

## **ENHANCING ENGLISH SKILLS OF WORKFORCE IN CASTILE AND LEON RURAL TOURISM SECTOR**

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### **Abstract**

*The growing interest in rural tourism within Spain has been given an extra impetus due to the increased demand in the region of Castile and Leon. There is now a noteworthy boost in the number of businesses which cater to tourists and in the number of rooms available. However, the traditional source markets - national clients - are slowing; therefore, the region of Castile and Leon needs to grow their national market to a wider international level. The purpose of this study is to analyze if the rural hospitality industry experiences cultural and language proficiency problems when hosting international travelers and, if so, to propose adequate solutions. A survey has been carried out among different workers of the sector in Castile and Leon. This needs analysis reveals that the hospitality industry lacks a mastery of English communication, which greatly limits the possibilities of the hospitality industry to effectively provide good service to international tourists. A possible solution to address this situation would be through education and training. Thus, with the information gathered through the survey, we have designed a program of English for Rural Tourism for the wooing of and catering to international tourists. We have taken into account the peculiarities of the region in terms of culture, heritage, environment and gastronomy, but also, different aspects of the acculturation of this industry are deemed.*

**Keywords:** English for tourism, rural tourism, international tourism, culture, acculturation, ESP

**JEL Classification:** I25, Z32

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### **1. Introduction**

Rural tourism is a very popular type of country experience which is, at present, transforming the hospitality industry, and has become the chief source of progress in the economy of many country areas worldwide. In Spain, rural tourism is now recognized as a main source of income in numerous territories, including Castile and Leon, a high plains interior region, where this type of tourism has experienced increased demand. As a matter of fact, this is a great moment for the hospitality industry in the region, since they rank among the top industries, having had the highest growth rate over the last few years (Ayuso Santamaría, 2019).

Rural tourism in this area is considered a destination with a very strong and positive image for the national tourist. No wonder it has been the fourth preferred destination for local visitors during the second half of 2019, with over 5 million visitors (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2019).

Despite this optimistic situation, there are several reasons why Castile and Leon should not only rely on domestic markets but expand its offering to international visitors. For one thing, the significant increase in the number of beds available -from 77.398 beds in 1995 to 178.718 in 2018 (Junta de Castilla y León, 2018)- may become a problem in the near future. Also, the gap left in the off-peak season needs to be shifted so as to avoid inefficient resource use. Furthermore, the recent crisis is a clear example of why it is not wise to just put trust in one source of income.

But it is also a fact that it is not easy to accomplish a spatial spread of tourism throughout the territory, given that Castile and Leon is not part of the coastal sunny areas that have made Spain one of the three most salient international destinations (Hernández-Maestro and González-Benito, 2013). Therefore, the promotion of this rural area within international markets should be carried out creating a strong

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strategy so as to become more competitive, as well as considering the specific requirements of this type of tourist.

The search for new markets has been a common concern for many tourist areas in the world, and thus it has been given great attention by researchers. Some authors have analyzed international tourist expectations (Yeoman, et al, 2009; Weiermair, 2000). Similarly, careful consideration has been given to best practices and consumer requirements (Poon, 1989; Urry and Larsen, 2011), and studies on the new forms of tourism and market segmentation have also been widely carried out (Arva and Deli-Gray, 2011; Gottdiener, 2000). Additionally, attention has been drawn to issues pertaining to the acculturation of the workforce. Here, the main emphasis of research has been on the cultural literacy needs of migrant workers (Dietz and Pugh, 2004; Magnini, 2004), and on the English L2 proficiency of white-collar tourism staff and their instruction at a tertiary level (Leslie and Russell, 2006; Hsu, 2014).

Our interest has to do with the need to improve the communication skills in English to the staff of these businesses, and also their cultural awareness. We realize that, so far, attention has not been given to linguistic and cultural instruction of the rural tourism workforce, being that this is an under-researched area of English for Tourism curriculum design (Hsu, 2014).

