most critical language skills for the position were, “speaking clearly” and “using professional language.” One manager stated, “Better communication will improve guests' experiences.” Current servers also echoed the importance of pronunciation when they ranked “speaking clearly and professionally” as the most important aspect of being a waiter. When asked for further recommendations on how to improve employee-guest communication to say, “Asking clarifying questions is very important.” Finally, the importance of pronunciation was the similarly noted by non-native English speakers when they answered that they wished to, “speak[ing] with confidence,” and “use higher vocabulary.”

The following categories of describing food and drink, using professional verbal/nonverbal language to create rapport, and understanding how to clarify problems or misunderstandings can be divided into several smaller sub-categories for the learners to acquire each skillset (as seen below).

A. Describing Food and Drink:

- a. Food
 - i. Cooking Descriptions/Methods (verbs/nouns)
 - ii. Food Vocabulary (nouns)
 - iii. Food Descriptions (adjectives)
 - iv. Flavor Descriptions (adjectives)
 - b. Drink
 - i. Drink Vocabulary (nouns; wine, beer, cocktails)
 - ii. Flavor Descriptions (adjectives)
 - iii. Specialty Phrasing/Words to Promote a Sale
- B. Creating Rapport
- a. Non-Verbal
 - i. Body Language
 - ii. Personal Presentation
 - b. Verbal
 - i. Standard steps-of-service phrasing
 - ii. Open Ended Questions

C. Clarification

- a. With Guests
- b. With Coworkers

The proposed course design takes place over five modules which address the needed skills. Based on the overarching needs and their supporting skills, we have designed our course with five overall goals and modules. Each module has unique topics and activities that will be completed on Canvas.

**Proposed Course Design: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) – Becoming a
Successful English-Speaking Waitstaff**

Course Goals

By the end of this course, learners will be able to:

1. Accurately describe and recommend food and drink items using appropriate vocabulary and sales techniques.
2. Use professional verbal and nonverbal communication to establish rapport with guests and coworkers.
3. Clarify misunderstandings and answer guest inquiries effectively.
4. Improve pronunciation and fluency to enhance communication confidence.
5. Demonstrate culturally appropriate customer service skills aligned with industry expectations.

Course Modules

Module 1: Food and Drink Description – The Language of the Menu

Objective:

- Learners will develop the ability to accurately describe food and beverages, including preparation methods and flavors, using professional and engaging language.

Topics:

- Cooking Methods & Descriptions (baked, grilled, sautéed, seared, medium-rare, crispy, tender, etc.)
- Essential Food Vocabulary (proteins, vegetables, sauces, grains, etc.)
- Food & Flavor Descriptors (rich, tangy, smoky, umami, buttery, etc.)
- Drink Terminology (wine, beer, cocktails, spirits, soft drinks, etc.)

- Phrasing to Promote Sales (e.g., "Our chef's special today is....," "This pairs well with....," "I highly recommend...")

Activities:

- Menu Role-Play: Learners practice describing dishes from a restaurant menu.
- Taste & Describe Exercise: Learners describe flavors and textures using target adjectives.

Module 2: Professional Communication – Building Guest Rapport

Objective:

- Learners will practice verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to create a welcoming and professional dining experience.

Topics:

- Nonverbal Communication in Hospitality (body language, posture, eye contact, smiling, mirroring guests)
- Professional Presentation (dress code, grooming, carrying oneself confidently)
- Verbal Communication & Steps of Service (e.g., greetings, taking orders, handling requests)
- Using Open-Ended Questions to Engage Guests ("What brings you in today?" vs. "Do you want an appetizer?")

Activities:

- Body Language Role-Play: Practicing appropriate gestures and posture.
- Greeting and Service Flow Practice: Simulating interactions at different stages of service.
- Conversational Openers: Practicing effective open-ended questions to encourage guest interaction.

Module 3: Clarification Strategies – Resolving Guest and Coworker Misunderstandings

Objective:

- Learners will develop skills to clarify questions or misunderstandings with both guests and coworkers professionally.

