STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEECH: A REGISTER ANALYSIS IN THE SCHOOL CAFE AT VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL OF KY AGENG GIRI

MUNAFIAH, ARSO SETYAJI & LISTYANING SUMARDIYANI

Indonesian Teachers Association University of Semarang

ABSTRACT

This study investigated how Ky Ageng Giri Vocational High School students use English when interacting with customers in the school cafe. The café offers a realistic context where students practice genuine service communication as part of the school's teaching-factory curriculum, making it a perfect place to examine language use via the register theory perspective. Based on three register components: field (what they discuss), tenor (their interaction with the interlocutor), and mode (the structure and delivery of messages) this study attempts to investigate how pupils create meaning. A descriptive qualitative method was used, with data obtained from direct observation, audio recordings, and transcribed conversations of students serving teachers, guests, and peers. The analysis focused on identifying the types of utterances produced and the contextual factors influencing students' linguistic choices. The data suggest that students primarily developed expressions linked to delivering menus, accepting orders, verifying decisions, and providing brief explanations. Students displayed varied degrees of formality based on who they interacted with. When chatting to teachers or guests, they employed more polite and structured terms, whereas discussions with friends featured more relaxed and colloquial language. Meanwhile, the mode analysis found that students relied primarily on basic sentence patterns, direct communication, and unmarked topical themes to preserve clarity and efficiency while doing service tasks. Overall, the findings show that students can adapt their language to various communication contexts, however there are still significant discrepancies, especially when it comes to upholding proper formality levels and creating more complicated phrases. These results emphasize how crucial it is to offer contextualized English instruction that reflects actual business conversation. The study provides useful insights for future researchers interested in investigating language register in vocational education contexts, as well as for English teachers creating communicative tasks and schools enhancing practice-based learning environments.

Keywords: register, field–tenor–mode, vocational English, school cafe, service communication.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Language varies according to context, and this variation is explained through Halliday's (1985) register theory, which includes field, tenor, and mode as key determinants of linguistic choice (Qiao Xiao-hong, 2022). In vocational education, especially in Indonesia, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) remains limited despite increasing workplace demands for effective communication in sectors such as hospitality, tourism, and business (Marliana, Ali, Warqiah,

& Syamsul, 2025). Developing communicative competence—beyond grammar and vocabulary—is therefore crucial for helping students adjust their language according to formality, audience, and professional situations (Cafe, 2024).

Ky Ageng Giri Vocational High School incorporates a school cafe as part of its teaching factory model, providing students with an authentic environment to practice English while taking orders, serving customers, and interacting with teachers, peers, and guests. Observations reveal that students still struggle to choose appropriate registers; some use overly informal expressions with teachers, while others rely on rigid textbook English that sounds unnatural in real interactions. Studies underscore that real-world learning environments such as cafes or hospitality simulations can significantly improve speaking confidence and contextual language use (Mohsein & Kadhim, 2024; Authar, Saputri, & Djuwari, 2022).

Previous research has largely focused on classroom discourse rather than authentic service interactions, leaving a gap in understanding how vocational learners adapt language based on roles, power relations, communication goals, and situational formality (Holmes, 2013; Paltridge, 2021). This study therefore examines students' English register use in real café interactions to identify linguistic patterns, contextual influences, and implications for workplace communication readiness. Findings are expected to contribute both to sociolinguistic theory and to vocational English pedagogy, especially for preparing students for professional communication in hospitality and cruise industries.

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

What do students talk about during English service interactions in the school cafe? (Field)

How do students deliver their spoken messages when serving customers in the school cafe? (Mode)

Why do students use such language during school cafe service interactions? (Tenor)

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics examines how language and society interact, particularly how speakers use linguistic choices to convey social meaning. Holmes (2013) argues that sociolinguists investigate why people speak differently across situations and how language reflects social identity and community norms. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) further emphasize that language is inherently social because every linguistic choice whether intentional or unconscious signals identity, social relationships, and the norms shaping an interaction.

Language use is therefore contextually patterned rather than random. Giglioli (1972) notes that sociolinguistics focuses on parole, or language in actual use, because speech reflects the underlying social structures of a community. Eckert (2012) highlights a tension between efforts to standardize language and the desire to preserve local identities, showing that linguistic variation indexes power, belonging, and resistance.

