



## ELF As the Main Medium of Communication in the Albanian Tourist Industry

Irena Skendo

University "Ismail Qemali", Albania

### Abstract

*The growth of the tourism industry in Albania has been accompanied by an increase of interest in the English language. As the numbers of tourists visiting Albania continue to rise, it was deemed crucial to adopt and adapt English as a common means of communication, which would facilitate: a) understanding among foreigners and locals; b) the provision of services by the hospitality industry c) travel agencies or purveyors of food. ELF is now the main medium of communication in the Albanian tourist industry. In addition, the hospitality industry has also increased throughout the whole country to the construction of new hotels, guesthouses, summer apartments and holiday homes. Those who run this business are now either hiring qualified people with English skills, or are trying to acquire a basic English competence themselves. The questionnaire survey conducted among hotels in the city of Vlore to investigate the use of English in their work confirmed that English was the only language in which they communicated with their customers.*

**Keywords:** *English, ELF, communication, tourism, accommodation.*

### 1. Introduction

The importance of English as a lingua franca in Albania is growing rapidly, with Albanians perceiving English as a language which grants them access to information, knowledge and people beyond their own country. Moreover, and an ability to communicate in English is now widely considered crucial both on a personal level and for the country as a whole. The government has taken various measures in the field of English language teaching (ELT) in an effort to raise proficiency in this international language among Albanian citizens. This entails teaching English to young learners in school, introducing contemporary methods and methodologies of language learning via English textbooks, and defining English as a requirement for professional tourist guides and as the main contact language in the context of tourism. The growth in the significance of the English language in Albania is a relatively recent phenomenon, with much of its development taking place over the last decade or so. In her book *World English*, Janina Brutt-Griffler (2002) claims that World English has come about because its users have altered the language as they have spread it. World English is linked to the globalization of English Language Teaching, otherwise known English as an International Language (EIL). She cites Smith (1987) who uses the term EIL to refer to a language different from one's mother tongue, a second language "which is used by people of different nations to communicate with one another" (Brutt-Griffler, 2002, 38). From an Albanian perspective, the extensive spread of the English language has occurred concurrently with the urban and rural development of the country based on the government's socio-economic policies and political strategies. Quirk's econocultural model (1988) considers how the different uses of EIL in diverse contexts (i.e. finance, commerce, academia, tourism and technology) may affect the world community. In turn, the spread of this language includes Albania, where there has been a steady increase in the number of English speakers. From this point of view, it seems natural to assume that the increase in the numbers of visitors to Albania over recent years has resulted in an increase in revenue and a general improvement of the economy, but it is also manifested in an increased demand for the use of English. This made Albanians feel the need to develop their communicative competence in English, which became a linguistic facility or commodity to do business. Thus, the spread of English in Albania is directly linked to its economic potential, all of which subsequently contributes to the overall prosperity and welfare of the country. Albania is a relative beginner in this process and is therefore eager and highly enthusiastic about fulfilling the linguistic needs of foreigners through the proliferation of English at educational institutions and workplaces. I use the word "beginner" because Albania remains a new country to most people, relatively unknown to most foreigners. However there has been an increasing interest in this country



among tourists. Moreover, over the recent years Albania has undergone a remarkable development in an effort to fill the gaps of the past, more specifically those inherited from the former communist regime. Tourism in Albania is linked to the growth of the economy, but this process needs some shared linguistic background which can be found in the use of English as a lingua franca.

English plays a crucial role in the promotion of Albanian tourism. In travelling around the country it is possible to encounter many public signs in English, shop names like “Top Fashion” and restaurants using names such as “Albanian Traditional Food”. The presence of such signs suggests that entrepreneurs want to show the international nature of their business, which offers higher quality and a welcoming attitude. McArthur (1998, 14-15) has referred to this phenomenon as the use of English as a “decorative language”, a use which is more symbolic than practical.

## 2. Definition of ELF

As Jenkins (2017, 594) recalls “It was in March 1996, to my knowledge, that the term ‘English as a lingua franca’ and its acronym ‘ELF’ were first used in public”.

The term lingua franca is normally used to mean a contact language, a common language between speakers who do not share a first language. A contact language can be used between speakers or speaker groups when at least one of them uses it as a second language.