This article analyses the linguistic and cultural needs of owners and staff of the hospitality industry to be able to widen the scope of their appeal to clients from English speaking countries; it also tries to find ways to help the staff to better communicate with foreign visitors. In order to analyze the specific needs of workers, we have completed a survey among a well-defined group of rural hospitality businesses from Castile and Leon. After evaluating the results, we have used the data obtained in the design of a program named *English for Rural Tourism* intended to better prepare the workforce to overcome their language and cultural limitations.

## **2. Rural tourism in Castile and Leon**

Castile and Leon can be a very attractive destination for international tourists. It is well known for its cultural richness, its strong heritage and its spectacular monuments. The natural landscape with its great diversity is arguably the greatest in Europe and food and wine connoisseurs will be delighted by the myriad of fine restaurants. To sum up, Castile and Leon has everything an international traveler desires including a fabulous central location with easy access, via a modern infrastructure, to make it a base for day-tripping while keeping your suitcase unpacked and your comfortable accommodation awaiting your return.

The benefits that international markets can provide to this autonomous region are also unmistakable. International visitors can be a strong source of power for the economic growth of a territory, and thus they can greatly favor Castile and Leon, meeting its economic and social objectives. In fact, this offer to foreign travelers has a lot to do with the need to interest a type of tourist which stays longer and spends more money, as well as with the necessity to reduce seasonality (Hernández et al, 2016). Also, using a diversified strategy when targeting different types of clients is always beneficial.

It seems that a serious and appealing offer to attract international visitors would be useful for both parties. But English is the established language of the tourist trade, and to be able to participate in the international tourism industry, personnel need to be appropriately trained and educated in this language to contribute correctly in the different service encounters. Unfortunately, this is not always the case of the rural lodging workforce in Castile and Leon, due to the specific peculiarities of this type of business.

The personnel of these small businesses often need to fit within a multifaceted working environment, being capable of communicating in a vast array of service deliveries under flexible working conditions - working hours, variety of activities, seasonality. Traditionally, many of these lodgings are family run, and the staff attending them generally live on the property or nearby. This means that these people are used to working with no set timetable, they are highly resourceful, adaptable to rapidly changing work environments, and thus ready to give a hand when it's requested and in whatever activities they are required. Also, another characteristic of these workers is that they do not often have very high

literacy skills, including foreign language proficiency, which reduces their ability to communicate with the public.

Consequently, to be ahead of the game in this international endeavor they would need to overcome some linguistic and cultural deficiencies. First, these workers frequently lack the English language ability to successfully communicate with foreign customers. Moreover, owners and managers don't feel confident enough to invest fully in attracting these customers, as they don't think they are prepared to cope with interacting in a foreign language. It is also a fact that many rural hostels create their own web pages and get their booking on-line. But, even if they have had dialogue translated into other languages, still much of the information provided must be produced by the rural lodging employees and should be understood by the customer. Also, the staff have to be able to understand their future customers when trying to contact them via e-mail or by phone and, once they visit the establishment, succeed in keeping a fluent conversation with them.

In conclusion, if they want to be successful in attracting and attending to foreign customers, service suppliers of rural lodging establishments should make an effort in terms of better preparing their staff linguistically and culturally since their accomplishment in this field greatly depends on their level of hospitality (Hernández-Maestro and González-Benito, 2013).

### **3. Needs analysis**

#### **3.1 Methodology**

In order to help these businesses to productively woo international, English speaking tourism, we have first carried out a needs analysis of the existing language barriers in the rural tourism businesses of Castile and Leon, so as to identify possible ways to overcome them more effectively.

