

## MODERN TRENDS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AT NON-LINGUISTIC UNIVERSITIES<sup>1</sup>

L. V. KHVEDCHENYA<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Belarusian State University, Nezavisimosti avenue, 4, 220030, Minsk, Republic of Belarus*

The article describes new tendencies in foreign language teaching at non-linguistic universities. A steady tendency to teaching professionally oriented context on the basis of a discipline specific language and communicative, job related situations is noted. The benefits of this approach, as well as specificity of content areas, curricula and syllabi design, teaching techniques, technical equipment, the role of subject experts and other issues are discussed. The model of thematic content selection is the basic organizing principle for curriculum design and teaching techniques. The latter include cooperative techniques, problem solving tasks, communicative tasks of any format – everything that promotes the development of foreign language professional communicative competence as the main target of teaching at non-linguistic universities.

**Key words:** foreign language teaching; non-linguistic university; trend; professionally oriented teaching; teaching in context; content of teaching; curriculum design; teaching techniques; technologies; technical equipment.

## СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ В ОБУЧЕНИИ ИНОСТРАННЫМ ЯЗЫКАМ В УНИВЕРСИТЕТАХ НЕЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКОГО ПРОФИЛЯ

Л. В. ХВЕДЧЕНЯ<sup>1)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup>*Белорусский государственный университет,  
пр. Независимости, 4, 220030, г. Минск, Республика Беларусь*

Описываются новые тенденции в обучении иностранным языкам в университетах нефилологического профиля. Отмечается устойчивая ориентация на обучение профессионально ориентированному языку специальности посредством анализа спецтекстов и коммуникативных ситуаций, релевантных для потребностей будущих специалистов. Обсуждаются преимущества этого подхода, специфика содержания обучения, разработка учебных планов и программ, технологии обучения, техническое оснащение, роль предметных экспертов и т. д. Предлагается модель отбора содержания с учетом профессиональных и общественных потребностей будущего юриста. Отмечается, что тематический контекст является базовым организационным принципом для разработки учебных планов, выбора методов и технических средств обучения. Рекомендованы технологии, включающие в себя обучение в сотрудничестве, решение проблемных задач, коммуникативные задания любого формата – все, что способствует развитию иноязычной профессиональной коммуникативной компетенции как главной цели обучения в нелингвистических университетах.

**Ключевые слова:** обучение иностранным языкам; нелингвистический университет; тенденция; профессионально ориентированное содержание обучения; составление учебных планов; технологии обучения; контекстное обучение; техническое оснащение.

---

<sup>1</sup>Статья публикуется в авторской редакции.

---

### Образец цитирования:

Хведченя Л. В. Современные тенденции в обучении иностранным языкам в университетах нелингвистического профиля // Журн. Белорус. гос. ун-та. Журналистика. Педагогика. 2017. № 1. С. 128–133 (на англ.).

### For citation:

Khvedchenya L. V. Modern trends in foreign language teaching at non-linguistic universities. *J. Belarus. State Univ. Journalism. Pedagog.* 2017. No. 1. P. 128–133.

---

### Автор:

**Людмила Владимировна Хведченя** – доктор педагогических наук, доцент; заведующий кафедрой английского языка гуманитарных факультетов.

### Author:

**Ludmila Khvedchenya**, doctor of science (pedagogics), doцент; head of the department of English language of humanitarian faculties.  
*khvedchenya@bsu.by*

## New orientations

Non-linguistic universities present a peculiar challenge to that of other educational institutions with respect to foreign language teaching (FLT), its methodology, course content, activities, etc. These are the universities where the bulk of the students study for getting professional education in various spheres of national economy such as engineering, agriculture, medicine, law, pedagogy (apart from linguistics), etc. Foreign language (FL) is taught there as a compulsory subject of a curriculum and students with different levels of language competence and degree of motivation have to learn it on equal basis. The hours of classes are usually limited and teachers have to think how to organize a short course properly to achieve the global goal. The latter is defined as developing FL communicative competence in the spheres relevant to the learners' future jobs. So the generally accepted approach to FLT at the universities described can be defined as a professionally oriented one with the focus on a specific language field (sublanguage).

