

## FOREIGN LANGUAGE NEEDS IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY IN OHRID TOURIST REGION<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Tourism becomes very important channel of globalisation. Communication practices and processes and the media are of fundamental concern to humanities and social sciences disciplines. Although languages and communication are central aspects of tourism studies, this is relatively unexplored area of study. This paper explores the necessity of designing an innovative ESP course as a result of global trends in tourism and hotel industry. A needs analysis research has been carried out regarding the foreign language competence of Macedonian guest contact operators in the hotel industry, tourism and hospitality in order to define the framework for an innovative foreign language course. A methodologically relevant model, based on the *ethnography of speaking* approach is proposed, which can be compatible for Macedonian needs. The indicative findings acknowledge the necessity of designing a model for effective English for Specific Purposes learning in Macedonian tourism and hotel industry education.

**KEY WORDS:** foreign language needs, ethnography of speaking approach, course design.

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<sup>1</sup> review paper

## INTRODUCTION

The following paper is a result of research and findings in the field of ESP in hospitality and tourism field. The main objective of the paper is through analysis and description of the language of tourism in the English and Macedonian following the principles of the ethnography of communication, to evaluate similarities and differences in the tourist communication and to highlight their cultural aspects.

When Macedonia was one of the six constituent republics of Yugoslavia, Ohrid was one of the country's most popular tourist destinations. Tourists visited Ohrid from all over Europe and beyond often on charter flights and on package tours. Famous politicians and celebrities even kept summer homes in Ohrid, on a hillside overlooking beautiful Lake Ohrid. Today, fourteen years after Macedonia peacefully seceded from Yugoslavia, Ohrid remains the primary destination for pleasure travellers within Macedonia. However, the growing pains of nationhood experienced by Macedonia including dramatic political and institutional changes, economic hardships, and various external pressures, have prevented Ohrid from assuming its rightful place among Europe's leading tourism destinations.

According to recent statistical references, the Macedonian tourism market is changing, the clientele has changed and so has the need for foreign languages in the hospitality industry. In the light of the evidence we found our language policy should be re-examined, innovated and based on research results in order to adapt to requirements for greater language competence and hospitality education in a global international context.

Communication practices, processes and the media are of fundamental concern to humanities and social science disciplines. Although language and communication are central aspects of tourism studies, this is a relatively unexplored area of study. Similarly it is only very recently that students of linguistics have turned their attention to the language of tourism.

English for specific purposes (ESP) teaching and learning situations can be considered to be part of post-initial education, since in most cases they

presuppose some basic linguistic competence in the target language (Dudley-Evans & St.John,1998) and sometimes an engagement with the subject to be taught that can range from theoretical to experiential (Robinson,1991:3-4) and concomitant motivation to learn. Despite the great diversity of many ESP situations, a ESP '*approach*' to the teaching of language can be seen as a predominantly 'adulthood-oriented' approach.

### GENERAL LEARNING VS ESP LEARNING

While *general learning of English language* means acquiring knowledge or skills that are unrelated to language, *learning a language* means acquiring knowledge or skills that are related to using a language for general communicative purposes, and *learning in ESP situations* means acquiring knowledge or skills that are related to using a language under certain circumstances and for SP. ESP domain can be characterised as an organised and sustained teaching/learning situation that is carried out in a formal or non-formal vocational or non-vocational environment. Adults are claimed to be primarily workers and secondarily learners, acquiring knowledge mainly from experience, rather than from books and media. Adult learners are usually self-or sponsor-directed and this implies that their learning performance is proportional to the levels of motivation and sense of self-fulfilment that they get from the learning situation. This is contrasted with pre-adults' primary role as learners, who are usually supervised by parents and teachers and whose daily environment is constrained within the formal education system (school, university, etc.)

ESP learners generally operate in a university level or post-school environment, their needs are essentially definable, and motivation levels central for the success of the learning programme. (Dudley-Evans & St John,1998:10).

While adult learners' knowledge and ability in using English language for general communicative purposes is gauged and the teaching syllabus planned accordingly, ESP learning involves both acquiring new and/or specialised knowledge and becoming trained in vocational competence of certain language/culture specific communicative interactions.

