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LANGUAGE INVESTIGATIONS AS A MEANS OF IMPROVING QUALITY IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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Review

This paper is the result of a number of language investigations carried out by the author in order to find out the extent to which operators in the field of tourism and the hospitality industry value the importance of foreign languages in their everyday work as well as the factors that motivate hospitality management language students in learning foreign languages. The aim of the article is to summarize the findings of our research so as to give a possible answer about the way of improving quality in the hospitality industry through improving competence in foreign languages.

Key words: language for specific purposes, linguistic competence, attitudes, motivation.

1. INTRODUCTION

For the hospitality industry and tourism, foreign languages represent a necessary means and a compulsory prerequisite to understand an enormous amount of information flowing in from the field of science, that is, scientific investigations for all the specific trades it involves. In order to improve and evolve the trade, operators in tourism and the hospitality industry must constantly keep up to date, with a vigilant eye on everything that foreign countries offer to their potential guests and clients so as to take advantage of all the good ideas explained and illustrated through numerous practical examples of research and investigations. For that reason foreign languages represent a very important link in the chain of the process that goes from learning from successful foreign experience towards trying to put it into practice in the best possible way and satisfy the needs and expectations of our clients and business partners.

The main objective of this article is to summarize the findings of our research work about the extent to which the hotel industry and tourism operators are aware of the importance of the facts mentioned above and to find a tentative answer regarding the way of improving quality in the hospitality industry through improving the linguistic competence of hospitality industry operators in foreign languages.

2. DATA ABOUT OUR RESEARCH WORK

Over a number of years our main interest has gravitated towards two fields: we were first engaged in research with the objective of finding out the attitudes to, and motivation for, learning foreign languages, and the way that students rate them in their process of learning. The results of that first investigation were presented and published in the proceedings of the Congress *Hotelska kuća 2000.* in Opatija.

After that our interest shifted from motivation towards the language for specific purposes in the hospitality industry, namely we carried out an investigation to find out to what extent employees in the field of tourism and the hospitality industry value the importance of foreign languages in their everyday work. The results of this research were published as an article in "Tourism and hospitality management" n. 1-2/ 2001.

3. RESEARCH IN ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The survey investigated attitudes and motivation of the Faculty students connected to foreign language learning. The first part of the project (in the academic year 1996/97) dealt exclusively with the Italian language, as the author teaches Italian and was specifically interested in this area.¹ The second was a further step in the project, as that time all the four languages (English, Italian, German and French) were investigated.

The target of the survey was an analysis of second year students' attitudes towards language learning and their motivation for further language studies. The stress was put on the elaboration of a list in which students rank their reasons for learning each foreign language, i.e. their orientation.

Besides the main motivations, the results expected were also aimed at showing the needs and expectations of students from foreign language classes at the Faculty. Taking all those facts into account, the author presumed that foreign language teachers would be able to adapt their curricula to real students' needs as tomorrow's leading managers in the hospitality industry.

3.1. Method

With reference to our research aim, a sample of 173 students was collected and divided into four groups, according to the language investigated. The first group represented 60 students for the English language, the second represented 50 students for the German language, the third group represented 40 students for the Italian language and the fourth group represented 23 students for French. The survey was

¹ Cfr. Miškulin Čubrić, Dolores (1997): "Attitudes and motivation.." *Tourism and Hospitality Management* 1/1997.

conducted in March, 2000 at the Faculty. Because of its character it was anonymous and voluntary.

Taking advantage of her knowledge of existing literature about motivation for learning foreign languages, but also from other researchers' experience in the field of attitude and motivation investigation² the author worked out a questionnaire with 10 assertions about the languages tested, in random order, expressed as reasons for learning a certain foreign language.

For each of the assertions students had to express their opinion about how the assertion matched their viewpoint by circling one mark from a given scale ranging from the lowest (1) to the highest (7). Besides the numerical scale, they were also given the possibility to check their mark by its description, in the sense that the values 1-2 meant the assertions "don't refer to me at all", 3-5 "refer to me up to a certain degree" and finally 6-7 "positively refer to me". The students were also given the possibility to write down their opinion if different from the listed ones.

The questionnaires were elaborated manually and independently by elaborating the indices of descriptive statistics. We calculated the arithmetical mean out of the values obtained for each assertion (M), together with their standard deviations (deviations from the arithmetical mean, σ), for each group of students (each language).

Following this procedure we worked out a list which ranked reasons for learning a specific language, from the ones they considered the most important to the least important ones and presented them in tables.

