

The importance of Spanish language in Hospitality service in Dubrovnik  
How satisfied are Spanish tourists with Spanish language support?

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## Abstract

According to Dubrovnik Tourist board, in last four years number of Spanish tourists coming to Dubrovnik has been increased, and it is still growing up. Since Dubrovnik is famous because of developed hospitality industry, that is not weird, and Spain is close to Dubrovnik as well.

The purpose of this paper was to find out the level of satisfaction of Spanish tourists with Spanish language support in hospitality and tourism sector in Dubrovnik.

The research method used for this paper was a survey. It was distributed to three hotels and fulfilled by 30 Spanish tourists. Lack of signs in Spanish language, poorly translated menus, low language skills of employees in hospitality industry in Dubrovnik are recognized as the weakest points by Spanish tourists. The importance of foreign languages when it comes to providing a service on a higher level is very important and crucial thing “to make a guest feel at home, hence draw more brand loyalty and larger cash flows” (Torres & Kline, 2013). All these questions are discussed in detail in the results section.

Key words: Satisfaction of Spanish tourists with language support, Dubrovnik hospitality sector.

## Introduction

## Multilingualism

According to Linguistic Society of America (2012) multilingualism is defined “as a common human condition that makes it possible for an individual to function, at some level, in more than one language”. Longitudinal studies by Harvard University proved that learning more than one language actually helps children in maths, art etc.... Speaking second language prevents Alzheimer’s disease and it helps to stop decreasing brain activity, according to the latest researches. It is not just that multilingualism clarifies interaction between people, and it helps to understand people of different cultures, it has also many other benefits. It is divided in three types of benefits: cognitive benefits, social benefits, and competitive benefits.

### Cognitive benefits

Children who speak more than one language are more adjustable and innovative in their acquired vocabulary, and they can describe or express some concepts in a more words.

Children who speak more than one language are better in school and have better problem-solving skills.

They are more willing to learn a third and fourth language.

### Social benefits

Children can communicate and interact with other people easily.

Children understand other cultures; they have better understanding of other cultures.

### Competitive benefits

Children who learn more foreign languages have better job opportunities, and also more important better college opportunities. It is very important to learn a language from an early age.

### Importance of foreign language skills and multilingualism for international hospitality employees

Importance of foreign languages when it comes to providing a service on a higher level is very important and crucial thing “to make a guest feel at home, hence draw more brand loyalty and larger cash flows” (Torres & Kline, 2013, p.3). All things that make the customers life convenient, such as conversation, can influence tourist interest according to Paulina and Biagi (as cited in Chassapopoulos et al, 2014). According to Torres & Kline (2013) behavior of hotel employees play a big role in a guest satisfaction, and the crucial thing for them is “professionalism and friendliness” (Torres & Kline). Very important for customers is that employees are able to apprehend needs of a customer and adequately deal with their issues (Deng et al.,2013). According to International studies (Holmqvist et al. 2014), it is of crucial importance that employees to speak with tourists in their native language, and in that way, they are more willing to leave a tip or suggest the service to their friends and other people. (Holmqvist et al.,2014) states that language is found to have a sentimental interrelationship with the customers beliefs and their point of view regarding a sense of community with other people who speak the same language. (Poon & Low, 2015) said that “it is making them feel at home away from home”. European Community indicated the demand for advanced language skills for company’s higher management levels by “investing in language training or employing native speakers and ensuring good multilingual communication through the

Internet”. Research presented by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training – CEDEFOP (Strietska-Ilna & Tessaring ,2005) explains that there is a lack of foreign language skills when it comes to tourism and hospitality employees. The UK established research (Leslie & Russel, 2006) showed that 83 % of European administration students were obligated to learn foreign languages as a part of their studies considering it very important for hospitality sector. Travelling, working abroad, Erasmus programs, all that is very important and crucial for students and it helps them a lot to understand the importance of learning foreign languages. 96 % of students believe that speaking more foreign languages is very important and, they believe that it offers better job opportunities as well.

