

TEACHING MATERIALS FOR THE BUSINESS LANGUAGE CLASS

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Abstract: *At the level of the pedagogical design of the foreign language class, after having identified the objectives and the teaching strategies, after having analysed the students' interests and needs, teachers have to solve the difficult task of selecting the teaching materials and deciding on the technical means which can enhance the efficiency of the teaching/ learning activity. The specialized language of business involves a lot of challenges for foreign language teachers, who are trained as philologists.*

One of these great challenges is represented by the selection of the teaching materials, which should meet the needs of future specialists, with very diverse interests and numerous and different information needs. The way in which teachers set objectives, choose strategies and find the best means to attain the objectives by selecting and devising teaching materials is a proof of their professional attachment to the subject taught, of the respect towards their students and towards themselves.

Keywords: *linguistic competences, selection, representativeness, decision-making, self-development, teaching materials*

1. Competences, objectives, desiderata

Within the foreign language classes organized in the higher education for economists at intermediate or advanced level, foreign language teachers aim at certain educational objectives, which are connected to the desideratum of a harmonious intellectual and affective development of the future specialists. The three directions they follow focus on cognitive, applied practical and communication competences, each of them based on knowledge, skills and linguistic habits.

Knowing the language in depth, understanding its grammar system and the different shades of meaning for given phrases and idioms, the connotation and denotation of words, all these are connected to the cognitive competences. The applied practical

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competences involve the students' ability to analyse language structures from the specialized literature pertinently, to express themselves efficiently orally and in writing, to make connections with previous knowledge, to identify and use new sources of information to solve new problems, the ability to apply the knowledge acquired during academic studies creatively, in different professional situations, as well as the ability to organize their own future professional activity. The capacity to communicate in a foreign language, to use the various registers of a language appropriately in different situations, the flexibility and adaptability when working in teams, these are all the appanage of communication and networking competences, which foreign language teachers, trained as philologists, aim at.

A major objective of the foreign language class for economics students is to consider the students' learning needs, especially at the level of the speaking skill, which, based on their linguistic acquisitions prior to university studies, is generally not satisfactory either as regards the specialized vocabulary, or the grammar structures. The two generic factors of success in this respect are, according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2000: 105), fluency and accuracy, i.e. the ability to formulate ideas and express thoughts accurately, without changing the sentences and their meaning, according to one's level of knowledge at a given moment.

Other objectives set are connected to professional and transversal competences. The former suppose knowing, understanding and using the common language, while the latter focus on specialized language (students acquire knowledge and the ability to communicate in a foreign language considering the main concepts, values, principles, rules in economics, to apply and transfer knowledge using the foreign language, to interpret a situation/ phenomenon/ process, to identify key-problems starting from similar examples and to formulate and communicate their opinion with reference to all this, to appreciate and evaluate information and documents from primary or secondary sources written in the given foreign language) (cf. Ellis, M., Johnson, C. 1997, 142). Transversal competences require that students prove that they have acquired the ability to work independently to obtain and use the information found in a foreign language, information which they need to accomplish a specific task, associated to one of the subjects studied in the economic field (bibliographic information, case studies etc.), that they have the ability to identify and expand their own resources, as well as research and learning ones, that they have acquired strategies for learning and responsible work.

The ultimate objective of the foreign language class (according to CEFR, 2000) is that student should become locutors, scriptors, auditors and lecturers, which suppose a good command of cognitive, linguistic, phonetical, semantic, spelling and, last but not least, grammar skills.

The desiderata for the foreign language class in economics are that graduates should be able to communicate and interact with other people within teams focused on

accomplishing common tasks, to convey information orally and in writing in their professional or daily life. Apart from the social interaction, reference should also be made to the creative behaviour, considered to be the ability to combine information, to use the connotation for different words and phrases, to deduce things from a given context, to make translations from their mother tongue into the target language and the other way around.

2. Selecting the Teaching Materials

The student-centred education aims at transforming teacher from producers of discourses and authors of treaties into guides and trainers supporting the acquisition of competences by students, who are consciously involved in defining their academic route. After having identified the objectives and strategies for approaching the foreign language class, after having analysed the students' interests and needs, teachers have to solve the difficult task of selecting the teaching materials and selecting the technical means which can make the teaching and learning activity more efficient (one of the causes of the possible academic failures can be encountered at this level of the pedagogical design). Based on the teaching material devised as an autonomous unit, simultaneously with accomplishing instructive tasks, educational tasks are accomplished as well, so that the informative and the formative sides interweave, even at this level, where characters are almost built (according to Girard, D., 1995, 210).

