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Speak my language if you want my money

Service language's influence on consumer tipping behavior

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Abstract

Purpose – Despite the importance of the interaction between consumers and service personnel for how consumers perceive quality, service research assumes that both customers and service provider are perfectly able to interact with each other. This might not be the case on bilingual markets. This paper aims to examine customers' behavioral reactions to being served in their first versus second language. Specifically, the paper tests whether bilinguals who are served in their second language are less likely to tip the service provider. Moreover, it seeks to examine the mediating role of speech accommodation, and the moderating roles of bilinguals' perceived second language proficiency and political considerations.

Design/methodology/approach – Study 1 tests the main hypothesis using a scenario-based experiment with adult consumers in two bilingual countries (Belgium, Finland). Study 2 further elaborates on these findings using a retrospective survey of actual customer experiences in Belgium.

Findings – Driven by perceptions of speech accommodation, the results consistently show that consumers are more likely to tip if served in their native language compared to when served in their second language. Moreover, this relationship is not dependent on consumers' perceived second language proficiency, but rather upon their political considerations.

Originality/value – This is the first study of bilingual customers' behavioral reactions to being served in their second language, among bilingual customers from different countries. Given that more than half the countries in the world are multilingual, service providers need to take customers' native language into account when serving bilingual customers.

Keywords Language, Tipping behaviour, Speech accommodation, Language proficiency, Political considerations, Consumer behaviour, Service industries, Belgium, Finland

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

More than half the countries in the world are officially multilingual (Wei, 2007) and many officially monolingual countries contain regions where multiple languages are spoken (Comrie, 2011). This situation is reflected in marketing research, where considerable attention is given to understanding how language can influence consumers in advertising contexts. Several studies examine how consumers process bilingual textual information (e.g. Schmitt *et al.*, 1994; Schmitt and Zhang, 1998;

Tavassoli and Han, 2001) or respond to bilingual advertising (e.g. Krishna and Ahluwalia, 2008; Luna and Peracchio, 2001, 2005; Puntoni *et al.*, 2009; Zhang and Schmitt, 2004).

In service contexts, however, research on language influence is much scarcer, despite the fact that bilingual consumers in bilingual markets often have to conduct service encounters in their second language (Callahan, 2005, 2006). While acknowledging the importance of understanding the role of language in advertising contexts, we argue that the interactive nature of services (Grönroos, 1978; Surprenant and Solomon, 1987) makes the importance of understanding how language influences consumers in service encounters crucial. In service contexts, the value that consumers perceive derives explicitly from the interaction between consumers and service providers (Bendapudi and Leone, 2003; Vargo and Lusch, 2004); if they do not share a common language, this might affect the outcome.

Both the behavior and the perceptions of consumers who speak more than one language might change depending on the language in which an interaction takes place (Briley *et al.*, 2005). Understanding how bilinguals react to being served in their first as compared to their second language is thus of considerable importance. To the best of the authors' knowledge, only Holmqvist (2011) has examined language in service contexts, showing that bilingual consumers prefer to be served in their native language in service encounters. To date, it thus remains unknown whether service language, that is, the language in which a customer is served on a bilingual market, influences behavioral outcomes. The main purpose of this paper is to address this issue by focusing on one specific behavior, namely tipping behavior.

Tipping is common around the world (Star, 1988) and involves trillions of dollars (Azar, 2011). Tipping behavior is of interest for understanding consumer perceptions; although consumers rarely wish to pay more than necessary for goods and services, tips are voluntary payments for good service (Becker *et al.*, 2011; Lynn *et al.*, 1993). Tipping thus indicates that consumers perceive the service as good, and restaurant visitors often leave tips to the waiter who serves them as a reward for good service (Lynn, 2001; Lynn and Sturman, 2010). This makes tipping behavior an interesting outcome variable in examining how bilingual consumers react to service language.

In addition, we examine how person-related characteristics influence customers' reactions to service language. Sociolinguistic literature proposes that bilinguals' willingness to communicate in a second language is determined by their perceived second language proficiency, defined as individuals' perceptions of their ability to communicate in a second language (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998). Additionally, bilinguals' willingness to communicate in a second language may also be a political consideration. That is, people's ideological preferences for their own language group affect their language choice in conversations with speakers from another language group (Dewaele, 2005; MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998; McRae, 1999). In the context of our research, we examine how bilinguals' language proficiency and political considerations moderate the impact of service language on tipping behavior.

