

ÇA FAIT 20 EUROS, S'IL VOUS PLAÎT: THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES ON BILINGUALS' TIPPING BEHAVIOR

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OBJECTIVES The impact of language in services has mainly been studied from a perspective of perceived importance of language use. To date, research has not investigated the impact of language differences on behavioral outcomes. In this paper, we focus on one specific outcome variable; and examine how the service provider's language use may influence consumer tipping behaviour. Investigating tipping behavior is an interesting outcome variable as consumers rarely wish to pay more when being served (Lynn and McCall, 2000). In this paper, we present three studies investigating the impact of language differences between bilingual customers and service personnel on tipping behavior. We further test the mediating effect of speech accommodation, a process in which the service provider accommodates the customer by doing or showing efforts to use the customer's language.

METHODS The three studies on tipping behaviour include two experiments and one survey with adult bilingual customers from two different countries (Belgium, Finland). The effect of language use on tipping behaviour, and the mediating effects of speech accommodation, is established through the three studies, confirming the hypotheses.

RESULTS The results show that the service provider's language use has a large and significant effect on the consumer tipping behaviour. This effect can consistently be observed in all three studies across both countries, confirming the generalizability of the results. We further establish that the impact of language differences on tipping behaviour is fully mediated by speech accommodation employed by the service provider.

CONCLUSIONS Consistent across different countries and different methodologies, we find that customers who are served in their second language are less willing to tip than customers who are served in their native language. Given that tipping behavior can be considered as a proxy for service quality perceptions (Lynn, 2001; Lynn and Sturman, 2010), our findings thus suggest that restaurant visitors who are served in their second language perceive the quality of the service as low. This is an important finding as prior research focused on whether customers find it important to be served in their native language (Holmqvist, 2011), but did not focus on behavioral outcomes of these language differences.

Our research has important implications for waiters and waitresses active on bilingual markets. It appears that they are able to increase their income with tips if they accommodate to the restaurant visitor's native language. This would require waiters and waitresses to learn or enhance the second language of the market. Restaurant owners might also offer language courses to waiters and waitresses in order to make them more fluent in the different languages of the market. Doing so might be beneficial, as waiters and waitresses who receive more tips have a higher job satisfaction, and are more committed to deliver good service