PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO JOURNALISM STUDENTS

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Abstract. *The English language is an absolutely necessary means of communication nowadays, including in the journalistic field. The prospective journalists who use a correct English grammar and an extended vocabulary in English, related to the mass media, will definitely have an advantage in a competitive, performance-based globalized world. The present paper includes a survey of the English language needs of 1st year students in journalism at the Faculty of Letters, the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, and also refers to in-class activities suggested to the students and to some challenges encountered at the English course. The decrease of teaching semesters during the B.A. years of study should be counterbalanced by an increase of quality in the teacher's interaction with the students and of quantity regarding the students' individual work. The results of the survey revealed a series of learning methods, which if taken into consideration, could lead to an improvement of the relationship teacher-students, on the one hand, and of the students' English skills, on the other hand.*

Keywords*: English for specific purposes, didactics, journalism, higher education*

Introduction

The English language is essential for international communication nowadays, as it is a *lingua franca* people from different fields turn to when they want to communicate with one another. This should provide extra motivation when learning English. However, the number of foreign language classes for non-philological students has been reduced at Romanian universities in the past years. For instance, according to the new curriculum introduced at the Faculty of Letters of the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași in September 2017, the number of semesters of foreign languages offered to students in journalism was reduced from four to three. Similar situations exist at other faculties and universities as well, although the course has a frequency of only two hours a week, which is definitely not enough for practising a foreign language, especially a language for specific purposes (LSP).

In her keynote speech entitled "Teaching LSPs and LSP translation in the 21st century", given in Constanța within the international conference *Innovative Trends in Teaching Language for Specific Purposes in the Context of the Current Social Instability – INNO-LSP 2018*, Professor Aleksandra Matulewska from Adam Mickiewicz University Poland asserted that "in the European Union it is assumed that B2 level is optimal to teach an LSP" (Matulewska). We dare say that B2-level students starting to study an LSP in Romanian universities are rather an exception. The English starting level for instance for the students in journalism in Iași is B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

In what follows, we will present the students' answers concerning their learning needs when choosing to attend English for specific purposes (ESP). The survey is based on a questionnaire filled in by 40 students in journalism at the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, enrolled in the 1st year of study, who attended their first English course at the university on 3 October 2018.

> ESP is an approach to language teaching which aims to meet the needs of particular learners. This means in practice that much of the work done by ESP teachers is

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> concerned with designing appropriate courses for various groups of learners. [...] for the ESP teacher, course design is often a substantial and important part of the workload. Designing a course is fundamentally a matter of asking questions in order to provide a reasoned basis for the subsequent processes of syllabus design, materials writing, classroom teaching and evaluation. (Hutchinson, Waters 21)

In our opinion, a teacher should be first of all a partner to the students, who are at the beginning of their independent life. From our own experience, a constant dialogue is what grabs their attention first and foremost. That is why, we try to focus on their needs and ask about their expectations from the very beginning of the course. After one year of study we intend to ask for a feedback, with a SWOT analysis, to see which teaching methods functioned best in their case and how the course could be improved.

> The student-centred learning approach is diametrically opposed, in its ethos, to the philosophy underlying the conventional method of learning. By its very nature, student-centred learning allows students to shape their own learning paths and places upon them the responsibility to actively participate in making their educational process a meaningful one. (Kumar 1225)

Students' Learning Needs

> Good teaching is teaching that creates the foundation for and stimulates learning and development. It does not mean that, as teachers, we must necessarily have thorough knowledge of learning psychology or educational theory. But that means we have a conscious relationship with teaching. A good teacher is one who makes certain reflections on what is needed in order to learn and understand the subject he or she teaches. (Raaheim 141)[2]

What we intend to do is also to stimulate students' learning and personal development and function rather "as a guide" and "as a loving and caring person" (Eren, Tekinarslan 439-440)[3].

In the book *English for Specific Purposes: A Learning-Centred Approach* (Hutchinson, Waters 62-63), the two authors draw a framework which we used in order to analyse students' learning needs. The questions which we included in the students' questionnaire are to be found in Chapter 6, "Needs Analysis". We have taken into consideration only answers given more than three times, and the results of the survey can be seen below:

Why are the learners taking the course?

- *Compulsory or optional*

[2] "God undervisning er undervisning som skaper grobunn for og stimulerer til læring og utvikling. Det betyr ikke at vi som undervisere nødvendigvis må ha inngående kjennskap til læringspsykologi eller til pedagogisk teori. Men, det betyr at vi har et bevisst forhold til det å undervise. En god underviser er en som gjør seg visse refleksjoner over hva som skal til for å lære og å forstå det faget en underviser i" [our translation].

