The Importance of Foreign Languages in Resolving Customers' Complaints in Hospitality Industry

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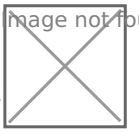
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The Importance of Foreign Languages in Resolving Customers' Complaints in Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to find how relevant it is the knowledge of foreign languages in customers' complaints resolution in hospitality industry. In order to find the answer to this question, the author has identified different categories of customers as well as different reasons why they choose to complain or not. The questionnaire was chosen to collect data and it was distributed to RIT Croatia students from Hospitality and Service Management Program as well as to full-time employees in hospitality industry. The results obtained has shown the difference in the perception of the importance of foreign languages in the process of resolution of customers' complaints. Since this process has a great importance in overall tourism business, it is clear that any data related to it that could help improve dealings with customers could be potentially valid and important not only to make customers satisfied but also to help the company stay competitive on the market.

Key words: foreign languages, complaints, employees, students, hotel industry

Introduction

In the today's ever-changing world of hospitality industry customers are becoming ever-more demanding. It seems clear that their expectations are higher than ever and companies should learn how to deal with them. It becomes a necessity that they learn as much as they can about their customers, their needs and their desires if they want to stay competitive in the business. According to Wysocki, Kepner&Glasser (2001) there are several types of customers: the meek customer, who doesn’t complain, the aggressive customer, who often complains loudly and aggressively, the high roller customer,who believes he would get a value for the price he paid, the rip-off customer, who always expects to get something better, and finally the chronic complainer customer who is always complaining.

It is clear that in order to resolve effectively their complaints, it is important to understand each type of customers.Barlow &Moller (1996) stated if customers buy a high priced product and they are not satisfied with that product or provided service they will complain more than those who buy an inexpensive product because they believe the price is worth complaining.In addition, there are also different reasons why many customers do not complain: sometimes they feel uncomfortable, or they simply think that their feedback is not important; sometimes they do not have enough time to complain not do they know where to complain to or to whom to complain to. Finally, the procedure sometimes looks so difficult and complicated that it becomes easier to choose not to complain at all.

Butera, A.M. (2000) noted that customers complain because companies made certain promises they didn't keep; therefore, customer's expectations were higher, since they believed they could fix the problem or they can feel better if they complain.

The research has shown some evident mistakes that companies tend to make when their customers complain. According to Barlow & Moller (1996) the first mistake they usually make is making customers feel it is their fault, while the second would be that companies make promises they cannot make, or they simply choose to ignore customer's feedback, or ask customers for unimportant information instead of focusing on their complaints etc.

Wysocki et al. (2001) have provided in their research advice about how to help resolve complaints: appreciate customers more, make them feel important, listen to them, customers are always right, apologize for the mistake and thank to customers because they provided a free message and information about what needs to be improved.

On the other hand, another author, Cook, S. (2012) claims that it is important for the companies to welcome complaints since in such a way customers give companies insight into how they can improve their service quality. In addition, companies could even encourage customers to complain: since if customers know where and to whom to complain to, the immediate response to customer complaints will not only satisfy and inform customers about the complaint but will also improve the business.

In 2006, Goodman, J. identified a situation called The Tip of the Iceberg Phenomenon. This is the situation in which customers complain on various problems with which companies must deal. The author tried to answer the question: To whom customers complain? In this research it was stated that 1-5 % customers complain to managers, 45 % complain to agents, front line employees while 50 % choose not to complain at all.

Another research, done by Hoffman & Bateson (2016) states that there are three complaining outcomes: voice, exit and retaliation. Voice is one of the outcomes where customers complain to the hotel. High voice occurs when customers are complaining to the general manager. Medium voice occurs when customers complain to front desk employees while low voice

occurs when customers complain with no one associated with the hotel. This categorization also shows some clear distinctions between not only the ones who are responsible to deal with complaints but also with the level of importance of certain complaints when they are addressed through different channels.

In this research another relevant data is provided: the analyses of the behavior of customers. According to this research, customers can decide to exit the hotel and never purchase again any product or service, and this is recognized in terminology as *high exit*. If customers purchase only if other alternatives are not available, then the exit is *medium.Low exit* means that customers will continue to shop for products or services as they did before the complaint.

In high retaliation customers tell many people about what has happened to them and even attempt to physically damage the store. Medium retaliation means that customers tell just a few people and create minor inconveniences. In low retaliation customers do not retaliate at all.

Bennett(1997) claimed that customers complain because their expectations from the company and its employees were higher. In addition to this,when complaining, nervous customers would in many cases still remain as your customers because they have just expressed what they felt at that time, and even though they were nervous but it doesn't mean they meant all the words they uttered when complaining.