The topic of ELF has attracted scholars from a range of other fields, initially and most notably Barbara Seidlhofer and Anna Mauranen, two of the three “founding mothers of ELF”, with Jenkins being the third. Mauranen (2003) and Seidlhofer (2001) were the compilers of the first two ELF corpora, with their work heralding a plethora of newer ELF scholars, including the ELF researchers Martin Dewey and Will Baker. As Anna Mauranen (2017, 28) has argued: “the latest wave of globalisation has meant an enormous growth in the volume and kinds of mobility – and thereby in language contact. [... English leads the way: it] stands out from any other language in having become the global default lingua franca”. English is the language employed by tourists all around the world; it is also used by people seeking asylum, migrants, businesspeople and traders. There is no need to come into direct contact with English speakers, as we can exploit other sources to access English, such as TV broadcasting, the Internet or the radio.

Another claim confirming the status of English as a lingua franca derives from H.G. Widdowson (2017, 101): “It has become a truism to say that the extent to which English is now used as a lingua franca is unprecedented in that it has become an all-pervasive feature of a globalized world [...] has spread beyond its borders to become an international means of communication.”

Researchers of ELF also link English with the intercultural domain. Here Baker (2015, 43) states that “ELF is by definition intercultural in nature since ELF communication is typically defined as involving speakers from different linguacultures”. If we were to define this approach with an example, we could say that Albanians can come in contact with English speakers, both native and non-native, as a result of the increasing numbers of foreigners visiting the country. It is also possible to say that people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds can meet or become acquainted through English.

The growth of the tourism industry in Albania has been accompanied by an increase of interest in the English language. As the numbers of tourists visiting Albania continue to rise, it was deemed crucial to adopt and adapt English as a common means of communication, which would facilitate: a) understanding among foreigners and locals; b) the provision of services by the hospitality industry c) travel agencies or purveyors of food.

ELF is now the main medium of communication in the Albanian tourist industry. In addition, the hospitality industry has also increased throughout the whole country to the construction of new hotels, guesthouses, summer apartments and holiday homes. Those who run this business are now either hiring qualified people with English skills, or are trying to acquire a basic English competence themselves.

## 3. Needs Analysis of ELF

English is the main means of communication among Albanian employees in the tourism sector and tourists. As Blue and Harun observed, English “*is not only a means of communication, it is a*



*professional skill through which hotel routines and transactional activities are performed by the staff*.<sup>1</sup> The tourism industry requires people with a good command of English so that the whole process of communication can be facilitated.

#### 4. Context

The city of Vlore is chosen as a main urban area, a tourist destination in Albania. It is the third most populous city of the Republic of Albania. It is located in southwestern Albania, and it is surrounded by the foothills of the Mountains along the Albanian Adriatic and Ionian Sea Coasts. Its Mediterranean climate and the clear blue waters make it a preferable tourist destination. (Wikipedia. Online: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vlor%C3%AB>).

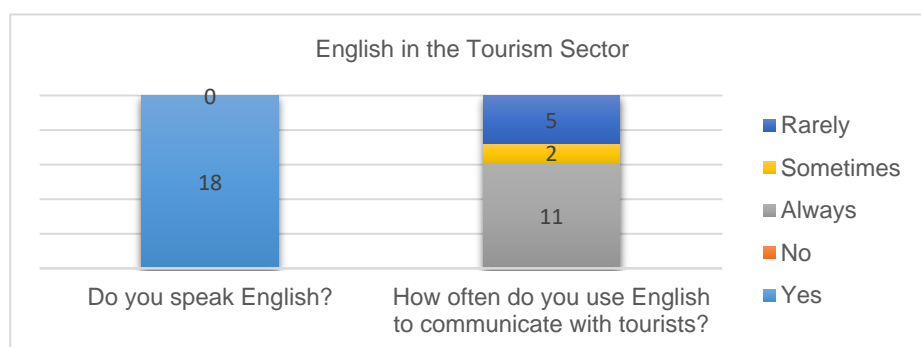
The number of tourists visiting Vlore has steadily risen. According to the Institute of Statistics in Albania, about 21 thousand tourists visited the museums and forts in the Vlora region during the summer season of 2003. If we look at the country of origin most of the travellers come from our neighbouring country Italy, others from Poland, a considerable number from Ukraine, North Macedonia, Germany as well etc. The analysis of the questionnaire results reveal that most employees in the tourism sector use English as the contact language with foreigners.

