

# DOUBLE TROUBLE: INTEGRATED TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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## Abstract

One of the eight competencies for lifelong learning defined by the EU Reference Framework is communication in foreign languages. Based on the assumption that formal education should prepare students for lifelong learning, foreign language learning (and teaching) at the graduate level of professional studies at the *Baltazar Adam Krčelić College of Business and Management from Zaprešić, Croatia* has moved into the area of LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) because of the demands of the students and the labour market. This paper will give an overview of this process.

The problem encountered was the lack of adequate teaching materials that would fit into the integrated model of teaching foreign languages and core courses. The solution was preparing our own materials that would be tailored according to the needs of our students and the specificities of our teaching reality, such as large multi-level groups and the dynamics of short intense courses.

The current result is one published LSP textbook (English for Project Management) and two textbooks in preparation. The emphasis in foreign languages teaching, and consequently in the preparation of teaching materials, is placed on combining foreign language competencies with the core subject competencies, while developing thinking skills and another EU Reference Framework competency – learning to learn.

Keywords: Foreign languages, lifelong learning, teaching materials, integrated teaching.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Communication in foreign languages is a skill that is becoming indispensable. The EU Reference Framework defines it as one of the eight competencies for lifelong learning - the idea of an ongoing pursuit of knowledge that has recently been given a lot of consideration by educational policy makers. Based on the assumption that formal education should prepare students for lifelong learning, foreign language learning (and teaching) at the graduate level of professional studies at the *Baltazar Adam Krčelić College of Business and Management in Zaprešić, Croatia*, has moved into the area of LSP (Language for Specific Purposes). The process was initiated by students who expressed the need to learn those aspects of foreign languages (English and German in this case) which are closely related to their jobs and the work they perform. Since it is not easy to teach LSP to diverse, mixed-ability groups of students, a strategy was devised which would eventually lead both the teachers and the students to their common goal – acquiring core competences for their jobs and foreign language skills to match them. This paper will give an overview of this process, dubbed the “Double Trouble” approach.

## 2 FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE CONTEXT OF LIFELONG LEARNING

*“Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death”*

– Albert Einstein.

The idea of lifelong learning is not as new and modern as is sometimes thought. People have always felt that it is very important to keep one’s mind busy and never stop acquiring new knowledge, but only recently has this idea been implemented into educational policies and found its way into educational strategies.

The EU Reference Framework defines eight key competences for lifelong learning (European Parliament and Council of Europe, 2006):

- communication in the mother tongue
- communication in foreign languages
- mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
- digital competence
- learning to learn
- social and civic competences
- sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- cultural awareness and expression

One of these competences is the competence to communicate in foreign languages. In today's interconnected and interdependent world, knowledge of foreign languages is essential and plays an important role in everyone's education. Foreign language learning is encouraged in the EU and the aim of enabling EU citizens to acquire two foreign languages is ambitious, yet necessary. Usually called "mother tongue plus two languages", this strategy aims at creating a multilingual workforce which would be competitive on the international labour market and able to increase its employability. This specific competence not only helps students acquire new knowledge and improve their skills in certain areas of both their professional and personal life, but also develops positive attitudes towards other nations, their cultures and diversity in general. As explained in the EAEA (The European Association for the Education of Adults) Statement on the proposal on key competences for lifelong learning in spring 2006, "Foreign languages, for example, help broaden people's views of society and shape their attitudes in a new way; they help communicating with people from other backgrounds and cultures; they may support democratic approaches in communication; they increase opportunities to participate in economic life of the common European space, etc." (EAEA, 2006).

### **3 LANGUAGE FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES**

The students themselves have become aware of the need to learn foreign languages because of the current situation on the labour market. They realize that if they want to be successful in their professional life, they have to master not, for instance, only general English or business English (or another language), but also the Language for Specific Purposes. The knowledge of LSP gives them the competitive edge they feel is sometimes crucial in finding and keeping a good job.

### **4 OUR CONTEXT**

*Baltazar Adam Krčelić College of Business and Management* in Zaprrešić, Croatia offers study programmes at both undergraduate and graduate level. At the undergraduate level (first-cycle) students can choose between three professional study programmes, i.e. business and finance, cultural management and office management. At the graduate level (second-cycle) they choose between specialist graduate programmes of finance management, project management and communications management.

