

Exploring Tourists' Reported Perceptions of Students' English Speaking in Tour-Guiding at Prambanan Temple

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ABSTRACT

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in education is often justified by its relevance to the real communicative demands of future work, in which it is ultimately the tourist not a teacher or a test who judges whether a student's English is adequate. This study explores international tourists' reported perceptions of student tour guides' English speaking immediately after guided explanations at Prambanan Temple, collected as part of an internship in the Implementation of ESP for Tourism course. The research addresses how tourists evaluate students' speaking and explanation in their own words, aiming to describe recurring patterns in these perceptions rather than to measure students' speaking performance directly. Using a qualitative descriptive design, eleven short verbal responses were elicited from international tourists through a standard post-tour question, video-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Eight evaluative categories emerged, most frequently referencing clarity and comprehensibility, with smaller numbers of responses referencing interactional competence, politeness, interest, perceived knowledge, contribution to visit enjoyment, and one explicit critique of scripted-sounding delivery. Within this small, single-site convenience sample, tourists' reported perceptions more often referenced comprehensibility than grammatical accuracy, though this pattern should be read as suggestive of tourists' impressions rather than as a measure of students' actual speaking competence. The findings suggest that tourists judge student tour guides' English primarily by how clear and comprehensible their explanations are, with interactional competence, politeness, and perceived knowledge serving as secondary

considerations, while explicit grammatical accuracy was rarely mentioned as an evaluative criterion. Based on these findings, the study recommends that ESP instruction for tourism explicitly emphasize intelligibility and interactional competence alongside grammatical accuracy, and incorporate practiced question-and-answer routines to help future guides deliver explanations that sound natural rather than scripted. These tentative implications are offered alongside key limitations, including the small convenience sample, single site, brief elicited responses, unequal exposure across guides, and possible courtesy bias.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes; Tourism English; Speaking Skills; Tourists' Perceptions; Tour-Guiding Communication

INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for Tourism in education is usually justified on one main ground: it should prepare learners for the actual communicative demands of their future work, not just for language in the abstract (Mao & Zhou, 2024). For tourism and hospitality students, that “real work” mostly means talking directly with international tourists, and in that setting it is the tourist standing in front of them not a teacher or a test who judges whether a student's English is good enough (Mao & Zhou, 2024). This practical rationale does not, by itself, justify treating tourists' brief evaluative comments as evidence about students' actual speaking ability or about how well an ESP course works. Three distinct objects of inquiry need to be kept separate here. The first is tourists' perceptions: what tourists say, and how they evaluate what they heard, immediately after a guided explanation.

The second is students' observable speaking performance: features of students' speech such as accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation that could in principle be independently observed and assessed, rather than only inferred from a listener's impression. The third is curriculum effectiveness: whether a given ESP course design measurably improves students' communicative ability over time. This study is concerned only with the first of these three objects. The eleven short, elicited verbal responses analyzed here speak directly to tourists' perceptions; they are not an independent measure of students' observable speaking performance, and they do not, on their own, support conclusions about curriculum effectiveness.

Instead of a closed-ended questionnaire, this study examines what tourists said in their own words, in a brief response elicited by a standard question immediately after listening to students' guided explanations at Prambanan Temple, collected as part of the same internship program under the Implementation of ESP for Tourism course. A Likert item such as “pronunciation is clear” can register agreement or disagreement, but it cannot show whether a tourist overlooks grammatical mistakes as long as the message is understood. Examining tourists' own wording, rather than a pre-set rating scale, offers one way to get closer to that distinction.

At the same site, Prameswari and Makhasi (2020) asked foreign tourists to rate internship guides' English on a ten-item Likert scale and found generally high scores. That approach can show that tourists rate guides' speaking favorably; it cannot show, in tourists' own words, what that favorable judgment is based on. This study extends that earlier quantitative work rather than simply comparing against it: using the same site and a similar population of international tourists, it replaces the closed rating scale with an open, elicited verbal response, so that the specific language and reasoning behind tourists' evaluations can be examined directly.

Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: 1) What recurring patterns appear in international tourists' short, elicited verbal responses about student tour guides' English speaking during guided tours at Prambanan Temple? And 2) How can these patterns be interpreted in relation to the constructs of communicative competence, intelligibility/comprehensibility, and interactional competence?. The findings, discussion, and conclusion that follow are organized around these two questions. Claims about students' observable speaking performance or curriculum effectiveness in general are outside the scope of what this study's data can support and are not made here.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

Most existing research on this topic relies on structured instruments questionnaires and rating scales handed to tourists once the interaction is already over. At Prambanan Temple, Prameswari and Makhasi (2020) asked 20 foreign tourists to rate internship tour guides' English using a ten-item Likert scale covering speaking and listening. The scores were high (86.2 for speaking, 90.2 for listening), though tourists also mentioned repetitive vocabulary and inconsistent delivery of historical facts. Instruments like this are standardized and easy to compare across studies, but they also force tourists' impressions into categories decided in advance, which can obscure the specific things tourists actually notice, value, or find lacking, along with the words they use to describe them. The present study extends this earlier work directly, using the same site and a similar population of tourists, but replacing the closed scale with tourists' own open-ended wording, so that the reasoning behind a favorable rating not only its overall level can be examined.

Other studies add to this picture, though from a different angle. Novitasari et al. (2022) ran a classroom action research project using Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in a Tourist Guiding course and found that students' speaking scores rose from a pre-test average of 64.03 to 76 after the intervention. Sasabone et al. (2021) similarly reported that a targeted ESP implementation improved students' speaking skills at UKI Paulus Makassar. Suharto and Sekarasari (2026) surveyed 40 tourism students about their own English learning and found that, despite being highly motivated, students reported real struggles with vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and confidence when speaking. Rahman et al. (2024) found that ESP teaching materials used in a tourism-vocational curriculum

matched curriculum and student needs only 63.3–80% of the time, with speaking coming up repeatedly as the skill needing the most additional support. Taken together, these studies judge speaking performance either through closed-ended instruments handed to tourists after the fact, or through assessments teachers and students make about themselves; either way, the categories used to judge speaking competence are decided in advance rather than drawn from what tourists actually say in the moment. This is the gap the present study addresses, while limiting its claims to the perception layer that its data can actually support.

Communicative Competence

Canale and Swain (1980) frame communicative competence as comprising grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic components; Canale (1983) later added discourse competence the ability to combine utterances into a coherent, cohesive whole as a fourth component. Together, these models treat communicative competence as the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in context, not simply to produce grammatically correct sentences. This framework underlies the distinction this study draws between grammatical accuracy and the tourist-facing outcomes (being understood, being responded to appropriately) that the data can more directly speak to.

Intelligibility And Comprehensibility

Munro and Derwing (1995) distinguish accentedness (how strongly accented speech sounds), intelligibility (how much of an utterance a listener actually understands or can transcribe), and comprehensibility (how easy a listener judges an utterance to be to understand); Derwing and Munro (2009) further argue that these listener-based judgments, rather than accentedness alone, are what most directly affect real-world communication outcomes. In this study, tourists' comments about clarity are treated as reports of perceived comprehensibility a listener's impression rather than as an objective measure of intelligibility or of students' underlying speaking competence. A response is coded under this construct only where it contains an explicit clarity marker such as “clear,” “understand,” or “well explained.”

Interactional Competence

Young (2011), building on the discourse-analytic tradition represented in Young and He's (1998) edited volume on language proficiency interviews, describes interactional competence as the ability to co-construct meaning in real time with an interlocutor managing turns, responding to unplanned questions, and adjusting language to the person one is speaking with as distinct from the ability to deliver a prepared monologue fluently. This construct is applied only to responses that explicitly reference a student's handling of a question or exchange, not to general praise of an explanation.

Tour-Guiding Discourse

Cohen (1985) characterizes the tour guide role as combining instrumental, social, interactional, and communicative components, with professional guiding placing increasing weight on the communicative component. Pond (1993) similarly identifies presentation and speaking skills, and the ability to bring a place to life for an audience of outsiders, as central, trainable dimensions of professional guiding rather than by-products of general language proficiency. Together, these sources support treating tour-guiding as a distinct communicative genre, with its own audience-design demands, rather than as a simple proxy for general spoken English proficiency; this framing is used below to interpret T6's critique of scripted-sounding delivery as a comment on guiding style specifically, not on English proficiency in general.

