

ENGLISH AND OTHER FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN CROATIA – A NEEDS ANALYSIS



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This article presents the results of preliminary research on the foreign language needs of the Croatian adult population. The results of the survey show that English is the language most widely needed in both private and professional domains, and German is consistently in second position. Regarding the attitudes towards learning foreign languages in schools, the results reveal that English and German, in that order, are considered to be indispensable, but there is also agreement throughout on the need to learn as many foreign languages as possible. Furthermore, the article provides information on which particular contexts and skills participants need the English language for. The findings prepare ground for designing a more specific instrument for wider scale research on learners' needs with respect to different professional contexts.

Key words: needs analysis, English as a foreign language, foreign language learning, English for specific purposes

Foreign language learning (FLL) in Croatia has had a long and successful history. Still, it seems that awareness of the need for learning and knowing foreign languages, particularly English, has been increasing in the last decade. Globalization, the role of technology, the Internet, the media, an upsurge in the service industry, opportunities for higher education and other factors seem to account for this demand. It can be assumed that such demand arises from various individual needs in people's personal and professional lives.

In a broader context, J.C. Richards (2001) points out that the European countries began a re-evaluation of their foreign language policies in the late 1960s. Concerned with specifying second language proficiency in terms of 'some particular purpose', (Munby 1978: 22) turned the curriculum design of language instruction towards considering learner needs as the starting point, while societal needs came into focus in the next period (Richards, 2001: 27). Apparently, learner motivation, and hence success, are dependent on real learner needs. Therein lies the purpose, in the Croatian context, for a thorough 'needs analysis', i.e. the collection of various kinds of information about learners in order to establish not only what learners would need to learn during instruction, but also "how language learning and skills learning can be maximized for a given learner group" (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998: 125f).

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Therefore, in the spring of 2003 we conducted a survey to examine the present situation in Croatia. We concentrated on the needs of the adult population for English and other foreign languages (FL), keeping in mind that “statements of the aims and objectives of language learning and teaching should be based on an appreciation of the needs of learners and of society, on the tasks, activities and processes that the learners need to carry out in order to satisfy those needs, and on the competences and strategies they need to develop/build up in order to do so” (Common European Framework 2001:131).

Our intention was to establish the needs of foreign language users on the global level of needs analysis as defined by Yule and Tarone: it “specifies the situations in which learners will need to use language and the language-related activities required in those situations” (1989: 37). Thus, we have been able to accomplish our two main goals: to obtain preliminary data on the FL needs of the Croatian adult population, and to prepare the ground for designing a more specific instrument for wider scale research on learners’ realistic needs concerning foreign languages.

The survey was organized around the following questions:

- Which languages are felt to be needed in people’s private and professional lives?
- Which particular situations and contexts, as well as English skills and competences (i.e. language-related activities), do the individuals identify as necessary in their private and professional lives?
- What is the overall situation of personal FLL histories of adults in Croatia?
- What are the attitudes of the members of the community
 - regarding the importance of and/or need for learning various FLs?
 - regarding the need for FLL at school/within the school system?