The organization of study programmes at the *Baltazar Adam Krčelić College* has a pyramidal structure – its base (the first year) offering general and introductory courses which become more and more specialised in the subsequent years of study. Since the same structure is applied to language courses, the first year is general to a certain extent, the second year introduces general business English with little specialisation (depending on the study programme), while the graduate level is highly specialised and covers the LSP area of each of the specialist programmes.

### **5 THE TROUBLE WITH LANGUAGE FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES**

Since the students clearly stated their need to learn LSP at graduate level, a strategy had to be developed in order to enable them to achieve this goal. A lot of problems had to be solved along the way – large mixed-ability groups and extensive syllabus being only some of them. This paper gives an overview of this strategy and the process of implementing it.

At the undergraduate level the students come from all kinds of secondary schools, both vocational and grammar schools. Among part-time students there are also older ones who have never learnt English (or German, which is also taught). They also do all sorts of jobs and some of them use English on a daily basis, while others not at all. This results in multi-level groups. Add to that a large number of students in groups, an extensive syllabus and quite a limited amount of class-time, and it becomes quite obvious that no standard course book could fully accommodate our needs. (Jurina Babović et al., 2013)

The situation is even more complex with the graduate level students since they follow the same condensed study scheme of intensive courses, while learning LSP. Teaching materials available on the market were not adequate because they needed to fit a 15- or 20- hour course and at the same time cover the required subject matter. The result was either inadequate coverage or too extensive materials that had to be adapted and could only be used partially. More importantly, the students expressed a need for specialized language focusing on their chosen programme (such as project management) which was simply not offered on the market.

## **6 THE SOLUTION(S)**

The solution to the described problems was to prepare materials that would be tailored according to the needs of our students and the specificities of our teaching reality.

### **6.1 Solution 1- the “Double Trouble” Approach**

In the case of the English course for Project Management students (second cycle - graduate level) the idea of using English Language Teaching (ELT) to support core-subjects classes was elaborated having in mind the advantages of an interdisciplinary approach to teaching as an ideal instruction approach for classes oriented towards providing students with practical knowledge. This was also in accordance with the authors' firm belief that such an approach was far more productive than forcing the students to learn grammar rules and vocabulary in a de-contextualized classroom environment. It has also proved to be very interesting to students since the focus was not only on developing the four traditional language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) but also on developing specific language skills necessary for project management, which they would be able to apply in practice and therefore find very relevant. (Skledar Matijević et al., 2012)

With this in mind, an integrated model of teaching English and project management was first developed in theory. The next step, the testing of this model was to be conducted in English classes. However, there were no teaching materials for teaching English for project management on the ESP textbooks market so new teaching materials had to be produced. The students' request was to place the English course in the area of ESP (English for Specific Purposes), with a strong emphasis on project management terminology.

According to Paltridge and Starfield, ESP refers to teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language where the goal is to use English in a particular domain. A key feature of an ESP course is that the content and aims of the course are oriented to the specific needs of the learners. ESP courses, then, focus on the language, skills, and genres appropriate to the specific activities the learners need to carry out in English. Key issues in the teaching of English for specific purposes are how to identify student learner needs, the nature of the genres that learners need to be able to produce as well as participate [...] (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). In the light of this definition, all the preparatory steps were taken and the students' request was given serious attention.

The students' request for an ESP course for project management presented the authors with a challenge but the solution which imposed itself was simple – using the ICB – the International Project Management Association (IPMA) Competence Baseline 3.0 as the basic authentic material for learning English. A language-centered approach to course design was then adopted, in order to produce an ESP course for Project management that would meet the students' needs. (See Figure 1).