The article is organized into the theoretical background followed by two studies investigating the impact of service language on tipping behavior. After a discussion of the results, we outline limitations and implications for further research.

Theory development and hypotheses

The role of language in service encounters

Good communication is a crucial part of the service encounter (Bitner *et al.*, 1990; Mattson and den Haring, 1998), and it is the interaction between the company and the consumer that determine how consumers perceive service quality (Bitner, 1990, 1992; Grönroos, 1984). This being the case, it is striking that virtually all research on the role that language plays for consumers is found outside the service field, while service research appears to take a common language between consumers and companies for granted (Holmqvist, 2011). Taking a sociolinguistic perspective on language use, Callahan (2006) notes that in interactions where two interlocutors do not share a common native language, the person with the lowest status usually accommodates by speaking the language of the person with the highest status. As it is the customer who decides the outcome of the service encounter (Grönroos, 2008), applying this logic to a consumer setting suggests that it is the service provider who should accommodate the customer (Callahan, 2005). However, customers are not always served in their native language on a bilingual market (Holmqvist, 2011). So what happens if a service provider serves customers in their native language versus their second language?

The fields of sociolinguistics and social psychology provide theoretical anchoring for the impact of service language on tipping behavior. In the case of interactions between service providers and customers, the tact maxim is of special importance (Leech, 1983). According to the tact maxim, dealing with politeness in interactions between people, the goal is to minimize cost and maximize benefit for the other person; in other words, to make the other person satisfied (Pfister, 2010). During interactions, both persons want to interact in relative harmony (Leech, 1983). As a result, when we perceive that another person is trying to maximize our benefits, we in turn respond by trying to maintain harmony by also maximizing benefit for the other person (Fraser, 1990).

Adopting the idea of perceived politeness to our research, customers expect service providers to display tact by serving them in their native language; that is, to minimize cost and maximize benefit to the customer (Holmqvist, 2011). When waiters act in this polite way, customers strive to maintain harmony by maximizing benefit to the waiter. As a result, customers are more likely to tip the waiter. When waiters do not act in a polite way, customers do not feel obliged to maximize benefits for the waiter, and will be less likely to tip the waiter.

Sociolinguistic and social psychological research has specifically examined interactions among speakers of different languages in the speech accommodation theory. The principal idea of speech accommodation, first proposed by Giles *et al.* (1973), suggests that speakers might adjust their speech either toward a listener (i.e. convergence) or away from a listener (i.e. divergence). Research on speech accommodation theory demonstrates that the more effort in language choice a speaker of one group puts in his message in order to accommodate to the listener, the more favorably he is perceived by listeners from other groups, who will in turn would put more effort into accommodating the speaker in return (e.g. Giles *et al.*, 1987; Myers-Scotton, 1988). For example, Genesee and Bourhis (1982) presented respondents constructed conversations in which the speakers either converge to the language of the respondents or fail to do so. Their results indicate that speakers are

evaluated more positively when they converge to the language of the respondent than when they diverge. The more effort speakers put into their message, the more favorable the listener thus perceives them. Speech accommodation is particularly important in bilingual countries because persons might be confronted with speakers of a different language. In case of language differences between bilingual speakers, a service provider might choose to converge (i.e. speak the customer's native language) or to diverge (i.e. speak the own native language, which is the customer's second language).

Tipping behavior is usually seen as a reward for the efforts of service workers (Bodvarsson and Gibson, 1994; Jacob and Page, 1980). We might thus expect that a waiter doing efforts for speaking the customer's native language to be more likely to receive a tip. Support for this relationship can be found inequity theory, which argues that people evaluate the equity of an exchange by comparing inputs to outcomes. An exchange is perceived as equitable when a person's inputs-to-outputs ratio is in balance with the other person's inputs-to-outputs ratio. Inequity arises when a perceived inputs and perceived outcomes are not in balance (Adams, 1963, 1965). In the context of restaurants, good service and tips are inputs and outcomes in exchange relationships between waiters and restaurant visitors. If customers receive good service, this will lead to perceptions of positive inequity because customers perceive that the service providers' input/output ratio was larger than their own input/output ratio; stated differently, they perceive having received more than they have given. Feelings of positive inequity are usually distressing, so restaurant customers may wish to restore equity in their relationships with waiters by giving tips (Lynn and Grassman, 1990; Lynn and McCall, 2000). In contrast, if customers receive bad service, this leads to perceptions of negative inequity because customers perceive that they have received less than they have given. In the context of our research, the waiter's input is the effort to speak the customer's native language and the waiter's output is the tip that customers give. For customers, the input is the tip they give the waiter and their output is the satisfaction with the service; in situations where the waiter serves customers in their second language, customers are less likely to tip because they perceive the waiter's input as too low. In situations where the waiter serves customers in their native language, customers are more likely to tip as they perceive a high input from the waiter, and perceive that the waiter tries to accommodate them. We hypothesize:

- H1.* Bilingual customers who are served in their native language will be more likely to give a tip than bilingual customers who are served in their second language.
- H2.* The impact of service language on tipping behavior is mediated by perceptions of speech accommodation.

The moderating role of perceived second language proficiency

Even though bilingualism among consumers is widespread (cf. Luna and Peracchio, 2001), not all bilinguals are fluent in their second language (Zhang and Schmitt, 2004). We propose that consumers' perceived second language proficiency impacts the relationship between language difficulties and tipping behavior. Fluent bilinguals can easily activate both languages, whereas non-fluent bilinguals have to put more effort

into activating their second language (Beauvillain and Grainger, 1987; Jared and Kroll, 2001). Rather than their actual second language competence, it is perceived competence that drives willingness to communicate in a second language (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1999). Individuals who perceive themselves as poor communicators in a second language are more unwilling to communicate in that language (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998, 1999; Matsuoka and Evans, 2005). If customers with low perceived second language proficiency are served in their second language, they have to put more effort into the service encounter than customers with high levels of perceived second language proficiency. Building on equity perceptions as predictors of tipping behavior (Lynn and Grassman, 1990; Lynn and McCall, 2000), we can expect that when consumers with limited perceived second language proficiency are served in their second language, they have a higher perceived input/output ratio than consumers with high perceived second language proficiency. Stated differently, customers with limited perceived second language proficiency perceive less positive inequity than customers with high perceived second language proficiency, making them less likely to tip when served in their second language:

- H3. The relationship between service language and tipping behavior is moderated by perceived second language proficiency.

The moderating role of political considerations

Apart from the issue of how capable consumers are to use a second language, there are situations in which consumers' willingness to communicate in a second language is not necessarily based on perceived second language proficiency. Language is not just a tool of communication; consumers often perceive an emotional connection with their native language (Holmqvist, 2011; Puntoni *et al.* 2009). According to Nelde (1987), contact between different languages implies linguistic conflict, in which language acts as a symbol of underlying tensions that relate to politics. A study by Torras and Gafaranga (2002) investigating people's willingness to communicate in a second language found that language preference itself may be based on language proficiency, but also on political ideologies that dictate which language to speak in given speech situations. Language use thus might depend upon political considerations; for people with high levels of political considerations, language use becomes "a political act" (Dewaele, 2005; MacIntyre *et al.* 1998; McRae, 1999).

In a study focused on consumer language preferences, Holmqvist (2011) identifies political considerations as an important part of consumer preferences for native language use. As the choice of which language to use can be political and language use is connected to nationalist feelings (cf. Redondo-Bellón, 1999), we propose that customers with high political considerations are less likely to tip when being served in their second language than customers with low political considerations. This is because customers, high in political considerations, believe that service providers should have done (more) efforts into accommodating to the customers' native language. This feeling results in a lower perceived input from the service provider's side, leading more negative inequity perceptions for customers high in political considerations compared to customers low in political considerations:

- H4. The relationship between service language and tipping behavior is moderated by consumers' political considerations.

Studies

Across two studies, we establish a link between service language and consumers' tipping behavior. A controlled scenario-based experiment in Belgium and Finland (study 1) demonstrates that bilinguals served in their second language are less likely to tip the waiter than customers who are served in their native language, regardless of the accent a service provider might have. We enhance the external validity by demonstrating the negative impact of service language on tipping behavior, using a survey of actual restaurant experiences (study 2). In the latter study, we further examine the moderating role of perceived second language skills and political considerations.