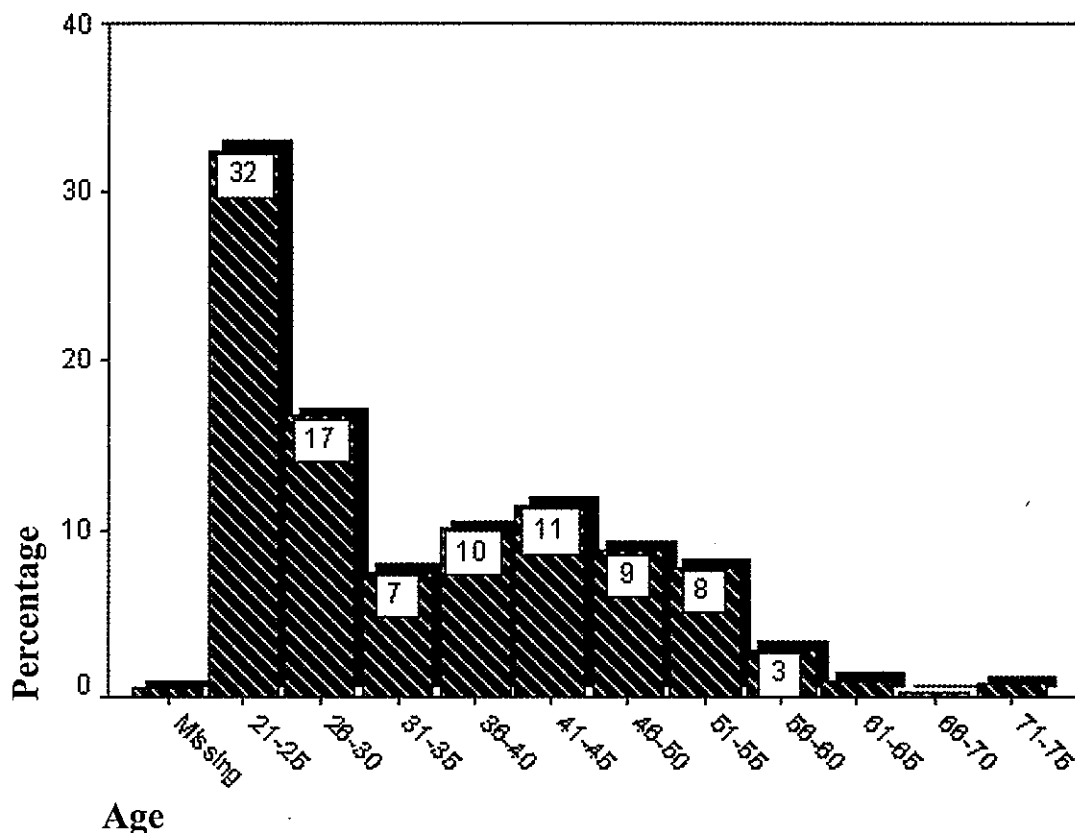
SAMPLE

The sample consists of 388 randomly chosen adults of 21 years of age and older (161 males and 227 females) with different educational and professional backgrounds. More than half of the participants come from Zagreb, and others from different parts of Croatia, that is, slightly more than a third come from towns other than Zagreb, and about 10% from villages. As can be seen in Figure 1, the majority of our participants, about 50%, are between 21-30 years old, and the rest are older. Next, 66% of the participants are employed, 22% are still students, leaving a very small percentage of those who are unemployed or retired. Of the 388 participants, the majority, 175, have completed secondary education, 48 higher-education (2-year college), 140 have finished tertiary education (university), 19 have completed post-graduate levels (specialists, PhD, etc.), and a small fraction have completed only primary or

compulsory education. It can be seen that our sample consists mostly of employed, educated and urban individuals – the age range, though, is from the early twenties to mid-seventies, and they are roughly divided into two balanced age groups: those younger and those older than 30.



Figure 1: Age range



METHOD

Apart from biodata questions, the questionnaire is consisted of two parts. The first part dealt with whether and for what purposes the respondents need the English language in their private and professional lives. Participants also added specific language skills and competences they found important for those two domains (e.g. the Internet, communication with friends, business partners, correspondence, etc.). Then they self-assessed their general competences in English on a scale from 0 to 10. The second part of the questionnaire dealt with foreign languages in general. The participants were first asked which languages they had learnt, where and for how long. Secondly, they gave their views on which languages they



desired most to learn (i.e. second and third most desirable) in their private and professional lives. Finally, the participants ranked, based on their opinions, the foreign languages that children should learn at school. The language used in the questionnaire was Croatian, the participants' mother tongue.

RESULTS

As can be seen from Table 1, in the participants' answers to the initial two questions, as many as eight in ten claim they need English in their private lives, and about three quarters say that they need English in their professional lives.

Table 1: Needs in general.

		Answers	
		Yes	No
Questions			
1	Do you need English in your private life?	81.1 %	18.9 %
2	Do you need English in your professional life?	74.1 %	25.9 %

When asked to specify the skills and tasks they need English for (Table 2), the respondents accepted many of the offered examples, but also added such items as reading and giving directions, instructions, gaining access to the media (news, film, etc.), listening to announcements, taking notes, filling in documents, recounting events. In their professional lives they stress the importance of reading professional materials, understanding and presenting talks, lectures and speeches at conferences and meetings, note taking, on-line conferencing, paraphrasing, speaking from notes, managing discussions (e.g. arguing), carrying out informal conversations. Particularly widely represented are tasks connected with communication by means of computers and IT literacy, ranging from understanding manuals, following instructions for installing computer software, and reading and writing electronic mail. Professional needs also include tasks connected with further education, such as conducting and interpreting research, completing applications, writing essays, articles, etc.

Table 2: Specific needs.