To do so, we have conducted a survey to identify the needs of workforce of the rural tourism sector in Castile and Leon. A questionnaire was specifically designed to acquire useful information on issues pertaining to the English language and cultural needs of these workers and their proficiency with this language. The questionnaire was administered to a selection of rural tourism accommodations, and the owners, managers or person-in-charge were invited to fill them in. The selection of the businesses targeted in this survey was made from within all the establishments registered as rural tourism lodging in Castile and Leon. It was decided to leave out of this survey those businesses under the category of *Rural Accommodation*, that is, "houses and cottages providing tourist accommodation for a charge, with or without complementary services and registered in the corresponding Registro de Alojamientos Turísticos of each Autonomous Region" (Guzman-Parra et al, 2015:124), since, due to their specific characteristics, they are not very prone to cooperate in this type of actions. The questionnaire was passed before the deadline for the application of the present categorization on rural tourism accommodation had expired -as ruled by the decree 75/2013 of November 28. Thus, our sample consisted of Rural Houses with on-Farm Lodging (RHFL), Rural Tourism Centers (RTC), 3, 4 and 5 star Hotels (H3, H4, H5) and Royal Inns (RI).

Since some of the businesses selected to take part in this needs analysis are located in very remote places and tend to have Internet connection problems, it was decided to send the questionnaires by regular mail. In total 1.055 questionnaires were passed corresponding to the following categories: H5(10), H4(96), H3(132), RI (123), RTC(444), RHFL(250). We received 156 replies (14,8%) as shown in Table 1.

**Table no. 1: Replies to questionnaire**

TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION	% OF REPLIES
H5	2.6%
H4	7.9%
H3	9.8%
Royal Inns	18.8%
RTC	38.2%
RHFL	22.4%

*Source:* Author's own calculations

### 3.2 Results

The first section of the questionnaire passed was dedicated to gathering information about the lodging itself and about the person completing the survey: i.e. position held, name of the business, location and number of employees. A second section was devoted to learning more about the percentage and characteristics of the international travelers that they usually host, and when, if any, is their high season. This section also asked about their interest in increasing their foreign demand levels and in levelling of their occupancy rate throughout the year. A third section enquired about the language needs of the personnel working in the business. Similarly they were asked if they had any language training plans for their staff and, if they did, what were these? In the last section of the survey, questions were aimed at eliciting data about the specific activities promoted by the rural accommodation intended to improve the English language proficiency of their workers. If this wasn't the case, respondents were asked if they believed it would be positive to do so. Also, opinions were requested on the different contents to be included in a course of English for Rural Tourism aimed at those personnel. Finally, interviewees were invited to make comments or suggestions on the issues proposed.

We will now briefly comment on some of the results obtained in this needs analysis, some of them very useful for the planning of the program of English for Rural Tourism. To begin with, we can say that the occupation rate of foreign language clients is very low in rural tourism businesses of Castile and Leon (see Table 2). In fact over 80% of the respondents to this questionnaire said that foreign visitors are just below 20% of their total clients, and over 50% of these respondents get less than 5% of foreign clients.

**Table no. 2: Foreign occupation rate**

% OF FOREIGN VISITORS	% OF RESPONDENTS
0%	11.5%
1-5%	43.9%
5-20%	28.4%
20-30%	9.5%
30-40%	3.4%
Over 40%	3.4%

*Source:* Author's own calculations

They could mark more than one option when asked about the distribution of these sojourns throughout the year and, as we see in Table 3, the majority of the foreign visitors come during the Summer, and just half of those visit the region during the Spring. But, it is also interesting to note that 19% of the businesses host clients all year round.

**Table no. 3: Distribution of foreign occupancy throughout the year**

SEASON	% OCCUPANCY
Spring	22.1%
Summer	44.7%
Fall	10.5%
Winter	3.3%
All year	19.3%

*Source:* Author's own calculations

When asked about their interest in increasing their rate of international visitors in order to break seasonally, 98% responded affirmatively. 99.3% expressed their willingness to organize a campaign to capture foreign clients. This last question is quite interesting. Rather than just expressing an interest in expanding their businesses, respondents express their willingness to make an extra effort both financially and in terms of their workload. And they not only had to give a yes/no response, they were also asked to provide an explanation of why they thought so. The answers here were diverse and very useful in the design of our proposal.

