



T.E.I. Thessaloniki  
Greece



Department of Tourism  
Management

UDC 811.112.2:338.48(497.5)  
Subject review  
Received: 21.09.2007

## THE PRESENT POSITION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS OF THE GERMAN LANGUAGE IN CROATIAN TOURISM

Nevenka Blazevic  
Maja Blazevic  
University of Rijeka, Croatia<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The global competition on the tourist market and the internationalization of the tourist industry intensify the need for language learning. Knowledge of foreign languages is the most important prerequisite of the quality service in the tourist industry. The structure of foreign guests in Croatia classified by emitting countries proves that the part of the German speaking guests in comparison with other language communities is the most prominent one, so that German is the most important foreign language for the communication in Croatian tourism. Although its learning in Croatian educational institutions compared to English has been neglected, it has been learnt by all pupils in vocational schools for hotel and tourism industry. In Croatian tourism English as the language of the global communication can not satisfy all communication needs in tourism.

*Key words:* globalization, foreign languages and tourism, language needs in tourism, German in tourism, communication in tourism.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid and intense globalization of the late 20th century and early 21st century has performed a great impact on language policy all over the world. Although the Council of Europe promotes multilingualism, English as a language of international communication might soon become the only language to be learnt in European schools.

---

<sup>1</sup> Nevenka Blazevic, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Opatija, Maja Blazevic, M.Sc., Puella Ltd., Zagreb, Croatia.

The globalization of English has become a great challenge for the policy of multilingualism in the European Union as for practical reasons it might become the only official language of the Union. Nowadays the role of other languages in the international communication has been underestimated.

This research will show the present position and future prospects of the German language in Croatian tourism. In this context it will also try to answer the question if English as the language of the global communication can satisfy all communication needs in tourism.

## 2. THE MOST IMPORTANT LANGUAGES IN EUROPE AND IN THE WORLD

There are various data about the number of languages in the world. According to Haarmann (2001a, 2001b) 6417 languages have been spoken worldwide. Most of them are small languages and only 12 languages have been spoken as the first or as the second language by more than a million of speakers. To these languages belong Chinese, English, Hindi, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Bengali, Portuguese, Indonesian, French, Japanese and German (Table 1).

**Table 1:** The biggest languages in the world

Language	Number of native speakers	Percentage of the world population
Chinese	1 210 000 000	23, 6 %
English	573 000 000	11, 3 %
Hindi	418 000 000	8, 2 %
Spanish	352 000 000	6, 9 %
Russian	242 000 000	4, 7 %
Arabic	209 000 000	4, 1 %
Bengali	196 000 000	3, 8 %
Portuguese	182 000 000	3, 5 %
Indonesian	175 000 000	3, 3 %
French	131 000 000	2, 5 %
Japanese	125 000 000	2, 4 %
German	101 000 000	2, 1 %

(Haarmann 2001 b, 11)

After Haarmann (1993: 53) the biggest languages in Europe are Russian, German, French, English, Italian, Ukrainian, Polish, Spanish, Rumanian, Dutch, Serbian/Croatian, Hungarian, Portuguese and Greek (Table 2).

**Table 2:** The biggest European languages

Language	Number of native speakers
Russian	135 000 000
German	91 473 000
French	58 120 000
English	56 390 000
Italian	55 437 000
Ukrainian	43 235 000
Polish	38 231 000
Spanish	28 616 000
Rumanian	23 741 000
Dutch	20 230 000
Serbian/Croatian	14 604 000
Hungarian	12 425 000
Portuguese	10 100 000
Greek	10 075 000

According to these data the leading language in Europe is Russian, which is also the fifth language in the world. In the second place is German, which takes the first place in the European Union. French takes the third place and English the fourth. The fact is that the number of native speakers is not the most important factor which determines the importance of some language in the world. If it were the case, Chinese would be the most important language in the world, and Russian in Europe. It does not mean that the number of native speakers is not important.

Besides the number of native speakers, the importance of some language is influenced by historical, cultural, political and economic factors. As a matter of fact, English has become the language of the international communication not only owing to a great number of native speakers, but also thanks to political and economic factors.

At the moment German and French, besides English, are the most important languages in the EU. German takes the first place as the mother tongue with more than hundred millions speakers and has a long tradition of learning as a foreign language. French takes as the mother tongue the third place, has a long tradition of learning as a foreign language and belongs to the leading languages in the world.

In Europe English takes the first place as a foreign language, the second one takes German and the third French (Hoberg, 177). As already mentioned, the importance of some language depends not only on the number of native speakers, but also on political, cultural, historical and economic factors. Regarding these factors, German should remain one of the most important languages in Europe, especially in tourism, where Germany is not only the European, but also the world leader.

Nowadays there are two trends in Europe – multilingualism on one side and on the other side monolingualism as a result of the globalization. Nobody can deny the

leading position of English as the first language of international communication in the history. While the former transnational languages like Greek and Latin were used by educated people mostly in Europe, English is today the most important means of communication all over the world.