3.2. Research results

The results of the analysis show that for the great majority of questioned students (63.58%) the main reason for learning foreign languages is the possibility of using it in their future career. In literature it is known as "the instrumental aspect". While the arithmetical mean for this entry in table number 5 (representing the average values for all the students involved in the survey) is a very high 6.44, for English it is slightly higher (6.51), for German slightly lower (6.38), for Italian considerably higher (6.60) and for French slightly lower than M . The average standard deviation is 0.92 which is the lowest in the whole survey. Such a standard deviation shows that this attitude is the most homogeneous amongst students as the highest standard deviation is 1.15 (for German) and the lowest is 0.79 (for English).

Most of the students rank very highly the "communicative aspect", i.e. the possibility of communication with native speakers (native English, German, Italian and French speakers) and most of them ranked the communication reason in second place with a high average M of 6.11. For English it is slightly higher than the average (6.21), for German a great deal lower (5.94), for Italian much higher (6.30) and for French much lower (6.00). We assume that some students learning Italian come from Istria and they are more self-confident with Italian as it is treated as a second

² Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) by Robert Gardner and similar study by D.Vilke-Pinter at Veterinary Medicine Faculty in Zagreb.

language, thus the higher interest in communication with native speakers. The interesting point is that students of German and French ranked this reason as the third most important reason for learning, positioning it after the general knowledge reasons. Standard deviations also show their attitude is not very homogeneous ($\sigma=1.06$): the highest being 1.21 (for French), while the lowest being 0.95 (for English).

On the other hand, students of English and Italian consider general knowledge reasons ("general knowledge aspect") to be the third most important reason for learning a language. While the average for this reason is 5.98, the value for English is much higher (6.13), for German it is a little higher (6.02), for Italian is a little lower (5.75) and for French it is higher than the average (6.04). Also the standard deviation is high (1.25) which proves that this attitude is not homogeneous: the highest standard deviation being 1.51 for Italian and the lowest being 0.97 for English.

In a relatively high position (the fourth) is "the cultural orientation", i.e. the possibility of understanding cultural products (5.04). The M for English is much higher (5.50), for German much lower (4.46), for Italian almost the same (5.00) and for French much higher (5.21). This shows the great influence of the media, especially for the English language, on the students in spreading culture and understanding also through films, music and other types of entertainment close to young people, though the attitude is not homogeneous, as the average standard variation is 1.62: the highest being 1.84 for Italian and the lowest 1.46 for French.

The aesthetical component of the language on average occupies the fifth position ($M=4.81$). Students of English value this reason much higher (5.28), for German M is much lower (3.30), for Italian much higher (5.50) and for French a little higher (5.17). Also important, students of English rank this reason lower - in sixth position, while students of German put this reason in the seventh position on their list. On the other hand, students of Italian rank it higher than the average, i.e. in fourth position. Standard deviation is 1.61: the highest 1.82 for French and the lowest 1.36 for German.

The possibility of using technology and the computer is surprisingly low- in sixth position with an average M of 4.58. Obviously, students of English rank this reason much higher (in fourth position) with 5.63. We can explain that by the fact that the language of the computer is almost entirely English as are instructions received with technology packages. We can rarely get them in other languages, so other language learners obviously rank this reason lower. For example, for German M it is 4.08 (fifth place), for Italian it is 4.10 (seventh place) and for French it is 4.52 (also seventh place). This is also shown by the fact that average standard deviation is 1.76: the highest (1.95) is for French, while the lowest is 1.51 (for English).

Next is a wish for a longer stay in the country where a certain language is spoken as a mother tongue. On average it is situated in seventh position with an average M of 4.50. For English it is much higher (5.13), for German it is much lower (3.96), although students rank it in sixth position. For Italian it is slightly lower (4.15) even though they also put it in sixth position. For French it is higher (4.78) and also found in sixth position. Standard deviation average is 1.89: the highest being 2.16 for German, while the lowest 1.70 is for English. The aforesaid standard deviation of 2.16

is at the same time the highest standard deviation in the whole survey, i.e. this is the least homogeneous attitude amongst students.

In eighth position is the possibility of professional improvement with $M=3.51$. For English it is a bit higher (3.91), for German it is a lot lower (2.88), for Italian it is a bit higher (3.75) and for French it is very similar (3.52). We can deduce that students don't place too much importance on their professional improvement, with the exception, perhaps, of the ones learning English. This reason was formulated by the first assertion: "Better language knowledge allows me to read specialized foreign literature". We assume that the reason for such a response is that the majority of specialized literature is written in English and there is no tradition of reading it in other languages. In our opinion this is one of the aspects that should be modified in the sense that students should be given the opportunity to read specialized literature also in other languages. They should also be motivated not only to rely on their textbooks while preparing for their exams, but also to use different sources mainly from specialized foreign literature and make comparisons.