Several questions were posed, related to learning more about the English proficiency level of the personnel of these businesses. First, information about the difficulties that these workers find when contacting their foreign clients was requested. 61% of the responses have to do with the language barrier, basically because they do not speak the language or they have a very poor knowledge of it. Some respondents specifically talk about their inability to communicate orally either directly or by telephone. The majority of the problems arise when clients phone to make a reservation, or when they have to give directions on how to get to their business. Some other difficult situations that arise are when having to give information to clients about where to go, advice on what to eat or buy, etc. In some instances, respondents openly admit their total lack of knowledge of the language, while in others, they simply comment that they have a poor level. Some of the solutions that these people have found, to overcome the problem of the language barrier, are writing different signs with basic information such as timetables, menus, tips or rules to facilitate communication. They believe that it would be very useful for the staff to attend a course that would teach them how to interact with their clients in English and also, which would give them some guidance about basic cultural peculiarities they should know in order to better interact with these customers.

Apart from the language and cultural barrier, survey participants also referred to the difficulties found when trying to contact prospective clients. They often don't know how to reach them or what courses of action they should take to find them. Here, respondents admit that they would like to learn more about how to better promote the area. Also, another problem is that many prospective visitors don't know much about the area and thus are not interested in visiting it. But it is also true that, once they get to know the region, these sojourners are the best vehicle for word-of-mouth marketing.

When asked about the languages they find more useful for communicating with clients, as seen in Table 4, participants value the knowledge of English the most, almost double than those who prefer speaking French.

**Table no. 4: Languages staff should know**

ENGLISH	PORTUGUESE	FRENCH	GERMAN	OTHER
46%	12.4%	25%	13.8%	2.8%

*Source:* Author's own calculations

It is also quite thought-provoking the fact that not many rural tourism accommodations have qualified employees with multilingual skills. As seen in Table 5, in over 20% of the businesses no one speaks a language other than Spanish, whereas, in 36%, there is someone who can speak English.

**Table no. 5: Languages spoken by staff**

ENGLISH	PORTUGUESE	FRENCH	GERMAN	OTHER	NO
36.4%	7.1%	24.3%	6.3%	5.5%	20.5

Source: Author's own calculations

When asked if their formative plans include English language classes, 66% of the responses have been negative. When they answered affirmatively, participants enquired who was the person responsible for deciding on the contents of these classes. Most of the answers stated that it was either the owner or the manager who made that decision (71%). In the rest of the cases it was the company in charge of organizing the course who was responsible for this. This demonstrates that most of the persons in a management position do not consider that they should rely on specialists for the design of a foreign language training plan for their staff.

Even though they were not asked precisely to do so, some respondents have commented on what type of courses they would like to hire: English for the catering business, advanced English or simply that the contents should be adapted to the tourism world, i.e. learning how to contact prospective clients, learning how to give information, and learning how to manage in service encounters. A few of them even commented that some courses that they had taken in the past were mostly aimed at university students and they didn't think this was appropriate.

The next section of the questionnaire was aimed at obtaining more specific information on the English language needs of these workers. First, respondents were asked to give some feedback on the activities they regularly need to do in English. They had to check the corresponding options out of the four given (Table 6) and oral communication activities got the highest percentage of responses.

**Table no. 6: Most common activities done in English**

	YES	NO
Reading paperwork	84.2%	15.8%
Writing documents	86.8%	13.2%
Oral communication	97.1%	2.9%
Written communication	94.4%	5.6%

Source: Author's own calculations

In order to have a more clear picture of the specific activities done in English, survey participants were asked to select different options in a table saying how often they did them (see Table 7). Five were the activities that respondents found they did more often - writing emails, and/or letters; reading emails, and/or letters; reading online documents; using computer programs and dealing with phone calls. They less frequently read business documents, held informal conversations, travelled abroad, attended fairs, made new contacts and wrote business documents.