[3] In the study "Prospective Teachers' Metaphors: Teacher, Teaching, Learning, Instructional Material and Evaluation Concepts" by Altay Eren and Erkan Tekinarslan, the teacher concept was defined through three metaphors "Teacher as a loving and caring person", "Teacher as a guide" and "Teacher as a source of knowledge", out of which the first two best applied to our students' answers.

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Our students have the possibility to choose one compulsory foreign language between English, French and German. Many of them choose English because it is so widely spoken and so much used in all fields. The students can attend the course for a period of maximum three semesters.

- *Apparent need or not*
  The students answer they learn the language mostly for trainings involving personal development, for their studies in Romania or abroad, for communication with foreigners, for work abroad after graduation, for public speaking in English or an easier access to the mass-media available in English. Just a few have an immediate learning need for the "Work and Travel" programme for students or for language examinations necessary for study scholarships.

- *Are status, money, promotion involved?*
  Status, money and promotion are involved on a mid-term basis, in general not for the time being.

- *What do learners think they will achieve?*
  Learners think they will become more advanced users of the English language with improved writing, reading, listening and speaking skills. As mentioned in the "Introduction" to *Cambridge English for the Media*, for example, the units in the teaching materials are aimed to improve these skills through:

  - discussions of the media topics
  - listening activities reflecting everyday media scenarios which allow the students to learn the language used in different working situations […]
  - realistic speaking activities that give the students plenty of practice of the language looked at
  - realistic and writing practice, based on authentic media documents
  - engaging topics and articles which ensure that learning is interesting and motivating. (Ceramella, Lee 3)

- *What is their attitude towards the ESP course?*
  They want to improve their linguistic skills and enrich their vocabulary in the field of journalism, which requires some theoretical basis, but mostly practical applications by means of projects, discussions, exercises etc.

How do the learners learn?

- *What is their learning background?*
  The students began to study English at the latest in the lower secondary school, however, several of them prove lower linguistic knowledge than the B1 level. Since there is only one group of English for the 1st year, we have to follow the level of the average, namely B1 despite the varying levels (there are also a few students having already reached B2 level).

- *What is their concept of teaching and learning?*
  The students want their teachers to be informal, behave in a friendly way, be open-minded, have a sense of humour, not to show superiority, not to inspire fear, to

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explain several times, to pay the same attention to all students (both to the more talkative and to the shyer ones), to treat students with respect and last but not least, to update their course materials. A stress is put on the humane characteristics of the teacher and not so much on the encyclopaedic character of the teacher, since nowadays there is much information available from different sources. Nowadays, the teacher is rather seen as a "facilitator (student-centred)" (Sequeira 3), and the teacher "views the students not as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge but as seekers to be guided along their intellectual developmental journey" (Brown Wright 93).

- *What methodology will appeal to them?*
  The students are interested in an interactive approach, in free speaking on different topics, in watching short videos, in learning through music or simply in varied activities which do not repeat themselves every week and thus awaken the students' interest.

- *What sort of techniques are likely to bore/alienate them?*
  They would dislike doing the same type of activities, learning by heart, writing too much in their notebooks, having to do too much homework. Moreover, they would dislike a teacher who lectures without interaction with the students or a teacher who writes too much on the blackboard.

What resources are available?

- *Number and professional competence of teachers:*
  For the Journalism programme of study, there is one teacher of English having studied English language and literature as a major and holding an M.A. degree in British cultural studies in addition to a Ph.D. degree in the field of Philology.

- *Attitude of teachers to ESP*
  Of high importance, in our opinion, is the teacher's awareness of the students' expectations regarding their choice of studying journalism in general and English in particular, as part of their study programme, and the students' awareness of the need to improve their skills in a widely used language, especially in a field which is directly related to their future career. We are aware as well that for most of the students these courses are the last attended in a high-level educational institution, and that is why, the courses should be anchored in the students' practical needs (including for instance activities such as practising interview skills, writing a CV in English, writing a professional e-mail etc.).

- *Teachers' knowledge of and attitude to the subject content*
  The teacher recommends the students a specialized bibliography so as to enrich their English vocabulary in the field of journalism, but proves at the same time flexibility and takes into consideration the students' suggestions with a view to topics for discussions or for individual presentations. In our opinion, the learning tasks should be related to subjects students enjoy (for example writing film reviews based on films students are really interested in). We have noticed that out of the four skills of language learning (reading, writing, speaking and listening), students tend to develop their reading and listening skills, due to a large extent to the amount of written information in English, available on the internet, and to watching in general movies in

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English without voice dubbing. Therefore, we try to put a stress on speaking in front of the colleagues or in pairs, and on opinion-based or fact-based written contributions, with the aim to help the students to speak more fluently and write more correctly.