Actually this trend is not a new one, it has a long history. Early versions go back to the movement called English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It was the time when English began to be accepted as international language of technology and commerce. English speaking countries expanded their political and econo-

mic influence world over and their language acquired a high status. A new generation of learners knew what they needed the English for. To become successful businessmen they had to read instruction manuals to keep up with the latest developments in their fields. Most of such books were available in English. They also needed English to communicate with their potential employers and partners.

Over time ESP research was extended to other settings, especially those connected with the use of English for different academic purposes. This movement has been initiated in the 1960s in Eastern and Central Europe where English began to be intensively used to promote professionally based instruction. Western Europe also did much to advance second language studies that involve some forms of professional content learning (T. Hutchinson, A. Waters, J. Swales, W. Littlewood, P. Robinson, etc.). As a result a number of bilingual programmes and curriculum formats in a wide range of educational contexts have been introduced in university level instruction. More recently, its role has dramatically increased and nowadays a professionally oriented content-based approach is gaining prominence in a wide range of vocational and workplace instructional contexts.

## Content Area

Professionally oriented course of FLT is organized around content. The challenge lies in the principles of its structuring relevant to the goals of FLT. The problem is not as simple as it may seem. The declared principle of professional orientation doesn't give a definite idea of the volume and thematic preferences of the content formation. The lack of strict criteria leads to the solution of these questions often dependent on the content of textbooks and manuals. In its turn textbooks are not always available and English teachers have to compile their own materials that create no systemic view on the content area. The attempts to solve the problem on a scientifically grounded basis resulted in a broadly accepted approach according to which the whole content continuum is subdivided into General Language, Language for Specific Purposes and its variety – Language for Scientific Purposes, which correspond to the modules of social, professional and scientific communication. All of these blocks in this or that way relate to different aspects of professional activity and therefore are included into the content area. The module of professional communication is the largest as it deals with minor business communicative skills. The module of the so-called social communication reflects the structure of specialists' public relations linked to the prospective professional needs. Scientific/research block (primarily master's level) in-

cludes practical ability of making reports, presentations, summaries as well as participation in international conferences. Content area becomes relevant to the learners' professional, social and personal needs. Taken together all blocks balance the curriculum in a certain proportion, emphasizing the role of business and occupational environment. In other words the essence of this approach is in including FL activity into the analogue of student's prospective activity.

The model described represents a kind of microsystem which integrates the main qualities of the whole system. Even in case of some educational gaps in this or that content area, the loss is compensated at the expense of preserving the integrity of the whole system. In didactic purposes minimization of thematic and linguistic content may take place in all three blocks. One of the main principles of selecting content is its accessibility and sufficiency for achieving educational goals.

Content-area approach in FLT is practiced in all branches of knowledge such as history, biology, economics, maths, etc. Special curriculum is designed for each of them being based on the discipline-specific language and subject matter. In practice much of the material is concerned with reading and discussing subject texts. Scholars are convinced that a thorough and systematic analysis of written discourse is essential for creating professional communicative competence. For

example, for law students at the level of intermediate fluency of English we suggest the following thematic content.

*Law as a science*, its place among other humanitarian sciences and in the life of modern society. Essence of law. Ancient legal systems. Sources of law. Case studies.

*Profession of a lawyer*. Main spheres of activity. Socio-cultural specificity of legal profession in the co-studied countries: barristers and solicitors. Case studies.

*Court systems* in the co-studied countries (the USA, the UK, Belarus). Jurors.

*Constitutional law* in the co-studied countries. British constitutional Monarchy Systems of government. Political parties. Prime-minister's role, etc. Case studies.

*Criminal law*. The notion of crime. Crime classification. Crime agents. Criminality in the co-studied countries. Juvenile delinquency. Case studies.

*Criminal procedure*. Prosecution and defence. Problems of inquiry. Types of punishment. Role of jury.

*Penal system*. Goals of punishment. Problem of capital punishment. Case studies.

*Civil right law*. Main distinction of civil and criminal law. Variety of civil offense. Forms of punishment. Court preceding. Case studies.

*Law enforcement agencies*. Police. Peculiarities of the police systems in the co-studied countries. Role of the police in crime investigations. Case studies.