Respondents enquired about the possible activities they feel they may have to do in the future in English. This time they were not provided with a set list of items to choose from. They were free to include any activities they thought they would need to do. Most of the answers had to do with attracting new clients or with service encounters. Specific instances of the latter being, making reservations or telephone calls, writing emails, socializing or communicating with travel agencies. Other face-to-face service encounters referred to by participants were giving information to clients about routes, cultural activities, restaurants, and the like. Also, virtual visits to web sites or automated transactions, as well as promotion and marketing activities such as attending fairs or generating contents for a guide or webpage were identified. Finally, there were some respondents who didn't add any extra information here, either because they couldn't think of any new activities or because they thought that the ones provided in the previous table were the correct ones.

**Table no. 7: Frequency of activities done in English**

ACTIVITY	FREQUENCY			
	DAILY	2/3 TIMES/ WEEK	OCCASIONALLY	NEVER
Write emails, letters	9%	8.2%	67.2%	15.7%
Write reports	2%	5%	26%	67%
Write business documents	0.9%	6.3%	55%	37.8%
Write contracts	1%	--	28%	71%
Fill in business documents	3.9%	0.9%	54.4%	40.8%
Fill in forms	5.6%	2.8%	50.9%	40.7%
Read business documents	5.9%	11%	61.9%	21.2%
Read emails, letters	9.7%	10.4%	66.4%	13.4%
Read reports	4.8%	8.7%	34.9%	51.5%
Read books, manuals	4.6%	13.9%	47.2%	34.3%
Read online documents	11.8%	23.6%	48.8%	15.7%
Use computer programmes	15.1%	15.1%	43.7%	26.1%
Programming	3.9%	--	17.6%	78.4%
Attend Fairs	1.7%	1.7%	46.1%	50.4%
Attend business meetings	1.8%	0.9%	35.8%	61.5%
Attend conferences, lectures	0.9%	0.9%	3.7%	61.3%
Business visits	0.9%	0.9%	32.4%	65.7%
Receive formative courses at work	1.9%	0.9%	26.7%	70.3%
Telephone conversations	9.1%	12.1%	66.7%	12.1%
Business meetings	3.6%	6.3%	52.3%	37.8%
Personal conversations	8.5%	6.8%	55.9%	28.8%
Make new contacts	3.5%	7.1%	61.1%	28.3%
Travel abroad and manage to get along	2.5%	2.5%	72.9%	22%

Source: Author's own calculations

At the end of the questionnaire respondents were invited to add any comments they would like to make, relevant to the aspects dealt with in the questionnaire. With reference to the language needs some of them once again expressed their interest in being able to attend a course in English, specific for their precise needs. In line with this, they gave particular examples of these needs -communicating with their clients, giving concrete information about touristic aspects of the area, timetables, typical food...

After considering all the answers included in this questionnaire we can conclude that respondents are very interested in broadening the scope of the clients they get in their business. In order to do this they are willing to carry out different promotion activities, which includes targeting foreign visitors despite the language barrier they, in many cases, feel they have. In line with this, they seem very receptive to the idea of engaging in learning English with a specific emphasis on rural tourism.

#### 4. Our proposal

Our needs analysis reveals that the lack of mastery of workforce in communicating in English greatly limits their meaningful participation in the international tourism industry. It is well known the English language is clearly the language of tourism communication; thus, a majority of personnel of rural hospitality businesses who do not master this language are effectively excluded from international markets, and so are businesses themselves.

Small businesses in the rural tourism world find it very hard to access international markets because often larger companies or corporate structures control them. But small businesses should work hard towards redressing this situation and demonstrate that international tourism in Castile and Leon can benefit all the people in the region. An important vehicle to do so is education and training, a basic necessity that many working in this business have not had access to in the past or, if they have, it has often been inadequate. In order to try to remedy this, we have designed a language and acculturation program specific for this workforce. The plan has been designed to provide this personnel with the necessary tools to contribute to the success of rural tourism businesses in their contact with foreign visitors. Thus, we have first considered the peculiarities and specific requirements identified in the needs analysis of these small businesses.

