

Languages for specific purposes – challenges in teaching on the example of German philology

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ABSTRACT: The aim of the text is the description of the teaching process of languages for specific purposes in philology studies. The paper presents an outline of courses on business language at the Institute of German Studies, University of Warsaw, designed both to teach language skills and convey professional knowledge in the CLIL formula, which is becoming more and more popular. The author focuses on the problem how to combine important academic goals: to teach economics, on the one hand, and to practice intercultural communication skills, on the other. Special consideration is given to the teachers' problems. The teacher must not only teach German, but also introduce his students to various branches of economics. The question is how to fulfill the task successfully. It is argued here, how an academic teacher should be prepared to take that challenge successfully and to provide the balance between both goals: content and language. The project is in line with a new trend in foreign language teaching in higher education. The trend consists in implementing and fulfilling real life tasks as a part of teaching languages for specific purposes.

KEYWORDS:

- language for specific purposes
- teaching
- philology
- challenges
- activities

1. Introduction

1.1. LSP teaching at a university

LSP teaching as part of foreign language courses at a university (also at human sciences universities) has gained importance in recent years. Societies have become more mobile; students participate in different foreign exchange programmes, hold apprenticeships and internships in enterprises, take up professional work during their studies and want universities to prepare them for their profession. Class groups become increasingly diverse with respect to age, culture and knowledge as many pursue education in two or more fields of study and bring different subject-related experiences from the bachelor's degree stage to the master's degree programme. This is the environment that a tutor – a LSP teacher – has to navigate. Thanks to their education, the tutor is usually a teaching methodology expert, but not necessarily an specialist in the subject area taught. Such work is based on continuous further training and then harmonising linguistic and subject issues and keeping them relatively balanced. Professionalism, on the other hand, is based on the operational use of competences at their disposal so that the programmed and/or implemented educational process could end with a didactic success (Sowa, 2018, p. 122).

This paper aims to reflect on the work of LSP teachers conducting classes at universities (mainly in the humanities) and their educational needs. The article provides an example of studies in the field of philology educating German students who pursue careers in a variety of professional fields after graduation. Some of these students find employment in the economy (in its various sectors), others become translators or teachers, including LSP teachers. "The professionalisation of language education visible in recent years (also in philological studies) clearly directs the education process towards specific skills required and/or desired in the professional environment. Students who learn foreign languages in order to employ knowledge thereof in future work, want to attain as high proficiency as possible, since linguistic competence is the key to success in the labour market" (Sowa, 2018, p. 123). The analysis of the specificity of the modern business services sector in Poland, with its demand for graduates with a good and very good command of German, results, however, also in the conclusion that in planning a university-level LSP course, from the learner's perspective it seems unfavourable to educate language competences with the specific, currently existing labour market demand in view. It seems more advantageous to develop skills that prepare philology graduates for the ever-changing market conditions (Makowski, 2018, p. 73).



1.2. Defining concepts and needs

Students of the master's degree programme at the Institute of German Studies at the University of Warsaw can study the language of economics¹. However, does such a language even exist? There is no clear answer and no unambiguous definitions – many researchers describe it as an umbrella term covering many languages for specific purposes². In her considerations, the author of this article inclines towards the definition of LSP provided by Rosemarie Buhlmann and Anette Fearn (2000, p. 124), according to whom the term refers to "professional languages, used by various groups of people" with different education and training, forms of activity and various communication goals used in the professional, academic and/or educational field in some way related to the economy. Later in this paper, an attempt will be made to specify what a lecturer is to teach future philologists, although "given the multitude of definitions of a specialist language, developing the foundations of LSP teaching methodology [...] turns out to be a substantial challenge" (Gajewska and Sowa, 2014, p. 26).