- *Materials:*

The suggested basic bibliography includes textbooks in the field of English for the media, as well as grammar workbooks in accordance with their English level:

- Ceramella, Nick, Elizabeth Lee. *Cambridge English for the Media.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Mascull, Bill. *Key words in the media*. London: Harper Collins, 1995.
- Thomson, Audrey Jean, Agnes V. Martinet. *A Practical English Grammar*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Vince, Michael, Paul Emmerson. *Intermediate Language Practice*. Oxford: Macmillan, 2003 (B1 level).

Upper-intermediate students (B2 level) could use as an additional bibliography:

- Chilărescu, Mihaela, Constantin Paidos. *New Proficiency in English*. Iași: Polirom, 2008.
- Evans, Harold. *Essential English for Journalists, Editors and Writers*. London: Random House UK, 2000.
- Harcup, Tony. *The Oxford Dictionary of Journalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Hicks, Wynford. *English for Journalists*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2013.
- Vince, Michael. *Language Practice for First*. London: Macmillan, 2014.

- *Aids:*
  - technical aids: projector, laptop, CD and DVD player;
  - human resources: the English teacher and guest lecturers[4];
  - study scholarships: Erasmus and EEA grants in the field of journalism are available for the students. The language which is mostly used during the study periods abroad is English.

- *Opportunities for out-of-class activities:*

The students take part in out-of-class team projects. For instance, they have to record videos in which they present tourist attractions from Iași and shoot ads for different products. In addition to English language skills, the students have thus to prove their social skills (interpersonal communication and teamwork), organizational skills (knowing how to organize their ideas in order to have a final product) and technical

[4] In November 2016, for instance, prof. Helge Rønning, Professor emeritus at the Department of Media and Communication, Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo, was invited to meet the students in journalism and hold a lecture entitled "Are social media really social?" Other participants to the event were Lect. Alexandru Lăzescu (Head of the Department of Journalism and Communication Sciences, Faculty of Letters, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași), Nora Ioniță (Public relations and communication specialist, Evolution Media, Bucharest) and Alexandru Grigoraș (from the Department of Educational Marketing, Events and Academic Image (MEDIA) of the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași). Moreover, a part of the students in journalism at the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași are willing to get involved in various activities as volunteers and organize events such as the "Evenings of Romanian Films" (SFR) Festival, meetings with writers, teachers, well-known journalists etc., in quality of members of the Association of Students in Journalism in Iași, created especially for them in 2007.

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skills (using different film making programmes). The videos are presented in front of the colleagues and a feedback is given by the students themselves and by their colleagues (with pluses and minuses after watching the screened videos). Thus, "students will be taught to assess their own work and that of their peers by asking critical questions in a constructive manner" (Brown Wright 95). We will also take into consideration unconventional learning places for practical activities (e.g. cafés as a place for linguistic cafés, museums where the students can interpret the local guide's explanations into English). Thus, we aim to encourage the students to speak English during out-of-class activities.

Who are the learners?

- *Age/sex/nationality*
  The students are in general 18 or 19 years old. Most of them are newly high school graduates. There are very few who attend journalism as a second study programme. Out of the 40 students who filled in the questionnaire, only 2 were boys and only 5 were not from Romania, but from the Republic of Moldova.

- *What do they know already about English?*
  Most of them had their English skills evaluated as part of the final high school exam.

- *What subject knowledge do they have?*
  The average language level is characteristic of B1.

- *What are their interests?*
  Their interests include means of communication, writing, reading, art, foreign languages, music, travelling.

- *What is their socio-cultural background?*
  Most of the students come from towns and cities from North-Eastern Romania. There are also some from the countryside. Their families belong to different social environments. Some students have parents working abroad.

- *What teaching styles are they used to?*
  They mention being used to interactive activities, lectures, debates, games, essay writing, projects, task sheets, learning from movies.

- *What is their attitude to English or to the cultures of the English-speaking world?*
  They agree that English is an absolutely necessary means of communication. Moreover, they consider it easy to learn, probably because they are very exposed to it, and they seem to like the sounds of the language. In general, they admire the cultures of the English-speaking world since the countries where English is used as an official language include developed and powerful countries. The students have an 'open-minded', positive attitude towards them and show interest in discovering them since the cultures of the English-speaking world are 'attractive' and 'exciting'. They consider the course useful since English allows people to communicate with others all over the world. A more advanced use of English provides access to better work opportunities, the course being itself an opportunity to benefit from.

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Where will the ESP course take place?

