

THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract:

This article investigates the pivotal role and profound significance of foreign languages in propelling the development of the tourism industry. The increasing globalization of the tourism industry has magnified the role and significance of foreign languages in facilitating seamless traveler experiences, fostering cross-culture interactions, and driving industry growth. Besides, it emphasizes the economic and societal perquisites derived from language diversity within the tourism workforce, highlighting the intense impact of multilingual competencies on destination marketing, international cooperation, and overall competitiveness of tourist destinations. Finally, it delves into the intrinsic connection among foreign language proficiency, cultural preservation, and responsible tourism practices, explaining the must-have value of language diversity in determining the future trajectory of the global tourism industry.

Key words: tourism industry, communication, cross-culture interaction, destination marketing, economic growth, sustainable.

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During the last decade, the sphere of hospitality and tourism industry has been developing especially fast (Bilodia, Vorobel, 2022). It is difficult to define the tourism industry, as unlike with other industries, there is not one clear product. It incorporates many industries, including accommodation, transport, attractions and more. In its broadest sense, tourism is defined as when people travel and stay in places outside of their usual environment for less than one consecutive year for leisure, business, health, or other reasons. Globally, travel and tourism's direct contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) was approximately 7.7 trillion U.S dollars in 2022. This was a, not insignificant, 7.6 percent share of the total global GDP (Statista Research Department, 2023). In recent years, tourism has become a source of high-level income in the economy of many developing and developed countries (Achilova Dilnavoz, 2022). To illustrate, it is estimated that around 1 in 10 jobs globally are in the tourism sector, including both direct employment (e.g., hotels, airlines, tour operators) and indirect employment (e.g., suppliers, support services). Despite the increased interest, there is a considerable gap in the literature concerning the role language plays in tourism sector (Leslie, Russell, 2006). As we know, language is the primary and the most elaborate form of human communication. With the use of language in its oral and written form, humans are able to communicate and express their feelings within the cultural norms (Ugochukwu, Kingsley, 2020). The definition of Greenberg (1971) describes language as something very unique to humans. Greenberg is of the view that: "Language is

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unique to man. No other species possesses a truly symbolic means of communication and no human society, however simple its material culture, lacks the basic human heritage of a well-developed language". The ability to navigate linguistic landscapes has been vital for both travelers and tourism professionals alike. This article engages in a journey to unscramble the complicated relationship between foreign languages and the burgeoning development of the tourism industry. From enhancing the authenticity of cultural encounters to influencing economic growth, the influence of languages in travel is far-reaching and transformative.

Literature review.

Cultural Enrichment through Linguistic Engagement.

Since the 1970s, with the development of immersive teaching practices, the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach to foreign language (or in other words, "target language") teaching has gradually gained ground (Veselova, Khimich, Terentieva, 2021). By the 1990s, it had become the most commonly used method of teaching foreign languages in the world, having almost completely overshadowed alternative target language teaching methods (Philipson, 2020). Studies by Smith (2018) and Garcia-Rio (2019) emphasize that foreign language skills empower travelers to move beyond surface-level interactions. Having adequate knowledge in the local language allows tourists to engage with communities in a more genuine manner, opening doors to authentic cultural experiences that go beyond the typical tourist attractions. This deepens the richness of the travel experience, enabling individuals to participate in local festivals, traditions and rituals. Cultural enrichment begins with the ability to engage in meaningful conversations with locals. Language proficiency allows travelers to communicate not only basic needs, but also to delve into the intricacies of daily life, personal stories, and local insights. These conversations foster a deeper connection and provide a nuanced understanding of the community. Linguistic engagement enables travelers to decipher cultural nuances that might be lost in translation. Understanding idioms, expressions, and the cultural context of language use enhances the appreciation of local customs, social norms, and the subtleties embedded in daily interactions. Moreover, effective communication in the local language contributes to breaking down cultural barriers. It fosters a sense of openness and acceptance within the community, locals appreciate the effort made by visitors to connect on a linguistic level. This, in turn, can lead to more authentic and welcoming interaction. In essence, cultural enrichment through linguistic engagement looks like two-way street. While travelers gain insights into the host culture, locals also benefit from the exchange of ideas, experiences, and perspectives. This mutual learning fosters a sense of shared humanity and interconnectedness.