With these constructs defined, the relationship between comprehensibility and grammatical accuracy is treated in this study as a pattern to be examined through the data — and, where it holds, explained with reference to specific responses — rather than as an assumption made in advance of the analysis. Within English for Tourism specifically, direct interaction with tourists constitutes the target situation against which course content and students' speaking are conventionally measured (Khoirunnisa et al., 2018), and ESP course design is expected to combine an analysis of that target situation with a realistic sense of where learners currently stand (Mao & Zhou, 2024). Khoirunnisa et al. (2018), in a qualitative case study of an ESP Tourism Program in Surakarta, found that both teacher and students repeatedly pointed to grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and content as their biggest sources of difficulty and anxiety. That earlier study offers a useful contrast for the present one: it captures an insider view of how teachers and students perceive their own speaking, whereas this study asks the same broad question from the outside — what do tourists themselves report noticing?

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design. The aim is to explore the tourists' perceptions as they were actually expressed, without forcing the data into a bounded case-study structure or building toward new theory. A qualitative descriptive design fits this aim, where the goal is a close, comprehensive summary of a phenomenon grounded in participants' own words. Data collection took place at the Prambanan Temple tourism park between 29 July 2026 until 11 August 2026, during a one-month internship undertaken as part of the Implementation of ESP for Tourism course within the English Education study program. Each guided tour lasted approximately 30 minutes to one hour, depending on the group and the questions tourists asked along the way. Across the data collection period, students conducted two guiding sessions each day, a morning session and an afternoon session, for a total of approximately 28 sessions, from which the eleven analyzed responses were drawn.

Tourists were not drawn from a pre-set sampling frame; this is convenience sampling, chosen for its fit with the naturalistic, walk-up setting of temple tour guiding, and it does not yield a sample representative of international tourists in general. Student guides approached visitors at the temple with a standard opening: "Excuse me, Miss/Sir, we are students and we know some information about this temple; if you don't mind, may we explain it to you? Don't worry, it is free of charge." Tourists who declined were told, "It's okay, enjoy your visit," and were not approached further. The exact number of tourists approached, and the number who declined the tour or declined to be recorded, were not systematically logged during data collection and are reported here as a limitation rather than as a count.

More than eleven tourists initially agreed to be guided and video-recorded. However, several of these recordings were made on days with strong wind at the site, and when the research team reviewed the recordings for transcription, the tourists' voices were largely obscured by wind noise, leaving speech that could not be reliably transcribed. These recordings were excluded, and the eleven responses with sufficiently clear audio for verbatim transcription were retained as the dataset analyzed in this study. Because a technical constraint, not a principled selection rule, determined which responses were retained, and because the overall sample remains a small, non-probability convenience sample, the eleven responses are treated as an illustrative rather than a representative set. This sampling approach also raises the possibility of self-selection bias: tourists who agreed to a spontaneous guided tour, and then to being recorded and asked for their opinion, may differ systematically (for example, in friendliness, extroversion, or a wish to be polite to a student) from tourists who declined.

The tourists recorded came from France, the Netherlands, Croatia, Italy, the United Kingdom, Russia, Ireland, and the United States. Table 1 lists participant codes and country or region of origin as reported by each participant. Two clarifications are made here. First, Ireland is reported as its own country of origin rather than as "(United Kingdom)", since the Republic of Ireland is a separate sovereign state; this study did not record whether T11 held UK nationality, Irish nationality, or both. Second, England and the United Kingdom are not treated as parallel, equally-weighted country categories, since England is part of the United Kingdom rather than a separate sovereign state: where a participant specifically identified as English (T10), this is recorded as "United Kingdom (England)" rather than as a category distinct from "United Kingdom" (T6). Country of origin alone is a limited basis for interpreting perceptions of English, since it conflates nationality with first language, English proficiency, and prior exposure to non-native English speech. Relevant language background and prior experience with guided tours were not systematically collected for this study; this is reported as a limitation in the Conclusion below.