### Customer's satisfaction

“Customer satisfaction plays an important role in the survival and future of any tourism products and services “(Gursoy, McCleary and Lepsito, 2007, p.4). Research that has been done has practicalized satisfaction as overall satisfaction and attribute satisfaction levels. Attribute satisfaction has been determined as customer subjective satisfaction perception coming from observation of attribute performance (Oliver, 1993). It would be more applicable first of all to scope consumer satisfaction towards various attributes of service and product and then calculate overall satisfaction received from measures of satisfaction including various elements. According to study (2013) responsiveness, tangible, communication, consumable and empathy are elements that they are using to measure customer satisfaction.

### Spanish tourists in Dubrovnik

According to Tourist board of city of Dubrovnik, in last four years, from 2015. to 2018. number of Spanish tourists that are coming to Dubrovnik is steadily growing. According to Dubrovnik Tourist board number of Spanish tourists in Dubrovnik in 2015. was 46,228, which means 5,0 percent. In 2016. number of Spanish tourists in Dubrovnik was 50,609, which means 8 percent. Number of Spanish tourists in Dubrovnik for 2017. was 58,286, which means 9 percent, and in 2018. number of Spanish tourists were 59,991, which means 10 percent. According to these results we can say that number is, as it has been already mentioned, steadily growing. It is growing every year and it should be even higher in next five years according to Tourist board and their calculation. According to these numbers Dubrovnik should improve offer for Spanish tourists, since they are very important for hospitality industry in Dubrovnik, and whole Croatia as well.

### Benefits of learning Spanish for career advancement

Spanish language is after Mandarin Chinese and English language the most spoken language in the world. 500 million people in 25 countries all over the world are speaking Spanish. According to researchers, there is a big chance that English and Spanish are going to become official languages of United States. “Learning Spanish as a foreign language can be one of those great advantages in life, especially in the workplace. Living in a multicultural world, knowing a second language improves communication, language skills, and raises cultural awareness”. According to Spain’s CIS state research institute 60 % of Spaniards (native Spanish speakers) noticed that they cannot read, write or speak in English language. According to the poll, 67% of Spaniards think that they did not miss any opportunities because of not speaking another foreign language (El Pais, 2017.) According to studies,

Spanish people are afraid of speaking English because of bad pronunciation. Many Spanish students learn minority languages in school, such as Basque and Catalan, no matter they do not use it out of school context. They consider it very important to learn their languages rather than English or another foreign language.

### Methodology

Method that has been used for this research was a survey. It was very important to carry it out quickly and to find participants to fit this research. The aim for this research was to get at least 30 participants in order to get necessary results, and survey was the most appropriate method for getting those results. Answers were totally anonymous, and participants were not under pressure, they were relaxed which helped to get a valid result.

The survey was distributed in 3 hotels in Dubrovnik, to Spanish tourists who spent some time in Dubrovnik in order to get their impression of the service they were provided with. The participants were divided into five groups, ranging from under 25 to 59 years age-70 years age.

The purpose of this survey was to find out the level of satisfaction of Spanish tourists with Spanish language support in hospitality and tourism sector in Dubrovnik.

Questions in the survey were asked in such way as : level of satisfaction with the availability of brochures they were provided with, availability of events in Spanish language, their satisfaction with translation of menus in restaurants, signs on streets in Spanish language, language skills of staff in hotels, of local people. These questions were asked in a form of

statements, so they can grade them on a scale 1-5, 1 being very satisfied, and 5 being very unsatisfied.

The second part of the survey was about their knowledge of English language, and other languages they might speak. It was in a form of multiple-choice questions.

The third part was about their age, gender and there was also an open-ended question about their native language. At the end they were provided with space for any additional comment related to service they were provided with in Dubrovnik.

## Results

The survey was distributed in three hotels in Dubrovnik, and it was written in Spanish language. The first idea was not to distribute it to hotels, since the questions were related more to language support of locals, waiters, and their satisfaction of overall service related, as it has been already mentioned, signs, menus, brochures, events in the Spanish language. Idea was to distribute it to guests who travel with cruise ships, but since there were no cruise ships before May, the author of this paper was forced to find Spanish tourists in hotels. Later on, the question about their level of satisfaction with language skills of staff in hotels was added. The survey was distributed in 30 samples, and all 30 were valid for research.