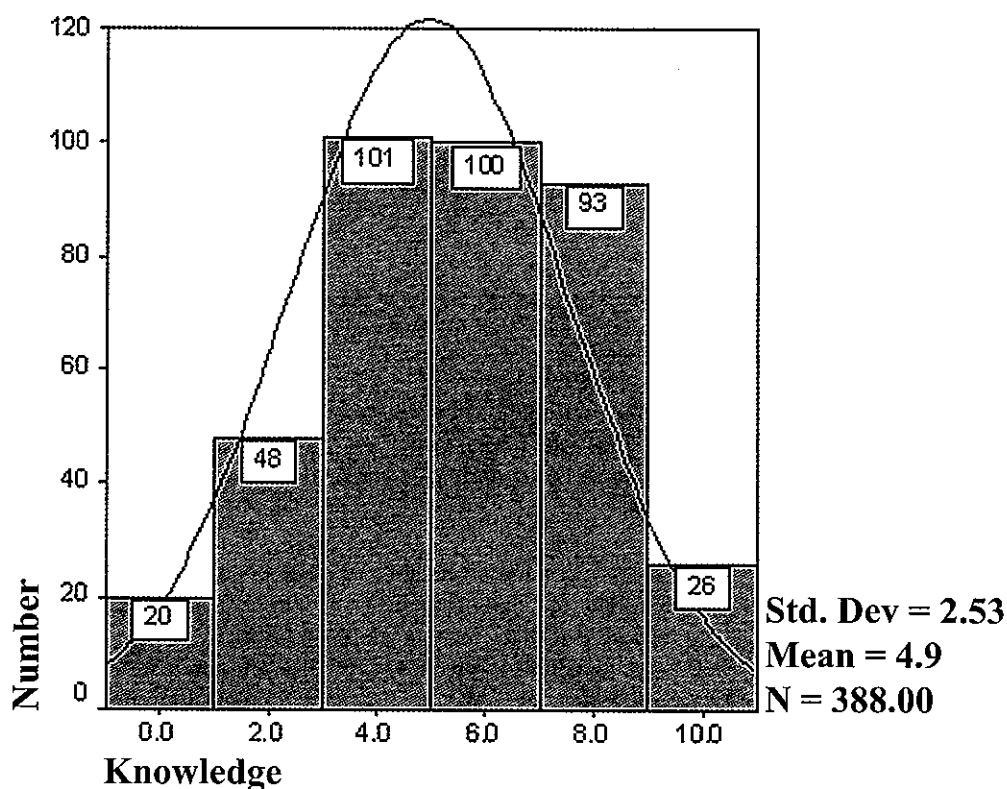
NEEDS		IN PRIVATE LIFE	IN PROFESSIONAL LIFE
Situations and contexts	Suggested in the survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Internet • Hobbies • Communication with friends and family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Internet • Job searches • Business contacts • Correspondence • Negotiation
	Added by participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal pleasure • Sport competitions • Telephone conversations • Spontaneous conversations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conferences and meetings • Telephone conversations • On-line conferences • Job interviews • Informal conversations • Conducting and interpreting research • Discussions, debates, argumentation, expressing opinion
Language-related activities (types of texts included)	Suggested in the survey	Understanding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lyrics (music) • Directions for medication usage (package leaflets, labels, etc.) • Directions for handling electronic equipment 	Understanding/ producing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Term papers • Professional literature
	Added by participants	Understanding/using/producing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directions for using cosmetics, ingredients, installing computer software, cookbooks, manuals • Books, magazines, daily newspapers • Public announcements • Brochures • Advertisements • TV programs (news, sport, film) • E-mails • Short messages • Information (directions) • Recounts of jokes, events, stories, films • Telephone conversations • Filling in documentation 	Understanding/using/producing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essays, articles, journals, books • CVs • Work applications • Summaries, reports (financial, etc.) • Note taking • Paraphrasing • Translation • Speeches and lectures • Informal conversation





The results of the self-assessment requested in the question *How would you rate your English language levels on a scale from 0 to 10?* show that the subjects on average seem to be quite satisfied with their English language competences. The average “grade” was 4.95, i.e. almost 5, and only 5% claim to have no knowledge of the English language at all. Figure 2 shows that the distribution of the “grades” represents an almost perfect bell curve. It is impressive that as many as 95% of the participants seem to know at least some English.

Figure 2: Self-evaluation



Grade	Number of participants	%
0	20	5.2%
1-2	48	12.4%
3-4	101	26.1%
5-6	100	25.8%
7-8	93	24.0%
9-10	26	6.7%
TOTAL	388	100%

Self-evaluation - Legend

As shown in Table 3, responses to the question *Have you ever studied a foreign language?* show that about 18% of the subjects studied only English and about 19% studied only German. A third of the subjects have at some point been engaged in studying two foreign languages, about 13% have studied three foreign languages and more than 8% four. As many as one in five have studied three or more foreign languages. On the other hand, only about 2.6% have not learned any foreign languages, and 4 participants failed to provide a response to this question.