Topics:

- Clarifying Guest Orders ("Did you mean you'd like your steak medium-well?")
- Handling Guest Questions & Requests ("Let me confirm with the kitchen to be sure.")
- Coworker Communication for Efficiency ("Behind you!" "Can you run this to Table 5?")
- Strategies for Overcoming Language Barriers (paraphrasing, confirming understanding)

Activities:

- Clarification Role-Plays: Practicing polite ways to confirm orders and guest requests.
- Coworker Coordination Exercise: Practicing teamwork and language for back-of-house communication.
- Guest Complaint Resolution Simulation: Handling guest concerns professionally.

Module 4: Pronunciation & Fluency – Speaking Clearly with Confidence

Objective:

- Learners will improve their pronunciation and speech clarity to communicate confidently in fast-paced restaurant environments.

Topics:

- Common Pronunciation Challenges for Spanish Speakers (e.g., "v" vs. "b," final consonant sounds)
- Stressing Key Words for Clarity ("Would you like another drink?" vs. "Would you like another drink?")
- Speaking at a Natural Pace in Service Settings

- Active Listening Strategies (hearing and responding appropriately)

Activities:

- Shadowing Exercises: Repeating real restaurant interactions for natural fluency.
- Minimal Pairs Practice: Distinguishing between commonly mispronounced words.
- Service Speed Drills: Practicing clear and efficient speech during simulated rushes.

Module 5: Cultural Expectations & Professionalism in Hospitality

Objective:

- Learners will develop an understanding of cultural expectations in English-speaking hospitality settings, focusing on customer service excellence.

Topics:

- Understanding Guest Expectations (professional tone, friendly service)
- Cultural Differences in Customer Service (compared to Latin American norms)
- Dealing with Difficult Guests Professionally
- Understanding Tipping Culture & Handling Checks

Activities:

- Scenario-Based Discussions: Exploring cultural differences in service expectations.
- Difficult Guest Role-Play: Practicing responses to guest complaints.
- Service Review & Feedback Sessions: Evaluating real-world service interactions.

Conclusion

The review of several studies revealed a convergence of strategies that effectively supported both face-to-face hospitality training and CALL. Those strategies emphasize material authenticity, communicative interaction, explicit language instruction, learner autonomy, multimedia integration, and collaborative feedback—each contributing to the development of

professional communicative competence in real-world service contexts. All the studies emphasized the use of authentic materials to simulate real-life language encounters. Learners engaged with authentic texts and videos, which included unscripted speech containing incomplete phrases, repetitions, and rephrased statements. They reviewed written discussions of texts and engaged in forced output relating to plots and hospitality situations. Additionally, spontaneous cultural commentary also helped learners connect language with practical usage. These activities built the foundation for meaningful language practice that reflected the demands of hospitality environments.

Communicative practice was reinforced through role-play and simulation, both scripted and unscripted. Learners responded to guest complaints, addressed preferences, and explained responsibilities in hospitality roles, all within problem-solving and decision-making contexts. Many of these tasks encouraged learners to elaborate, hypothesize, and interact as they might in a workplace setting. Think-and-guess activities and hypothetical training scenarios also added to the depth of output by requiring learners to articulate their thoughts using precise vocabulary and phrasing. Vocabulary and grammar instruction were delivered through both direct and contextualized means. Learners were introduced to targeted terms through visual aids, unscripted commentary, and explicit grammar correction. Clarification of similar-sounding terms, use of English-English and bilingual dictionaries, and inference from context were among the most effective strategies for vocabulary development. Grammar was reinforced through video tutorials and student-to-student corrections that enhanced learners' control over form and structure in communication.