The global spread of English illustrates that language status is socially constructed. Crystal (2003) explains that English gained global prominence not only through native speakers but through institutional adoption worldwide. Pennycook (2001) adds that sociolinguistic practices are shaped by local identities and global ideological forces, meaning language use is never neutral. Altogether, sociolinguistic perspectives show that linguistic behavior is the product of social context, identity, and power relations.

b. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Systemic Functional Linguistics positions language as a social semiotic system used to make meaning in specific contexts. Halliday and Hasan (1985) argue that grammar is functional, flexible, and context-dependent. In this model, every linguistic choice contributes to three metafunctions: the ideational (field), interpersonal (tenor), and textual (mode) (Accurso & Gebhard, 2021).

Darong (2022) explains that ideational meaning represents experience, interpersonal meaning constructs social relationships, and textual meaning organizes messages coherently. These metafunctions guide researchers in analyzing how speakers convey ideas, negotiate relationships, and structure information. In educational and vocational settings, SFL helps reveal how students adapt language to roles and tasks. In a school café, for example, students shift tone and structure depending on whether they interact with teachers, customers, or peers. Thus, SFL provides a theoretical foundation for analyzing contextualized spoken English in service interactions.

Figure 1
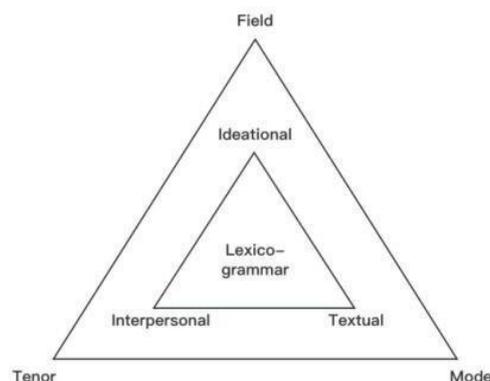
- **Field**

Field captures the ongoing activity and experiential meaning in discourse. Kolo (2025) states that the field reflects social action, subject matter, and ways participants interpret experience through language. Field is expressed through lexical choices and process types, often revealing whether the text is professional, casual, or specialized. Logical relations such as elaboration, extension, and enhancement help structure these experiences, contributing to coherence and meaning-making.

- **Tenor**

Tenor concerns social roles, relationships, and levels of formality. Halliday's interpersonal metafunction explains how speakers use language to build relationships through mood and modality. Siregar, Pasaribu, and Sinambela (2021) classify mood into declarative (giving information), interrogative (asking for information), and imperative (giving instructions).

These patterns reveal communicative intent and expected responses. In café settings, students typically use interrogatives to ask for orders, declaratives to give information, and imperatives for service procedures showing how tenor shapes politeness, authority, and interactional stance.

- Mode

Mode involves how messages are structured using theme–rheme organization, information flow, and cohesion. Hao (2023) explains that textual meaning ensures coherence and logical progression. Themes may be unmarked (subject-first) or marked (fronted elements for emphasis). See Spoken service interactions often rely on unmarked themes for clarity and efficiency, though marked themes appear when emphasizing time, sequence, or instructions.

c. English Speech

Language enables individuals to express ideas, emotions, and cultural values (Tektigul et al., 2023). Speaking, as its vocal realization, is an interactive and situational meaning-making process (Hayder & Furat, 2023). Saussure (1916/1959) distinguishes speech as dynamic, individual, and social, whereas language is a structured system.

Communicative competence is essential, especially in vocational settings where students must interact directly with customers or supervisors. Chen (2021) stresses that communication skills enhance language learning and professional readiness. In service-oriented vocational education, learners must master conventional expressions related to greeting, offering help, taking orders, and closing interactions.

According to Buranova (2021) and Richards (2006), Communicative Language Teaching supports this through authentic materials and real-world tasks. In cafés, register variation appears clearly: students may say "Good afternoon, Sir, may I take your order?" to teachers but "What do you want to drink?" to peers. As Halliday (1978, in Lukin et al., 2011) explains, this variation reflects differences in situational context, participant roles, and communicative purpose.

4.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The first previous study was conducted by Zeng and Della (2024), who in their article "A Systematic Review of Professional Communication Skills in English for Specific Purposes in Vocational Education within the New Media Era" highlighted the significant development of ESP in vocational education through a PRISMA-based analysis of 90 papers, selecting 40 with strong methodological rigor. Their findings show that integrating digital technology and new media platforms such as online learning environments and social media is critical for improving students' professional communication abilities by making ESP learning more contextual, interactive, and aligned with modern industry needs. They also found that new media increases engagement, learning outcomes, and adaptability, while emphasizing the need for further

research on long-term digital impacts and stronger collaboration between educators and industry. This current study connects closely to Zeng and Della's research by similarly emphasizing contextual, workplace-oriented communication and extending their focus by examining real-world spoken English use in a teaching factory setting.

