



Mandarin Language Needs Analysis for Communication in the Tire Manufacturing Industry: A Case Study at PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia

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Keywords

Language needs ; Work communication ; Mandarin language ; Manufacturing industry

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the need for Mandarin language skills to support work communication in the tire manufacturing industry, with a case study at PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia. The research method used is descriptive qualitative, with data collection techniques including observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of this study show that communication between local employees and Chinese supervisors is mostly conducted directly with the help of translators, as well as using alternatives such as Google Translate and hand gestures. However, these methods are not yet fully effective due to limited internet signal in the machine area and the suboptimal use of hand gestures in conveying detailed messages. The main challenge faced is the limited Mandarin proficiency of local employees, especially in speaking, listening, and reading skills. An effective strategy to overcome these challenges is Mandarin language training accompanied by individual learning motivation. These findings emphasize that mastering Mandarin is an essential need in a multinational work environment to improve communication effectiveness and work productivity.

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization and the rapid development of communication and information technology have had a broad and significant impact on various aspects of life, not only in the education sector, but also in industry, particularly the manufacturing industry. One consequence of this situation is the increase in the number of multinational companies, including those from China, that establish large factories in Indonesia and engage in business collaborations. In these working relationships, cross-cultural communication, especially the use of Mandarin becomes extremely crucial. Effective communication helps prevent misunderstandings among employees in carrying out their daily activities (Fatimah, 2024)

In daily work activities, the ability to communicate in Mandarin has become a primary necessity for Indonesia workers because many supervisors, technicians, and experts come from China and use Mandarin as their daily working language. In the manufacturing industry, effective communication is a crucial element to ensure the smooth running of production processes and the establishment of good cooperation. A study conducted by (Putri, 2021) revealed that one of the factors supporting the smooth use of a foreign language is direct interaction with native speakers. This is due to the increase and development of vocabulary, especially when the frequency of communication with native speakers rises.

PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia is part of Sailun Group Co., Ltd., a company engaged in tire manufacturing. Sailun Group is a global tire manufacturer from China and ranks among the top 20 in the world. The company produces various types of tires, ranging from passenger vehicle tires to heavy-duty off-road tires, all meeting international quality standards. Headquartered in Qingdao, China, Sailun has operational and distribution networks in several countries. As a strategic move to strengthen the Southeast Asian market and bring the supply chain closer to regional consumers, Sailun Group established PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia, located in Jatengland Industrial Park Sayung (JIPS), Demak Regency. However, language differences between China supervisors and local employees have resulted in communication challenges during operational processes.

As a multinational company, communication is crucial to understand and establish between Chinese supervisors and local employees. Differences in culture, language, systems, and work styles result in various communication barriers between local employees and supervisors or experts from China. These obstacles often arise due to the lack of Mandarin language skills among local workers, as well as the absence of structured language training programs tailored to their work context in the manufacturing industry. Communication difficulties between local employees and Chinese workers frequently lead to misunderstandings. Most local workers cannot speak Mandarin, while Chinese workers rarely speak English or have very limited proficiency. Consequently, work instructions are not conveyed effectively, causing misunderstandings (Lusiana, 2023). These issues result in production errors, delayed task completion, and in the worst cases, workplace accidents. Additionally,

they negatively impact the company's productivity.

Based on the phenomena observed in the field, it is evident that local workers face difficulties interacting with Chinese supervisors and often rely on translators for assistance. Additionally, from the perspective of the Chinese supervisors, they have advised local workers, especially operators, to start learning Mandarin with the hope of making communication more effective. On the other hand, local workers experience challenges in learning Mandarin due to the difficulty of self-study and the lack of language training provided by the company. However, it cannot be denied that if local workers, particularly operators, become proficient in Mandarin, it will have a positive impact on improving the company's effectiveness and productivity.

Research by (Murtadhoh, 2023) shows that proficiency in a foreign language, especially Mandarin, greatly supports the transfer of intellectual knowledge, technological innovation, and information data without the need for translation processes. Mastery of Mandarin enables operators in the manufacturing industry to better understand Chinese cultural habits, principles, and work ethics, thereby fostering trust and building harmonious and sustainable working relationships.