Baron and Bryne(1994) noted that customers who have high confidence would complain more than those who are less confident. On the other hand, Michel (2008) claimed that customers are more likely to talk positively about the company. If customers had negative experience they will start to talk negative about company because they are dissatisfied with the product or service company offered.

One of the main elements how to improve service is to provide trainings for employees but as noticed from the author's personal experience, it is true that many companies do not provide trainings for employees. Aguinis,Kraiger and Gegenfurtner (2009) stated that companies should know how to motivate their employees and also how to apply the knowledge gained from the training and apply it directly in business. Dev & Gupta (2010) emphasized if companies provide trainings for employees it means that they respect them and want to increase their performance and become more professional at job. Employees should know what they are doing in each situation especially when it comes to resolving customer complaints and turning angry dissatisfied customers to loyal customers.

Baron S. et al. (2005.) claimed service recovery is the situation where the companies recover service failures. (Rust and Oliver, 2000, p.86) managing service recovery to make customers satisfied is very tough and costly process.It is important to react immediately on customer complaints and react efficiently in resolving them. The whole process of resolving complaints matters because companies still have time to improve they just need to find a way how to return customer's trust again.

Cheng, Y. et al (2015.) stated that service recovery paradox is the situation in which customer's satisfaction is higher if the failure occurs and employees recover it efficiently rather than if the service was provided with no failures at first. It could be argued: Does this mean that the failure should occur to recover beautifully? In this specific situation, to recover beautifully means deal with customers' complaints and resolve them in a way that sounds to be "more beautiful" to them since the solution to the problem is provided in their own language.

It is important to know how to communicate in a foreign language especially when a problem occurs. Blunkett (1998) stated that it is a fact of high importance to speak not just English but

also other foreign languages. This can be applicable even to the situation in Croatia as well. What would happen if for instance, a Russian citizen came at the front desk in Croatia and an employee doesn't understand what he wants? How this employee would respond to his requirements? It is important to understand what customers want to meet and exceed their expectations when it comes to offering any product or service.

Leslie & Russel (2005) claimed that knowing how to communicate in a foreign language, especially in tourism and hospitality, means delivering communication effectively, creating customer value, building relationships with customers, making the company more attractive. Klunge (1984) stated that the knowledge of foreign languages is important because it can make the communication process between two different nations easier. It is important for employees to be professional and in hospitality, knowing more languages clearly leads to professionalism.

Leslie et al. (2004) stated that communication between locals and foreigners is easier when a local person knows the language which a foreigner speaks and then there is even a higher possibility that that foreigner will book destination where this local person lives just because of his foreign language skills and his ability to understand the customer better.

When hiring employees, companies should know how to recognize ideal employees for them. For instance, in any hotel an adequate personnel and employee is clearly the one that knows more foreign languages to understand better their customers and therefore provide excellent service.

Stated below is a case study that indicates that even though employees can make errors but it is the responsibility of the company to train and prepare them for this situation in order to avoid more problems in the future.

Answering the Customer's Complaint: A Case Study

Dr. William Loflin, his wife, his wife's brother and his wife went to have a dinner at The Retreat House on Foliage Pond as they previously made a reservation for October 11th, 1986. They wanted to order drinks and they waited for 15 minutes for the waitress to come although the restaurant wasn't busy. Dr. Loflin sister- in- law ordered a drink but the waitress was rude and didn't want to receive order. After the waiter came and informed them about their specials, he left. He came after 10 minutes without serving ordered drinks. They waited for an hour and thirty minutes in total to be served. Although the atmosphere in the restaurant was excellent they were disappointed with the way how they were treated by The Retreat House's waiters. Written in Mr. Loflin complaint, waiters were extremely rude and they should be trained how to work properly.

Complaint like this above will affect the business because employees are those who make the overall experience. Dissatisfied customers will inform their relatives about their experience and their relatives will believe them and in many cases, companies will lose their potential customers just because of negative word of mouth. Companies should definitely mark each problem written in complain and work on how to fix the problem although they should react immediately on the spot.

Hart et al., (1990.) stated that "Errors are inevitable- but dissatisfied customers are not." Companies cannot avoid errors that happened no matter of the service quality. Once errors occur there is just the time left to recover and make customers satisfied.

Methods

The data was collected from hospitality employees and RIT Croatia students who worked in the hotel. This method is chosen because both had an experience working in the hotel and in resolving complaints in foreign languages. Both can provide a wide variety of information due to their working experience.