Study 1

Method

A total of 76 adult Belgian bilinguals (55.3 percent male; $M_{age} = 33.79$; $SD_{age} = 16.52$) and one hundred seventy-seven adult bilingual Finns (58.5 percent male; $M_{age} = 30.64$; $SD_{age} = 16.05$) participated in a three-group between-subjects experiment. Similar to prior studies on bilingualism, Belgium (Puntoni *et al.*, 2009) and Finland (Kreander and Sundberg, 2007) were selected as the setting for this study because of their linguistic characteristics. Respondents were recruited through a random-walk. Only native Dutch-speaking Belgians (Belgium) and native Swedish-speaking Finns (Finland) participated in this research.

Three different scenarios were designed to test our first hypothesis. In the first scenario, customers are served by an employee who is a native speaker of the respondent's native language. In the second scenario, respondents are served by an employee who is a native speaker of the respondent's second language, but who converges to the respondent's native language during the service encounter (albeit with an accent). In the third scenario, respondents are served by an employee who diverges from the respondent's native language and thus speaks the respondent's second language. A sample scenario can be found in the appendix.

In Belgium, all scenarios depicted a restaurant experience in Brussels, the Belgian capital. Brussels is officially bilingual, although French is the dominating language in the city. Dutch-speaking restaurant visitors are often served in French in Brussels, thus providing a realistic setting for studying the impact of language difficulties on tipping behavior. In Finland, all scenarios depicted the same restaurant experience in Helsinki, the Finnish capital. Helsinki is officially bilingual, although Finnish is the dominating language in the city; Swedish-speaking Finns are often served in Finnish in Helsinki. In the scenarios, we also control for service quality perceptions (reliability and food quality, physical design and appearance of the restaurant, and price; see Andaleeb and Conway, 2006) in order to isolate the effects of language difficulties on tipping behavior.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions and asked to imagine themselves as the restaurant visitor in the scenario. After reading the scenario, participants were asked to indicate whether they would give the waiter a tip or not, after completing a number of filler items. In accordance with prior tipping research (Jacob and Guéguen, 2011; Jacob *et al.*, 2010), we focus on a binary dependent variable (giving a tip: yes/no) as the service cost of being served in Belgium and Finland is already included in the total price. Moreover, waiters are given fixed wages

in both countries, making them less dependent on tips and making tipping less a social norm. In this context, the decision of giving a tip or not is thus the first and most important decision restaurant visitors face to evaluate the service quality (Jacob and Guéguen, 2011; Jacob *et al.*, 2010). The service language manipulation was assessed by asking respondents whether the service provider spoke Dutch or French (Belgium); or Swedish or Finnish (Finland) using a seven-point semantic differential. We also assess scenario realism using a two-item, seven-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.885$) adopted from Liao (2007). Additionally, we asked for demographic information.

Results

Manipulation checks and scenario realism. In Belgium, respondents in the “Dutch waiter” condition indicate that they interacted with a Dutch waiter ($M = 1.91$, $SD = 1.76$), whereas respondents in the “Only French waiter” condition indicate that they were served by a French waiter ($M = 6.96$, $SD = 0.19$). Respondents who are served by a French waiter speaking Dutch evaluate this waiter as not fluent in Dutch ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.95$). The three groups are significantly different from each other ($F(2,73) = 70.384$, $p < 0.001$). In Finland, respondents in the “Swedish waiter” conditions indicate that they interact with a Swedish-speaking waiter ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 1.78$), whereas respondents in the “Finnish waiter” condition indicate that they are served by a Finnish-speaking waiter ($M = 6.76$, $SD = 0.92$). Respondents who are served by a Finnish waiter speaking Swedish evaluate this waiter as not fluent in Swedish ($M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.50$). The three groups are significantly different from each other ($F(2,174) = 172.713$, $p < 0.001$). Respondents evaluated the scenarios as realistic in both countries (Belgium, $M = 5.86$; $SD = 1.23$; Finland: $M = 5.66$; $SD = 1.37$), and the average scenario realism does not differ across the three scenarios (Belgium: $F(2,73) = 0.464$, $p > 0.05$, Finland: $F(2,174) = 1.965$, $p > 0.05$).

Research findings. A χ^2 -test indicates that the likelihood of tipping significantly differs across the three conditions both in Belgium ($\chi^2(2) = 18.697$, $p < 0.001$) and in Finland ($\chi^2(2) = 7.491$, $p = 0 < 0.05$). In Belgium, 80.8 percent of customers served in Dutch (their native language) by a Dutch-speaking waiter would tip the waiter, while 66.7 percent of respondents would tip the waiter if served in Dutch with a French accent by a waiter who is a native French speaker. If customers are served in French (second language), the likelihood of tipping significantly decreases to 25.0 percent. There is no significant difference in tipping behavior between customers who are served in Dutch and customers who are served in Dutch with a French accent.