Ratio of the gender of the participants were 60% men and 40% were women. The age of majority of Spanish guests who participated was under 25, 42% of participants were under 25 years old, the age of smallest group of participants was 70-80 years old, just 3% of them participated in the research. 26% were 46-57 years old, 23% were 57-68 years old, and just 6% were 35-46 years old.



On a question whether they consider English language as a global language, 60% of participants answered no, and only 40% answered yes. This answer was surprising since English is the most spoken language in the world after Chinese, and this answer has confirmed many researches that proved that Spanish people have low language skills, and low interest toward learning foreign language.

When it comes to other foreign languages that they speak, 50% of them speak French as a second foreign language, 30% speak English, 6,7% German, and just 13,3% of them speak Italian.

When it comes to their satisfaction with availability of brochures, their average answer was 2,7. Average answer on a question related to events in Spanish language is 3. The interesting fact is. When it comes to language skills of staff in hotel, locals, and waiters in the restaurants the interesting fact is that average answers were pretty much the same. The average for level of satisfaction with language skills of staff in hotels were 3, average for locals were 3,1, and for locals were 3,4.

Expected results were for their level of satisfaction with signs on streets in Spanish language, and with translation of menus. Average answer for level of satisfaction with signs were 1,9, for translation of menus were 2,1.

The average answer for level of satisfaction with overall service was 2,9. Since this question was maybe the most important one, the result was not good at all.

When it comes to the part of their knowledge about English, on a question how much is English important for them, on a scale 1-5, 1 being very important, and 5 being not important at all, their average answer was 2,9%. Another question in that section was to circle the correct answer on question why they are afraid to speak English. The average answer was that they felt anxious and scared to speak it because of their bad pronunciation.

Majority of participants were Spanish native speakers, 70% of them, 26% of them were speaking Catalan.

## Discussion

Dubrovnik, as a city with rich cultural heritage and high potential, should work a lot in order to improve quality of service. The results of this research show that something needs to be done in Dubrovnik. According to this research Spanish people have shown their dissatisfaction with signs, there is no a single sign in Spanish language on the street. There are signs in Italian, German, English, but no in Spanish. Since Spanish is the third most spoken language in the world, there should be signs in Spanish language. Menus are poorly translated, using google translate, and this is really a weak point of the restaurants. According to many researches it has been proven that Spanish people are not good in speaking foreign languages, and that they do not consider it as a global language. These findings have been confirmed in this research as well.

That was also a reason of distributing the survey in Spanish language, and that was the only way to get valid results.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done and improve in order to make Spanish guests satisfied and make them return. Firstly, they should hire some professional menu translators in order not to make them confused. Menus are very important thing, and translation of menus by using google translate looks really unprofessional.

When it comes to language barrier, grades for language skills from staff in hotels to waiters in restaurants were not satisfied. Grade 3 is sometimes good, it is in the middle, but since it is the

third most spoken language, staff and waiters should be provided with language courses.

Taking into consideration their low language skills and inability of speaking English language, it should definitely be improved.