Learner-directed engagement was also a key feature through self-paced modules, daily content exposure, and the ability to revise and resubmit assignments. The use of recording

technology enables learners to monitor their own speech and compare it to benchmark models, which fosters greater awareness through self-assessment. Tools that allow students to generate digital notes, especially when paired with visual aids, support long-term retention and personalized study practices. Multimedia content also plays a critical role in the delivery of instruction. Learners are consistently exposed to native speaker input, including authentic speech patterns, unscripted explanations, and discourse markers common in casual and professional settings. This exposure helps bridge the gap between instructional materials and the real-world language demands of hospitality work.

Finally, collaborative learning was facilitated through chat-based communication tools that supported peer-to-peer interaction and instructor feedback. Learners engaged in asynchronous discussions, received immediate feedback, and participated in guided guess-and-try exercises that promoted exploration and refinement of language use. These interactions helped learners stay motivated while also providing them with a support system for clarification and reinforcement. In developing an ESP course for casual dining, all the observations gathered from previous studies will be utilized to ensure the course meets the learners' needs through pedagogically grounded principles which reflect the findings of the needs assessment.

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Appendix A

Survey for Management: Prioritization of Wait Staff Skills

This survey is designed to help us understand how management prioritizes the skills and abilities of waitstaff, including their technical and language skills. Your responses will guide curriculum development and support the creation of a program that ensures servers are equipped to perform their roles effectively.

Section 1: Importance of Skills

1. What do you consider to be the most important skills for waitstaff to succeed in their role? (*Rank these in order of importance, 1 being the most important*)

- Greeting and making a strong first impression _____
- Describing menu items and upselling _____
- Handling customer questions and comments _____
- Resolving disputes with customers _____
- Maintaining communication and teamwork with coworkers _____
- Providing consistent and accurate service _____

2. Which language skills are most critical for servers? (*Check all that apply*)

- Speaking clearly and confidently
- Understanding customer accents
- Using professional and polite language
- Handling misunderstandings
- Using shorthand for note-taking

3. What challenges do you see non-native English-speaking servers face most often?

4. How important are the following transferrable skills for waitstaff? (Rate from 1 = Not Important to 5 = Very Important)

- Dispute resolution with customers: 1 2 3 4 5
- Dispute resolution with coworkers: 1 2 3 4 5
- Clarifying areas of confusion: 1 2 3 4 5
- Using open-ended questions for customer engagement: 1 2 3 4 5
- Shorthand note-taking: 1 2 3 4 5

Section 2: Evaluation and Training Needs

5. What do you think are the most common barriers to effective communication between servers and customers?

6. What are the most common barriers to effective communication between servers and coworkers?

7. What additional skills or training do you feel would benefit waitstaff in performing their roles effectively?

8. How would you describe the impact of improved language skills on the overall success of your business?

Optional: Additional Comments

9. Would you like to share anything else about the skills/training of your waitstaff?

Appendix B

Survey for Current Servers: Language Use and Job Priorities

This survey is anonymous and designed to gather insights into how you use language in your role as a server. Your responses will help us identify key areas for language training and develop a curriculum tailored to the needs of non-native English speakers. Please answer honestly and in detail where possible.

Section 1: General Information

1. How long have you been working as a server?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1–2 years
- More than 2 years

2. What type of restaurant(s) do you work in, or have you worked in?

- Casual dining
- Fine dining
- Fast casual
- Other (please specify): _____

3. Have you worked with non-native English speakers on your team?

- Yes
- No

Section 2: Language Use in Your Role

What common phrases or expressions do you use in the following situations?

4. The Initial Greeting (e.g., welcoming guests, introducing yourself):

5. Description of Items (e.g., describing menu items, specials, or drinks):

6. Handling Questions (e.g., answering questions about ingredients or requests):

7. Handling Comments (e.g., addressing feedback, complaints, or compliments):

8. Taking the Order and Clarifying for Accuracy:

9. Delivering and Confirming Order Accuracy:

10. Checking Back and Confirming Satisfaction:

11. Presenting the Check:

12. Processing and Delivering the Closed Check:

13. Closing Statements (e.g., thanking guests, inviting them to return):

14. Language for Interactions with Coworkers (e.g., coordinating tasks, clarification):

15. Do you use shorthand or abbreviations for note-taking? If so, please list examples.

16. What strategies do you use to clarify areas of confusion with guests or coworkers?

17. How do you handle disputes or conflicts with guests or coworkers?

18. Do you use open-ended questions with guests? If so, please list examples.

Section 3: Job Priorities

19. What do you consider the most important aspects of being a successful waiter?

(Rank these from 1 = Most Important to 10 = Least Important)