Based on these phenomena and field findings, this research is important to conduct in order to comprehensively analyze the need for Mandarin language skills in the context of workplace communication in the tire manufacturing industry. The focus of this study will be specifically on the interaction between Chinese supervisors and production operators at PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia, considering the urgency of mastering Mandarin to support work effectiveness and prevent production errors. The results of this research are expected to provide practical contribution in the form of recommendations for Mandarin language training programs that are contextualized to the needs of the industry, as well as serve as an academic reference on the importance of foreign language competence in a multinational work environment. Thus, this research will not only benefit PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia but can also serve as a model for other manufacturing companies facing similar challenges.

METHOD

This study is a descriptive qualitative research. Qualitative research is a method that emphasizes an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, behaviors, and human experiences. In qualitative research, the main characteristic lies in collecting data from real-life community settings using qualitative methods such as observation, interviews, and documentation. Theories in qualitative research are developed based on data findings in the field (Subandi, 2011). The strength of the qualitative research method lies in its ability to explore the views, meanings, and experiences of the research subjects (Sugiyono, 2016). The subjects of this study are production operators, translators, and human resources (HR) personnel at PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section will present the research findings and discussion regarding the analysis of Mandarin language needs for communication in the tire manufacturing industry, with a case study at PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia. The data for this study were obtained through interviews with production operators in Manufacturing Department 2, Forming and Cutting Division, the Human Resources (HR) department, and translators. In addition, the researcher also collected data through previous observations and documentation.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Results of the Observation

Based on observations conducted by the researcher in the production area of Manufacturing Department 2, Forming and Cutting Division at PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia, communication between Chinese supervisors and local employees generally takes place directly with the assistance of a translator, especially during meetings before the shift starts or when conveying work instructions in the machine area. For example, in situations where Chinese supervisors give directions regarding tasks that must be completed on the same day, the supervisors request a translator to clearly communicate the instructions to the local employees. However, in some cases without the presence of a translator, local employees have difficulty understanding overly detailed orders. According to information from several local employees, they rely on basic Mandarin knowledge, Google Translate, and hand gestures as alternative means of communication. Additionally, the researcher found several warning signs in the machine area written in both Mandarin and Indonesian. Although provided in two languages, some local employees reported difficulty understanding the Mandarin text due to limited ability to read the characters. The researcher also found that the company had conducted Mandarin language training for Indonesian employees during training at the Sailun factory in Vietnam. However, there has been no follow-up training since the initial program. These findings indicate a need for Mandarin language proficiency to support effective workplace communication at PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia, particularly in the Forming and Cutting Division. The dependence on translators and the obstacles in understanding instructions without assistance highlight the importance of Mandarin language training for local employees.

Results of the Interview

This study involved 6 respondents consisting of 3 production operators from Manufacturing Department 2, Forming and Cutting Division, who had previously participated in Mandarin language training conducted in Vietnam, a Human Resources (HR) representative, and 2 translators who facilitate communication between local employees and Chinese supervisors. Interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth data regarding the need for Mandarin language skills in communication.

Based on the interview results, several key findings were identified and categorized into the following themes: forms of communication and Mandarin language competence, communication barriers, and strategies employed.

1. Theme 1 : Forms of Communication and Mandarin Language Competence

Some respondents revealed that communication with Chinese supervisors is conducted directly or with the help of Google Translate and hand gestures.

Respondent 1 : *"Communication with Chinese supervisors is usually direct. Sometimes we also use Google Translate, chat on WeChat, or hand gestures."* (R1)

Respondent 2 : *"Usually, communication is direct even though Mandarin proficiency is limited. Sometimes we also use Google Translate."* (R2)

In addition, respondents expressed that Mandarin language competencies such as speaking, listening, and reading are very important to master.