What are the needs of students, and thus the needs of academic LSP teachers – these issues have been discussed for many years. The fundamental questions are: Should a philologist know the language of the economy and to what extent, e.g. marketing, tourism, advertising and logistics? Should philology curricula be adapted to the labour market and consider the language of business to prepare graduates to enter demanding global markets safely? What skills are most important to them? These questions were put to both students and employers, yet the answers were surprisingly similar. Business communication skills are the most important for both parties in learning a foreign language, including conducting business correspondence, negotiations, and phone conversations (i.e. "dealing with matters" in a foreign language). Małgorzata Held of the Cracow University of Economics (Held, 2015, p. 79) conducted research confirming those findings. Her surveys show that employers expect the following skills from their employees: communication, correspondence and negotiation. On the other hand, students seek knowledge in a given field and professional and communication skills. So, there is certain compliance in both sides' expectations. The latest survey conducted in April and May 2020 by Maria Walasek of the University of Warsaw (Walasek, 2021) on a group of the so-called young adults confirmed it. The survey examined respondents' motivation to learn, determining to what extent their professional activity (or willingness to undertake it) contributed to taking up foreign language education

¹ *Fachsprache Wirtschaft* (Ger.).

² *Fachsprachen* (Ger.).



(in this case: German). In this age group, similar to our student groups, issues related to communication and the practical application of a foreign language at work prevailed.

On the other hand, there is less research devoted to business language teachers themselves, although they are the ones who try to satisfy both parties in the labour market through their work. They often ask themselves questions essential to achieving those goals and have to answer them on their own. So, what is the specificity of an LSP teacher's work, in particular, an academic teacher at the human sciences university? What are the challenges ahead? Let us take a closer look at the specifics of a LSP teacher's work.

A teacher encounters various specialist texts, obtaining them from authentic sources. The teacher develops in students the ability to read, write, listen and speak – for professional purposes. By shaping various aspects of these skills, the educator arranges exercises independently, tailoring them to the recipients' proficiency and the specificity of the industry they try to navigate. Usually, instead of using a textbook, the teacher processes selected professional texts for educational purposes. The educator uses skills that must be constantly developed and updated in response to the developing economy. The teacher needs a lot of time for this development to prepare students to be ideal candidates for the labour market (Held, 2015, p. 79). Summing up, it is a serious task potentially contributing to improving the image of a candidate in the eyes of an employee (Held, 2015, p. 80). Along the way, it turns out that the knowledge of German – not too often pursued by students – is considered a necessary skill by employers (Held, 2015, p. 75). What prompts students to enrol in LSP classes? What counts for the recipients of the educational offer is its attractiveness consisting of the direct impact of the learning content and process on life after graduation, when they intend to quickly find a well-paid and interesting job in which the skills acquired at the university will prove useful (Sowa, 2015, p. 112). Thus, three parties – the employer, the future employee and the lecturer – are interested in the richest possible offer of LSP classes in one of the desired foreign languages.

1.3. Acquiring linguistic, business and cultural competences

This article briefly presents the challenges that result from the confrontation between the goals of foreign language teaching in philologies and the practical aspects of the subject dictated by the labour market (Strzelecka, 2017, p. 143). Which language for specific purposes can be taught to future philologists? Referring to the definition of Buhlman and Fearn (2000, p. 124) cited in the introduction, several examples of languages can be given that offer



learners a certain cross-section of the economy that are not technical in nature and do not require in-depth knowledge of the subject. These are, for example, the language of marketing and advertising, tourism, and even the language of logistics. Introducing students to the professional vocabulary and basic knowledge in these fields will allow them to gain experience and build their own language base, which they will be able to use in their future employment. The Institute of German Studies at the University of Warsaw offers master's degree students a LSP course that meets thus formulated specific needs.