- Speaking clearly and professionally _____
- Making guests feel welcome and comfortable _____
- Explaining menu items accurately _____
- Resolving guest complaints or issues _____
- Clarifying orders for accuracy _____
- Communicating effectively with coworkers _____
- Checking on guests during their meal _____
- Presenting the check and thanking guests _____
- Staying organized during busy shifts _____
- Using time efficiently to serve multiple tables _____

20. Are there other aspects of your job that you believe are crucial for success?

Section 4: Additional Feedback

21. What do you think are the biggest challenges for non-native English speakers in your restaurant?

12. In what areas do you think non-native English speakers need the most training to perform their jobs effectively? (Check all that apply)

- Greeting guests
- Explaining menu items
- Answering guest questions
- Handling complaints
- Clarifying orders
- Talking with coworkers
- Resolving disputes
- Other (please specify): _____

13. Do you have any suggestions for improving communication between team members and guests?

Thank you for completing this survey! Your input is valuable and will help us create an effective training program.

Appendix C

Needs Assessment Survey for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Course

This survey is anonymous and designed to help us understand your needs, goals, and current skills to create a course tailored for you. Please answer honestly. Your feedback will guide the development of this program.

Section 1: Background Information

1. What is your native language?

- _____

2. How long have you been working in the restaurant industry?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1–2 years
- More than 2 years

3. What is your current position in the restaurant?

- Busser
- Host/Hostess
- Food Runner
- Line Cook
- Other: _____

4. Have you worked as a waiter before?

- Yes, in my home country
- Yes, in the U.S.
- No

Section 2: English Proficiency

5. How would you rate your current English-speaking skills?

- Beginner
- Intermediate
- Advanced

6. How confident are you in the following areas of English? (*Rate from 1 = Not*

Confident to 5 = Very Confident)

- Greeting customers: 1 2 3 4 5
- Describing menu items: 1 2 3 4 5
- Answering customer questions: 1 2 3 4 5
- Clarifying orders: 1 2 3 4 5
- Handling complaints: 1 2 3 4 5
- Talking with coworkers: 1 2 3 4 5

7. What challenges do you face when speaking English at work? (*Check all that apply*)

- Understanding customer accents
- Finding the right words to say
- Speaking confidently
- Explaining menu items clearly
- Understanding coworkers
- Other: _____

Section 3: Goals and Needs

8. What areas of English would you like to improve the most? (*Check all that apply*)

- Greeting customers and making a good first impression

- Describing menu items and daily specials
- Answering customer questions about food or drinks
- Handling customer complaints and resolving problems
- Clarifying orders for accuracy
- Checking on guests during their meal
- Presenting the check and closing statements
- Talking with coworkers and managers

9. What do you think is most important for being a successful waiter? (*Choose up to 3*)

- Speaking clearly
- Using polite and professional language
- Explaining food and drink options
- Solving problems calmly
- Making customers feel welcome
- Communicating effectively with coworkers

10. Are there specific phrases or situations you struggle with in English?

- Yes (please describe): _____
- No

Section 4: Work-Related Skills

11. How comfortable are you with using shorthand or abbreviations for taking orders?

- Not comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Very comfortable

12. Do you feel confident in resolving disputes with customers or coworkers in English?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

13. Would you like to learn more about how to:

- **Use open-ended questions to engage customers?** Yes / No
- **Handle confusion or misunderstandings?** Yes / No

14. What other skills or topics would you like to learn in this course?

Thank you for completing this survey! Your input is valuable and will help us create an effective training program.