Although many institutions in Europe support multilingualism, we can not say that it became a reality.

Researching learning German as a foreign language, Hoberg (2002) blames for the lower interest in learning it the lack of motivation. He found out that even people who like Germany and Germans often wonder why they should learn German, when they can communicate in English all over the world.

To increase the motivation in learning German as a foreign language Hoberg thinks that Germans should take some measures. The problem is that Germans do not appreciate their own language. Even when they can use interpreters, they rather communicate in English than in German, and in their companies abroad they prefer English to German and do not look for German speaking employees. Especially politicians and businessmen should not neglect their language, but they do that, and the others follow their example.

Hoberg also thinks that German teaching should be practical oriented with the stress on the language for special purposes. Even receptive teaching should be promoted. It is easier, does not take a long time and the communication could be realized if each speaker uses his mother tongue and if he just understands the language of the other speaker.

### **3. THE IMPORTANCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN CROATIAN TOURISM**

Tourism is becoming more and more important in human life. At the same time the tourist sector represents a considerable part of the economy in all European countries. The employees in tourism have to meet a wide variety of needs and demands of guests coming from various countries. That is the main reason why the communication in tourism is more sensitive than in other branches. Communication skills are a very important segment of the high-quality service in the tourist industry. Due to the orientation of tourism towards the international market, an important prerequisite for communication in this branch is the knowledge of foreign languages. Therefore foreign languages have been learnt as compulsory subjects in educational institutions for tourism, in language schools and in self-study.

According to the above mentioned reasons foreign languages are the most important part of the curricula of Croatian educational institutions for tourism. In vocational schools for tourism and hotel industry (waiters, cooks) two or three foreign languages are compulsory subjects (receptionists, tourist agents etc.). Two or three foreign languages are compulsory subjects at the university, too.

Moreover, the hotel categorization in Croatia classifies the command of foreign languages as one of its basic components<sup>2</sup>. Hotel managers, receptionists and the personnel communicating with guests are supposed to have command of four languages (in five-star-hotels), three languages (in four-star-hotels), two languages (in three-star-hotels) and one language (in two- and one-star-hotels).

#### 4. THE POSITION OF GERMAN LANGUAGE IN CROATIAN TOURISM

The position of foreign languages in tourism should be proportional to the structure of foreign guests by the country of residence. According to the statistical data<sup>3</sup> in the period from January to December 2006 the tourists realized in Croatia 53 006 946 nights: 11,3% domestic tourists and 88,7% foreign tourists.

Concerning the structure of the foreign tourist nights (Table 3) the most of them were realized by tourists from Germany (23,4%), Italy (11,6%), Slovenia (11,2%), Austria (8,7%), the Czech Republic (8,3%), Hungary (4,7%) and the Netherlands (4,1%). The tourists from other countries realized 28% tourist nights. Consequently, the German speaking guests (from Germany and Austria) realized more than 32% tourist nights.

**Table 3:** The structure of foreign guests by country of residence

Country of residence	Tourist nights (2005)	Tourist nights (2006)
Austria	3 756 535	4 069 302
Czech Republic	4 051 780	3 921 345
France	1 920 288	1 707 718
Italia	5 698 791	5 474 456
Hungary	2 405 145	2 196 365
Netherlands	1 910 080	1 938 295
Germany	11 001 142	10 986 866
Poland	1 374 595	1 612 013
Slovakia	1 183 499	1 428 346
Slovenia	5 099 116	5 245 881
United Kingdom	1 348 574	1 366 266

According to these data German should be the language number 1 in Croatian tourism. It has a long tradition in the tourism of our country and was for a long time the most important language in tourism schools. How is its position now? The answer to this question will give the results of two investigations.

<sup>2</sup> Pravilnik o razvrstavanju, minimalnim uvjetima i kategorizaciji ugostiteljskih objekata (1995). Zagreb: Narodne novine, br. 57, 1674.

<sup>3</sup> First release, Central bureau of statistics, Zagreb, 06. February, 2007.

The first one presents the attitude to foreign languages expressed by the employees communicating with guests in Croatian hotels and tourist agencies. The second investigation deals with the learning of foreign languages and shows the position of German language in Croatian schools.

## **5. ATTITUDES OF EMPLOYEES IN TOURISM TO FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

In order to find out the attitudes of employees in tourism to foreign languages, we interviewed 25 hotel managers, 23 sales managers, 55 receptionists, 45 waiters and 28 tourist agents who work in Croatian hotels and tourist agencies located in various tourist destinations. The interview was carried out in February 2007 partly during the training organized by the Croatian society of hoteliers and restaurateurs and partly by telephone. The employees were asked to answer two following questions:

*What foreign languages do you speak at work?  
Can English as the language of the global communication satisfy all  
communication needs in tourism?*

They were also asked to order the languages according to the frequency they use them at work.

The results show that the use of foreign languages is proportional to the structure of foreign guests by country of residence. 94% of employees put German in the first place. Italian is in the second place, English in the third place and French in the fourth.

