

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of research, problem formulation, research objectives, research significance and limitations of the research scope.

1.1 Background of the Study

Tourism is one of the sectors that plays an important role in the economy, both locally and globally. With the potential of natural beauty, culture, and the richness of customs owned by each region, tourism can be the main driver in improving people's welfare. In Indonesia, tourism is highly expected to be a source of considerable income, especially in areas rich in tourist attractions. This is in line with the opinion of Weaver and Lawton (2014) who stated that tourism can make a significant contribution to economic growth by creating jobs and increasing regional income.

In the context of tourism development, in addition to physical infrastructure, non-physical factors such as communication and cultural exchange also play a crucial role. Through effective communication, tourists can gain deeper insights into the rich cultural heritage of an area, thus creating more meaningful interactions. As explained by Richards (2018), quality cultural interactions not only enrich the travel experience but also encourage greater respect and appreciation for local customs among visitors. Thus, effective communication can bridge cultural gaps and create harmonious relationships between tourists and local communities

Communication in the context of tourism cannot be separated from the complex and interrelated linguistic aspects. According to Gudykunst and Kim's (2003) intercultural communication theory, effective communication in tourism begins with the understanding that language is not just a means of communication, but a cultural bridge connecting two different worlds. In this context, linguistic aspects can be understood through five interrelated dimensions, from the most general to the most specific.

First, language readiness as the main foundation is the most basic aspect that covers the entire communication capability in the tourism industry. Blue & Harun (2003) emphasized that language readiness is a crucial indicator in a successful tourism industry, because it reflects the level of professionalism and competitiveness of the tourist destination. This concept includes not only foreign language skills, but also an understanding of communication norms, language ethics, and cultural sensitivity needed in serving tourists from various backgrounds.

Second, cross-cultural communication becomes a more specific aspect of language readiness, where the focus is on the ability to overcome communication barriers that arise due to cultural differences. Hofstede (2001) in his theory of cultural dimensions explains that each culture has a unique way of communicating, including in terms of high and low context, power distance, and time orientation. In tourism, this understanding allows tourism actors to adjust their communication style according to the cultural characteristics of

tourists, thus creating more effective communication and avoiding misunderstandings.

Third, cultural exchange through language is an aspect that emphasizes the function of language as a medium for transferring cultural information. Shepherd (2015) in his study of tourism communication emphasized that the process of cultural exchange through language involves "cultural translation" which not only changes words from one language to another, but also transfers meaning, values, and cultural context. In tourism, this aspect is seen when tour guides or other tourism actors use language to explain local traditions, history, and values to tourists. This process is not just translating information, but also interpreting and contextualizing local culture so that it can be understood and appreciated by tourists, as explained by Shepherd that cultural translation involves the transformation of complex cultural meanings to create authentic cross-cultural understanding.

Fourth, communication effectiveness as a more technical aspect relates to the ability to convey messages clearly, accurately, and easily understood. Jamal and Hollinshead (2020) in their study of sustainable tourism communication emphasize the importance of "clarity of message delivery" which includes the use of language that is inclusive and easily understood by various segments of tourists. In the context of tourism, communication effectiveness includes the use of appropriate vocabulary, simple but informative sentence structures, and the ability to explain complex cultural concepts in a way that is easily understood by tourists from different cultural backgrounds.

Fifth, relationship harmonization is the most specific aspect that focuses on the final result of successful communication. The communication accommodation theory from Giles and Ogay (2007) explains that good communication will encourage both parties to adjust their communication style, thus creating a harmonious relationship. In the field of tourism, this harmonization is reflected in the creation of a sense of mutual respect between tourists and local communities, where tourists not only enjoy the beauty of tourist destinations but also appreciate local culture, while local communities feel proud because they can share their cultural heritage.

The five aspects of language are interrelated and form a unified tourism communication system. The researcher chose language readiness because language readiness is the foundation that enables cross-cultural communication, which then facilitates cultural exchange through language, produces effective communication, and ultimately creates a harmonious relationship between tourists and the local community. A comprehensive understanding of these aspects is essential for the development of sustainable and quality tourism. This definition shows that language readiness is a complex and multidimensional concept that needs to be analyzed comprehensively to understand its role in tourism development.

Language readiness is an important factor in the tourism sector because it is directly related to the quality of service and tourist experience. Graddol's (2021) research shows that tourist attractions with good language readiness have a high level of revisit intention. This indicates that foreign language skills,

especially English as an international language, function not only as a means of communication, but also as an important factor in building emotional bonds and trust in tourists towards a place. In the tourism sector, language readiness is not only an added value, but also an important factor in success tourism.