Regardless of the chosen economy field or branch, the programme also covers intercultural themes. In fact, taking up the subject of the specific needs of philology students, apart from purely linguistic matters, one cannot ignore the transfer of intercultural knowledge, i.e. information and skills that will help graduates find their way in an international environment and protect them from making "cultural" mistakes in the company of German business partners. Therefore, patterns of linguistic behaviour and practical knowledge about business partners, their mentality and habits are also the subjects of LSP classes during the second-cycle studies. The culture and customs of a given country are presented in the context of the economy, so a specific goal of the classes is to develop certain cultural sophistication allowing effective business communication in speech and writing. This is best explained when comparing business correspondence of different countries, in this case, Poland and Germany. The ability to write a concise and factual letter using well-established formulaic structures and phrases (and this is what we teach in commercial correspondence courses) made work for a German company easier for many graduates. During oral communication classes, we develop the ability to communicate in a foreign language in a given field and various environments (according to the NQF), including the ability to popularise a given area of knowledge or effective promotion, which is extremely important, for instance, for the advertising and tourism industry.

The classes, collectively called *Wirtschaftsdeutsch*, therefore aim to skilfully combine the content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approach with building cultural competences – all this to introduce specialist vocabulary, enable students to prove themselves in real professional communication situations, teach them German structures of formal correspondence and provide them with knowledge from selected economy sectors. At the same time, the issue of linguistic correctness and the assessment of the correct application of grammatical rules, proper syntax, varied vocabulary and style within the performed tasks remain invariably important.

2. Challenges for lecturers

The business and management language classes for students of German studies are to develop communication skills and transfer knowledge in a foreign language, in this case in the field of broadly understood business, advertising and tourism, marketing and logistics. We should remember that students of language faculties – unlike, for example, those from economic faculties – generally do not have more profound knowledge about the functioning of the economy and financial markets. Therefore, the lecturer's role is to initiate and support the process of gaining and assimilating professional economic knowledge by them. At the same time, the teacher must conduct discussions in a foreign language, in this case, an intercultural debate, and carry out philological tasks (e.g. teaching the correct terminology, strictly following the rules of grammar and building sentences according to a complicated syntax). On the one hand, the teacher provides students with professional vocabulary and knowledge in a given field, teaching classes according to the CLIL approach, which is a current tendency or even a priority in European education policy; on the other hand, the teacher tries to accomplish the educational goals of German studies (using a sophisticated language, distinguishing linguistic nuances and adequate stylistics). Let us remember that not all graduates will work in large corporations, and many will take up teaching where language perfection is a must. The challenge is attending to a number of goals simultaneously and finding an answer to whether this unified approach will allow our graduates to succeed in the global economy and simply enable them to find an interesting and well-paid job quickly. Will learning German for economy purposes in German studies prove to be the key to their career?

The challenge is to profile the teaching of a foreign language in the second-cycle studies in such a way that it meets the needs of the labour market. At the same time, the terminology and phrases communicated in LSP teaching (e.g. "business language") should be questioned and subjected to constant analysis. This means that the foreign language we teach in philology courses cannot be reduced to efficient communication in economic and business situations. We are supposed to help students cope with professional situations, but we also teach them philological correctness and this way of thinking. The challenge for the lecturer is to take this special journey along a balance beam, i.e. maintain equilibrium between all educational goals so that our "final product", namely a German philology graduate fluent in speech and writing, is ready to address various challenges in the constantly changing labour market (Strzelecka, 2017, p. 148).



3. Formulas, approaches and strategies

Wirtschaftsdeutsch classes are practical in nature, they respond to students' interest in learning elements of specialist language for work-related purposes. However, they are not tailor-made courses (the "demand logic"). They fit into the "logic of supply", i.e. they do not correspond to the learner's current need but "somehow anticipate the learner's future potential needs", without guaranteeing that the skills acquired in the course of studies will eventually be used (Sowa, 2016, p. 143). In this context, three theoretical foundations on which we base LSP teaching are of importance:

- CLIL approach;
- task-based approach;
- ludic strategy.