The second previous study by Khan, Rehman, and Ahmad (2025) conducted a register analysis of the Pakistani animated series Burka Avenger using Halliday's register theory and a qualitative purposive sampling approach to examine how lexical and grammatical resources, mode, field, and tone construct social meanings in media discourse. Their findings revealed that the series expresses ideological themes such as freedom, identity, equality, and education, demonstrating how linguistic elements communicate explicit and implicit cultural values. The study also stressed that media texts are valuable data for understanding how language functions across contexts, with register analysis revealing the link between lexis, grammar, communicative aims, and semiotic meanings. While their study analyzed ideological meanings in media discourse, the current research applies the same theoretical lensfield, tenor, and modern to real-life spoken interactions, expanding register analysis into authentic vocational communication in a school café setting.

The third study by Kolo (2025) compared social media language and academic writing using Biber and Conrad's (2009) register analysis framework to highlight linguistic variation across contexts. The results showed that social media communication relies heavily on verbs, adverbs, and personal pronouns, producing a casual and expressive style, whereas academic writing favors nouns, declarative structures, technical vocabulary, and an impersonal tone, reflecting situational influences shaped by field, tenor, and mode. Kolo emphasized that understanding such register variation helps learners develop contextual appropriateness and language awareness, demonstrating register theory's role in connecting grammar with real-world communication. While Kolo examined written and online discourse, the current study extends the register framework to spoken English in a customer-service environment, offering insights into how vocational students' language choices align with professional etiquette and communicative demands.

5.0 RESEARCH METHOD

The descriptive qualitative design allowed the researcher as the main instrument (Creswell, 2014) to observe and interpret students' natural communication using Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) SFL framework. The study took place at SMK Ky Ageng Giri, Demak, where the school café serves as a teaching factory environment that provides authentic English service interactions. Fifty students on rotating café duty were selected purposely, supported by information from the English teacher and café manager to contextualize communication behaviors.

Data were collected through non-participatory observation and audio recording during 15–20 minute café shifts, capturing authentic customer-service interactions. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and compiled into a Register Analysis Sheet based on SFL categories. Semi-structured interviews with students and supervisors further supported interpretation by exploring students' communication experiences, awareness of register adaptation, and challenges in service encounters.

Data analysis used a coding sheet to categorize each clause according to Field (experiential and logical meanings), Tenor (mood types and interpersonal roles), and Mode (theme–rheme organization). A frequency table summarized the distribution of register categories, and percentages were calculated to identify dominant linguistic patterns. Interpretation involved comparing coded patterns within and across transcripts to determine how students expressed meaning through process types, politeness strategies, and thematic choices. This analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of how students' spoken English reflects textual, interpersonal, and experiential meaning-making in a vocational service context.

6.0 DISCUSSION AND FINDING

The analysis using the Register Theory framework (Field–Tenor–Mode) shows that students' spoken interactions in the school café are dominated by experiential meanings (41 instances; 63.07%), reflecting a strong focus on concrete service actions such as offering items, confirming orders, giving explanations, and processing payments. Logical meanings appeared 24 times (36.92%), mostly in simple extensions using and, indicating that students rarely elaborate or enhance information and instead rely on linear and transactional clauses. Declarative mood emerged most frequently (24 instances; 40%), showing students' tendency to provide information and maintain clarity, followed by interrogatives (19; 31.67%) for checking preferences and imperatives (16; 26.67%) for polite directives like "please wait." In terms of Mode, unmarked topical themes (21; 53.85%) indicate that students generally used simple S–V structures for clarity, while marked themes (18; 46.15%) were used to emphasize instructions or manage interaction flow. These distributions reveal that students' language remains straightforward, procedural, and highly task-focused, consistent with the nature of transactional service interactions.