Descriptive type of research was used because of descriptive comparison in awareness of hospitality employees and students. Type of sampling is non probability. Paper form of questionnaire was used and distributed to 15 employees in 5 hotels in Dubrovnik while the other 75 was distributed to RIT Croatia Dubrovnik students. 22 questionnaires returned invalid. For data analysis 50 paper formswere delivered to students and 50 were delivered to hospitality employees.

The purpose of this research is to find out how hospitality employees and students perceive the importance of resolving customer complaints in foreign languages and if their knowledge comes from education or working experience. Targeted population that was studied was hospitality employees from Dubrovnik and RIT Croatia Dubrovnik students.

The questionnaire consists of 14 questions and the model that was used is Trochim “Social Research Methods.” Questionnaires were delivered to hospitality employees directly in their working place and directly to students at RIT Croatia Dubrovnik (all generations from freshman to senior).

The main goal of this research is to measure difference in perception between hospitality employees and students who worked in the hotel.

Results

IBM SPSS Statistics program was used to get more precise results. Figure 1. shows that both employees and students consider it is very important to know foreign languages to solve customer complaints successfully. On the scale 1 as not important to 5 as extremely important, mean of 4.35. Both rarely find it difficult to manage customer complaints (mean 2.96).

In figure 2. 86 of 100 participants noted that supervisor encourages them while 14 of them are not encouraged. Figure 3. showsthat 52 participants had trainings on how to deal with customer complaints while 48 didn't have any training. Only 22 of 100 participants had specialized basic training in foreign languages to learn how to deal with customers' complaints but 78 participants didn't have any training in foreign language what can be seen in the figure 4.

Most received foreign language trainings are in English, Russian, Turkish, French, Italian, Spanish and German. Trainings in English are most received (16 of 100 participants) while 84 didn't receive trainings in English. Following is German (12 of 100 participants received, 88 didn't receive). Russian, French, Italian and Spanish is used by 3 % of participants. Turkish is used by only 1%.

English is the most used language when dealing with customers' complaints (97 participants used). Only 8 participants of 100 used Spanish. 6 of 100 participants used Italian. 9

participants used German when resolving complaints.French is used by only 3 participants. Other languages (Chinese, Norwegian) are used by 1 participant of 100.

Coming to education, 90 of 100 participants learned foreign languages at school while 48 of 100 participants learned at the university. 14 participants learned foreign language living abroad and 19 participants learned from family members who live abroad. Surprisingly 63 participants learned foreign language watching TV. 29 participants learned from taking the course outside the formal education, 5 participants learned foreign languages from other (you tube, videos etc.)90 participants are interested in learning more foreign languages.

Customers complain most on cleanliness of the hotel or other facility problems (43 participants noted). Following is no value for the price (30 participants), slow or unavailable service delivery (23 participants), low food & beverage quality (14 participants), inappropriate employee behavior (12 participants), 10 participants stated for other (TV, remote not in a good condition) while low foreign language skills are considered as least important (7 participants).

Figure 5 shows that 63 of 100 participants are college educated, 35 have graduated from high school and 2 participants were course educated. Most participants believe they got their experience working seasonal (40 participants), while 30 participants got their experience during co-op and 30 participants got an experience as full time employeeswhat can be seen in the figure 6. Figure 7 shows that 63 participants are up to 24 years old, 23 participants are 25 to 39 years old, while 14 participants are 40 to 60 years old.

From the figure 8 it can be seen that students are more aware of importance of resolving customer complaints in foreign language (mean 4.42) while employees should be more aware due to their working experience (4.28 mean).

Figures 9 and 10 show that 45 employees were encouraged by their supervisor about the importance of reporting to customer complaints while only 5 employees were not encouraged. 41 students were encouraged by supervisor while 9 students were not. Students are not just less encouraged; they also had less trainings than employees had what can be seen in the figure 11. 28 employees had trainings on how to deal with customer complaints, 22 didn't. 24 students had trainings while 26 did not.Students want to learn more languages (48 want to learn more, 2 do not want to learn more). 42 employees want to learn more foreign languages, while 8 do not want to learn more (showed in the figure 12)