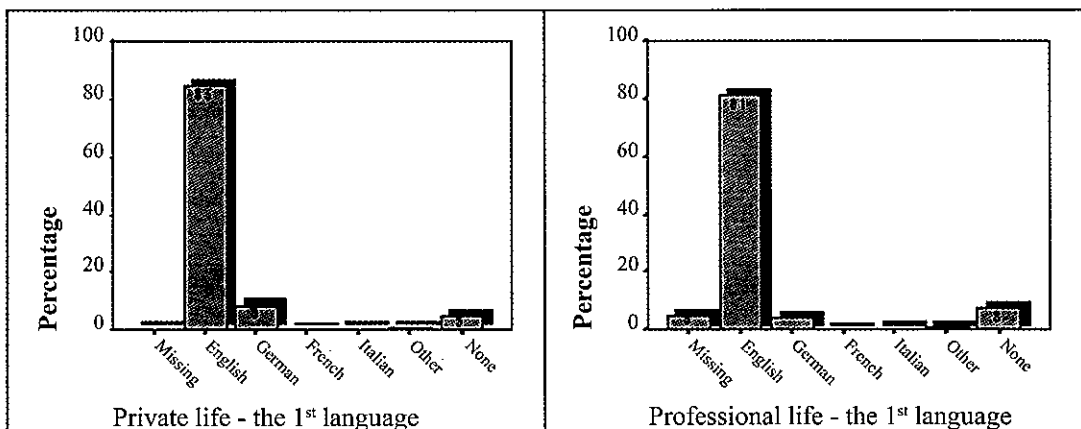


Table 3: Learning foreign languages – personal histories.

	Number of languages studied		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent
	None/ No answer		10	2.6%	2.6
	One	English	70	17.9%	18.2
		German	73	18.7%	19.0
		French	4	1.0%	1.0
		Italian	2	.5%	.5
		Other	9	2.3%	2.3
	Two		130	33.3%	33.9
	Three		50	12.8%	13.0
	Four		33	8.5%	8.6
	Not specified		3	.8%	.8
Valid	Total		384	99.0%	100%
No response			4	1.0%	
Total			388	100.0%	

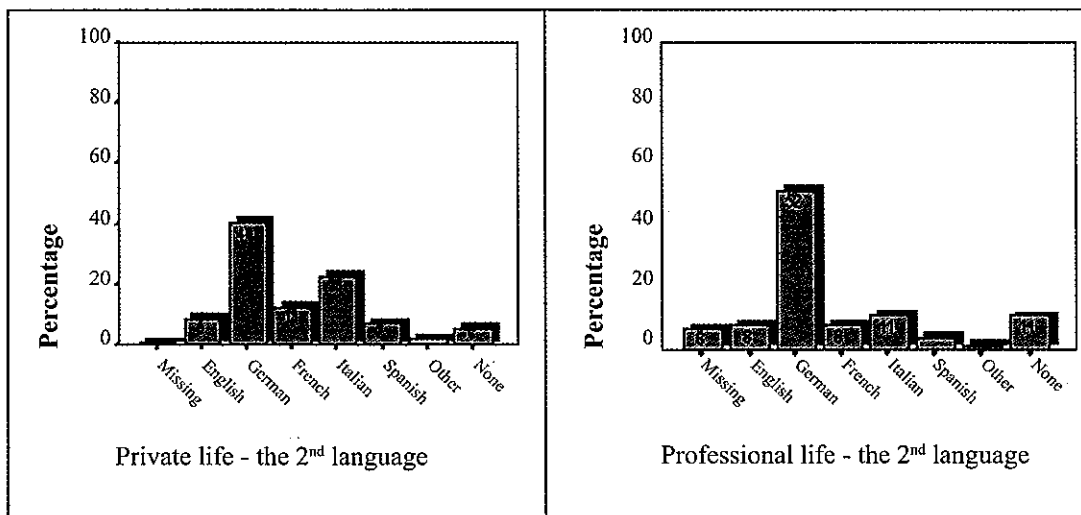
The following sets of questions were aimed at obtaining information as to what would be considered the three most desirable and important languages to be mastered in people's private and personal lives. For 84.5% of the subjects, English was the most important and useful language in their private lives, followed by German, which was the most important for 8.5 percent. The same was reflected in their professional lives, where English was selected as the most important and useful language by 81.2 percent of the respondents, and German by 4.1%. On the other hand, there was a relatively large portion of our sample who did not think they should learn any further languages either in their private or professional contexts (about 5% and 8% respectively).

Figure 3: The most desirable foreign languages to be mastered in private and professional lives.