## ETHNOGRAPHY OF TOURISM COMMUNICATION

The ethnography, as a scientific discipline has close and inseparable connections with related social sciences such as ethnology, anthropology, linguistics, sociology, etc. There is especially close connection between the ethnography and sociolinguistics combined in a scientific sub-discipline *the ethnography of speaking*, that is, *the ethnography of communication*. Thus the contribution done by Del Hymes is invaluable specially his interdisciplinary approach in the analysis of the communicating interactions in a certain society. The close connection of the ethnography, language and culture in a society is certified by the author Seville-Troike who claims that “the ethnography is a field of scientific research that deals with description and analysis of a culture”. (Del Hymes, 1964, Seville-Troike,1989)

The research of tourist communication reflects the interdisciplinary aspect of the objective in this paper- on the one hand, tourism, as a significantly important and strong agent and channel of globalization, and on the other hand, the ethnography of communication, with its basic principles present in the tourist communication. Both disciplines, joined together, at the same time reflect change and transition, thus growing into treasures of different discourses since the existence of tourism. (Petrovska, 2005). Such an approach should be strictly related to the learner’s ability to handle certain professional tasks and subject-specific information and especially necessary for shaping the syllabus accordingly.

An important characteristic of the language of tourism are the specific communicative interactions. Communication does not occur only in a language surrounding but in a cultural context as well, where the speakers are accommodated towards the norm of behaviour. Thus, an accent is put on the similarities and differences on both cultures realised through the communicative strategies where the subcultures and individual variables penetrate deeply, which rule one’s communication the way it is communicated. An attempt to divide them is impossible nor desired, especially for the fact that their inner relations are culturally strengthened.

## THE PLACE OF CULTURE

No one involved in teaching ESP is likely to argue for cross-cultural understanding and multicultural diversity, but some may question the relative emphasis to be given to cross-cultural as opposed to target or local culture components in course design.

Students should be made aware of socio-cultural contexts in which communication occurs, culturally-influenced behaviour, the impact of different cultures on their languages, so cultural awareness raising and cultural instruction should play an important role in up-to-date foreign business language curricula.

The main teaching/learning aim should be mastering spoken communication, as tourism is actually a human exchange in which it is extremely important to communicate respecting and understanding the tourists' different cultural values in order to create reliability and trust.

One of the most important task in the ESP teaching process is the students' cross-cultural awareness. Foreign language teachers should bear in mind that they are actually teaching operators in direct contact with clients a very complex art of how to "manage, interact, negotiate and compromise with people of different culture backgrounds "(cfr.Yu, 1999) and at different levels of communication.

Because tourism and hospitality industry is a "people oriented industry", one of the most important issue of the innovative curriculum design should be to raise the cross-cultural awareness of the students through socio-cultural input. Some of the most important segments involved in an innovative curriculum design should be:

- Dichotomy indirectness vs. directness
- Requests
- Complaints
- Compliments
- Forms of addressing
- Presence /absence of certain cultural values expressed through language

Implementing an ethnography of speaking approach in an innovative curriculum design for hospitality industry will help future hospitality and tourism students to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave. Students can develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviour. They will become more aware of conventional behaviour in common situations in the target culture and thus they will increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language. Further on the students can:

- develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms
- develop necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture.
- notice cultural behaviour as an integral part of all communication
- become aware of their own culture as well as of that of the target language
- tolerate, accept and respect other cultural behaviour
- keep the balance between cultures

#### NEEDS ANALYSIS RESEARCH

The survey sought to elicit reactions to the following three hypothesis:

- What should a hotel operator know and learn in order to communicate successfully
- What causes communicative breakdowns in the guest-operator interaction
- Presence or absence of certain cultural values in the target and local culture

The results expected were aimed at showing the real needs and expectations of hospitality industry operators from foreign language classes. The final aim was to work out a possible way to adapt the curricula to the real needs arisen from the questionnaire and to give possible directions to teacher teams interested in designing courses for hospitality industry operators. Only through this it is possible to satisfy hospitality industry operators' actual needs, thus at the same time improving the quality in the hospitality industry.

## THE SURVEY

The survey was in the form of a questionnaire which consisted of questions regarding certain cultural values such as *hospitality, politeness, invitation* and they way the guests experience them through the communication with their hosts.

The Ohrid tourist region is considered to be the most developed tourist centre in the Republic of Macedonia. Having this in mind, during the summer period 2004 foreign tourists with English language speaking background who were staying in Ohrid region for more than ten days, were given a questionnaire. During 2017 summer season (June, July, and August), Ohrid region was visited by 71,373 foreign visitors from all over the world. They spent total 205,868 nights. (State department of statistics, Municipality Ohrid, local dept. for tourism).

The questionnaire was distributed in the hotels of A and B categories as well as in several restaurants. The survey covered a hundred respondents at age between 35-65, with even presence of male and female respondents.

The questions were divided into two categories: services and communication in a hotel and services and communication in a restaurant. Two of the questions were dedicated to the intercultural understanding/miss-understanding.