3.1. CLIL

According to the CLIL approach³, teaching includes practical learning of professional vocabulary and gaining knowledge in a given field. LSP teaching in the CLIL formula means that the lecturer simultaneously teaches a foreign language and provides students with industry knowledge delivered in that language. Philology students are also interested in learning about culture and customs in the economy or business as well as corporate culture. Classes are taught using the CLIL approach when, in assessing students' achievements, the factual content, i.e. professional content, and the mastery of a foreign language (maintaining grammatical and stylistic correctness) are equally taken into account. Additionally, the use of correct specialist vocabulary is assessed and respecting cultural differences in the created or translated texts. So, it is about the ability to present, prepare and translate specialist texts.

3.2. Task-based approach

The observation of social behaviour indicates a close relationship between learning and action. The task-based approach to teaching foreign languages is an educational tendency being the next step in developing communication methods (Janowska, 2011, p. 17). A feature of this trend is the combining communication with social activity. As a result, the difference between the learning and the use of language blurs (Janowska, 2011, p. 84) and performed tasks provide learning with meaning. This approach aims to develop the ability to cooperate in a group and cooperative activity. The foreign language becomes an instrument of communication, action, and striving for a common outcome. Learners are given specific tasks – writing

³ *Fach- und sprachintegriertes Lernen (Ger).*

a letter, conducting a phone call, negotiating a price, presenting a product, creating an advertising leaflet, coming up with a slogan or developing a marketing strategy – which, "incidentally", are carried out in a foreign language.

3.3. Ludic strategy

The ludic strategy⁴ means learning a foreign language through games, which is fun⁵. Teresa Siek-Piskozub writes about it in the book *Uczyć się, bawiąc. Strategia ludyyczna na lekcji języka obcego* (2001), entirely dedicated to learning the language by playing. This strategy focuses on the implementation of fun tasks. This approach works very well in a LSP lesson, e.g. when students engage in role-playing as enterprise employees and must communicate with each other to fulfil their assigned tasks. The ludic strategy applies techniques referring to playing games in a classroom to solve problems in a foreign language. Therefore, learners are involved in solving tasks, but the goal is achieved through fun and play. Interested in a practical aspect of teaching, the instructor pursues another objective. The most important factors leading to the educational success of this approach include group activity and willingness to acquire subject knowledge in a foreign language, and an experienced and well-prepared teacher.

4. Class topics – examples

We select topics of classes without exact knowledge of what will be the future occupations of our graduates. Still, we are generally guided by usability and suitability criteria in various sectors of the economy. It is challenging to teach strictly technical or hermetic languages, although such attempts are undertaken with already popular languages of law or medicine. However, the broadly understood language of the economy seems to open a wider room for manoeuvre. Therefore, let us look at three proposals that work as a programme offered for master's degree students of German philology.

4.1. Marketing and advertising

During classes on advertising, students learn about vocabulary and language structures and locutions, enabling them to edit advertising texts, e-mails, letters, product descriptions (*Produktdesign* elements, corporate identity elements),

⁴ *Ludische, spielerische Strategie* (Ger.).

⁵ *Spaß* (Ger.).



brochures and information leaflets. They also analyse and edit direct marketing texts (*Werbebrief*, newsletter). Exercises also include phone conversations and selling products and services using language games. Discussion, analysis and translation of texts taking into account cultural differences are also the fixed component of classes. Basic thematic areas are:

- Advertising as a form of communication;
- Linguistic means in advertising;
- Means of advertising and its message;
- Target groups and marketing;
- Advertising impact;
- Analysing and composing advertising slogans;
- English loanwords in German advertising;
- Polish-German comparative analysis.

Marketing classes include issues such as negotiations, trade correspondence and intercultural training. The effect of education should be, *inter alia*, spontaneous and correct response in a telephone conversation and a written expression of content promoting a product or service. At the same time, it is important to demonstrate not only knowledge of vocabulary but also different shades of meaning or wordplays (puns) necessary, for example, to edit an advertising text. The course prepares for work in the commercial or advertising industry and launching one's own business. In the practical part of the course, its participants present a product that, in their opinion, is applicable for the German market. As part of these activities, the presentation of the product in a foreign language also takes place – and employers seek this type of skill.