In Finland, 55 percent of customers served in Swedish (their native language) by a Swedish-speaking waiter would tip the waiter, while 64.9 percent would tip the waiter if served in Swedish with a Finnish accent by a waiter who is a native Finnish speaker. If customers are served in Finnish, the likelihood of tipping significantly decreases to 39.7 percent. There is no significant difference in tipping behavior between customers who served in fluent Swedish and customers served in Swedish with a Finnish accent. These findings lend support for our first hypothesis.

Discussion study 1

Consistent across two countries, our results indicate that when waiters converge to restaurant visitors' native language, regardless of their own native language, they are more likely to receive a tip. For restaurant visitors, all that seems to matter is being

served in their native language; it does not matter that waiters have an accent as long as they speak the consumers' language. These findings highlight the importance of using consumers' native language in service interactions (Holmqvist, 2011).

However, there are limitations to the generalizability of our findings in study 1. First, we used scenario-based experiments to test the first hypothesis; this increases internal validity but possibly at the cost of external validity. The mediating role of speech accommodation was not measured in study 2, and we did not test for moderating effects. To address these limitations, study 2 tests the findings of study 1 using a retrospective survey. Such a survey is based on actual service encounters, rather than scenarios, and also allows for testing actual tipping behavior. Study 2 further examines whether the relationship between language difficulties and tipping behavior is mediated by speech accommodation perceptions. Finally, we examine whether the relationship between service language and tipping behavior is moderated by consumers' second language skills and political considerations.

Study 2

A total of 133 Dutch-speaking Belgian bilinguals (46 percent male; $M_{age} = 32.83$; $SD_{age} = 13.98$) were recruited through an online research panel. Participants were asked to recall a restaurant visit in Brussels during the last six months. In line with previous research, the six-month period was chosen to reduce recall bias (e.g. East and Uncles, 2008; Liao, 2007). If respondents did not meet two screener questions ("Did you visit Brussels during the last six months?" and "Did you visit a restaurant in Brussels during the last six months?"), they were informed that they were not part of the target population and thanked for their participation. The 133 participants fulfilling these conditions were asked to write down their experience of a restaurant visit in Brussels during the last six months. Afterwards, participants responded to general questions about the restaurant experience.

Respondents completed questions about the restaurants' service quality. Based on seven-point Likert scales adopted from Andaleeb and Conway (2006), the questionnaire measured food quality and reliability (five items, $\alpha = 0.822$), physical design and appearance of the restaurant (three items, $\alpha = 0.859$) as well as price perceptions (two items, $\alpha = 0.819$). The respondents also rated their past transaction history with that restaurant on a two-item measure ($\alpha = 0.888$) adopted from Hess *et al.* (2003) and Magnini and Karande (2009). These variables served as covariates.

Respondents were asked whether they had tipped the waiter or not. Respondents also indicated whether they were served by a waiter that was Dutch-speaking (consumer native language), Dutch-speaking with a French accent (consumer native language with accent) or French-speaking (consumer second language). We further asked for respondents' perceptions of speech accommodation by the waiter ($\alpha = 0.963$) using a four-item seven-point Likert scale developed after a review of literature (items: "the waiter did efforts to speak Dutch", "the waiter adjusted his/her language to mine"; "the waiter showed flexibility in his/her language use", "the language used by the waiter was appropriate"). Similar to Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008), we measured respondents' self-reported language proficiency using a three-item seven-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.877$) developed after a review of literature (items: "I am very fluent in French", "I understand both French and Dutch"; "I can easily switch from Dutch to French"). Respondents' political considerations were measured using a three-item

seven-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.749$), developed after a review of literature (items: “my language plays a part in how I vote in elections”; “I am in favor of increased autonomy for [my region]”; “[My region] should become independent”). Finally, we asked for demographic information.

Results

A total of 19.7 percent of the respondents had been served in their native language by a native speaker; 35.2 percent were served in their native language, but with an accent; the remaining 45.1 percent of customers reported had been served in French. These results indicate that being served in the second language is quite common for restaurant visitors in Brussels. A binary logistic regression modeled the impact of language difficulties on tipping behavior, while controlling for the covariates. The results of the analysis are listed in Table I.