Instrument and Procedure

Tourists' verbal responses were video-recorded immediately after a student guide finished explaining and showing them around the temple complex. Before

recording, the guide told each tourist that they wished to record a short video of the tourist giving their opinion about the explanation they had just received. Recording proceeded only if the tourist agreed; if a tourist declined, no recording was made and that tourist was not included in the study. Tourists were also told at this stage that the recording would be transcribed, analyzed, and published in an academic article. The evaluative question used to elicit each tourist's spoken response was: "What is your opinion about our speaking skill and explanation during our interaction?" Because this question was asked directly by the same student who had just guided the tourist, and because it explicitly invited an opinion, courtesy bias a tendency toward polite, positive language toward someone who has just provided a free service face-to-face is a plausible influence on the responses and is treated as a limitation below. In addition to a verbal comment, six tourists (T1–T6) also gave a numeric rating of the explanation on what appears to be a 1–10 scale; whether this rating was requested from all eleven tourists as a standard part of the elicitation, or arose informally in some responses only, is not established and is not treated as a systematic measure in this study. No names were recorded; only country or region of origin was noted, used to distinguish participants using codes such as T1 and T2.

Tourists gave verbal, informed consent specifically to being video-recorded while sharing their opinion of the guiding they had just received; recording proceeded only for tourists who agreed, and tourists who declined were not recorded or included in the study. Tourists were additionally told, at the point of consent, that their recorded response would be transcribed, analyzed, and published in an academic article. Formal ethical review was not required under the authors' institutional policy for this type of internship-based data collection; course-level approval through the Implementation of ESP for Tourism course was the applicable procedure followed.

Data Analysis

Analysis followed a reflexive thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006): Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. The process starts when the analyst begins to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data /this may be during data collection. The endpoint is the reporting of the content and meaning of patterns (themes) in the data, where 'themes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs the investigators identify [sic] before, during, and after analysis' In this research becoming familiar with the data by reviewing recordings and transcripts repeatedly, generating initial codes from tourists' own wording, grouping codes into candidate themes, reviewing those themes against the full dataset, defining and naming them, and producing the analytic narrative presented in the Results and Discussion section.

The unit of coding was each participant's full verbatim response (T1–T11); a response was assigned more than one code only where it contained more than one explicit, separately identifiable evaluative statement, rather than by default. Table

2 states, for every coded response, the specific wording that triggered each code, so that the coding is auditable against the transcript. The research team comprised six members: five students and one supervising lecturer. All members transcribed the recordings together and generated initial codes jointly; coding was then cross-checked among all team members, with disagreements discussed until resolved (for example, by retaining both interpretations, as is done for T6 in Table 2). All eleven recordings were transcribed verbatim and went through this process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Everything below is drawn from all eleven verbatim-transcribed tourist responses collected for this study; counts such as “several” refer to counts out of that total of eleven. Table 2 lists each tourist's verbatim response and the theme(s) it was coded under, using the explicit inclusion criteria defined in the Theoretical Framework above: a theme is applied only where the response contains a specific word or phrase that directly indicates that construct. Responses that were positive but did not contain any of these specific markers are coded as “General Positive Evaluation, construct unspecified” rather than assigned to a more specific theme by inference.

No	Code	Country of Origin	Verbatim Response (transcription conventions apply — see note above table)	Theme(s) Identified (inclusion criterion)
1	T1	France	“I think it's really good, your explanation we really understand. About your explanation, even your English not very good, for me it's very clear, simple.”	Theme 1 – Clarity/Intelligibility (explicit “very clear”)
2	T2	United States (California)	“I think it's was very good, how you answer question, your explanation.”	Theme 2 – Interactional Competence (explicit reference to answering a question)
3	T3	Croatia	“It was really great, and I like your explanation, how the three of you explain.”	Theme 7 – General Positive Evaluation, construct unspecified (no explicit clarity/politeness/interest marker)
4	T4	Netherlands	“Your speaking skill are very well and explanation we love the most, so we enjoy	Theme 3 – Contributor to Tourist Experience (explicit link to enjoyment of the visit)