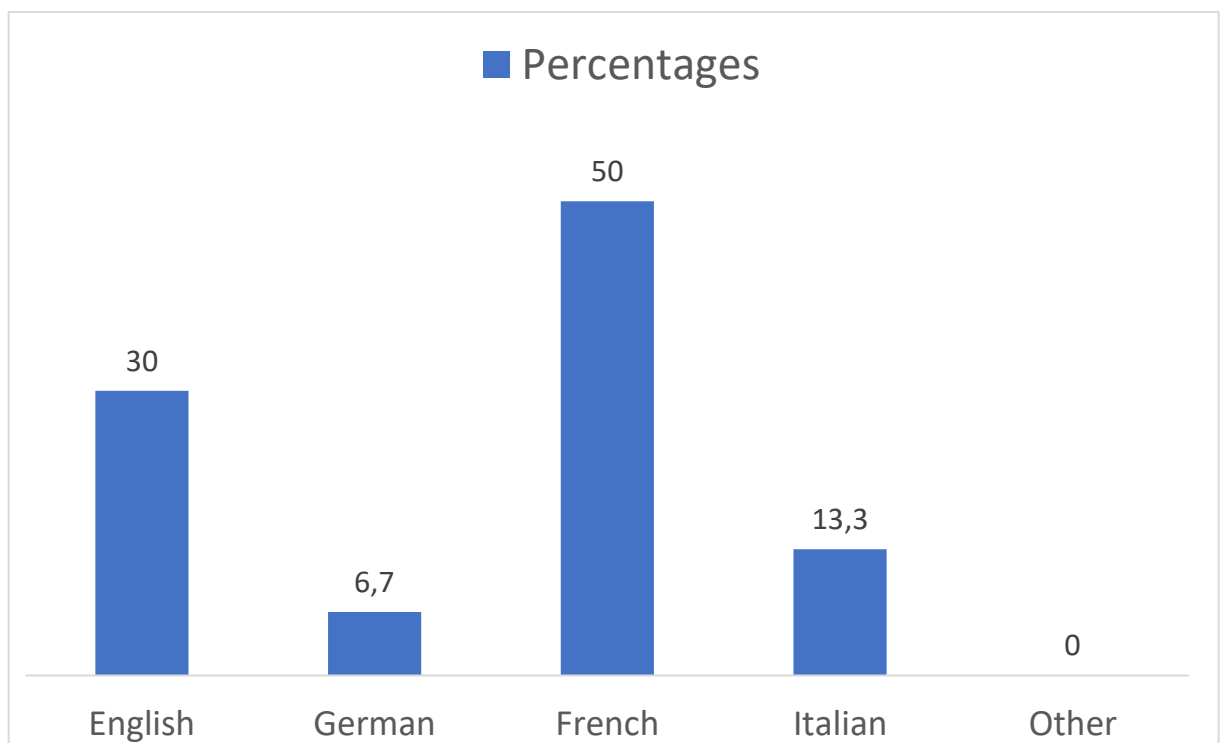
It is of crucial importance to improve offer for them, make something that is unique just for them, since there is increase in number of Spanish people coming to Dubrovnik. They are not satisfied with brochures, events in Spanish language, and when we look at the offer, it is very poor. It should be improved in order to make them leave with a good impression, because if they are satisfied, they will come back for sure, and that is our main goal.