- *Are the surroundings pleasant, dull, noisy, cold etc.?*
  The ESP course takes place in a pleasant auditorium. No problems with noise or cold have been mentioned.



Picture 1. Course auditorium. (Photo credit: Crina Leon)

When will the ESP course take place?

- *Time of day*
  The course starts at 8 o'clock in the morning.

- *Every day/once a week*
  It is scheduled two hours a week, on Wednesdays.

In-Class Activities

As mentioned above, our ESP course is designed starting from the students' feedbacks, and from this point of view the answers provided by the students at the beginning of the academic year are extremely important to us. For instance, we have noticed that they enjoy working in groups for different projects and consequently, we aim to give them the opportunity to further enrich their English knowledge through teamwork (their older colleagues have been previously involved in writing newspapers about recent cultural events in Iași, in presenting different aspects related to the cultures and civilizations of English-speaking countries and in debates on various topics: use of mobiles in schools, volunteering, home-schooling, the generation gap, mental health, the power of social media, TV violence, manipulation of the press, morality of the press, the ratings battle, freedom of speech, fake news etc.) We also plan to form smaller groups of activity at the courses for higher efficiency.

The chosen media books included in the bibliography approach key areas in the field of journalism: newspapers, radio, magazines, television, film, new media, advertising and

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marketing. Thus, the students learn more about how to write headlines in English using different language devices (emphatic language, alliteration, play on words, cultural references), how to turn complete sentences into headlines, how to analyze the contents of the articles and become aware of the slant of a newspaper (conservative, emotive, liberal, neutral or reactionary), how to recognize words used in the tabloid press as compared to those typical of the broadsheet papers, how to express their opinions in writing by paying attention to the choice of words, how to take and give an interview, how to take notes at an event, how to write an article taking into consideration the house style and the steps suggested by Ceramella and Lee: brainstorming the topic, researching the story, planning, writing the introduction, the main body and the conclusions, and last but not least, checking the articles for mistakes (see Ceramella, Lee 6-17). The radio unit helps the students to learn how to introduce news, shows, music, guests or presenters at a radio station, how to differentiate between different genres of radio stations, what to include in a radio commissioning brief, how to define words related to the production process, how to decide the content for a radio package, how to make a news list for a specific programme, what to discuss in a debriefing meeting for a radio programme, how to write a debriefing e-mail for a previously held debriefing meeting etc. (Ceramella, Lee 18-29). The chapter on magazines enables the students to discuss about different types of content or about choices of titles, slogans and coverlines. Moreover, students discuss about the importance of bolding, underlining, capitalisation, the font size of words, the colours and photographs used on covers or throughout the pages, and they learn how to plan the issue of a magazine within an editorial meeting, how to prepare a brief for a photo shoot and how to take notes in order to write a true story (Ceramella, Lee 30-41). As far as the field of television is concerned, students learn about planning a news broadcast, about the members and the role of a production team, about writing a filming schedule when making a documentary, about shooting on location and editing a documentary on a topic of interest (Ceramella, Lee 42-51).

On the other hand, throughout the film section, students discuss about important aspects when deciding to watch a film (e.g. the director, the stars, the cast, the soundtrack, the screenplay, the special effects, the impact of previous film reviews); they tell about movies they know well in terms of background, the conflict and the resolution, they discuss about advantages and disadvantages of adapting a novel to a screenplay, they deal with excerpts from screenplays and identify typical features and analyse different film endings, they examine forthcoming steps after writing a screenplay, they role play a pitch session so as to obtain financing for a film including the genre of a film, the title, the logline or a short synopsis of the screenplay as well as other details forming the hooks, which refer to the target audience, music, setting etc. (Ceramella, Lee 52-62). The students have to shoot a short movie and write a film review on their own as well. Afterwards, they discuss about characteristics of the new media they are familiar with (websites, blogs, mobile phones, game consoles, podcasts, interactive television and kiosks, emails etc.) and examine in which way they are different from the old media, which include newspapers, radio, magazines, television, cinema or books. The students learn tips to be used for successful blogging and podcast recording (Ceramella, Lee 63-73).

When it comes to advertising, students practise possible interactions between advertising agencies and potential clients who need different products being advertised. They also search for and present effective print ads from newspapers and magazines as well as successful TV ads. They compare images representing the same concept and slogans which make use of different language devices (alliterations, comparisons, emphatic language, metaphors, repetitions, rhymes and word plays). Then they create their own print or screen ad for either existing or invented products (Ceramella, Lee 74-83). The last unit in *Cambridge*

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English for the Media (Ceramella, Lee 84-92) focuses on marketing and refers to different types of charts (pie charts, line charts and bar charts) to describe market trends. The students discuss about marketing strategies to increase the number of students applying for admission to the Department of Journalism in the future. They suggest different celebrities for endorsement and various events to be organised. They discuss about the content of a press kit and how to write a press release. A stress is put on the communication strategy whenever launching or relaunching a product.