The results from a first model (M1) indicate that when restaurant customers are served in Dutch by a French-speaking waiter, this does not lead to a significantly different tipping behavior than when served by a native Dutch-speaking waiter ($b = -0.386$, $p > 0.05$). However, if restaurant visitors are served in French, they are significantly less likely to give the waiter a tip ($b = -1.293$, $p < 0.05$). More specific, customers who are served in their second language are 3.650 times more likely not to tip the waiter than customers who are served in their native language. These results confirm *H1*.

The second hypothesis posits that the relationship between language difficulties and tipping behavior is mediated by restaurant visitors' perceptions of speech accommodation. We performed mediation analysis following the four-step approach by Baron and Kenny (1986). Results from a second binary logistic regression model are listed in Table I (M2). First, adding speech accommodation perceptions significantly improved the model, as evidenced by a significant decrease in deviance (Deviance M1: 121.309; Deviance M2: 116.148; difference: $\chi^2(1) = 5.161$, $p < 0.05$). The results indicate that perceptions of speech accommodation have a significant impact on tipping behavior ($b = 0.386$, $p < 0.05$). For each additional unit of perceived speech accommodation, restaurant visitors are 1.471 times more likely to tip the waiter. Results in Table II (M2) show that the significant impact of being served in Dutch or in French on tipping behavior disappears when controlling for perceptions of speech accommodation ($b = 0.249$; $p > 0.05$). Results from the mediation analysis support our second hypothesis: The impact of language divergence on tipping behavior is fully mediated by perceptions of speech accommodation.

Finally, we examine the moderating role of perceived second language proficiency and political considerations. Results in Table I (M3) illustrate that adding interactions between service language and second language skills, and interactions between service language and political considerations, significantly enhance the model (Deviance M1: 121.309; Deviance M3: 110.891; difference: $\chi^2(4) = 10.418$, $p < 0.05$). Customers' perceived second language skills do not moderate the relationship between service language and tipping behavior (Dutch versus Dutch with accent: $B = 0.597$, $p > 0.05$, Dutch versus French: $B = 0.101$, $p > 0.05$). Thus we do not find support for *H3*. In contrast, customers' political considerations significantly moderate the relationship between service language and tipping behavior between customers served in their native language and customers served in their second language (Dutch versus Dutch

with accent: $B = 0.098, p > 0.05$, Dutch versus French: $B = -0.951, p < 0.05$). Table II provides an overview of the estimated probabilities of tipping for varying levels of political considerations.

The estimated probabilities show that 51 percent of customers with low levels of political considerations would still tip the waiter if served in their second language, whereas the tipping probability is as low as only 1 percent for customers with high levels of political considerations. *H4* is thus supported.

General discussion

The aim of this paper was to examine the impact of service language on tipping behavior, resulting in two main contributions. First, consistent across different countries and different methodologies, we find that consumers who are served in their second language are less willing to tip than consumers who are served in their native language. This study is the first to demonstrate that service language influences consumers' actual behavior. This is a contribution to the field as prior research has focused on whether consumers find it important to be served in their native language (Holmqvist, 2011), but not addressed behavioral outcomes of service language. The results also confirm earlier research showing that the decision making of bilingual consumers is influenced by language (Briley *et al.*, 2005). Moreover, our results show that language influence on behavioral decisions is driven by consumers' perceptions of speech accommodation. The more efforts companies undertake to serve consumers in their native language, the more favorable behavior they receive in return. This finding is in line with sociolinguistic research (Rusbult *et al.*, 1991), showing that accommodating a speaking partner can result in more favorable behavior toward that speaking partner. As tipping behavior can be considered a proxy for consumers' service quality perceptions (Lynn, 2001; Lynn and Sturman, 2010), our findings thus suggest that consumers who are served in their second language perceive a lower service quality than consumers who are served in their native language. This is relevant for both consumer research and for managers, as the findings show language to be a relevant aspect determining consumer perceptions.