#### 5. Research Analysis and Findings

The questionnaire survey has been conducted among of eighteen employees from eighteen hotels in the city of Vlorë to investigate the use of English in their work. The participants in the survey worked in various positions such as receptionist, barman, cook, waiter, or cleaning service provider. Thirteen were women and five were male. The respondents confirmed that English was the only language in which they communicated with their customers. The results of the survey showed that all the hospitality employees spoke English and considered the competence in this language a necessary requirement for their job. Seven of the respondents rated their English skills as very good, five of them as good and six as rather good. The majority responded that English was essential for them and that it was the only language which tourists used to communicate with them. Many of the respondents also stated that they intended to improve their competence by mastering English skills and certifying the language at an international level. One of the employees in the position of a receptionist said: "My job is closely linked to English that's why it is indispensable". Another respondent in the same position stated: "The majority of tourists use English". Another one, a hotel manager said: "It is the most used language and it is very important".

The figures below present some of the data revealed from the questionnaires in more detail.

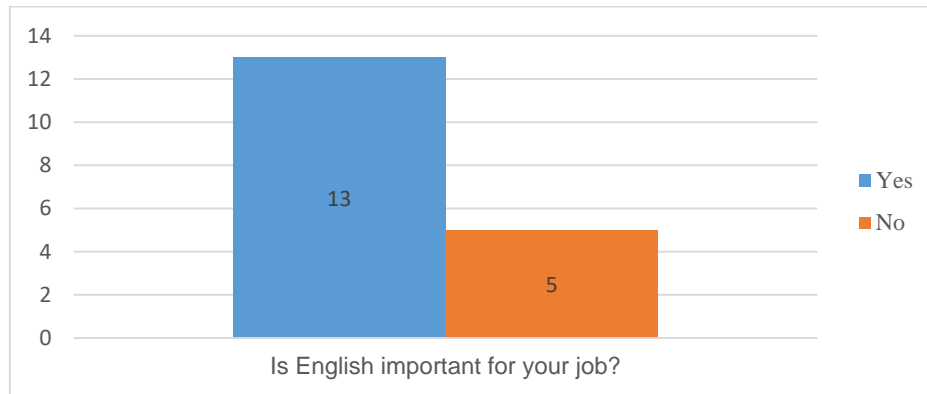
**Figure 1. English in the hospitality sector**



<sup>1</sup> Blue, George and Harun, Minah. "Hospitality language as professional skill", vol.22, 2003, pg. 77.

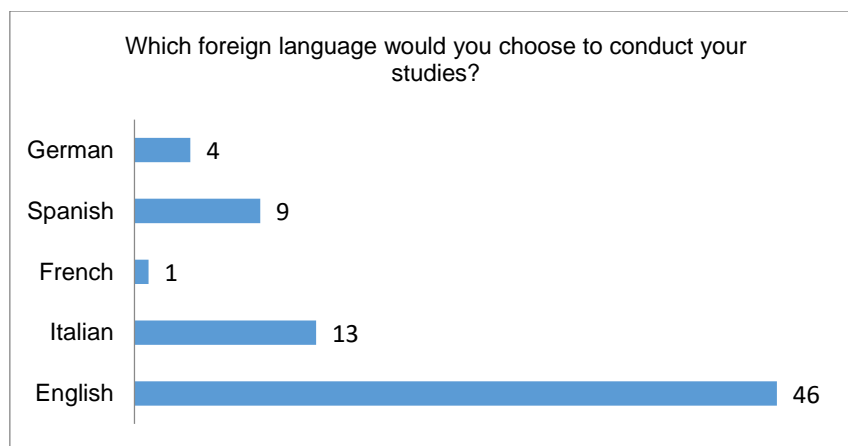


**Figure 2. The importance of English in the hospitality sector**



As the results reveal, all of the hospitality employees and their customers used English as a lingua franca to facilitate communication. We can see that business in tourism is required to use English as the main medium of communication. As Ingrid Piller (2007, 58) noted, “Clearly, language choice is a business choice in the context of tourism”. This concept is also applicable within the context of tourism in Albania. All business activities involved in the tourist industry recognise the value of the English language. Throughout Albania, visitors can find information signs and boards in English. The preference for English in the tourist sector is also apparent among students wishing to attend two-year courses or vocational courses in the field of front desk management or reception work. Based on an analysis of the labour market needs for the possibility of introducing a Bachelor’s study program in Front Office Management and Receptionist Skills at the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of Vlorë<sup>2</sup>, students expressed their preference for the course to be conducted in English, since it was the dominant language in the tourist sector and the language which is most demanded in the industrial world. Regarding the language they would choose for conducting their studies, Figure 3 shows the respondents’ answers.