As shown in Figure 4, the second most desirable language to be mastered is German, selected by 40% of the subjects for their private lives and by more than 50% for their professional lives. Interestingly, as many as one in ten of the subjects claim they do not consider it useful to master any of the languages as a second foreign language in their own professional lives.

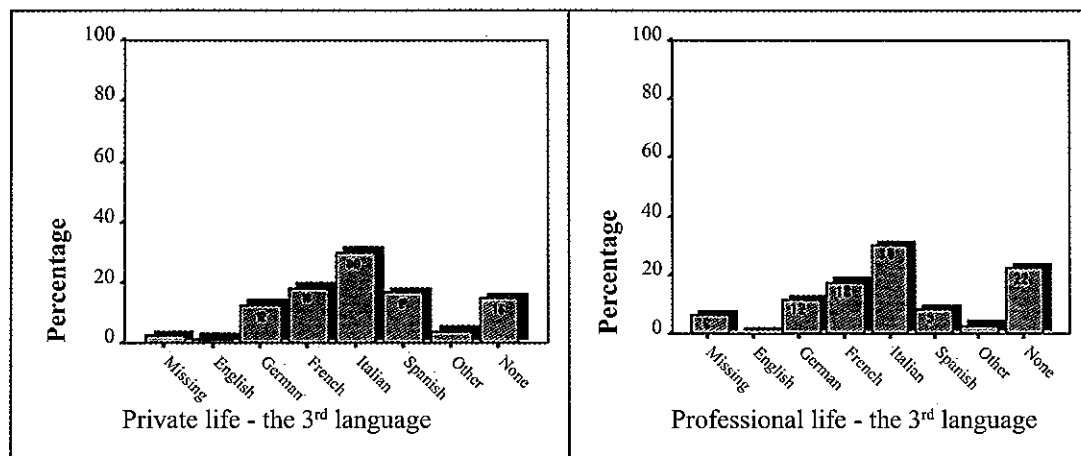
Figure 4: The second most desirable foreign languages to be mastered in private and professional lives.



Finally, as shown in Figure 5, about 30.2% of the subjects claim that the third most desirable foreign language in their private lives is Italian and exactly as many say that it is

the third most important language in their professional lives. French follows, or, occasionally, Spanish or German. Two in ten consider a third foreign language unnecessary in their professional lives.

Figure 5: The third most desirable foreign languages to be mastered in private and professional lives.



In the final question, the participants were expected to rank the languages according to the order in which children should learn them at school. English, German, French, Italian and Spanish were offered as possible choices, and three empty spaces were left for the participants to fill in independently. As shown in Figure 6, the vast majority of the participants (94.6%) gave priority to English as the first foreign language that children should learn in schools. German was ranked second by 84%. About eighty percent again agree that the next two ranks should be shared by Italian and French, with a slight lead of the former in third position (49%), and the latter in fourth position (44.8%). Spanish is firmly in fifth position (66.5%), although as many as a third of the sample placed it higher in priority, but not in the first place, and 8% left it out altogether.

It should also be noted that neither English nor German were left out of the ranking by any of the participants, so they seem to be universally needed.