4.2. Tourism

The linguistic training for the tourism industry is not terminological (typical, for example, for specialist technical languages), but is a social activity in a foreign language, spoken and written. In class, the learner acquires language skills facilitating employment in the tourism industry; however, the effects of education can be very versatile and interdisciplinary. The result of the course may even be a specific product, for example, a tourist publication. Tourism classes assume the task-based and ludic approach, preparing to work for travel agencies and portals offering such services. They focus on creativity, and their formulated objective is to promote Polish tourism in Germany, hence editing a convincing brochure (in a foreign language) on the region, cities, monuments or even one's own district. The education will result in good knowledge of the phrases needed to promote a tourist region, the ability to select information from various sources

(here, for example, non-use of German narrative in the promotion of Poland) and efficient translation of a promotional text taking into account cultural differences. The text may relate to a project involving looking for a partner or a sponsor (a genuine task).

4.3. Logistics

In the course on logistics, students learn about enterprise operations, breaking them down, and their relations with the outside world. Introduction to this subject is not easy for humanists but extremely useful; nevertheless, it prepares them well for work in many positions as it teaches the subject matter. Logistics facilitates learning about specifics of various professions and introduces issues related to the functioning of enterprises in the real-world labour market. A logistics language course allows students to gain valuable subject knowledge in business operations; it is also a fountain of terminology, professional phrases and expressions regarding transport and forwarding. In addition, it refers to other sectors of the economy, such as environmental protection or waste disposal systems interestingly. During classes, students learn about such concepts as *Holysystem* (in which waste and used packages are picked up from households), *Bringsystem* (households bring waste to a waste collection point), *DSD (Duales System Deutschland)*, a system widely referred to in Germany as *Grüner Punkt* (from a label placed on the packaging) or *Wertstoffhof* (selective waste collection points) – (Strzelecka, 2018, p. 101). Without going into details, it suffices to say that most of the course participants encounter this terminology for the first time. Still, it is useful not only for future employees but also for those who intend to live in Germany.

5. Future of LSP teaching at universities

After the end of the academic year 2020/2021, a survey was carried out with a total of 35 participants – three groups of Institute of German Studies students – attending the German marketing and advertising language course for two semesters, based on the aforementioned strategies. These were two fifteen-person groups and a six-person group (participants of the commercial correspondence course, an element of the “Communication in Business” module, in the previous academic year studying one of the *Wirtschaftsdeutsch* courses). Participation in the survey was voluntary. All respondents were under 30, i.e. in the group referred to as young adults. Some people (their proportion was not the object of study) combined education and work. Both the survey and the course took



place online, with more than half of the respondents (54.5%) declaring that they would prefer classes to be held in person.

The results show that LSPs are worth investing in: 63.6% of the respondents stated they had learned more in the marketing and advertising course than during general language classes. Also, all the respondents expressed the view that German studies should include LSP training⁶. Furthermore, 81.8% of the students would be happy to participate again in classes on marketing and advertising, the same percentage of the respondents would take up the tourism course, and 45.5% of that group would take up the logistics course as well as the general language of the economy (*Wirtschaftsdeutsch*) course. The general question of whether higher education should prepare for professional work resulted in an interesting response – over 90% of the students said “yes”.