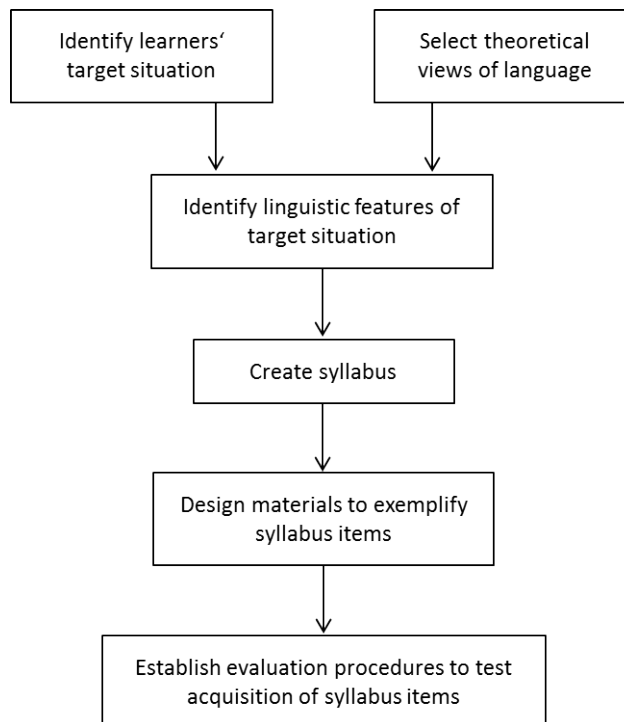


Figure 1: A language-centered approach to course design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987)

The ICB was first methodologically adjusted to serve ESP purposes – developing the four basic language skills, while placing special emphasis on vocabulary. A syllabus was created based on the 46 competence elements defined by the IPMA ICB, which were adapted to encourage students to acquire new vocabulary by means of vocabulary tasks, such as matching exercises, collocations exercises, cloze tests, word games, word search puzzles, crossword puzzles etc. This proved to be the biggest challenge of all since the language of the ICB is rather “dry” and its text was not intended to be used in an ESP classroom. A lot of resourcefulness and imagination was needed to create teaching materials that would be neither too difficult, nor too easy and the fact that the target audience was a number of multi-leveled classes made the process even more complex. However, the resulting materials proved to be both interesting and relevant and enabled the students to develop not only their English language skills, but also their project management competences. So, although the original idea was to design an ESP course, the result was an interdisciplinary course. (Skledar, Barilović, Vrečko, 2013)

The final product – the textbook - focuses on the specific English project management terminology, but also on the Project Management competences themselves. Students learn English vocabulary, lexical chunks and grammatical constructions while being focused on the project management context. They are provided with the knowledge and skills necessary for passing the exam and earning ECTS points but they can also prepare for IPMA certification at the same time. Also, the textbook fit perfectly into the curriculum, both in the sense of the course content and in the technical sense (it is an intense short course at the upper intermediate B2 level)

The positive reactions from the students and the project management community have encouraged us to apply a similar approach to teaching German, because the situation with teaching materials, i. e. the lack of adequate teaching materials for German for project management, is similar. A new German course for project management students with corresponding teaching materials is currently being prepared, using the same “Double Trouble” approach that was successfully applied to the English LSP course.

## 6.2 Solutions in the making

There are two other areas of LSP that are taught at the *Baltazar Adam Krčelić* College – foreign languages for communications management and for finance. Also, there are two other textbooks resulting from our “Double Trouble” approach to teaching LSP – German for Financial Management, which should be ready in the course of this academic year and English for Communications Management which is in the preparatory stage. The fact that the curricula demand short courses is

reflected in the structure of the textbooks. The learning outcomes of the graduate study programmes are reflected in the specific learning outcomes of these foreign language courses and the textbooks are designed so that these outcomes are achieved.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The guiding idea of LSP instruction at the Baltazar Adam Krčelić College is to further specialize the Business English courses at the undergraduate level, especially the English course for Cultural Management. While there is a wide variety of teaching materials for the area of general economy and general management, this is not the case with Cultural Management. Since there is a need for an ESP textbook in this area in order to meet the demands of the curriculum, our plans for the future will move in this direction. Naturally, the teaching materials will be tailored according to our needs: the number of hours, group size and the expected learning outcomes.

The emphasis in the “Double Trouble” approach to foreign languages teaching, and consequently in the preparation of teaching materials, is placed on combining foreign language competencies with the core subject competencies, while developing thinking skills and another EU Reference Framework competency – learning to learn\*. This will, hopefully, contribute to the employability of our students.

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