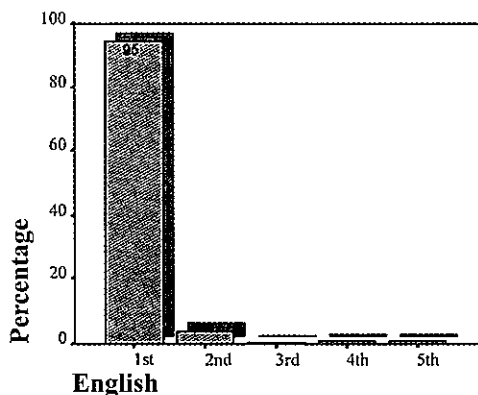
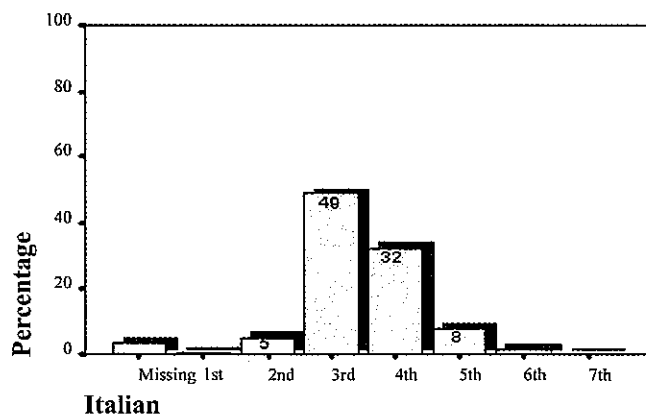
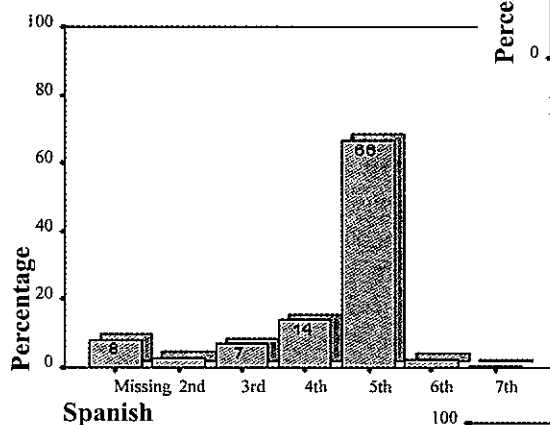
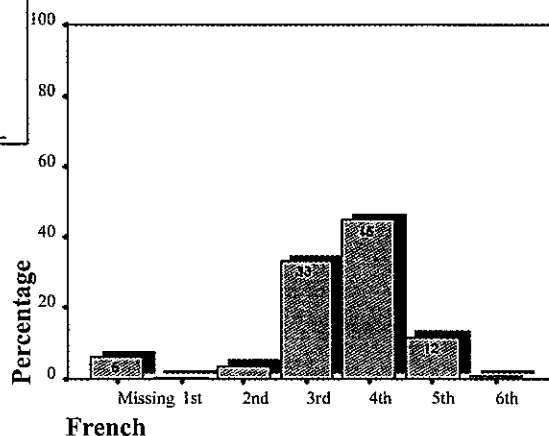
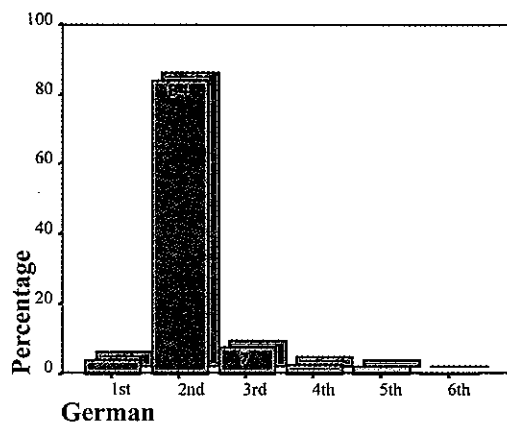


Figure 6: The priority of languages to be learned at school.



The need to learn other foreign languages at school is also recognized. For instance, Latin, even though mentioned by only 24 participants, was given a high rank by twelve participants.

They placed it in one of the five leading positions. However, its dominant position was still marked as sixth, challenging Russian, also dominantly in sixth position, and added to the list by 26 respondents in all. Other mentioned languages were Chinese (12 participants), Portuguese (8), Esperanto (5), Greek (3), and several others, including Slovene, Swedish, Japanese, Hungarian, etc. supplied by one or two participants each. (See Table 4).



Table 4: The distribution of the choices according to languages.

Language	Number of participants naming the language	Percentage	Dominantly ranked as n th language	Number of participants ranking it thus
English	388	100.0%	First	367
German	388	100.0%	Second	326
Italian	375	96.6%	Third	190
French	365	94.1%	Fourth	174
Spanish	357	92.0%	Fifth	258
Russian	26	6.7%	Sixth	13
Latin	24	6.2%	Sixth	11
Chinese	12	3.1%	Sixth	5
Portuguese	8	2.1%	Seventh	4
Esperanto	5	1.3%	Sixth	2
Greek	3	0.8%	Seventh	2
Other FL	14	3.6%		

It is also interesting to see the total number of languages individual respondents included in the ranking as possible school subjects. As shown in Figure 7, the vast majority of 76.3% included five languages in their ranking list, and not even one participant limited the number of languages to be learned to only one. On the contrary, about 15% of respondents were as ambitious as to suggest six, seven or eight languages.

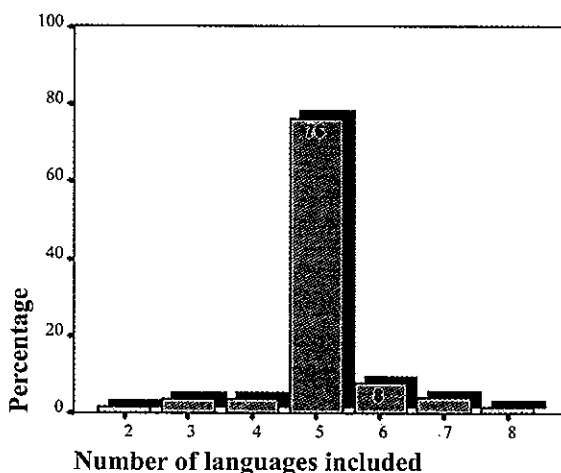


Figure 7: The total number of languages to be learned at school per participant.