As a complement to the vocabulary part, the students get also acquainted with other key words in the media, especially those referred to by Bill Mascull (Mascull 1-31). This book "systematically covers words and expressions that frequently occur and recur in the news media. Some of these words and expressions appear much more frequently there than elsewhere. Others occur more generally but are used in the media in a particular way" (Mascull XI). The key words used in this textbook are followed by explanations, definitions and examples rendering meanings in context. Language notes are included, with grammar and spelling information about the key words. The language activities suggested afterwards contain rephrasing, reordering, filling in the gaps, matching words to definitions or matching parts of a sentence, combining words, solving crosswords or understanding a written text.

> Students become part of the presentation and learn from each other when they respond to instructor invitation to give examples, applications, and summaries, and they experience learning when they take part in problem-solving sessions. In-class activities which involve students provide faculty with opportunities to help guide them in clarifying their understanding and in assimilating the subject matter in meaningful ways. (Brown Wright 94)

With a view to the grammar books which we use, Audrey Jean Thomson and Agnes V. Martinet wrote *A Practical English Grammar* for intermediate and upper-intermediate students. As far as grammatical issues are concerned, the students study and practise verb tenses, nouns, determiners and adverbs.

> The book is a comprehensive survey of structures and forms, written in clear modern English and illustrated with numerous examples. Areas of particular difficulty have been given special attention. Differences between conversational usage and strict grammatical forms are shown but the emphasis is on conversational forms. (Thomson, Martinet 5)

Moreover, the workbook *Intermediate Language Practice* by Michael Vince and Paul Emmerson is meant to consolidate grammatical issues at B1 level (the students with upper-intermediate language skills may use *Language Practice for First* by Michael Vince, Macmillan, 2014). The students work with varied types of exercises from the practical grammar section, and they work either individually or in pairs. The vocabulary section included in this book is omitted because of lack of time. The information in the book is clearly explained, and the consolidation units are very useful as they offer regular revisions, before adding new theoretical items. The students start with the verb tenses in the indicative in the first semester, continue with reported speech, conditional clauses, the subjunctive, the passive voice and modal verbs in the second semester, while the third semester is dedicated to countable and uncountable nouns, articles, determiners and pronouns, adjectives, adverbs and phrasal verbs. Unfortunately, not all the grammar issues can be covered, time not permitting, especially after the number of teaching semesters has been reduced. The types of exercises

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include activities such as: correcting mistakes, matching questions with suitable answers, completing and rewriting sentences, choosing the correct answer out of several variants, putting verbs into the correct tense, filling in the gaps with suitable words, combining two sentences etc. All the given assignments are checked in class making sure that the students have understood how the exercises should have been solved and how to put theory into practice.

Conclusions

In the present paper, we have taken into discussion the students' needs when it comes to the English course taught to 1st year students in journalism, at the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași. The students' answers put a stress on the teacher's role involving interaction, helping them to discover themselves and their skills, listening to them and trying to give them advice, drawing their attention to specific issues, sharing with them experiences and empathizing with the students' problems, being understanding and having patience with a view to students' needs. The educator Josef Albers was of the opinion that "Good teaching is more a giving of right questions than a giving of right answers." (Llywodraeth Cymru. Welsh Government 19). As far as we are concerned, we consider it very important to be in a constant dialogue with the students and to get a regular feedback from them regarding strong and weak points of the course, and regarding methods which best function in their case.

Since the English language is an extremely necessary means of communication in the journalistic field, the students have to realize that the users of a correct grammar and an extended vocabulary, especially field-related, will have an advantage in a competitive, performance-based domain. Many students are already aware of the need of the English language in their career, but there are still participants who think they will be able to learn the language very quickly only when they need it. In the paper, we have also pointed out some in-class activities we suggest to the students, as well as challenges encountered in teaching English to students in journalism, such as the decrease of the number of teaching semesters, having to teach at an inferior language level than the optimal one for an LSP course or having to teach students of different linguistic levels in the same group.

Throughout the courses, we try to develop all the four basic language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening, however, with a greater emphasis on speaking and writing, which seem to be less developed. All the students attending the classes have to be active participants week by week, as for them it is important to feel that they get involved in the courses, that their points of view matter. If a constant dialogue is established between a teacher and the students (also by means of the social media), they become much more open to the transfer of knowledge and come themselves with suggestions which could even more enhance their performance.

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