

## Business Spanish – a Chance for the Central and Eastern Europe

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### Abstract

*The relations between Spain and countries from Eastern Europe show how important is business communication nowadays. Doing business with Spain requires at least the basic knowledge of Spanish from the business partner.*

*That's why we created ESPA 2.0 project which meets the expectations of small and medium-sized enterprises which are able to cooperate with Spanish companies. The project supports development of common business strategies and contribution to the growth in competitiveness of European companies, as well as facilitating the development of commercial contacts between SMEs in Middle and Eastern Europe with Spain. The most important part of the course is ESPA Learning - the module which contains the educational part of the project and it's divided into five modules.*

1. *Español en imágenes (Language in pictures) – learning Spanish vocabulary.*
2. *Buscando socios (Looking for a partner) - writing letters, conducting a phone call, travelling.*
3. *Estableciendo contacto con socios (Partners meeting) – Spanish customs, including the details of business talks.*
4. *Compraventa de la A a la Z (Buying and selling) - principles for cooperation between companies and countries from Spain and Eastern Europe.*
5. *Nueva empresa (New company) – how to establish a new company in Spain.*

*The course enables development business language skills as well as communication in everyday situations. It's available on-line, therefore anyone can use it anywhere and anytime. To improve the attractiveness and make it coherent we prepared web 2 tools such as ESPA B2B and ESPA Society. The other two products ESPA Info and ESPA Base undergo minor substantive (methodological) and quality modifications and then become properly adapted linguistically to countries which will participate in the project.*

### Introduction

Synergy between language and business environment is influencing business communication. Business environment, like any professional group, creates its own language code that affects relationships in interpersonal relations and thus everyday communication between them.

Everyday communication as well as business communication is a social process that cannot be separated from the context in which it is created. Nancy Roundy Blyler and Charlotte Thralls present, from a sociolinguistic point of view that speech community is a specific group who share behaviour, norms and in consequence the language. We can distinguish a professional community whose members "acquire specialized kinds of discourse competence that enable them to participate" in the community. [1]

Professional communication encompasses written, oral, visual and digital communication within a workplace context. Professional language is nothing but a combination of commonness with a

specialized vocabulary. The specialized vocabulary defines the nature of business communication. Successful communication skills are critical to business because all businesses, though to varying degrees, involve the following: writing, reading, speaking, listening; in particular, writing emails, making phone calls, negotiations with contractors, signing contracts, etc.

## **Business communication**

The most popular language in business profession is of course English. Its business variety is referred to as a lingua franca of business communication. Its universal business character makes it possible to communicate efficiently within business environment. Why is that so? Anne Kankaanranta from Aalto University School of Economics and Brigitte Planken from Radboud University Nijmegen persuade: The dominance of Business English as a Lingua Franca in the international business arena is supported by the introduction of English as the official corporate language in several Europe-based multinational companies (MNCs), in favor of local languages. [2]

Kankaanranta and Planken assume Business Language as a Lingua Franca perspective and analyze why English has become a lingua franca in everyday and business communication. So why should we talk in Spanish business environment in Spanish, since in almost all the world people prefer to do their business in English? This question is directly connected with the customs and culture of Spaniards who are significantly different than in other European countries. Spaniards themselves prefer to do business in their mother tongue much more than other nations for a few reasons: cultural, but mainly because Spanish is the third language in the world.

The Berlitz Language School report shows that only 2 out of 10 Spaniards use language other than Spanish in everyday communication. This number stands out a great deal in the context of the European Union, where 44% of European citizens can participate in a conversation in a language other than their mother tongue. [3]

Last but not least comes the cultural context. They do not like to use another language, especially in companies that are from a Hispanic country. Spaniards do not, on average, speak English as well as Northern Europeans. Many companies in Spain have staff with good English language skills, but an initial approach in Spanish is usually more effective.

The needs of entrepreneurs have encouraged the creators of the project ESPA 2.0 to create such tools for learning Spanish which will help entrepreneurs from SMEs sector to effectively acquire partners from Spanish-speaking world. ESPA 2.0 focuses on business language and its necessary vocabulary, expressions, communicative situations and, what is very useful and important, the cultural context. ESPA 2.0 describes how real business situations exist in the Spanish world.

## **Spain – Central and Eastern Europe**

Statistics show that the business contacts between Spain and Central Europe are progressing but in many cases an obstacle to their progress is the lack of Spanish language. Research shows that ESPA 2.0 project will be particularly useful for the following business categories: producers of food, institutions related to tourism, telecommunications and transport companies, electric companies, building industries, IT companies, new technologies etc.

Although countries from Central and Eastern Europe and Spain are located in different parts of Europe and at first sight they appear distinct, they actually share many common characteristics. Spain consistently supported Estonia's endeavours to join the EU and NATO. Economic reforms, both in Spain and Estonia were very similar. Both countries have focused on the least interference with the state economy and leaving a lot of freedom to entrepreneurs in their business. Their main motto is

openness, liberalisation and reduction of the tax burden; the preferred areas of development are IT and new technologies. Spain has also very close cooperation in dozen fields with Poland.