Respondent 1 : *"Mastering speaking, listening, and reading skills is important because most supervisors are Chinese, and there are many Hanzi characters written in the machine area."* (R3)

Respondent 2 : *"In my opinion, the competencies that local employees must master are 听力 (listening), 口语 (speaking), and 阅读 (reading)."* (R4)

These findings indicate that direct communication, as well as communication aided by Google Translate and hand gestures, are common forms of communication used by local employees. Furthermore, to support smooth workplace communication, Mandarin language competencies such as 口语 (speaking), 听力 (listening), and 阅读 (reading) need to be mastered by local employees.

2. Theme 2 : Communication Barriers

Some respondents revealed that there are difficulties in communicating with Chinese supervisors, particularly in using the Mandarin language.

Respondent 1 : *"If the instructions are too detailed, I don't understand."* (R1)

Respondent 2 : *"Miscommunication often occurs with Chinese supervisors when there are instructions or work orders."* (R2)

Respondent 3 : *"My Mandarin comprehension is limited, which causes miscommunication. Sometimes I can't use Google Translate, and hand gestures are also ineffective."* (R3)

Respondent 4 : *"Local employees usually have difficulty understanding what Chinese supervisors say when giving instructions because of limited Mandarin vocabulary."* (R4)

These findings indicate that limited Mandarin proficiency is the main barrier in communication between local employees and Chinese supervisors. As a result, miscommunication frequently occurs during the delivery of instructions or work orders. The use of Google Translate and hand gestures is also ineffective.

3. Theme 3 : Strategies Implemented

Some respondents expressed that Mandarin language training can improve the abilities of local employees, especially if accompanied by each individual's willingness to learn.

Respondent 1 : *"The company has a Mandarin language training program to facilitate communication between local employees and Chinese supervisors."* (R1)

Respondent 2 : *"If the company facilitates Mandarin training, local employees are willing to participate in the training rather than having to learn on their own."* (R2)

Respondent 3 : *"In addition to Mandarin training, employees' self-awareness to learn and diligently practice is also important."* (R3)

These findings indicate that to facilitate communication between local employees and Chinese supervisors, Mandarin language training needs to be provided. Such training is far more effective than self-study. Moreover, each individual's self-awareness to learn Mandarin and consistently practice to improve their skills is equally important.

Results of the Documentation

In addition to conducting observations and interviews, the researcher also carried out documentation as part of the data collection for this study. The researcher documented several visual, written, and communication media materials found in the production area of the Forming and Cutting Division at PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia. This documentation aims to illustrate the forms of workplace communication and the need for Mandarin language proficiency among local employees.

1. Warning Signs and Information Boards



Picture 1. Warning signs

The researcher found that in the machine production area, there are several safety warning signs and information boards written in both Indonesian and Mandarin. This helps local employees understand the meaning of the safety warnings and information displayed. However, for local employees who want to learn to read Mandarin, the absence of pinyin alongside the Mandarin text makes it difficult for them to read the Hanzi characters. As a result, their desire to learn Mandarin is hindered by their limited basic ability to read Chinese characters.

2. Supporting Communication Media

The researcher found that although there are translators who help bridge communication between Chinese supervisors and local employees, there are situations where communication occurs without the assistance of a translator. In such cases, local employees use Google Translate and hand gestures to communicate directly. However, this method is less effective because the internet connection in the machine area is often unstable, making it impossible to use Google Translate, and hand gestures are not always able to convey messages clearly.

3. Training Activities Conducted

LAPORAN KELAS MANDARIN KARYAWAN PT SAILUN

PERIODE JANUARI – FEBRUARI

赛轮公司员工汉语班报告

2025 年 1 月至 2 月期间

BÁO CÁO LỚP TIẾNG TRUNG NHÂN VIÊN CÔNG TY PT SAILUN

GIÁI ĐOẠN THÁNG 1 – THÁNG 2

Koordinator 协调员 Điều phối viên : Novia Ananda Haryati / 黄晓华

N o 号 码 Số	Pengajar 老师 Giảng viên	Minggu 1 第一周 Tuần 1	Minggu 2 第二周 Tuần 2	Minggu u 3 第三周 Tuần 3	Minggu u 4 第四周 Tuần 4	Minggu u 5 第五周 Tuần 5	Keterangan 说明 Ghi chú	TT D 签 名 Chữ ký
1.	Intan Nurhaliza/ 赵思梦	Hari/ tanggal : 20 Januari 2025 Waktu : 19.30 – 21.00	Hari/ tanggal : 27 Januari 2025 Materi : Bab 3 dan bab 4 (hafalan	Hari/ tanggal 1 : Materi :	Hari/ tanggal 1 : Materi :	Hari/ tanggal 1 : Materi :		