There is no big difference in perception on what customers mostly complain. Figure 13. Shows that 23 employees consider customers complain most on cleanliness or other facility problems, while 20 students consider the same. In the figure 14 it can be seen that 8 employees believe customer complains on slow or unavailable service delivery while 15 students believe the same. 8 employees and 6 students consider that customers complain on food and beverage quality what can be seen in the figure 15. Students are more aware of importance of foreign language skills and 6 students believe many customers complain on low employee's foreign language skills while only 1 employee thinks the same (can be seen in the figure 16). 10 students believe customers most complain on inappropriate employee behavior while only 2 students consider it as important what is written in the figure 17. Figure 18 shows that 20 employees believe customers complain on high price but no value, but only 10 students consider the same. Obviously, due to their working experience,8 employees believe customers complain on other while only 2 students think the same (figure 19)

Both students and employees consider training should be the part of normal hiring procedure in hospitality. Employees are more customer-centric, want to make guest satisfied and increase company reputation while students are focused more on the process of resolving

complaints and benefits employees get from trainings what they learned during their education.

Discussion

If customers are not understood or they do not feel understood they will complain. Employees, especially hotel employees, should know how to resolve complaints in a foreign language and make customers feel welcome and important. Still, hotel employees and students have a different perception of the importance of resolving customer complaints. Students are focused on education, the process of resolving complaints and benefits employees get from trainings what they learned at the college.Employees are focused on how to make customers happy and satisfied and how to increase the reputation of the company. Obviously, employees have learned about resolving complaints through their working experience.

Students are less encouraged by the supervisors about the importance of reporting complaints. Students should be encouraged even more than employees because they do not have enough experience and need to apply what they learned to real life situations which takes time and practice. Students should be trained even more than employees because they are not experienced, sometimes students also do not know how to use the operating program that is used in the hotel,and it requires a lot of time to learn that, or they do not know basic information about the hotel. Supervisors should definitely pay attention to encourage and train

students who are educated and are willing to learn more. Thanks to their supervisor students can improve and grow to be more experienced.

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Appendix

Figure 1.

STUDENTS AND EMPLOYEES

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
FL IMPORTANT	100	2	5	4.35	.757
DIFFICULT TO MANAGE COMPLAINTS	100	1	5	2.96	.875
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Figure 2.

SUPERVISOR REPORTING

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	86	85.1	86.0	86.0
	NO	14	13.9	14.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

Figure 3.

TRAINING COMP

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	52	51.5	52.0	52.0
	NO	48	47.5	48.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

Figure 4.

Foreign language training

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	22	21.8	22.0	22.0
	NO	78	77.2	78.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

Figure 5.

EDUCATION

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	high school	35	34.7	35.0	35.0
	university	63	62.4	63.0	98.0
	other	2	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

Figure 6.

EMPLOYMENT

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	full time employee	30	29.7	30.0	30.0
	co-op	30	29.7	30.0	60.0
	seasonal employment	40	39.6	40.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

Figure 7.

AGE

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	-24	63	62.4	63.0	63.0
	25 to 39	23	22.8	23.0	86.0
	40 to 60	14	13.9	14.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

Figure 8.

Employees and students

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
DIFFICULT TO MANAGE COMPLAINTS	employees	2.96	.856	1	5
	students	2.96	.903	1	5
	Total	2.96	.875	1	5
FL IMPORTANT	employees	4.28	.730	3	5
	students	4.42	.785	2	5
	Total	4.35	.757	2	5

Figure 9.

Importance of reporting to supervisor

			SUPERVISOR REPORTING		
			YES	NO	Total
employees/students	employees	Count	45	5	50
		% within employees/students	90.0%	10.0%	100.0%
	students	Count	41	9	50
		% within employees/students	82.0%	18.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	86	14	100
		% within employees/students	86.0%	14.0%	100.0%

Figure 10.