This programme is rather suggestive, it can be changed in many ways according to the external conditions of teaching (timing of the course, classroom quality, students' motivation, etc.). Research on the advantages of extensive subject reading has shown that it leads to improved language abilities and greater content area learning [1]. Students become more «text-wise». They develop greater content knowledge and higher motivation.

Content area is a methodological concept which integrates both, the subject matter of speech and its linguistic representation. Acquiring new content knowledge always entails relating new information to new language units. In this respect ESP theorists admit dual nature of language: linguistic and extralinguistic. Systemic integration of both is quite natural and arises from the nature of language, its ability to reflect the real world and give names to its objects and concepts. Language content is inseparable from its linguistic expression. If speech were not related to the objects and notions it would remain «a pigeon language», senseless and useless for communication. This is one of the linguadidactic regularities which explains the synthesis of both aspects of content theory.

Deriving from this theoretical assumption methodologists consider FLT content as a mixture of both: knowledge of linguistic units (words, phrases, grammar rules, etc.) and conceptual world they represent [2]. In our case the cognitive structure of «real world» is associated with the professional sphere of knowledge,

exemplified above. Thus language acquisition involves acquisition of the learners' genuine professional subject of interest.

Systemic integration of both aspects and their close interconnection is interpreted in educational purposes, especially for the purpose of content area selection and curricula design. Content becomes the key organizing principle for both of them. Thematic content is the thing that is usually communicated and linguistic representation is something that is derived from it. It is not a random list of words or grammar rules but the derivative of a network of topical issues and concepts. The zone of overlap between content and language development activities is constantly shifting. Some students focus on mastering content and neglect their language skills while the instructor's task is to balance the roles of language and content specialist.

The development of all language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) and different aspects of language (lexis, grammar, phonetics) also takes place within certain content areas. Lexis includes subject-specific lexical items such as vocabulary of students' future occupations, technical terminology and scientific terms, business concepts and the like. Professional lexis changes as quickly as the spheres it «supports». It often goes beyond its typical usage, adapts itself to the common language and migrates to other languages becoming international. Originally professional terms were labeled «register» for a want of a better term, and it led to a useful analysis of several sub-branches of science and technology in terms not only of lexis but also of grammatical structure.

Grammar also has some specific features compared with its traditional systematic teaching. Grammar is taught in context and the instruction is limited and focused on the use of key or unpredictable grammatical patterns, passive voice, indefinite and definite articles, on restrictive relative clause constructions, etc. Methods of teaching grammar are preferably inductive. As it has been repeatedly stressed in literature the grammatical differences of ESP from common literary language are fewer than one can imagine, but still they exist. For example, there exist some grammar structural patterns typical for business correspondence. The general focus of instruction is on communication, but grammatical correctness is required. It doesn't mean that grammar is ignored as communication implies both, grammatical grasping concepts and conversational phrases.

The same approach is applicable to phonetics. In comparison with more academic accuracy-based approach ESP phonetics involves primarily the cases that prevent misunderstanding. Phonetically correct tones of social register and politeness are also in the focus of attention.

One of the recent requirements is a cross-culturally oriented approach to the English-language content for

undergraduates. It means that one should design the course according not only to linguistic and occupational needs of the learners but to the cultural experience as well. It is important that they should have a better understanding of native speakers' cultural values, norms of corporate culture and technical jargon. Some verbal

and nonverbal norms of behavior should be examined and the success of communication or miscommunication should be discussed. Cross-cultural studies, i.e. the integration of nonnative speakers with native speakers in the content course ensures the authenticity of the academic demands placed upon the students.

### Curriculum design

To teach specific content and language skills a content-based ESP curriculum is usually designed. It serves as a basis for further syllabi design. The primary concern for subject matter is the thing that most distinguishes one content-based syllabus from other syllabi types. Content is viewed not merely as something to practice language with, rather language is something to explore content with. Due to its great importance content is considered as the main curriculum organizing principle. First we choose content then strategies and skills.

According to M. C. Gianelli the procedure of creating thematic-based curriculum includes the following steps [3].

1. Selection of themes appropriate for developing professional competence.

2. Identification of the most important content area concepts. A designer chooses the most critical concepts and develops subtopics for each of the main concepts.