**Figure 3. Choice of foreign language**



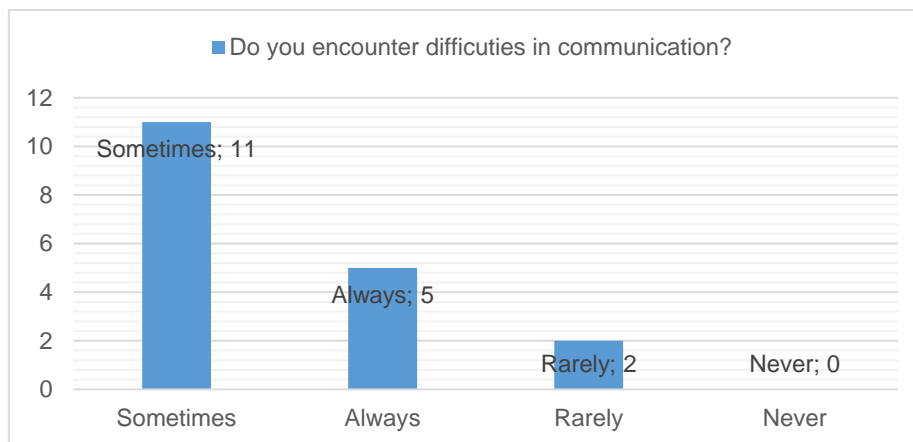
Another question in the survey related to the importance of the English language in the tourist industry. 100% of respondents agreed that English is a main requirement in this sector. Given the labour-intensive nature of the tourist sector, it offers a great opportunity for the employment of young

<sup>2</sup> The results of a questionnaire survey conducted on a labour market needs analysis on the possibility of opening a Bachelor’s study program in Front Office Management and Receptionist Skills conducted at the Commercial School, Vlorë and in the Vocational School of Pavaresia Vlorë among 70 students by the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Humanities, University of Vlorë, 2019.



people, despite the fact that industrial employment is typically seasonal. Vocational education and English language certification would be of particular strategic importance, as they are expected to provide young people with the linguistic skills required in this field.

**Figure 4. The Importance of English**



Regarding the question of specific difficulties which the respondents had experienced when speaking with visitors in English, ten of them selected the option of foreigners speaking too quickly, five of them mentioned the use of idioms and jargon which hindered understanding, but only three of them saw accents as an element which complicated communication. Finally, respondents were asked to state the specific linguistic skills which the employees considered most difficult; from the options of speaking, listening, reading and writing, seventeen of them stated that speaking was the most complex skill while only a single respondent mentioned the skill of listening.

### Conclusion

It is evident that English is definitely present in Albania and that its demand has increased due to the wide proliferation of the language in various spheres of life in Albania and as a result of the government's support and orientation towards the English-speaking world and the world in general. ELF has made considerable inroads into Albania at a rapid rate over the past decade, demonstrating the great vitality and practicality of the language.

As regards the development of Albanian learners' communicative competence in English, this research has shown that the growth of tourism has led to the demand for more licensed professionals. Thus, when they launch institutional training programmes for these figures, they should be able to make attendees develop appropriate language skills in the use of English as a lingua franca (e.g. accommodation), which are necessary to qualify in the different areas connected with tourism.

As mentioned throughout this study as well as confirmed by the governmental officials, English is considered a commodity and a language of preference in Albania. The study on accommodation showed that most interviewees were aware of their need to further develop their English skills in order to ensure effective communication with guests.

In conclusion, we may say that the development of the tourist industry in Albania has led to the concomitant spread of ELF. Hospitality, being one of the main economic sectors where contacts with international travelers is fundamental, requires a further development of operators' communicative skills, in order to avoid major problems in mutual understanding. Developing higher communicative competence in ELF is believed to enhance comprehension and facilitate the pragmatic effectiveness of communication. In this sense, accommodation appears to be the most appropriate strategy that allows ELF speakers to adopt English and adapt it to variable contextual requirements.

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