The second contribution stems from the moderation analysis. While previous studies into language influence on behavior has focused on fluency, our results show that there is no significant moderation by second language proficiency, but a strong impact of political considerations. Consumers with strong political considerations are less likely to tip when served in their second language than consumers with low

Political considerations	Native language (%)	Native language with accent (%)	Second language (%)
1	33	20	51
2	35	21	45
3	38	26	27
4	42	31	14
5	46	37	7
6	50	44	3
7	57	54	1

Table II.
Study 2 – estimated tipping probabilities

political considerations. All respondents in both Finland and Belgium were bilingual and perfectly capable of carrying out the interaction in their second language. Despite this, the respondents were much less prepared to tip, particularly when harboring political views on language, if the service was delivered in their second language. These findings illustrate that although consumers are able to speak a second language, they are not always willing to do so. What is more, the results show that ideological aspects appear to have a stronger impact on consumers' language preferences than second language proficiency.

Managerial implications

Taking a managerial perspective, our research shows that service employees are able to increase their income with tips if they accommodate restaurant visitors by using the consumers' native language. This requires that service employees are able to converge to customers' native language. If not, the increased likelihood of receiving tips might form a motivation to study the different languages of a market. Provided that the impact of service language is as strong in other service encounters, the results make a case for service language as a relevant aspect not only for understanding consumers' service perceptions, but also for understanding what they are prepared to pay for the service.

In order to stimulate tipping, bilingual service employees could also engage in certain behaviors that allow customers to decide in which language the service encounter should be conducted (Callahan, 2005, 2006). For example, a service provider might be proactive and greet customers in the different languages of the market. For example, a Belgian waiter working in a restaurant in Brussels (bilingual region Dutch/French) might greet a customer by saying "*Goeiedag/Bonjour*". By doing so, it is the customer who decides which language will be spoken during the remainder of the service encounter. Service employees might also explicitly ask language clarification from customers, or might overhear conversations between restaurant visitors to decide in which language he/she should address these restaurant visitors.

Companies might also offer language courses to service employees in order to make them more fluent in the different languages of the market. Doing so might be beneficial, as service employees who receive more tips have a higher job satisfaction, and are more committed to deliver good service (Jacob and Page, 1980). Moreover, tipping appears to selectively attract and retain better service workers (Lynn *et al.*, 2011). This suggests that if companies can motivate their employees to converge to the consumers' native language, this results in multiple beneficial outcomes.

Finding that perceptions of speech accommodation drive consumers' tipping behavior also carries important implications. Waiters speaking another language than the consumer need to demonstrate they are willing to make efforts to speak the consumers' native language. Additionally, companies might partially accommodate consumers by providing information material in their native language, for example menus in restaurants.

Observing customers' political considerations taking precedence over customers' perceived second language skills might offer managers guidance about when to explicitly focus on serving customers in their native language. For example, in regions where language use takes a political stance,

Limitations and future research

Several limitations in the current work present opportunities for amelioration in ongoing studies. First, we measured tipping behavior as a binary variable. Future research might focus on the amount of tip. Nevertheless, on the markets under investigation, the decision to engage in tipping is restaurant visitors' most important way to express their perceptions of the service as the gratuity is already included in the service charge (Jacob and Guéguen, 2011; Jacob *et al.*, 2010). Second, we used scenario-based experiments and a retrospective method to examine the impact of language divergence on tipping behavior. A field experiment might provide a fruitful research extension. Third, our study is limited to restaurant experiences. Studies have shown that tipping occurs in many service contexts such as delivery people, doormen, golf caddies, taxicab drivers, and so on (Star, 1988). Future research might examine whether our findings hold in other contexts. Based on our finding that the language of the service has a strong influence on consumers, future research is necessary to explore the relationship between service language and perceived service quality. Finally, future research might examine the impact of language divergence on other perceptual and behavioral metrics such as emotions, satisfaction, word-of-mouth and repurchase behavior (Namkung and Jang, 2010; Bui *et al.*, 2011).

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Appendix. Scenario study 1

Please imagine the following situation. Today you and a friend are visiting (Brussels/Helsinki) and are going for a lunch. You enter a nice looking restaurant and take place at one of the tables. After going through the menu you decide to order French fries and a steak, your friend decides to order some pasta. You call the waiter, who immediately comes to your table. The waiter looks proper and speaks (native language/native language with an accent/second language). You order your food and drinks. Sometime later the drinks are delivered to your table, and sometime later your meal is also brought to your table. The food tastes delicious. After the delicious meal and a nice chat to your friend you ask for the bill which is for €29.70. After paying the bill you leave the restaurant.

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