The average standard deviation is 1.32 and specifically it can range from 1.09 (Italian) to 1.74 (French).

The ninth position is held by what is called the requirements motivation, i.e. the wish to improve one's grades in order to meet the requirements of the course. The average M is 3.34. For English it is much higher (3.96), for German it is a bit lower (3.12), for Italian it is almost the average (3.35) and for French it is a very low 2.95. We can explain that by the fact that the majority of the students are quite self-confident about their foreign language because they learnt it for a long time before coming to this Faculty, whereas students learning French are beginners in the majority of cases and they need some more practice to feel more comfortable with their foreign language. This attitude was formulated through assertion no.10: "With a foreign language I improve my average marks." Obviously students don't think they could raise their marks by a course they have just started. The average standard deviation here is 1.87 and it can range from a minimum of 1.59 (German) to 2.03 (Italian).

Finally, the second attitude on which most of the students agree is the possibility of reading literature in its original form with an average M of 2.87. For English it is much higher (3.63), for German it is a lot lower (2.24), for Italian it is similar to the average (2.85) and for French it is a high 3.04. Also students of French are the only ones not to put this on the last position of the list, but in ninth position. We can deduce that students learning English and French show a higher interest in reading literature in its original form than other language students. The average standard variation is 1.55. Specifically it ranges from 1.30 (German) to 1.82 (Italian).

3.3. Research conclusion

Through an analysis of the samples we have come to significant indices shown in five tables: one for each language and one for the total number of participants in the survey. The results show that students consider the "instrumental aspect" as the most important in their language learning. It means that most of them think highly of a possibility of using a foreign language in their future career. Next is

“the communicative aspect” i.e. their wish for communication with native speakers. The so called “general knowledge aspect” is also positioned very highly, before “the cultural aspect”, i.e. the possibility of understanding cultural products. Aesthetic reasons are also a high motivator.

From the results it can be seen that the neglected aspect is the possibility of professional improvement through foreign language learning and also the possibility of reading literature in its original form. These two aspects should be encouraged more by foreign language teachers in order to give an incentive for students' self-confidence through achieving better results and being successful in learning.

The results of this investigation should be taken into account both by teachers and students. The former could take advantage of them when planning curricula and classes, while the latter could understand their motivation and faults better and make the best of them.

4. RESEARCH INTO THE IMPORTANCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN TOURISM AND THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Referring to our research aim, a sample of 80 examinees was collected and divided into two groups. The first group was represented by 50 operators from the trade of tourism and the hospitality industry from “Liburnija Rivijera Hoteli” Opatija, operating in the area of Opatija and surroundings. Their age range was between 25 and 56 years and besides English, they have learned German, Italian, French, Russian, Slovenian and Latin. We named the first group “Trade”(in the following text –T-group) so as to differentiate it from the second group.

The second group was represented by 30 college and faculty teachers in the field of tourism, hotel catering and hospitality management from the Faculty of Tourism Management and its College in Opatija. We named the second group “Science” (in the following text- S group).

Their ages ranged from 27 to 62 years. Most of them have learned English, but many of them have also learned German, Italian, French, Russian, Polish, Portuguese, Arab, Slovenian, Greek and Latin. The research was conducted in March 2001. The questionnaires were anonymous and voluntary.

Our objective was to compare the two groups and find out to what extent the examinees are aware of the importance of foreign languages for their immediate needs in their everyday work. Besides, we wanted to find out to what extent they use foreign languages through media as a means of getting information and whether or not these means are available to them in the everyday practice of their profession.

4.1. Method

In order to achieve our objective, we worked out 14 questions divided into two groups: 6 of them were to give us answers about the self-evaluation of examinees regarding their knowledge of foreign languages, taking into account the time involved

in learning and the attitudes regarding the need for learning foreign languages (at an early age, at University, for their everyday profession).

The remaining 8 questions were about the availability of trade (professional) literature (Croatian and foreign) and the availability of Internet use for professional purposes.

Examinees were to answer the questions by circling one of the 3-5 possible answers presented to them. The questionnaires were elaborated manually and independently by elaborating the indices of descriptive statistics.