The main direction in the development of LSP education should be an investment in a teacher who, in response to signalled needs, pursues more and more goals in classes, delivering professional, linguistic and intercultural content. A LSP teacher uses independently prepared materials, genuine or compiled, that Carolina Flinz defines as the “secret curriculum” (Flinz, 2019, p. 11). Such materials do not always work. While the task-based approach and the ludic strategy seem to be the right direction for the future of LSP teaching – these educational methods prove to be highly efficient (majority of the surveyed students expressed their wish to participate again in the same classes; they recognise LSP as a “helpful (tool) in searching for a job and in the future vocational life”). Such conclusions correspond with individualisation of education in line with teaching trends and guidelines advocated by the EU. These strategies are both effective and pleasant – tasks are not “school-like” but authentic and, as such, willingly performed. The vocabulary used in practice is absorbed “unknowingly”; therefore, there is no need to learn specialist terms and words by heart. Emotions (Koltsut, 2020, pp. 150-151) evoked during the tasks increase concentration and perseverance in language learning, while motivation stimulates achievements and results (Walasek, 2021, p. 212). The learners are “incidentally” involved in selecting information, comparing and analysing data to create their own creative foreign language texts. In contrast, the lecturer implements foreign language teaching goals and transfers the substantial content almost casually. Moreover, an LSP teacher practices interpersonal skills with students – and such skills are typically acquired through costly training delivered by professional coaches. Learners become autonomous (Siek-Piskozub, 2018, p. 66) without the tutor’s interference.

⁶ Own study conducted after the end of the 2021 summer semester, currently prepared for publication.



The time ratio of teacher to student utterances improves. The teacher is "relieved" from the teaching function and must only be authentic and on a par with students taking part in the game. Due to their experience, teachers organise students' work and assist in sorting out and stimulating the learning process (Siek-Piskozub, 2001, p. 131). As the tutor does not constantly control work, the group is not affected by stress. The teacher helps solve tasks, while learners experience a sense of achievement (Siek-Piskozub, 2001, p. 19)⁷.

Therefore, it can be stated that thanks to LSP in the humanities, motivation to learn increases. Over 90% of respondents answered "yes" to whether philologists should be interested in LSP, and many of them considered those languages "very important in foreign language learning". This happens regardless of whether the final course objective is achieved by the tutor. Intercultural competence also belongs to learning outcomes. It is achieved while performing specific tasks related to the economy and role-playing – today, this competence is considered an element of linguistic competence (Siek-Piskozub, 2018, p. 45). Activities and simulated situations result in learners taking responsibility not only for their individual assignments (an own text) but also for the entire team task (a group text). This prepares for authentic intercultural real-life contacts and strengthens intercultural sensitivity (Siek-Piskozub, 2018, p. 66). As it turns out, students, while writing their diploma thesis, consider not only personal interests but also the requirements of the labour market – they select subjects closely related to their professional activities, sometimes even to tasks they were assigned by their superiors (Kic-Drgas and Prokop, 2018, p. 33).

6. Conclusions

LSP classes meet the needs of the labour market and form a good base for successful professional communication in many areas of the economy. Such real communication occurs only when the graduate demonstrates a high level of linguistic and non-linguistic competence, knowledge of the subject, and cultural and intercultural skills. Surveys carried out after the end of the summer semester 2020/2021 and own observations suggest that interest in courses combining these three factors is very substantial and that students are very active participants. Curricula with economy-related content facilitate graduates' entry into the labour market. Also, the aforementioned surveys and general university surveys (very

⁷ *Erfolgs erlebnis* (Ger.)



positive evaluation results regarding marketing and advertising courses) show that classes that focus on linguistic prowess and convey subject content and instil skills valuable on the market are particularly popular. Therefore, the language of the economy became a fixture in the curriculum, and such courses do not compete with general language classes but are their valuable complement.

Several conclusions may and should be drawn from the above considerations. The database should be constantly developed by collecting up-to-date information directly from LSP teachers. There are still unexplored territories for researchers wishing to devote attention to LSP teaching methodology and strategies. The research should assist in diagnosing teachers' needs and developing a training network for those who want to devote time to finding out about LSP learning strategies. Groundwork projects are needed – if there are no other options – that would allow for synergy among scientific research, lesson strategies and work placements. It is the ideal to be sought to achieve a far-reaching goal, namely improved educational outcomes. LSP teachers in the humanities should be offered the opportunity of professional development in special courses, experience exchange with lecturers from universities of economics and participation in scientific conferences on languages for specific purposes.

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