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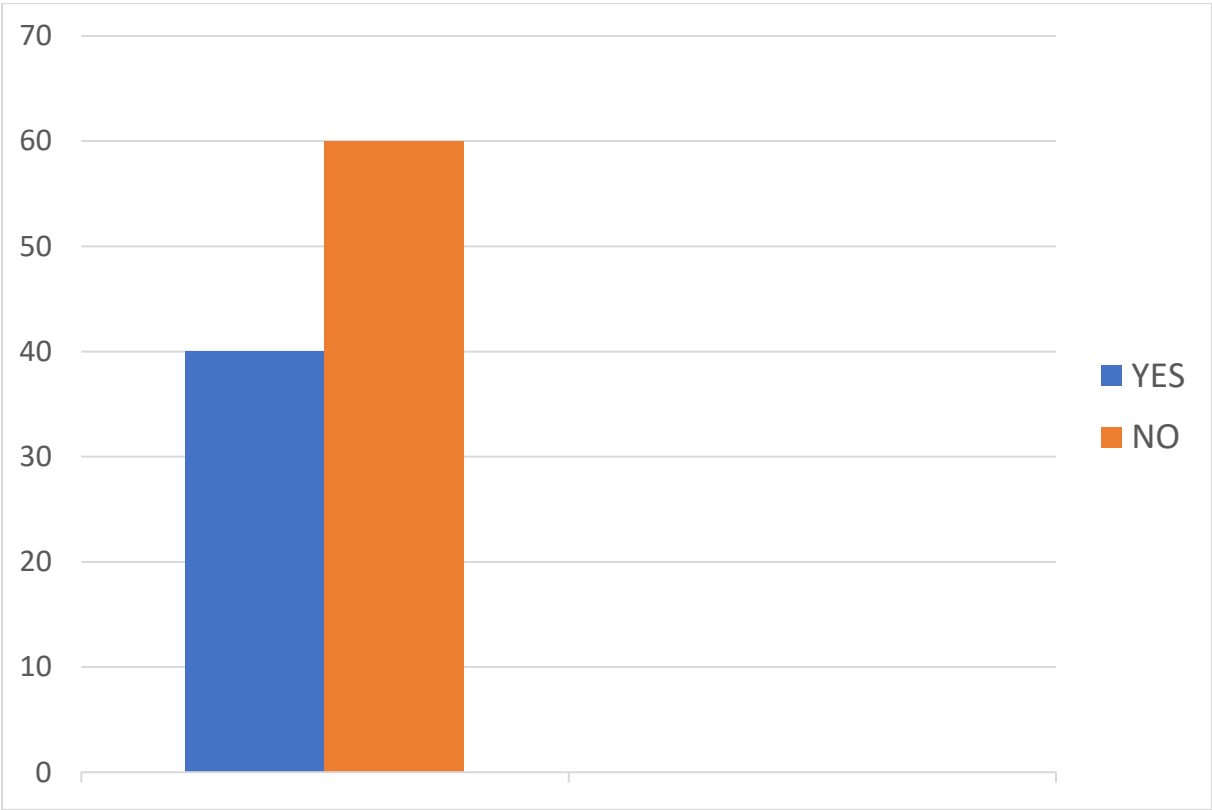
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Appendix:



*Figure1. Other foreign languages that Spanish people speak. Created with help of a questionnaire data for this research paper.*



*Figure 2. Spanish people rating of English language as a global language. Created with data of the questionnaire for purposes of this research.*

**PART I. SATISFACTION WITH SPANISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT**

**PLEASE RATE THE FOLLOWING:**

**DIRECTIONS: 1-VERY SATISFIED 2-MODERATELY SATISFIED 3- NOT VERY SATISFIED 4- NOT SATISFIED AT ALL 5- NO OPINIOM**

a.) Availability of brochures in Spanish language

1(very satisfied) 2 3 4(not satisfied at all) 5(neutral)

b.) Excursions and tours offered in Spanish language

1(very satisfied) 2 3 4(not satisfied at all) 5(neutral)

c.) Diversity of cultural events happening in Spanish language

1(very satisfied) 2 3 4(not satisfied at all) 5(neutral)

d.) Level of comprehension of my requirements

1(very satisfied) 2 3 4(not satisfied at all) 5(neutral)

e.) Clearly signposted tourist directions in the destination in Spanish language

1(very satisfied) 2 3 4(not satisfied at all) 5(neutral)Translation

d.) menus in restaurants in Spanish language

1(very satisfied) 2 3 4(not satisfied at all) 5(neutral)

## **PART II. ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS**

Put X or circle the correct answer:

**How would you rate your English language proficiency?**

- a.) Near native
- b.) Fluent
- c.) Excellent command highly proficient
- d.) Good command
- e.) Basic communication skills
- f.) I don't speak it at all

**Rate which of the following is true for you:**

Put X or circle the correct answer:

- a.) I usually feel anxious when I speak English
- b.) I usually feel uncomfortable when I speak English
- c.) I feel that my English is not enough
- d.) I need to search for the proper words
- e.) I don't have any problems when communicating in English
- f.) I don't speak English at all

**Do you consider English language as global language? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_**

## **PART III. DEMOGRAPHICS**

Put x or circle the correct answer:

**Gender:** \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_ Male

**Age:**

- a.) Bellow 25
- b.) 25-36
- c.) 37-48
- d.) 49-58
- e.) 59-70

**Native language:** \_\_\_\_\_



**Other languages you speak:**

- a.) English
- b.) German
- c.) Italian
- d.) French
- e.) Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

*Figure 3. The questionnaire used for this research.*