

TRAVELING TO LEARN A LANGUAGE – WHAT DETERMINES FORMAL AND INFORMAL LANGUAGE TOURISM?

Inês Carvalho

University of Aveiro, Portugal

Ana Ramires

IPAM Porto, Portugal

Montserrat Iglesias

University of Barcelona, Spain

Alexandria Fidalgo

Faculty of Social Science Technology

INTRODUCTION

Language tourism is characterized by language learning being a primary or secondary motivation for the trip (Iglesias, 2014). This type of tourism can be included within educational tourism (Ritchie, 2003). Educational tourism can be described as a continuum ranging from more informal and tourism-oriented journeys to more formal and education-oriented ones (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017; Ritchie, 2003). Formal learning is intentional and is a result of experiences in an education institution with structured learning objectives and leading to certification. Non-formal and informal learning are not provided by an education institution, nor do they usually lead to certification. However, while non-formal learning is intentional and structured, informal learning is not. It results from daily life activities related to work, family, or leisure (European Commission, 2001).

In the context of language learning, the importance of non-formal and informal learning has been underlined by previous literature (Krashen, 1976). To date, most research on language acquisition has considered informal learning as an extension of formal learning in the classroom, and the study of informal learning alone has been less frequently investigated. Likewise, tourism research has more frequently analyzed formal language tourism (i.e., which includes language lessons) (Castillo-Arredondo et al., 2018) than informal language tourism (Carvalho, 2021). However, language can be a motivation for traveling without necessarily implying taking lessons in the

destination. Nowadays, language tourists (LTs) are more informed than in the past, and some may choose to develop their language skills autonomously through immersion or sustained contact with members of the local community, e.g., through AuPair, volunteering, acquaintances, or internships (Iglesias, 2020), or by using a wide range of online language learning resources (Iglesias, 2017). Yet, to the best of our knowledge, no study thus far has analyzed why some LTs opt for pursuing language lessons in the destination while others choose to develop their skills autonomously. However, this is an important topic of investigation for the language tourism industry, and also for the broader educational tourism industry, which has sought to segment and understand the drivers of educational tourists (Ritchie, 2003).

Therefore, the aim of this article is to contribute to an explanation of what factors explain formal and informal learning in language tourism. Our research question is: *What are the main factors that predict language tourists' decision to take language lessons in the destination?* This study will contribute to a better understanding of language tourism by contributing to a clarification of which factors underlie formal language tourism (FLT) and informal language tourism (ILT). In the present article, the term FLT refers to the facilitation of second language acquisition in formal language learning contexts, e.g., through language lessons provided by an educational institution. In contrast, ILT is associated with informal language learning environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the World Tourism Organization, “education tourism covers those types of tourism which have as a primary motivation the tourist’s engagement and experience in learning, self-improvement, intellectual growth and skills development” (UNWTO, 2019, p.52). Hence, language tourists can be considered educational tourists. This statement aligns with Ritchie’s (2003) conceptualization of educational tourism, which encompasses different types of international and domestic tourist activities arranged independently or through providers in a wide range of settings. Ritchie divided educational tourists into two segments, namely “tourism first” and “education first”. In the former, travel is a primary motivating factor and purposeful learning is only a secondary motivation. In the latter, the main motivations are education and learning, as in school excursions, language schools and university study abroad experiences.

Language tourism is a specific niche of educational tourism that deserves analysis on its own. It has been mostly approached in the field of second language acquisition, in the context of study abroad experiences (Iglesias, 2020). However, due to the neglect of this area by tourism academia, factors of paramount importance, from a tourism perspective, have only been scarcely analyzed – e.g., travel choices, experience, and behaviour. One of the aspects that has not been approached is what determines FLT and ILT.

METHODOLOGY

In this study we analyse a sample of 1,014 which answered an online survey available in six languages. The sample contained 964 valid responses. This sample was divided into two subsamples (ILT vs. FLT) according to their answer to the question “Did you take language lessons during your trip?”. A binary logistic regression method was applied to find the main factors that explain LTs’ decision to take or not to take language classes during their most language trip.

RESULTS

For modelling the likelihood of LTs taking

language lessons during their trip, predictors were entered into a binary logistic regression model, using stepwise forward selection (likelihood-ratio). Previous studies provided the basis for predictor choice (Carvalho 2021, 2023; Carvalho & Sheppard, 2022, 2023). It is concluded that the decision to take language lessons in the destination is positively influenced by trip length, greater formality of pre-trip learning strategies, having a scholarship, doing exchange trips, having longer stays, learning language to use it at work. In contrast, several predictors decrease the odds to learn a formal language: choosing a country due to having acquaintances in the destination, traveling with relatives, mainly resorting to self-learning strategies, and believing in translation tools as facilitators in the tourism context.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to explaining what aspects drive FLT and ILT. This article is the first to attempt to provide an explanation of these phenomena, thus contributing to a better understanding of both language tourism and educational tourism. Several predictors were identified, which can be used, adapted, and expanded in future studies that seek to understand what determines the choice for more formal or more informal learning experiences in the tourism context.

In addition to offering new theoretical insights into language tourism, this study also provides valuable benefits for practitioners by advancing the understanding of FLT/ ILT predictors. As language travel organizations mainly provide packages including language lessons in the destinations, it is of utmost importance to better identify the profile of formal LTs. Moreover, this article sheds light on the unexplored segment of informal LTs.

Qualitative studies are needed to identify other relevant variables that we did not consider in this investigation, particularly to determine how the negotiation of constraints (namely time constraints) influences the decision to take language lessons in the destination. Future research is also needed to understand better who informal LTs are and what type of activities could further increase their satisfaction and engagement in the destination, as

these aspects can be conducive to more sustainable practices and experiences. Another topic of interest is the impact of the country of origin and the mother tongue in the propensity to choose to learn a language formally.

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