Figure 2. Mandarin language training report

Based on the observations made by the researcher, the Human Resources (HR) department of PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia has facilitated Mandarin language training for local employees. This training took place during employee training sessions held at the company's branch factory in Vietnam. All Indonesian employees participated in the training, with the learning materials based on the HSK 1 textbook as an introduction to Mandarin language learning. The impact of this training is that some local employees are now able to understand Mandarin vocabulary, albeit in simple contexts.

DISCUSSION OF THE ANALYSIS RESULTS

Forms of Communication and Mandarin Language Competence

Based on observations, interviews, and documentation, communication between local employees and Chinese supervisors in Manufacturing Department 2, Forming and Cutting Division mostly occurs through direct communication relying on the assistance of translators. However, in some situations without a translator, local employees use alternative communication media such as Google Translate and hand gestures.

The interview results support this finding, where most respondents revealed that direct communication, as well as the use of Google Translate and hand gestures, are common forms of communication. However, communication often encounters obstacles when instructions or orders from Chinese supervisors are given in detail and without the help of a translator.

Regarding competence, most respondents expressed that having Mandarin language skills such as 口语 (speaking), 听力 (listening), and 阅读 (reading) is very important for local employees to master. This is supported by observations and documentation in the machine area, where many signs are written in Mandarin without pinyin, making it difficult for local employees who have not studied Hanzi characters to understand the text. This indicates that Mandarin reading competence (阅读) is highly needed.

Communication Barriers

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, communication barriers are the main problem faced by local employees. Although they have received basic Mandarin training, the limited Mandarin proficiency of local employees is the primary factor causing frequent miscommunication with Chinese supervisors, especially when receiving detailed orders or instructions. This situation worsens when there is no translator available, Google Translate cannot be used due to poor signal, and hand gestures do little to aid communication.

The presence of warning signs without pinyin also poses a challenge for local employees who want to learn to read but have not yet studied Mandarin characters. This indicates the need for support in the form of strengthening language skills and providing visual media that is easier for employees to understand. Furthermore, these conditions show that effective communication has not yet been fully achieved between local employees and Chinese supervisors.

Strategies and Efforts to Improve Competence

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, some respondents expressed that Mandarin language training is an effort that can help local employees develop their Mandarin skills. According to the documentation, the company has previously conducted Mandarin training for

Indonesian employees during training sessions at the Vietnam factory. The material taught was taken from the HSK 1 book as the foundation for learning Mandarin. Unfortunately, this training has not yet been implemented at the Sailun Indonesia factory and remains a plan for the future.

In addition to training, respondents also revealed that motivation to learn is an important foundation for improving each individual's Mandarin proficiency. This is a good initial step but needs to be supported by structured training facilities tailored to job-related needs.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research on the Analysis of Mandarin Language Needs for Communication in the Tire Manufacturing Industry: A Case Study at PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia, through data collection via observation, interviews, and documentation, it can be concluded that communication between local employees and Chinese supervisors still faces barriers, primarily due to the limited Mandarin proficiency of local employees. Common forms of communication include direct interaction, the assistance of translators, Google Translate, and hand gestures. However, these methods are not yet fully effective.

To support smooth workplace communication between local employees and Chinese supervisors, Mandarin language competencies such as 口语 (speaking), 听力 (listening), and 阅读 (reading) are highly needed. Therefore, regular Mandarin language training and individual learning motivation are important strategies and efforts to address communication needs in a multilingual work environment like that at PT Sailun Manufacturing Indonesia.

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