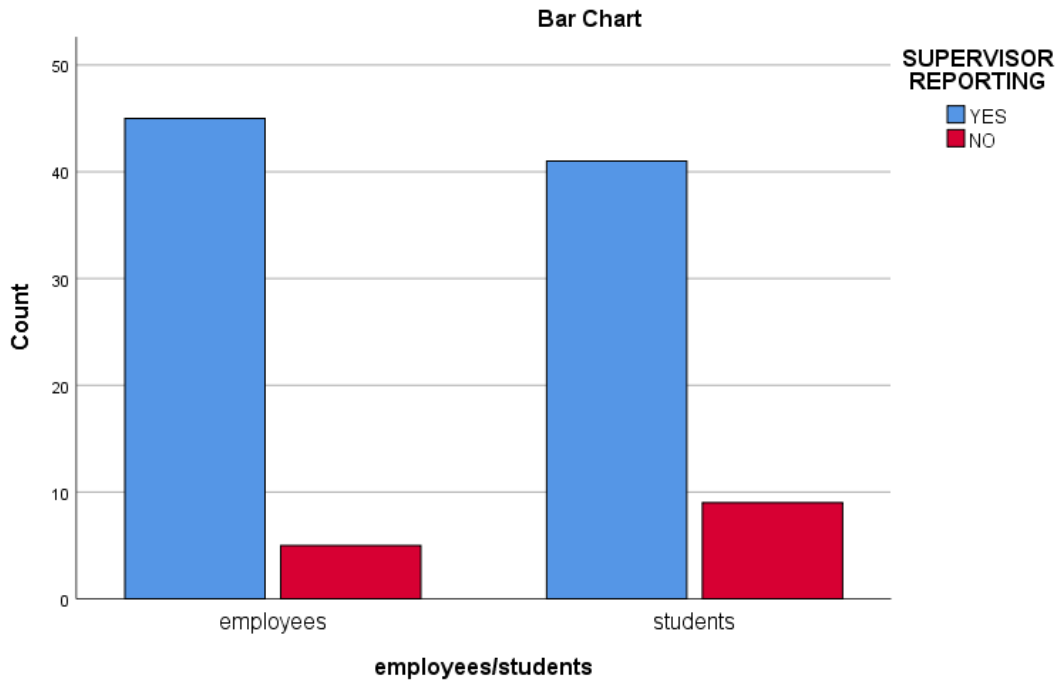


Figure 11.

Trainings

			TRAINING COMP		
			YES	NO	Total
employees/students	employees	Count	28	22	50
		% within employees/students	56.0%	44.0%	100.0%
	students	Count	24	26	50
		% within employees/students	48.0%	52.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	52	48	100
		% within employees/students	52.0%	48.0%	100.0%

Figure 12.

Learning more foreign languages

			LEARN MORE		
			YES	NO	Total
employees/students	employees	Count	42	8	50
		% within employees/students	84.0%	16.0%	100.0%
	students	Count	48	2	50
		% within employees/students	96.0%	4.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	90	10	100
		% within employees/students	90.0%	10.0%	100.0%

Figure 13.

Customers complain on

			cleanliness, facility		
			DO NOT COMPLAIN	COMPLAIN MOST	Total
employees/students	employees	Count	27	23	50
		% within employees/students	54.0%	46.0%	100.0%
	students	Count	30	20	50
		% within employees/students	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	57	43	100
		% within employees/students	57.0%	43.0%	100.0%

Figure 14.

Customers complain on

			slow service DO NOT COMPLAIN	COMPLAIN MOST	Total
employees/students	employees	Count	42	8	50
		% within employees/students	84.0%	16.0%	100.0%
	students	Count	35	15	50
		% within employees/students	70.0%	30.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	77	23	100
		% within employees/students	77.0%	23.0%	100.0%

Figure 15.

Customers complain on

			low f & b quality DO NOT COMPLAIN	COMPLAIN MOST	Total
employees/students	employees	Count	42	8	50
		% within employees/students	84.0%	16.0%	100.0%
	students	Count	44	6	50
		% within employees/students	88.0%	12.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	86	14	100
		% within employees/students	86.0%	14.0%	100.0%

Figure 16.

Customers complain on

			low employee fl skills		
			DO NOT COMPLAIN	COMPLAIN MOST	Total
employees/students	employees	Count	49	1	50
		% within employees/students	98.0%	2.0%	100.0%
	students	Count	44	6	50
		% within employees/students	88.0%	12.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	93	7	100
		% within employees/students	93.0%	7.0%	100.0%

Figure 17.

Customers complain on

			Inappropriate behavior		
			DO NOT COMPLAIN	COMPLAIN MOST	Total
employees/students	employees	Count	48	2	50
		% within employees/students	96.0%	4.0%	100.0%
	students	Count	40	10	50
		% within employees/students	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	88	12	100
		% within employees/students	88.0%	12.0%	100.0%

Figure 18.

Customers complain on

			no value for price		
			DO NOT COMPLAIN	COMPLAIN MOST	Total
employees/students	employees	Count	30	20	50
		% within employees/students	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
	students	Count	40	10	50
		% within employees/students	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	70	30	100
		% within employees/students	70.0%	30.0%	100.0%

Figure 19.

Customers complain on

			other DO NOT COMPLAIN	COMPLAIN MOST	Total
employees/students	employees	Count	42	8	50
		% within employees/students	84.0%	16.0%	100.0%
	students	Count	48	2	50
		% within employees/students	96.0%	4.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	90	10	100
		% within employees/students	90.0%	10.0%	100.0%