Spain is currently in 14th place in Polish imports in general. Since the Polish accession to the European Union the Polish turnover has increased by over 50%. As a result, strongly felt in Spain, the economic crisis, the Polish trade turnover in 2008 - 2009 fell by 20%. But in 2010, there has been rebuilding the level of trade, with significant growth of Polish exports. It is very important for Spain to invest in Poland. For example, Poland needs to develop its road infrastructure, railroads, port and Spain has the biggest and best construction companies in Europe that are interested in investing in Poland. Similar trends in the field of trade cooperation can be seen in other countries of the project.

Authors of ESPA 2.0 have explored how important the cooperation between Spain and Central and Eastern Europe is and therefore how important is the impact of business environment for communication and effective negotiations. We have created a questionnaire that was distributed to the entrepreneurs from Central and Eastern Europe. It turns out that small and medium-sized enterprises are more exposed to communication problems, rather than large corporations. One of the reason might be: small businesses do not have the funds for hiring specialists or translators. They have limited financial budget for language courses. Entrepreneurs expect, that language learning should be linked in the context of business environment and help to effectively communicate with a foreign partner. Entrepreneurs clearly confirmed the value and importance of the project ESPA 2.0 as a tool to facilitate communication in business.

## **ESPA 2.0 project**

This thought accompanied the authors of the project from the beginning of ESPA 2.0. [4] The business aspect of the project has become its trademark and a great value appreciated and most importantly, used by SMEs sector. Espa 2.0 is addressed to Small and Medium Enterprises from Central and Eastern Europe, which are interested in cooperation with companies from Spain. Apart from providing an e-learning platform, it enables a practical Spanish course in a business environment.

ESPA 2.0 is the result of work of experienced entrepreneurs who have been working with Spanish-speaking world for decades. Authors of the ESPA 2.0 project know the realities of business in Spain and cultural context, which is essential to start any kind of cooperation. How important for European economy is the foreign language knowledge shows the fact that 11% of SMEs exporters may lose contracts because of language barriers. Hence, it is important to improve the language skills of entrepreneurs. [5]

Improving business language abilities of SMEs entrepreneurs was the main reason of creating e-learning course (ESPA Learning) in a business context, based on business environment experiences.

ESPA Learning combines language learning with the education business. It was prepared on the basis of Content and Language Integrated Learning. The structure of the course was set up in such a way that all its elements were searched by the user in an intuitive way. Thus, searching for information or a specific communication situation is very simple. An additional advantage of ESPA Learning is its asynchronous nature. Users, especially the mobile ones can use it anytime and anywhere. In seeking the necessary communication situations, they find ready-made solutions. Moreover, technologies used in this course are simple. The whole course is based on HTML language with audio and graphic elements.

To improve the attractiveness and make it coherent we prepared web 2 tools such as ESPA B2B and ESPA Society. The other two products ESPA Info and ESPA Base are currently under minor substantive (methodological) and quality modifications and only then will they become properly adapted linguistically to countries which will participate in the project.

It is worth emphasizing that both the course ESPA Learning and materials in ESPA Info are created step by step. It means that all materials and lessons are a consequence of specific situations and actions during business meetings. ESPA Learning is divided into five modules.

The first module is called *Buscando socios* (Looking for a partner). This module provides a comprehensive set of communication situations and vocabulary necessary for the initiation and continuation of cooperation. Each lesson in the module that is a consequence of the previous, the user can easily find the necessary information such as: writing letters, conducting phone calls, travelling. The second module is called *Estableciendo contacto con socios* (Partners' meetings) – this module includes the details of business talks, especially at official meetings and in real business situations with a Spanish business partner. The third one contains information about cooperation between companies. It is called *Compraventa de la A a la Z* (Buying and selling). This part of the course is very important for entrepreneurs, for whom a knowledge about partners knowledge about the partner's habits, requirements, and cultural aspects is essential for business contacts. The fourth module is connected with establishing a new company in Spain - *Nueva empresa* (new company). A knowledge about national law, requirements and business reality is necessary to start any activities in Spain or Central and Eastern Europe. The last product of ESPA 2.0 assists all products and it is called *Español en imágenes* (language in pictures). That additional multimedia module is helpful to accustom users to whole ESPA 2.0 course, as the language level of the business course is even higher than A1. So language in pictures makes it easy to learn the language addressed to SMEs

An important element of the whole enterprise is the fact that the project does not focus exclusively on the educational purpose but also combines them with business goals. In addition to the classic e-learning tools, ESPA 2.0 includes a base of companies from Europe (ESPA Base), in which SMEs environment creates profiles of their companies. ESPA Base is a practical database of companies with information for small and medium-sized companies from Spain, Polish, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, interested in business cooperation. The minimum set of information includes: company name, address, e-mail contact, industries and the type of activity. The second business oriented product is ESPA B2B – an Internet platform which facilitates communication between small and medium-sized enterprises in Central and Eastern Europe with Spanish companies. It supports entrepreneurs in business: finding partners, employees, products, technologies, etc. A web portal allows easy and effective communication among the participants.

The whole ESPA 2.0 course is totally focused on business communication, resulting from direct impact into the business environment, its expertise, thereby creating a need in the business communication patterns, certain situations and the same vocabulary or professional business language.

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