

# Chapter 16

## Competitiveness in the Language Service Industry in Colombia and Spain: Perspectives to Increase Productivity

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### ABSTRACT

*Enterprises in the Colombian language service industry require, as in all trades, increasing competitiveness to stay in the market and grow. In a rapid changing business environment, companies must increase their competitive advantages and/or implement them if they want to stay active and be sustainable. This chapter analyzes the current situation of the Colombian language service industry and benchmarks it against the same business in Spain, a country with a modest yet more robust sector within the Spanish-speaking world. It further discusses some strategies that Colombian language service providers at large could adopt to increase productivity. Since the language service industry is rapidly growing across the world, Colombia needs also to stay ahead in aspects that make it grow. Market trends, the use of updated technology, proper training of professionals, and some other related aspects are likewise scrutinized. A proposal for an in-depth quantitative research is also outlined.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Companies in the language service industry should, as in all other industries, increase competitiveness in order to stay in the market and grow. Competitiveness makes all trades feel engaged in growing and achieving better results. In a rapid changing business environment, companies have to increase their competitive advantages and implement them if they want to stay active and sustainable in time.

In the past decade much has been discussed and published about *competitiveness* (Porter: 1991, 2008; Schwab: 2016, 2017, 2019), *productivity* (Collins: 2005; Covey: 1989; Cowen: 2011; Gutiérrez: 2014; Kogon, Merrill and Rinne: 2015; Sharpe and Tsang: 2018), *the world's language service market and the evolution thereof* (ATA: 2016; ELIA: 2019; Nimdzi: 2019; Pym: 2012; SDL: 2016), or *the Spanish-speaking world' language service providers* (Clavijo: 2006, 2008, 2013, 2018; Diéguez, Lazo and Quezada: 2014; Escobedo and Garvich: 2016; Fernández: 2018; Franco and Quiroz: 2011; Fundación Italia Morayta: 2017; Lozano: 2011; Morán: 2010; Morón: 2010; Quiroz, Gómez and Zuloaga: 2015; Rico and García: 2016), but not many works have described how Spanish-speaking LSPs may get more productive by becoming more competitive in a *scenario predominantly controlled by companies based in English-speaking countries*.

All of the aforementioned scholars stress the importance of analyzing competitiveness as an element of productivity in the language service industry. For Colombia to strengthen it, perhaps some lessons could be learned from Spain, a country where some medium-scale yet highly competitive companies are elbowing their way in a world predominantly dominated by giant English-speaking stakeholders.

Section 2 of this paper revolves around the intersection of the following five key concepts: (i) competitiveness and productivity; (ii) the world's language service market; (iii) the language service market in Spain; (iv) an overview of the language service market in some major countries of the Spanish-speaking America; and (v) the language service market in Colombia. Section 3 compares the situation of the language service industry in the different countries mentioned in the above section. Section 4 suggests a few research directions. Section 5, finally, wraps up all the above and focuses on how the future of the language service industry in Colombia might grow more competitive.

## BACKGROUND: FACTS AND FIGURES

### Competitiveness and Productivity

*Competitiveness* has long been studied in different industries as a key indicator of how companies (and countries) may become stronger and more profitable. Notwithstanding the many definitions that have been proposed for it, we will adhere, for the purposes of this chapter, to the one advanced by the World Economic Forum (WEF), an institution which has been measuring and benchmarking it across countries since 1979. As noted by Schwab (2019: xi), the WEF holds that *competitiveness* may be best referred to as “the set of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level of productivity”, while emphasizing, at the same time, that “the causal link from productivity to growth and income is firmly grounded in theory and has been established empirically” (2019: 2).

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