#### **4.1 Specific communication needs of workforce in English L2**

When referring specifically to English L2 proficiency, the particular basic skills these workers should possess are mainly related to their interaction with clients both orally and in written form, and to the avoidance of cultural misunderstandings and miscommunication.

Workforce of small rural lodgings in Castile and Leon should be capable of communicating orally in L2 in a range of service encounters. When analyzing the profile of the ESP needs of these workers, we realize that an important part of their interactions have to do with face-to-face service encounters. The oral skills will be needed basically to be able to hold a conversation and understand the guests' needs. More specifically, due to the specificities of this business, personnel are entitled to interact in various ways with clients. They will be required to be at the Front desk where they are expected to welcome and service clients in line with what receptionists of a hotel would do. Also, they should provide travelers with basic information on the lodging, the area, local customs, cuisine, and the like. If they offer meals, they will have to interact with clients while serving the meals, as well as be prepared to ask for clarification about their specific diet requirements or tastes. In sum, some of the most recurrent exchanges are the following:

- Socializing: Greeting and saying goodbye to clients, getting to know customers, thanking, making positive and negative statements, apologizing, asking and giving permission, dealing with complaints and difficult situations, talking about the weather, making small talk.
- In the desk front: Checking in, checking out, making reservations, requesting and providing information, wake up service, phone calls and messages, dealing with customers' travel schedules.
- Inside the lodge activities and outside the lodge activities: Troubleshooting, recreational activities, emergency and health, providing information about sightseeing, shopping and nightlife, satisfying clients' accommodation needs.
- In the dining room: Servicing clients, room service, restaurant service, waiting on customers.

Basic written communication is also an important skill these workers should need to practice. In fact, communicating online or by regular mail with prospective clients as well as with visitors is an important activity in this type of business. As concluded from the needs analysis carried out, emails and letters are the documents they more often need to read and write.

In sum, together with professionalism, service quality and attention to customers, a basic competitive factor workers need to possess is foreign language skills. These factors go hand in hand when aiming at a successful and favorable overall environment.

#### **4.2 Program of *English for Rural Tourism* for the wooing of and catering for international tourism**

English for Tourism, being a branch of ESP, "is considered an inter-disciplinary field which requires two types of knowledge; namely, language knowledge and discipline knowledge" (Chen, 2011:18). In order to briefly analyze the distinctive features of tourism English, we have grouped them in four perspectives typical of this discourse. First, from a linguistic point of view, there are different lexical and grammatical aspects that characterize tourism discourse. Within the lexical perspective we can highlight the use of technical terms, proper nouns and idioms. As for the grammatical aspect, the sentence structure, the use of specific verb tenses and the voice and mood, are the most salient features of this type of discourse. The second perspective is from its performative function-courtesy feature, and here we can stress the tendency in tourism discourse to use courtesy expressions and the effort done to sound polite and professional. The third angle is that of its style. Tourism style is usually plain, direct and specific so as to avoid misunderstandings. Finally, we can refer to cultural issues. This is a very salient aspect and should be paid a great deal of attention to since, as already stated, culture plays a very important role in any type of communication.

One of the purposes of the training program we propose is to play a part in increasing the confidence and comfort of the personnel of rural tourism accommodations when interacting with foreign clients. Thus, we understand that this program should pay specific attention to these four perspectives, both in the oral instruction and in the written one.



In their oral communication, rather than becoming intimidated by the accents, use of idioms or the speed of speech of native speakers, workers should be taught how to overcome their initial shyness. Instead of remaining silent during interactions for the fear of being ridiculed, they should be assisted into developing effective communication skills. Our purpose is to prepare them for many real-life situations they will for sure face in the future where they will have to give information or advice, state their opinion, clarify issues or deal with complaints, so that they are capable of expressing effectively in English.