No	Code	Country of Origin	Verbatim Response (transcription conventions apply — see note above table)	Theme(s) Identified (inclusion criterion)
			the temple because of your explanation.”	
5	T5	Italy	“Explanation are very good, very interesting.”	Theme 6 – Interest/Engagement (explicit “interesting”)
6	T6	United Kingdom	“It is very good, your explanation are very clear, but it look like text, maybe you can make it more alive, but it was very clear to us.”	Theme 1 – Clarity/Intelligibility + Theme 4 – Perceived Lack of Spontaneity (counter-pattern). Dual-coded: contains two distinct explicit evaluative statements.
7	T7	France	“i think it was very clear, when you speak is loud and learn about the culture, and we from France so we need to practice, and you know it's very well.”	Theme 1 – Clarity/Intelligibility (explicit “very clear”)
8	T8	Italy	“you are spoke clearly, i means in fluency, you can very polite, i really love that.”	Theme 1 – Clarity/Intelligibility (“spoke clearly”) + Theme 5 – Politeness (“very polite”)
9	T9	Russia	“it's awesome, very polite, it's very good, interesting.”	Theme 5 – Politeness (“very polite”) + Theme 6 – Interest/Engagement (“interesting”)
10	T10	United Kingdom (England)	“Excellent, very good, very knowledgeable.”	Theme 8 – Perceived Knowledge (“knowledgeable”)
11	T11	Ireland	“I think the tour was very nice, well explained, and also very nice, so yeah, we like it and thank you so much.”	Theme 1 – Clarity/Intelligibility (“well explained”)

Applying these criteria across the eleven responses, eight themes emerge, with three responses (T6, T8, T9) receiving two codes each because they contain two distinct explicit evaluative statements. The resulting counts, reproducible directly from Table 2, are: Clarity/Intelligibility, 5 of 11 (T1, T6, T7, T8, T11); Politeness, 2 of 11 (T8, T9); Interest/Engagement, 2 of 11 (T5, T9); Interactional Competence, 1 of 11 (T2); Contributor to Tourist Experience, 1 of 11 (T4); Perceived Lack of Spontaneity (counter-pattern), 1 of 11 (T6); Perceived Knowledge, 1 of 11 (T10); and General Positive Evaluation with no specific construct named, 1 of 11 (T3).

Clarity/Intelligibility was the most frequently coded theme, and is also the theme with the broadest evidential base in this dataset. T1, from France, said the explanation was “very clear, simple,” while explicitly separating that judgment from grammatical accuracy: “even your English not very good ... for me it's very clear, simple.” T7 (“i think it was very clear”) and T11 (“well explain”) used similar clarity language, and T8 added “you are spoke clearly, i means in fluency.” Read through Munro and Derwing's (1995) distinction, these are best treated as reports of perceived comprehensibility a listener's impression of ease of understanding rather than as an objective measure of intelligibility or of students' underlying speaking competence, which this study did not independently assess. T1's response is the clearest evidence in this dataset that at least one tourist can separate comprehensibility from grammatical accuracy explicitly, and no response in this dataset explicitly praised grammatical accuracy on its own; within this small sample, comprehensibility-related language was both more frequent and more explicit than any grammar-specific language, though a single-site sample of eleven responses cannot establish this as a general tendency among tourists.

One response (T2) explicitly referenced interactional ability: “how you answer question,” rather than only the delivery of a prepared explanation. Following Young's (2011) distinction, this is treated as a report of interactional competence specifically because it names the act of answering a question, not general praise. Because only one of eleven responses raised this directly, it is reported as a single, notable observation rather than as a dominant pattern; no claim is made about how common this experience was among tourists who did not mention it. Politeness (T8, T9) and Interest/Engagement (T5, T9) each appeared in two responses, pointing to affective and interpersonal dimensions of the interaction that are conceptually distinct from clarity. T9 said, “it's awesome, very polite, it's very good, interesting,” explicitly naming both politeness and interest in the same response, which is why T9 receives two codes in Table 2. Only T4 explicitly tied the quality of the explanation to enjoyment of the visit overall (“we enjoy the temple because of your explanation”), and only T10 explicitly referenced the guide's knowledge (“knowledge able” [sic]); each is reported as a single instance rather than generalized to the other nine responses.