100% of employees think that English as the language of the global communication can not satisfy communication needs in tourism. It does not mean that the employees in tourism should not have command in English. On the contrary, although English seems to be less important than German and Italian, the employees in tourism should have good command of it because of its international importance.

This research confirms the results of previous researches about the importance of foreign languages in tourism (Blazevic 1991, Blazevic 1996).

## **6. FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN CROATIAN SCHOOLS**

As a small country Croatia is aware of the importance of foreign languages. It follows the multilingualism as the language policy of the Council of Europe, which means different languages and language varieties at different levels of proficiency and different types of competences.

A foreign language is compulsory from the first grade of the primary school. Pupils can choose the language they study according to their wishes, preferences and motivation. They can select among English, German, French or Italian. Once they have

made their choice, pupils are obliged to continue studying that language during their school careers: during the primary school (eight years), during the four or three years of the secondary school and one or two years at the university. The vast majority of pupils choose English as the first language, the second place belongs to German, which is followed by Italian and French (Table 4).

**Table 4:** Foreign language choice in the first grade in Croatian primary schools<sup>4</sup>

	2004/2005
English	41 656 (86,44%)
German	5 480 (11,36 %)
Italian	182 (0,38 %)
French	147 (0,30 %)

A number of parameters generally dictate the choice of a language. Those are usually geographical, geopolitical, social or economical factors. In most cases the parents make a decision instead of a six or seven-year-old child. In some cases it is the school because of the shortage of teaching staff it disposes with.

German has been learnt mostly in regions near Austria, where the tradition of learning this language has never stopped. In other regions parents choose the language their children will be going to learn due to utilitarian reasons (in tourist destinations) and because they know it will be easier to learn English after German than vice versa.

Italian and French have been learnt by a small number of pupils, Italian in places which are near Italy and French mostly in our capital because there are some schools with long tradition in teaching this language.

In Croatian primary schools it is possible to learn a second foreign language, too. Its learning begins in the fourth grade and lasts until the end of the primary school. At the moment the second foreign language is not a compulsory one, but it might become very soon.

As a second foreign language mostly German has been learnt, followed by Italian, English and French.

The learning of the languages once chosen in the primary school is usually continued at the secondary level and at the university.

In vocational schools for the hotel industry and tourism German is a compulsory subject and it has been learnt as a first, second or third language by all pupils.

---

<sup>4</sup> Häusler/Karacic (2006:219)

## 7. CONCLUSION

According to the data given in previous chapters the present position of German in Croatian tourism is quite satisfactory. It is estimated as the most important language in tourism and it has been learnt by all pupils in vocational schools for hotel industry and tourism.

Although its learning in Croatian educational institutions compared to English has been neglected, it takes the second place as a foreign language, which makes it the second important foreign language in our country. Its position in schools will be much better when the second language learning becomes compulsory.

As long as German speaking guests are the most numerous foreign tourists in Croatia, it will be the most important language in tourism.

Although the time will come very soon when all German speaking guests and business partners will have good command in English, the communication in tourism in their mother tongue will be welcomed as in no other branch, for there is a Danish proverb which says: "*The Germans sell in English and buy in German!*" The fact is that nothing can convince more than when one speaks the mother tongue of its business partner or guest.

Having this proverb in mind, the future of German language in tourism might be not worse than its present position.

## REFERENCES

- Blazevic, N. (1991): *Strani jezici i turizam*, Turizam 1, Zagreb, 13 – 20.
- Blazevic, N. (1996): *Poznavanje stranih jezika kao osnovna pretpostavka za komunikaciju u turizmu*, In: Andrija Sevic, M. i Zergollern-Miletic, L. (ed.). *Jezik i komunikacija*. Zagreb: HDPL, 107 – 113.
- Haarmann, H. (2001a). *Babylonische Welt. Geschichte und Zukunft der Sprachen*. Frankfurt/New York.
- Haarmann, H. (2001b). *Die Kleinsprachen der Welt – Existenzbedrohung der Überlebenschancen. Eine umfassende Dokumentation*. Frankfurt/Berlin/Bern.
- Haarmann, H. (2002). *Sprachenvielfalt im Globalisierungsprozess*. In: Deutsch-Englisch-Europäisch. Impulse für eine neue Sprachpolitik. Mannheim-Leipzig-Wien-Zürich: Dudenredaktion und Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache, 9-30.
- Hoberg, R. (2002). *English rules the World. Was wird aus Deutsch?* In: Deutsch-Englisch-Europäisch. Impulse für eine neue Sprachpolitik. Dudenredaktion und Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache, 171-184.
- Drzavni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske. (2007). *Priopćenje*. Zagreb: 6. veljace, br. 4.4.2/11.
- Pravilnik o razvrstavanju, minimalnim uvjetima i kategorizaciji ugostiteljskih objekata (1995). Zagreb: Narodne novine, 57, 1674.

Copyright of *Tourism & Hospitality Management* is the property of *Tourism & Hospitality Management* and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.