Interview data reinforce these patterns, showing that students rely on simple, familiar expressions because they feel safer, easier to recall, and suitable for transactional purposes. Challenges such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and anxiety when responding to unexpected questions explain their dependence on short declaratives, basic interrogatives, and simple thematic structures. The teacher also noted that fear of making mistakes contributes to students' reliance on memorized phrases rather than more complex or polite constructions. Overall, students demonstrate functional yet limited communicative competence: they successfully perform essential service tasks, but their linguistic choices are constrained by affective factors, restricted lexical resources, and limited textual control. These findings highlight the need for pedagogical support that strengthens vocabulary, confidence, politeness strategies, and more flexible communication patterns for vocational service contexts.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Using the Register framework of Field, Tenor, and Mode, this study found that students' English during café service was functional but still simple, with experiential meanings dominating the Field component and limited logical linkages, while Tenor analysis showed a reliance on declaratives supported by basic imperatives and interrogatives, and Mode analysis revealed mostly unmarked topical themes indicating straightforward clause organization. Overall, students successfully performed essential transactional tasks but showed limited variation, politeness flexibility, and elaboration due to low confidence, restricted vocabulary,

and dependence on memorized expressions, suggesting a need for more contextualized and communicative practice to develop richer and more confident.

REFERENCES

1. Accurso, K., & Gebhard, M. (2021). SFL praxis in U.S. teacher education: A critical literature review. Linguistics and Education, University of British Columbia & University of Massachusetts.

2. Abd Al-Khadhim, H. H., & Abd Al-Hamza, F. N. (2023). The effect of linguistic intelligence-based activities on Iraqi EFL learners' speaking and reading abilities: A case study of Diwanniaya. International Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities (IJRSSH), 13(2), 485–496. https://doi.org/10.37648/ijrssh.v13i02.039

3. Adityawirawan, S. S. K., & Kusuma, H. E. (2021). Café as student's informal learning space: A case study in Bandung, Indonesia. DIMENSI: Journal of Architecture and Built Environment, 48(2), 109–120. https://doi.org/10.9744/dimensi.48.2.109-120

4. Authar, N., Saputri, T., & Djuwari. (2022). Students' perception: Coffee shop as joyful learning space in improving English speaking skill—Anxiety, comfortable place, internal motivation, external motivation, joyful learning. Education and Human Development Journal, 7(3). https://doi.org/10.33086/ehdj.v7i03.3405

5. Buranova, N. (2021). The Problems of Mastering Linguistic Politeness. European Journal of Humanities and Educational Advancements (EJHEA), 2(9), 5–8. Available online at: https://www.scholarzest.com ISSN: 2660-5589

6. Cafe, E. F. L. (2024). Effective Communication in English: Essential Skills for EFL/ESL Learners. EFL Cafe. net, 1.

7. Chen, R. H. (2021). Fostering students' workplace communicative competence and collaborative mindset through an inquiry-based learning design. Education Sciences, 11(1), 17. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11010017

8. Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.). SAGE Publications

9. Crystal, D. (2003). English as a global language (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

10. Daristin, P. E., Laili, E. N., Zuhriyah, M., Fajarina, M., Agustina, R. K., & Ma'rifatulloh, S. (2023). Pelatihan English Language Cafe bagi guru bahasa Inggris tingkat MGMP MAN Kab Jombang bersama UiTM Malaysia. Dalam Seminar Nasional Sains Teknopak VII, LPPM UNHASY Tebuireng Jombang.

11. Darong, H. C. (2022). Register categories (field, tenor, mode) of the text. LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching, 25(2), 572–581. Sanata Dharma University. https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v25i2.4724

12. Davidse, K. (2018). A tribute to M.A.K. Halliday (1925-2018). Functions of Language, 25(2), 205-228. https://doi.org/10.1075/fol.00008.dav

13. Eckert, P. (2012). Meaning and linguistic variation: The third wave in sociolinguistics. Cambridge University Press.

14. Giglioli, P. P. (Ed.). (1972). Language and social context: Selected readings. Penguin Books

15. Gokgoz-Kurt, B. (2023). Fluency, comprehensibility, and accentedness in L2 speech: Examining the role of visual and acoustic information in listener judgments. Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 6(1), 40–54. https://doi.org/10.29140/ajal.v6n1.1026

16. Hao, X. (2023). Discourse Analysis of Father's Grassland Mother's River Based on Register Theory. Pacific International Journal, 6(3), 20–32. https://doi.org/10.55014/pij.v6i3.389

17. Holmes, J. (2013). An Introduction to Sociolinguistics (4th ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315833057

18. Hendriyani, I. (2024). Positioning strategy of English Cafe as cafe course concept to compete, other English institutions in Semarang. EDUJ: English Education Journal, 2(1), 75–XX. Published by CV. Kalimasada Group Profesional.