One response breaks from the largely positive pattern. T6, from the United Kingdom, affirmed clarity (“your explanation are very clear ... it was very clear to us”) but added an explicit critique: the delivery “look like text,” and could be “more alive.” Read through Cohen's (1985) and Pond's (1993) framing of tour-guiding as

a communicative genre with its own audience-design demands, this critique is best understood as a comment on delivery style specifically sounding rehearsed rather than responsive not as a comment on English proficiency in general, since the same response also affirms clarity. This is the only explicitly critical response in the dataset and is reported as a single observation, not a pattern; it nonetheless points to a possible tension between a fixed explanatory script, which may support clarity and confidence, and sounding natural or responsive.

Two further points limit how these patterns should be read. First, because responses were elicited by the guide themselves immediately after providing a free service, courtesy bias is a plausible alternative explanation for the largely positive tone of the responses; this study cannot separate a tourist's genuine assessment from a polite one given in the moment. Second, because different students guided different tourists, and because the exact route and wording were not confirmed to be held constant across guides, some of what tourists commented on may reflect differences between individual guides rather than a general pattern in how tourists judge students' speaking. Neither explanation can be ruled out with the current data; both are raised so that the findings above are read as patterns in short, elicited, single-site responses, not as a settled account of what tourists in general think.

Within the bounds of what this dataset can support, two tentative implications follow for ESP course design. First, because comprehensibility-related language was both more frequent and more explicit in tourists' comments than any grammar-specific language, ESP instruction for future tour guides may benefit from treating intelligibility as an explicit teaching goal alongside, not instead of, grammatical accuracy. Second, because T6's only critical comment concerned scripted-sounding delivery and T2's comment concerned handling a question, brief, practiced question-and-answer routines alongside a prepared explanation may help guides sound and respond more naturally. These are offered as considerations for course design, not as demonstrated effects.

This study has several limitations that should qualify how its findings are used. Data come from a single site (Prambanan Temple) during one internship period, so findings should not be extended to other sites or settings without further evidence. The convenience sample of eleven tourists is small and was not drawn to be representative; the eleven responses were also the subset of a larger number of initial recordings that had sufficiently clear audio for transcription, after several recordings were excluded due to wind noise at the site, which is itself a further, non-random constraint on which responses could be analyzed. Self-selection bias is plausible, since tourists who agreed to a spontaneous guided tour and to being recorded may differ from those who declined, and the exact numbers of tourists approached and declined were not logged. Responses were brief, single-turn elicitations delivered directly to the guide who asked for them, rather than extended interviews conducted by an independent party, which limits how much can be inferred about any individual tourist's full evaluation and raises the possibility of courtesy bias. Exposure to different student guides was not confirmed to be equivalent across participants guides shared a common historical briefing but not a

standardized script or route so some patterns may reflect differences between guides rather than a general tourist response. Finally, because the study relied on country of origin alone rather than on first-language or English-proficiency data, its ability to explain why particular tourists judged speaking the way they did is limited.

CONCLUSION

This study explored international tourists' reported perceptions of student guides' English speaking during tours at Prambanan Temple. In the eleven short responses analyzed, clarity and ease of understanding were mentioned most often, appearing in five responses. Tourists also commented on politeness, interest, the ability to answer a question, the guide's knowledge, and the contribution of the explanation to their enjoyment of the visit. One tourist praised the clarity of the explanation while suggesting that its delivery sounded too scripted. These comments suggest that perceived comprehensibility matters to tourists alongside other aspects of guiding. One response explicitly distinguished a clear explanation from imperfect English, while none specifically praised grammatical accuracy. For English for Tourism instruction, the findings point to the value of practicing clear explanations and responses to tourists' questions alongside grammatical accuracy. This is a tentative teaching implication, not evidence that a particular course approach improves speaking performance. Because the study drew on eleven brief, elicited responses at one site, the findings describe these tourists' impressions and cannot be generalized to tourists more broadly or used as an independent assessment of the students' speaking ability.

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