4.2. Research results

The analysis of the results shows that the majority of the examinees from both groups have learned two and more foreign languages. Examinees from the T-group have mostly learned three foreign languages. The most frequently learned language was English, learned by 83% of the S group and 78% of the T-group. German was learned by 66% of examinees from both groups equally. Italian was the third language with 60% from the S group and 64% from the T-group, followed by French with 20% from the S group and 22% from the T-group. Examinees from the S group rate their knowledge in foreign languages from excellent to sufficient, while those in T-group rate their knowledge from excellent to bad.

Examinees from S group completely agree (100%) with the fact that it is necessary to learn foreign languages from early childhood, a fact that all the research in the linguistic field has confirmed. In the T group 94% agree with that, while 6% claim "I don't know". This is proof of the altogether very high awareness of the need for learning foreign languages from an early age, with a less higher awareness of that fact in the S group.

Almost all the participants from group S claim that it is necessary to learn foreign languages at University level, while in T group 98% say so and the remaining 2% say "I don't know". Presumably this 2% didn't go to University, so they didn't think about this problem.

The analysis of the results show that 16.66% from S group think that knowledge of foreign languages is very important, while 83.33% think it is extremely important for their professional work. In T group 2% think it is not important, 4% think it is somewhat important, 22% think it is important and the majority (72%) think it is extremely important.

We can notice that the awareness of the need to learn foreign languages is much more accentuated in S group in which none thinks this fact is unimportant or somewhat important, but they assert it is either very important or extremely important. On the other hand, group T showed less interest in that and we presume that is due to the fact that a number of examinees deal with administrative jobs with no real chance to use foreign languages in their everyday work, so they don't notice the immediate effect of foreign languages.

As regarding to keeping in touch with trade literature, we found that most of the S group examinees (56.66%) read it quite frequently, 23.33% from time to time, 10% daily and the remaining 10% often. This shows us the positive custom of following trade literature in their everyday work.

In the T-group the results are different, though expected; 4% never read those texts, 16% read them often, 20% very often, while the majority (60%) reads them from time to time.

With foreign trade literature the situation is the following: 46.66% of examinees from S group use it very often, 26.66% often, and 13.33% equally use it from time to time and daily. This is a very significant fact if we consider our previous research findings about foreign literature and the lack of its usage with students.

Again the situation in the T-group differs a lot. The majority of examinees (66%) read foreign literature from time to time, 16% never does, only 12% does it often, and just 6% does it very often. None of them reads it daily, which, in our opinion, is a big mistake if we want to follow the trends in the market and improve trade.

One of the possible reasons for that may be the answer to our questions on availability of foreign trade literature. Namely, in both groups the majority of examinees think foreign journals are quite unavailable: 46.66% in the S group and 46% in the T-group. For the remaining part in S group journals are quite available (53.33%), while the others from T group think they are either unavailable (18%) or quite available (36%). We think it is necessary to keep our tourist operators up to date with new ideas and information from the hospitality industry and one of the ways is to help them to get information from foreign trade literature easily and read it frequently.

That is also proved by the fact that 50% of the S group think foreign journals are extremely useful, 33.33% think they are very useful, 10% very useful, 6.66% useful and not even one of them thinks they are useless. The T group's ideas differ in the sense that 4% think foreign journals are useless, 30% quite useful, 34% useful, 26% very useful and only 6% extremely useful. It is obvious that examinees from S group get the majority of information and knowledge mainly through foreign literature and we can regard that fact as a peculiarity of the trade of tourism and hospitality which has to make comparisons constantly with foreign achievements.

Nevertheless, in practice we notice a stagnation in that field in the sense that a number of examinees don't notice the importance of foreign literature for the trade benefit, and only a small proportion uses it fruitfully.

The answers to the question about Internet use were not a surprise. Just 6.66% from S group claim they never use it, while in the T-group this percentage is very high (36%). In the S group 50% use Internet from time to time, 26.6% quite regularly and 16.66% very often.

In the T group 44% use Internet from time to time, 12% quite often and just 8% very often. Some of the examinees claim they don't use it in their work because it is not available, but they use it at home.

We can conclude that quite a small number of operators use Internet to get information, which is an absolute anachronism taking into account the usefulness or rather the necessity of this modern media, so our advice would be to make Internet available to every operator in the trade of tourism and hospitality.

In the S group 33.33% think it is extremely useful, 30% very useful, 26.66% useful, 10% not useful enough, but nobody thinks it is useless.