Mastering writing is also an important part of this language learning process. Getting students to write in a specific environment is not always easy. In fact, non-native speakers of English often have difficulty writing adequate professional prose. Professional written communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century takes place in a rapidly changing environment, increasingly international and intracultural, and also affected by innovations in workplace communication technologies. Thus, we intend to provide these learners with clear theoretical bases and teaching practices to meet the complexities of this changing environment.

**Table no. 8: Rural Tourism for workforce (A2-B2)**

	LESSON	LANGUAGE FOCUS	VOCABULARY	LISTENING/READING	SPEAKING	WRITING
1	Introduction					
2	Welcome to our Royal Inn	Making recommendations and giving Instructions	Basic socializing language	Body language to improve communication	Greeting new guests and introducing the staff	Filling in forms
3	Let me show you around	Describing facilities and showing how things work	Hotel facilities	The best place in town	Asking and answering questions about facilities to fill in gapped text	writing a review for a webpage
4	Breakfast is ready	Taking an order	Food and beverages	What are "piñones"?	Role play at the restaurant	Writing the menu
5	Where to go from here	Heritage and history	Art and architecture	The Collegiate church of Santa María la Mayor	Telephoning "taking a message"	Writing E-mails
6	Hiking	Surroundings and leisure time activities	Ecotourism. Compound nouns relating to traveling	Testimonials	Handling information	Writing letters
7	Promoting our guesthouse	Presenting information clearly	Terms related to advertising	Creating your own promotional webpage	Role play at a showfair	Writing contents for a webpage
8	Company performance	Organization and management	Liking words: comparison and contrast. Adjectives and adverbs :comparison	24h. at the desk front	responding to queries over the phone	responding to queries in writing
9	Festivities and festivals	Describing events	Noun phrases. Terms referring to cultural traditions	The Chronicle of Oña	Telephoning "handling information"	Explaining local customs and Traditions to visitors from other countries
10	Dealing with Difficult Situations	Troubleshooting. Softening bad news	Links for reason. Terms for expressing apology.	Case study: What to do when there is a power outage	Telephoning "handling complaints"	Letter of complaint. Letters of apology

Source: Author's own calculations

Our program consists, first and most importantly, of several courses –intended for different levels- of *English for Rural Tourism Workforce* in which emphasis is given both to oral and written communication within the rural tourism environment and with specific attention being given to cultural matters. In Table 8 a sample of one of these courses is presented.

As byproducts, we have created a phrase and vocabulary bank in English, Spanish and Portuguese (Pérez Ruiz and Ferreira Alves, 2011) and a compilation of a multilingual lexicon (Méndez Cendón and Pérez Ruiz, 2015) to facilitate interactions between workers and clients. The intention has been to provide workers with written materials they can resort to, to avoid misunderstandings.

Other useful, tailor-made tools for individual businesses, created for this program, are bilingual files in which information about the area where the accommodation is located is provided -local attractions and directions on how to get there, information about historical events and heritage sites, and data about regular events. Also, clear explanations on how to use these files is given. The files are developed with the intention of educating employees in finding ways of telling about these issues. It is true that there are excellent guides, blogs, websites and the like which provide remarkable information in all these respects, but the highlight of a trip is the opportunity to meet locals and learn and experience things first hand. In fact, the staff of these lodgings should act as unofficial ambassadors to the area, but these stories won't reach many of the sojourners unless told in English.

## 5. Conclusion

We have been analyzing how beneficial it would be for the rural hospitality industry in Castile and Leon, the wooing of foreign customers, and how it has not been fully exploited yet. Possible reasons for this are the linguistic and cultural deficiencies of its workforce. These rural hostels require a workforce to fulfil a multiplicity of tasks and, when necessary, they have to be able to communicate in English, too. Access to skilled labor, however, is one of the main constraints of these rural hospitality businesses. Our proposal has been the presentation of an acculturation and assimilation plan of Rural Tourism English L2 for these workers that we believe can be suitable and effective for educating them.

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