When selecting the sources, there are several requirements connected either to the characteristics of the groups of students or to the limited time and the objectives clearly set for the language course. For example, if students are asked to understand a specialized written text, then, resorting to communication using common language would contradict the requirements. In this case, the only realistic solution would be to choose reading comprehension and specialized discourse as the objective, without going through the preliminary stages of common language and the specific common core (as the length of time required would be unrealistic). Thus, the idea of privileging reading comprehension involves changing priorities of conjectural value: comprehension will have priority over expression.

While organising students' language skills, we notice that traditional language learning methods (audio-visual / audio-lingual) are accompanied by great opportunities provided by the Internet and by licensed language courses, from which fragments can be selected in order to match the pursued objectives. We have to outline a distinction between the language teaching materials used in language classes and the teaching materials made available to students for individual preparation and language enhancement on all four levels envisaged by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

The use of textbooks which explicitly or implicitly hint at economic elements, in which the discourse belongs to the field of economic sciences, sometimes causes confusion between common language and specific language, but it is preferable to those with general language. With regard to the terminology imposed on economists, account will be taken of the particular cases and especially of the differences from Romanian – an aspect which implies the use of different nomenclatures and less common terms, being altogether regrettable that students do not manage to master them or, at least, identify them in a text. In addition, by using reading materials, students are able to quickly grasp the essence of a text in order to understand the necessity or uselessness of their in-depth study (especially when it comes to sources for writing / presenting their own materials). It is important for students to understand the key details of the text by focusing on the passage or chapter that specifically contains references to personal preoccupations. Different types of reading can be employed as strategies for understanding the written language, according to students' needs (especially if identifying meaning and improving pronunciation are among the objectives of the course). Organizing a textbook for pedagogical use involves difficulties at the level of representativeness, as the selection has to be made wisely, considering the pedagogical accessibility of texts. All these aspects must be taken into account by foreign language teachers whose core specialization is philology, not economics; hence the great challenge when choosing teaching materials. Moreover, the pedagogical constraints in the selection of the texts to be studied stem from their length (a length which does not allow the students to identify the general outline and main ideas of the text etc.) and from the difficulty of the topics. Sometimes, in order to facilitate linguistic acquisition (overshadowed by interest in content) it is preferable to group economics related topics which are addressed in an original manner in the literature.

Without a constant interest in self-refinement, foreign language teachers are in danger of teaching a science superficially covered. The capacity to improve and enrich specialized linguistic competences made the implementation of interdisciplinarity a major exigency, even in the study of foreign languages (Bernat, S., Chiş, V., 2002: 53). Supported by the use of multimedia techniques, the interdisciplinary approach is a solution to this problem and hence the importance of the foreign language teachers' vision and ability to adapt to the needs of each student, each generation requiring continuous development in producing new content and identifying needs. They must constantly select and create materials in accordance with their students' performance level. In addition to the key concepts of the various economic specializations they have to provide, teachers add conversation topics that should lead to some of the conclusions that have been considered from the beginning, or which should arouse interest in finding answers. Students become explorers guided by their own learning interest and by teachers who, in turn, must study.

In the absence of specific training and programs tailored to the teaching of foreign languages in economic education, language teachers reinvent their profession while bringing together specialized texts and establishing linguistic or teaching objectives. Romania has adopted the objectives of the European language policy, so that the practices and strategies of foreign language courses in higher education are reinforced by a new approach of the communicative methodology promoted by CEFR. This action model is based on the students' actions, on their own way of using language in four areas: personal, public, educational and professional. CEFR opens up innovative perspectives in foreign language teaching, especially with regard to objectives and competences, with the aim of achieving a common European assessment based on transparency and coherence that can also bring about the common acknowledgement of the six levels of competences. The teaching materials selected for the language course receive the theoretical support of documents developed by the Council of Europe, which are indispensable in pedagogy, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (addressed to teachers, program makers, and trainers) and the European Language Portfolio (working tool and self-assessment of language users).

3. Conclusions

All things considered, there are some aspects which imply reconsidering the idea that learning conditions are in all cases unique. These aspects are related to the necessity for the teaching materials selected by language teachers to meet the needs of future specialists, with very diverse interests, with numerous and diverse information needs. For further clarification, we will elaborate a negation-based definition of the pedagogical act, starting from a working strategy that is not rigid, uniform and canonized. The analysis of the situation from case to case and from group to group will dictate the adoption of methods, the adaptation of teaching objectives and strategies, the selection of materials that will not lead to a sum of improvisations left adrift, but to a meeting point for values such as flexibility and adaptability interwoven with rigor.

Generally speaking, but strictly referring to the foreign language course, we can say that the way in which teachers set goals, choose strategies and find the optimal means to achieve objectives by selecting and creating materials, is a proof of the teachers' professional attachment to the subject taught, as well as of their respect for students and for themselves.

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