DISCUSSION



Our sample, predominantly of employed adults and of students, reflects the fact that various foreign languages have been studied in Croatia over the last few decades. The results also reveal a tendency for individuals to study more foreign languages. More than half of the participants (54.89%) report having learned more than one foreign languages, 43.3% have learned at least one, and only a slight portion of about 3% seem to have been excluded from the experience. This background also makes the participants competent in providing data for the central portion of our research – assessing the need of FLL in Croatia, both from their personal viewpoints and in terms of the needs within the community.

Based on the participants' answers, we can establish that there is a vast general need for English in the Croatian adult population at present. Interestingly, however, people seem to need English more in their private than in their professional lives. A more detailed analysis shows that such a situation is observed throughout the surveyed population. The results imply that the Croatian adult population cultivates positive attitudes towards English as the dominant language of international communication and of exchange of cultural and other information within the international community. They are obviously used to English and therefore, it is not surprising that their subjective self-assessment on how well they have mastered it is rather flattering.

Accordingly, the vast majority of the participants expressed their opinion of English as the most desirable and important language to be mastered in their private and professional lives. In other words, English is the language they would find most useful to know in both contexts. This is a particularly strong opinion among the younger participants, as 94.76% of the population aged 21-30 (191 in all, or 49.23% of our sample) chose English, in comparison to 75.13% of those over 30 (193 in all, or 49.74% of the sample). Remarkably, a larger portion of our overall sample identifies English (and other languages) as desirable and important here, in the context of the possible future need in both contexts (private and professional) than when simply asked about the situation at present (81.1% vs. 84.5% in private lives and 74.1 vs. 81.2% in professional lives – cf. Table 1 and Figure 3). Therefore, it can be concluded that our participants see foreign languages, largely English in this case, as beneficial in both their private and professional realms, even though not all of them use or need foreign languages now as much as they would if they were more adequately educated in this respect.

It is interesting that only one language other than English was chosen as the most desirable by more than one or two individuals in the sample – German was indicated as the most important language by 4.19% of the younger group, and by 11.92% of the older group. Besides, only one respondent in the former group and 18 in the latter (9.33%) saw no need to learn a foreign language. However, the differences between the age groups are more notable and consistent regarding the need for learning a foreign language in the professional context. While the demand for English remains high with persons in their twenties, as 91.1% of them still put English on top (2.6% keep to German and about as many pick another language, and again about as many report they do not need any foreign languages), the situation is different

with their elders. Notably fewer, but still quite a significant number, 59.99% of those over 30, find English the most desirable at work, while 5.18% consider it most useful to learn German, but the number of those who claim that it is not important for them to learn any foreign language rises to as many as 26 (13.47%).

Logically, the second most important and desirable foreign language in Croatia is German. This is somewhat different from the European situation. While, just as in Croatia, the most widely studied and the most popular foreign language in the European Union is English, since 60.3% of all school students who learn modern languages in Europe study English, the next position is divided between French and German. They differ, though. French is studied mostly in English-speaking countries, but it is still learned by almost a third of European students (30.4%). On the other hand, German is preferred as the second FL in northern and Eastern Europe, but it is learned by a relatively small number of European students (5.2%). Comparatively, 18.7% of our sample studied German as the only foreign language (and many more studied this language among the 54.89% of our population who studied more than one FL). Incidentally, in the European Union, 3.5% study Spanish and only 0.6% study other foreign languages (Graddol, 1997:45). With more than half of our sample having learned more than one foreign language, FLL in Croatia seems to include more variety and frequency of foreign languages than FLL in Europe.

Besides, as demonstrated by the European findings mentioned above, French is largely preferred to Italian in Europe, while a majority of our respondents finds that Italian is more relevant as the third most desirable language within their private and professional contexts. This is even more important as the population tested was largely from continental Croatia, rather than the southern parts, where Italian is traditionally significant, and in places even the dominant foreign language. Both French and Spanish do appear as desirable and important languages in our survey, whether in second or third place, but these languages do not come before Italian. Comparing the popularity of French and Spanish as the second and third most important languages, it can be seen that French is in the lead over Spanish – about twice as many choose it over Spanish. However, when chosen, respectively, as the third most important language, they appear almost equally popular, especially in participants' private lives, with French slightly in the lead. Nevertheless, comparing the two age groups in our sample, it can be noted that Spanish gains popularity with the younger group faster than with the elder, especially in the professional context. For example, 10.99% in the younger group and 5.18% in the older group chose Spanish as the third most desirable language at work.