1. Did you receive a *welcome drink* upon your arrival in the hotel?  
Yes 78%                      No 22%
2. Are you satisfied with the hotel services?  
Yes 32%                      No 68%
3. How well can the hotel personnel speak the English Language?  
Excellent 18 %  
Well 20 %  
Not quite well 41 %  
Has poor knowledge of English 21 %
4. How polite lexical patterns do the hotel personnel use in addressing you?  
Polite 64 %  
*Very polite* 31 %  
Impolite 5%
5. How well can the restaurant personnel explain in English the menu?

- Excellent 10  
 Well 18%  
 Not quite well 58%  
 Has poor knowledge of English 14%
6. How polite lexical patterns do the restaurant personnel use in addressing you?  
 Polite 67 %  
 Very polite 22 %  
 Impolite 11%
7. Would you change anything in the Ohrid Tourist Area restaurant service?  
 Personnel service 45 %  
 Lists of dishes 17%  
 Hygiene 26%  
 Prices 12 %
8. Are you satisfied with the restaurant services?  
 Yes 42 %                      No 58 %
9. Have you found yourself in a situation of intercultural misunderstanding?  
 Sometimes 23 %  
 Very often 39 %  
 Rarely 27 %  
 No, never 11%
10. Are you going to visit Ohrid Tourist Area again?  
 Yes 68%  
 No 25%  
 I don't know 7 %

#### THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

We can conclude that expressing *welcome* to the guests in the hotels is a regular habit the foreign guests come to know a new cultural tradition of the local culture which is used to express hospitality, as a typical cultural value. According to the results 68% of the respondents answered negatively on the question for the hotel services, whereas 58% are not satisfied with the restaurant services. Thus should not come as a surprise, since the hotel and restaurant operators have poor knowledge of English, that is, more than half of the respondents think that the hospitality operators are not able to explain a type of dish or the way it is prepared. As for the hotel personnel, only 18% of the respondents think that this personnel can speak English well.

The fact that concerns are the answers given for question 4 and 6 with a small percentage (5% and 11%) , thus leading to the conclusion that a special attention should be given to the learning of the English language with a specific accent on the ways of using certain communicative strategies in guest-host settings. If they could, the guests would change the restaurant personnel (45%), thus indicating the urgent need for more serious approach when learning English language and culture for SP.

An interesting point to stress is the intercultural competence and the high percentage of respondents who very often during their holiday found themselves in a situation of cultural miss-understanding (39%). This is one more indicator that in the course of English language learning the future hotel and tourism operators should pay a special attention on the specific cultural values expressed through the language itself.

The results of the survey showed that there is a need of educating personnel with solid knowledge of English language and culture for the needs of the tourism and hospitality industry, since they are the foundation for further successful development in the field. The phenomenon as tourism itself is asks for an interdisciplinary approach in leaching foreign language for the operators in different sub-fields.

## CONCLUSION

The hospitality language instruction through different levels of education in Macedonia is not satisfactory to prepare hospitality and tourism operators for the new challenges of an international globalized economy. Preparatory needs analysis show that if we want to prepare our operators for the competitiveness of the market, we must re-examine our hospitality language curricula, innovate them or design new ones, based on needs analysis research. The survey suggests that there is a place for evaluation and understanding cultural values in the ESL classroom and in this course design it should be predominant.

Taking into account the results of the preparatory analysis we can deduce that, according to examinees' opinions, the most important reason for not having learnt English language and culture better, is considered to be the curriculum or

program. There is an urgent need for changing the existing curricula, adapting the existing ones to real needs in the hospitality industry or finding hints and answers for 'made to measure' courses for the hospitality industry. Such a course wouldn't waste the precious time operators or future hospitality students have available.

Therefore the findings should offer the potential foreign language teachers some indicators as how to proceed in formulating the curricula for hospitality industry language courses.

Representatives of a given culture more often are exposed to the influence of a foreign culture more than ever, regardless that nature of their profession asks that, or because of the socio-economic factors which make the ethnic profile of a country make it relatively picturesque. In that colourful field of different cultures, traditions, languages and dialects, insufficiently informed person can very often experience a cultural shock, thus confronting diverse influences on a daily basis. Therefore, the systematic study of the cultural phenomenon in general and specially studying the specific a nation's cultural conventions the guests encounter becomes an integral part of the modern educational system. The information offered through this approach (ES) provides better penetration in one's own culture. The importance of multiculturalism is seen in overcoming the ethnocentrism which is a needed precondition for living in a multinational and multicultural society.

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