Enhanced Cross-Cultural Understanding.

Cross-cultural understanding holds immense importance in the tourism industry, as it significantly influences the dynamics of traveler experiences, destination management, and overall industry sustainability. Higgs-Desbiolles (2003:243) asserts that tourism is a major promoter of cultural interactions between people around the world. Tourism brings together various cultures in various ways and in various contexts. Cross-cultural understanding enriches the quality of visitor experiences. Travelers who possess cultural awareness and sensitivity are better equipped to engage with local communities, appreciate diverse traditions, and navigate unfamiliar environments with respect. This heightened experience contributes to greater overall satisfaction

and positive word-of-mouth, enhancing a destination's appeal. Additionally, cultural understanding plays a pivotal role in crisis management within the tourism industry. In times of unforeseen events or emergencies, a culturally literate approach allows destinations to respond effectively, demonstrating empathy and consideration for the local context.

Facilitations of Interpersonal Connections

It is though that identity issues lie at the heart of our desire for greater tourism travel (Desforges, 2000). While it is widely accepted that travel can play a part in shaping the self (e.g. Noy, 2004), less is understood about how the self can shape tourism travel. Therefore, facilitation of interpersonal connections through linguistic engagement is a crucial aspect of the tourism experience, contributing to the local language, it signals respect and effort to connect. This often leads to the establishment of rapport and trust between travelers and locals. Building trust is essential for more authentic interactions and fosters a positive environment for cultural exchange. Language serves as a powerful tool to break the ice in social interactions. Whether through casual conversations or friendly banter, linguistic engagement helps bridge initial gaps and creates a comfortable space for individuals to connect on a personal level. Social situations often require a nuanced understanding of language, including appropriate greetings, gestures, and expressions. Linguistic engagement equips travelers with the tools to navigate these social nuances, ensuring the interactions are culturally appropriate and respectful. All in all, the facilitation of interpersonal connections through linguistic engagement transforms travel from a series of transactions into a tapestry of shared experiences and connection.

Multilingualism In the Modern World

The proficiency in multiple foreign is one of the main advantages for successful communication in the tourism industry (Kingsley, Ugochukwu, 2020). More specifically, in the tourism sector, multilingualism is important for effective customer service. Tourists come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, and the ability to communicate in their native languages can significantly enhance their experience. This applies to hotel staff, tour guides, restaurant personnel, and other service providers. For tourism businesses, being multilingual can expand their market reach. Having content, websites, and promotional materials available in multiple languages can attract a wider audience of potential travelers, thereby positively impacting business growth. In the competitive tourism industry, offering multilingual services can be a significant differentiator. Establishing a reputation for being accommodating to diverse language needs can set businesses apart and lead to customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. As the tourism industry continues to globalize, the importance of multilingualism will only grow. Accommodating diverse language needs can lead to improved experiences for tourists, stronger business performance, and more profound cross-cultural connections, ultimately benefitting the industry as a whole.

Conclusion

The role and importance of foreign languages in the tourism industry are indispensable pillars that underpin the global travel landscape. As the tourism sector continues to flourish in an era of intensified globalization, the ability to navigate linguistic diversity with skill and sensitivity has become an essential asset for businesses, destinations, and travelers alike. At the heart of the matter lies the pivotal role of foreign languages in fostering seamless intercultural

communication. In a world where tourists acclaim from diverse linguistics backgrounds, the capacity to offer multilingual services is not merely a matter of convenience – it is a prerequisite for delivering exceptional customer experiences. From hotel staff and tour guides to cultural sites and local businesses, proficiency in foreign languages allows for meaningful interactions, engenders rapport with visitors, and ensures that travelers feel valued and understood. Moreover, foreign languages serve as a conduit for fostering cultural understanding and appreciation within the tourism industry. By speaking the language of their guests, tourism professionals demonstrate respect for diverse cultural identities, customs and traditions. This not only enriches the travel experience for visitors but also contributes to the preservation and celebration of linguistic diversity, ensuring that local heritage and customs are showcased and understood in their full richness.

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