The characteristics or aspects of foreign tourist destinations include several important interrelated dimensions, which are supported by various tourism theories. One relevant theory according to Cohen & Cooper (2016) emphasizes that "effective communication is the main bridge between hosts and guests. This model explains that the success of interactions between local residents and tourists. The success of interactions between the two parties is highly dependent on their ability to exchange information clearly and in a timely manner. Hakim and his team (2022) stated that the presence of information boards in various languages in tourist attractions helps facilitate access for all visitors and makes the destination feel more open to all groups. They also showed that the diversity of languages on information boards can increase tourist comfort and provide a positive image for the tourist attraction. These two studies show that infrastructure that supports multilingual communication plays an important role in facilitating tourists to access the information they need during their visit. In addition, the presence of human resources who are proficient in foreign languages also strengthens interpersonal relationships and builds trust between hosts and guests. Thus, the integration of language aspects and multilingual information not only improves the quality of tourism services

but also strengthens the position of the destination as a friendly and inclusive place for tourists from various cultural backgrounds.

Palembang, as the oldest city in Indonesia with a rich history of the Sriwijaya Kingdom, offers a variety of tourist attractions that attract both domestic and foreign tourists. The city, which is divided by the Musi River, has various tourism assets, ranging from historical tourism such as heritage sites of the Sriwijaya Kingdom, cultural tourism, culinary tourism such as Pempek, Model, and Tekwan, to international-class sports venues that are the legacy of the 2018 Asian Games (Siswanto & Moeljadi, 2021).

Based on statistical data from the Palembang City Tourism Office (2023), there was a significant increase in foreign tourist visits by 27% in 2022 compared to the previous year, with the majority of tourists coming from Malaysia, Singapore, China, and several European countries. Based on various scientific studies, five tourist destinations in Palembang have been identified as the most popular, each with its own uniqueness and attractiveness. First, the Ampera Bridge is the main icon of Palembang with the highest number of visits according to Siswanto & Moejiono (2017), has historical value as a symbol of modernization, and is the center of economic and tourism activities thanks to its strategic location. Second, Kemaro Island, as studied by Dwi Maharani (2014), offers a unique combination of spiritual and natural values, becoming the center and 1 annual Cap Go Meh celebration. Third, Pempek Village from the study of Rahmadani & Susilowati (2021), is a culinary tourism area that is the center of preservation and development of traditional Palembang food. This

study found the fact that this culinary area, which was formed naturally since the 1980s, has developed into a culinary tourism destination with more than 120 micro and small businesses that provide various types of pempek with traditional to modern. Fourth, Benteng Kuto Besak was identified by Adivanto et al. (2020) as Palembang's most important cultural asset with high historical value as a legacy of the Sultanate. Fifth, Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II Museum. According to Budi & Lestari (2022), it is the main center for preserving cultural heritage with a collection of unique artifacts. also as a popular educational destination that is a must-visit for tourists who want to learn the history and culture of Palembang.

Considering the increase in foreign tourists and the importance of language readiness in supporting the tourism sector, this study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the level of language readiness in Palembang in these five popular tourist destinations. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide a significant contribution to the development of tourism in Palembang. These findings can be the basis for formulating more effective language training programs, developing relevant communication materials, and raising awareness of the importance of language skills in serving tourists. Thus, it is hoped that this researcher can support efforts to improve the quality of tourism services, encourage economic growth, and strengthen the positive image of Palembang as a friendly and competitive tourist destination.

1.2 Problems of the Study

1. What is the current level of language readiness in five popular tourist destinations in Palembang?
2. What are the obstacles faced by Palembang tourism actors in communicating with tourists in each tourist destination?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research was to analyze the level of language readiness of five popular tourist destinations in Palembang and whether the five destinations were ready to become tourist destinations for local and foreign tourists.

1.4 Significance of Study

By analyzing language readiness of popular places in Palembang City, this research would contribute to the development of the tourism sector, especially in the aspect of language readiness. It was expected that the results of the research would enrich the literature on the importance of language skills in providing positive experiences for tourists and increasing the competitiveness of tourist destinations.

In addition, this research opens up opportunities for English Literature students to develop similar research topics that are applicable and relevant to local developments, such as developing language training materials for tourism actors, pragmatic studies in tourist-local interactions, and cultural translation in the context of tourist destination promotion. Thus, this research was expected to enrich

students' academic and practical perspectives, as well as strengthen their role in supporting the development of the sustainable tourism sector in South Sumatra.

1.5 Limitation of Study

This study focused on five popular tourist destinations in Palembang City, namely Jembatan Ampera, Kemaro Island, Kampung Pempek, Kuto Besak Fortress and Sultan Mahmud Badarrudin II Museum. The results of this study may not be widely generalized to the entire tourism sector in Palembang City, including other tourist destinations that may have different characteristics. The five tourist destinations were selected based on various scientific studies and levels of tourist visits. The popularity of the five destinations is also supported by several general factors, namely statistical data from the Palembang City Tourism Office (2023), intensive promotion by the local government in tourism campaigns, good accessibility compared to other tourist destinations in Palembang City, uniqueness and historical/cultural value, and the availability of official tour packages offered by travel agents.