In the T-group, however, some of the examinees (8%) think it is useless, 58% useful, 22% very useful and 12% extremely useful. It is obvious that, taking into

account that the majority of that group never uses it in its work, they are not as aware of its benefits as the ones in S group which use it daily and are more aware of the advantages they can get from this media. The results of the research are shown through tables.³

4.3. Research conclusion

The results of this research show a very high awareness of the importance of foreign languages for communication among operators in the field of the hospitality industry. Their attribution of a great significance to foreign languages in their everyday work is something that confirms our expectations and hopes.

The great majority of examinees assert it is necessary to learn them from an early age up to university level, while only a very small number of examinees isn't aware of their importance or doesn't appreciate their value for their everyday work.

A great number of examinees, mostly from S group, is interested in keeping up to date with trade literature, either domestic or foreign. We think it is a positive step forward taking into account our previous experience in the survey that showed a not very intensive use of trade literature among our students. We noticed a striking difference between answers in group S and group T, which was logical and expected owing to the nature of their business.

A similar situation is noticed for foreign trade literature where the habit of catching up with new information is much more accentuated in S group than in T-group and also the awareness of its importance in their everyday work.

One of the reasons for such a bad response to foreign literature is evidently the fact that it is not available enough (especially in the T-group). However, if we look at the problem globally and not considering in detail the reasons for such a poor response, we may assert that the situation should improve in order to make our operators in tourism and the hospitality industry capable of coping with foreign competition.

Also important is the use of Internet, which is not a big enough part of the everyday routine of getting information by our hospitality operators. They should be made aware of its importance and its possibilities as a means of information, education and self-improvement in the trade, while the interest shown in this research should also be in this direction by giving the operators a possibility to use it daily.

³ Dolores Miškulin Čubrić (2001), Značenje stranog jezika struke kod kadrova u turizmu i hotelijerstvu, Tourism and hospitality management, god.6, br.1-2, str.63-72.

5. RECENT RESEARCH

However, we continued in our investigation and our recent interest is represented by the real needs of our tourism and hospitality industry operators regarding foreign languages. Our aim is to work out a possible way to adapt our curricula to the real needs expressed in the questionnaires' answers and to work out "made to measure" courses. As we believe we have found out interesting evidence, we shall try to summarize the findings of our last piece of research in another article or paper very soon, hoping to contribute, if only minimally, towards an improvement of the quality of foreign language courses for specific purposes.

6. OVERALL CONCLUSION

Students of the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management Opatija show great interest in foreign languages learned not only as obligatory, but also as optional courses. This was our motive in starting a survey on attitudes and motivation towards language learning. The first step involved investigations regarding the segment of the Italian language, while the present research is a further step in this respect as it takes into account all the four languages taught at the Faculty: English, German, Italian and French. The results show that students consider the "instrumental aspect" as the most important in their language learning, followed by the "the communicative aspect" i.e. their desire for communication with native speakers, the "general knowledge aspect" is also positioned very highly, before "the cultural aspect", i.e. the possibility of understanding cultural products. Aesthetic reasons are also a high motivator.

The results of the research show that the possibility of professional improvement through foreign language learning and also the possibility of reading literature in its original form has been neglected, so if we want any improvements these two aspects should be more encouraged by foreign language teachers in order to give an incentive to students' self-confidence through achieving better results and being successful in learning.

Our hospitality industry operators from the field of science as well as from the field of trade are also highly aware of the importance of foreign languages for their professions. Moreover, we noticed a great, but not widely enough exploited interest in using information through foreign language media such as journals and Internet. The interest that has been shown through this research should be exploited, while the poor situation regarding keeping up to date with foreign literature and Internet use should be improved by making them more available to a wide range of users. Taking into account those facts and putting them into practice, we hope there will be some improvements either in the sector of science or in the sector of trade which is at its base.

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Sažetak

**LINGVISTIČKA ISTRAŽIVANJA KAO SREDSTVO ZA UNAPREĐENJE
KVALITETE U HOTELIJERSTVU**

Ovaj članak je rezultat niza lingvističkih istraživanja koja smo proveli s ciljem da utvrdimo u kojoj mjeri djelatnici u turizmu i hotelijerstvu cijene značaj stranih jezika u svom svakodnevnom poslu, kao i činitelje motivacije studenata hotelskog menadžmenta prilikom učenja stranih jezika.

Cilj ovog članka je da objedini rezultate naših istraživanja, kako bi dali mogući odgovor u svezi s načinom unapređenja kvalitete u hotelijerstvu putem unapređenja lingvističke kompetencije u stranim jezicima.

Ključne riječi: jezik struke, lingvistička kompetencija, stavovi, motivacija.