On the other hand, we determined that both age groups tend to recognize the need for, and importance of, various foreign languages in both contexts, but on the whole the younger tend to show more interest in a larger choice of languages, while their elders mostly rely upon those traditionally well represented in Croatian schools.

Furthermore, the results of this survey suggest that people have positive attitudes towards learning foreign languages in schools, especially the population represented by our sample: those who are educated, at least to secondary level, mostly either employed or studying, and mostly from an urban environment. They stress that English should be learned as the first foreign language in schools, followed by German, Italian, French and Spanish. It is striking





that the sample is almost unanimous regarding the priority of foreign languages that should be learned at school. Since the above-mentioned five languages were offered on our list to be ranked, we presumed the participants could have been slightly guided in their decisions. In fact, most of them did stick to exactly those five languages. However, a significant number of 88 in all (22.68%) modified that list. Some removed languages (6.95%), others created an individual list, omitting some languages offered and adding some other languages (2.06%). Finally, as many as 13.66% ranked all five, and listed additional languages. The enthusiasm of the participants in choosing sometimes up to seven or eight languages to be learned at school, but five on average, shows a welcome awareness of the educational importance of learning foreign languages as a means of personal growth. It also demonstrates openness towards the modern world, and strikes an optimistic note. These findings very strongly lead us towards the answer to Richards' question on the need for knowing foreign languages in the wider community (2001: 27): the wider community in Croatia considers it important that all its members know not only one, but more foreign languages, and that it is not considered necessary only for certain professional domains, but for everybody.

Finally, based on the responses to the survey, we could also fulfill our second goal and identify certain specific areas and activities that could form the frame for more detailed research. The findings suggest that the participants' needs for English go beyond knowing the "*common core*" of the basic language skills. Both their private and professional lives demand mastering a variety of specific language-related skills in diverse contexts. These results are particularly useful in developing a more precise instrument for measuring the concrete needs of various professional groups with respect to FLL in general and learning English as a foreign language in particular. In other words, they offer a sound base for further research.

CONCLUSION

The data analyzed for the purpose of this article is substantial. The fact that 98% of the participants have been involved in learning one or more foreign languages shows the great significance that Croatian society allots to foreign languages. We have also established a considerable need for learning and knowing foreign languages. The language that the participants find most useful in their professional and private lives is English, followed by German as the second, and Italian as the third most important foreign languages.

The participants also show positive attitudes towards learning foreign languages in schools. Their needs as adults are reflected in the way they feel about which foreign languages should be learned and taught in school. Accordingly, English as the first choice and German as the second were selected almost unanimously, whereas Italian was frequently chosen as the third. However, despite these priorities, the awareness of the need and significance of learning as many foreign languages as possible is equally evident.

Furthermore, we can establish that knowing the common core of the English language no longer suffices in people's private and professional lives. Basic needs have been identified and certain areas of foreign language learning emphasized. This information gives us ground

to establish categories of skills and sub-skills in English that should become an integral part of the English curriculum necessary for today's population.

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ENGLESKI I DRUGI STRANI JEZICI U HRVATSKOJ – ANALIZA POTREBA

Članak donosi rezultate preliminarnog istraživanja potreba odrasle populacije za učenjem stranih jezika u Hrvatskoj. Pokazalo se da je engleski jezik najvažniji i najpotrebniji strani jezik te mu se daje prednost, kako u privatnoj, tako i u profesionalnoj sferi. Slijedi njemački, dosljedno na drugome mjestu. S obzirom na mišljenja ispitanika o jezicima koji bi se trebali poučavati u osnovnim školama i o njihovu redoslijedu, prvi je ponovno engleski jezik, a drugi njemački. Svi ispitanici smatraju da ta dva jezika nužno trebaju biti zastupljena u školi. Međutim, postoji visok stupanj suglasnosti o potrebi učenja što većega broja stranih jezika. Osim toga, članak donosi i podatke o tome koje konkretne vještine ispitanici navode kao potrebne te u kojim situacijama im je bitno znanje engleskoga jezika. Ti su rezultati ujedno temelj za izradu preciznijega instrumenta za daljnja istraživanja potreba u učenju stranih jezika u različitim profesionalnim kontekstima.

Ključne riječi: analiza potreba, engleski kao strani jezik, učenje stranih jezika, engleski za posebne potrebe