19. Kadhim, H. S., & Mohsein, O. A. (2024). Task-based language teaching: Enhancing English skills through real-world tasks. International Journal of Social Science & Educational Research (IJSSER), 6(2), 286–291. https://www.socialsciencejournals.net

20. Khairuddin. (2024). Penugasan vlog dalam pembelajaran untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris. Jurnal Teknologi Konseptual Desain, 1(2), 160–169. https://doi.org/10.1980/jurnalteknologikonseptualdesign.v1i1

21. Khan, S., Rehman, Z. U., & Ahmad, F. (2025). Register Analysis of Burka Avenger. Advance Social Science Archives Journal, 3(1), 167–176. Available at: https://assajournal.com

22. Kunitz, S., & Jansson, G. (2020). Story recipiency in a language café: Integration work at the micro-level of interaction. Journal of Pragmatics, 170, 35–49. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2020.11.017

23. Kolo, O. (2025). Register analysis of social media language and academic writing: A comparative approach. Berkeley Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 7(6), 339–344. https://doi.org/10.70382/bjhss.v7i6.006

24. Marliana, R., Ali, H., Warqiah, R., & Syamsul, C. P. (2025). Practical English communication: Role plays training for SMKN 1 Majene students. Room of Civil Society Development, 4(3), 460-474. https://doi.org/10.59110/rcsd.639

25. Munro, M. J., & Derwing, T. M. (1995). Foreign accent, comprehensibility, and intelligibility in the speech of second language learners. Language Learning, 45(1), 73–97. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1995.tb00963.x

26. Pennycook, A. (2001). Critical applied linguistics: A critical introduction. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, University of Technology Sydney.

27. Polo-Pérez, N., & Holmes, P. (2023). Translanguaging as methodology to study language cafés: Implications for managing multilingual data. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 44(8), 737–750. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2023.2197882

28. Qiao, X. (2022). An analysis of application of register theory in teaching college English writing. Sino-US English Teaching, 19(10), 339–344. https://doi.org/10.17265/1539-8072/2022.10.001

29. Saussure, F. de. (1959). Course in general linguistics (W. Baskin, Trans.). Philosophical Library. (Original work published 1916)

30. Siregar, Y., Pasaribu, A. N., & Sinambela, E. (2021). An analysis of mood and modality: Students' hopes and views about the future of learning amidst COVID-19 pandemic. PIONEER: Journal of Language and Literature, 13(2), 302–314.

31. Tektigul, Z., Bayadilova-Altybayeva, A., Sadykova, S., Iskindirova, S., Kushkimbayeva, A., & Zhumagul, D. (2023). Language as a Symbol System that Carries Culture. International Journal of Society, Culture & Language (IJSCL), 11(1), 15–26. https://doi.org/10.22034/IJSCL.2022.562756.2781

32. Torres Reynoso, J. A. (2021). Teaching English for specific purposes in EFL classroom [Monografía de licenciatura, Universidad Nacional de Educación Enrique Guzmán y Valle]. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, Escuela Profesional de Lenguas Extranjeras.

33. Tveit, Å. K., & Johnston, J. (2024). Talking about picture books in libraries' language cafes. Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 56(4), 857–867. https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006231173681

34. Uchihara, T., Webb, S., Saito, K., & Trofimovich, P. (2023). Frequency of exposure influences accentedness and comprehensibility in learners' pronunciation of second language words. Language Learning, 73(1), 84-125. https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12517

35. Utami, H. S., & Morganna, R. (2022). Improving students' English pronunciation competence by using shadowing technique. English Franca: Academic Journal of English

36. Language and Education, 6(1), 127-150. https://doi.org/10.29240/ef.v6i1.3915 Wardhaugh, R. (2010). An introduction to sociolinguistics (6th ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.

37. Wijanarko, O. B., Sandika, K. C., & Kinanthi, F. T. A. (2023). Teaching English to food and beverage staff using a role-play method. ELTR Journal: English Language Teaching and Research Journal, 7(2), 110–116. https://doi.org/10.37147/eltr.v7i2.175

38. Xiao-hong, Q. I. A. O. (2022). An analysis of application of register theory in teaching college English writing. Sino-US English Teaching, 19(10), 339-344.

39. Zeng, S., & Della, C. (2024). A systematic review of professional communication skills in English for specific purposes in vocational education within the new media era. Eurasian Journal of Educational Research, 114, 226–249. Ani Publishing Ltd.