3. Identification of the skills to be emphasized. Basic skills are incorporated into each content area. In doing so we give a definite scope and sequence to the curriculum. At this point of the curriculum development, we have a hierarchy of concepts related to a theme and a list of objectives to be achieved and reinforced throughout the year.

4. Identification of strategies. The curriculum may be skill-based or text-dependent. The strategies should be appropriate. In comparison with the Whole Language Approach all teachers need an additional in-service training.

5. Gathering of materials. It's necessary to determine what materials best teach each concept. It can be done by reviewing available textbooks and supplementary materials including audiovisual ones. Certain materials have to be developed and assembled in a resource box for each thematic unit.

Judging by its complex character the procedure demands not only language but subject knowledge. How can it be achieved? Some practitioners hold the belief that English teacher must be a content producer and instructor. Some think that it may be a subject experts from major departments, a potential employer, industrial companies and their language requirements. They can better define what professional skills should be included into the syllabus. Of course, it's more reasonable to join the efforts of the teacher of English with that of the subject teacher. If the ESP instructor has

the opportunity to work with subject experts and employers, it may guarantee greater success. In this case the ESP teacher remains firmly on the side of language in the language-content course. His role would be not to teach content but to provide feedback and the linguistic means to be able to cope with it.

At the same time it is also wrong to say that the ESP teacher should be incompetent in the subject-matter of the course he teaches. If he wants to be engaged successfully in the teaching process he should know the main superficial aspects and what may actually happen in this or that educational setting. He must have a genuine interest and keep himself abreast of the latest findings in science or technology, business or economics. He should read authentic reading materials, watch some programmes on TV, understand the basic notions, etc. In case of difficulties he should not be ashamed to ask the students to explain this or that phenomenon which they may know better.

Teachers also need to have a repertoire of instructional strategies which may assist in making content comprehensible. They need knowledge of foreign language learning process. This permits them to select key concepts out of the many possibilities in the curriculum. In his turn an expert is more knowledgeable and familiar with the subject matter and study skills. He may serve as content experts rather than English teachers. What the instructor must have is a perfect command of language. This is his leading role in a performance that can excuse minor troubles with content. A definite level of language competence is also required of students because special sublanguage contains a great bulk of unknown words and phrases. So the common approach is that ESP shouldn't be introduced until the student has a general control of the English language. At the lower level of instruction it is also possible to use simplified material to be followed by authentic texts. In any case students are taught limited subset of the language sufficient enough to function within the domain of that subset. But if students are motivated to perfect their English we can do a disservice if we suggest them a limited language instead of providing with real authentic materials for reading purposes.

Discovering precisely which language skills students are lacking in relation to expected rather complicated job performance is not a simple task. That's why a large part of ESP has always been concerned with the preliminary needs analysis and material development.

Grammar and terminology course as well as some intercultural issues will not provide an answer to the challenge. Setting up University course of English one should aim at examining different types of prospective employers, their activities and requirements and work with subject experts. The final adjunct model guarantees that the ESP teacher goes in the right direction.

Benefits of such curriculum are obvious. First of all they concern motivation, students' participation and enjoyment. Although all this varies depending on factors that may be outside the teacher's control, such as the dynamic relationship among class members, the

timing of a course, and classroom quality, students' enthusiasm for business and industry-oriented English courses is significant. It manifests itself through regular attendance, enrollment in additional optional courses, active participation in class activities, initiative in homework and extracurricular reading, constructive suggestions on how to complement the course. In comparison with all-purpose courses in EFL, the specific curriculum proposed in this article has the deliberate objective of representing a bridge between the use of the language and the professional context of such use.

### Techniques of teaching

Having established *what* the English syllabus of the non-linguistic universities is supposed to be the next step is to define *how* it can reach its aims. This point concerns techniques and methods of teaching. It's obvious that all approaches of organizing content in ESP can be spoiled by the misuse of proper techniques. From the point of view of its methodology content-based instruction is organized around the text or situation. It integrates the work with language aspects (phonetics, lexis, grammar) and language skills (reading, communication, listening, writing).

*Teaching these aspects implies different learning techniques* and this seems to be a separate topic for discussion. Here we'll highlight only what seems specific for ESP. Some methodologists suggest the use of all kind of cooperative learning techniques, problem solving tasks, reading and communication [4]. Others speak in favour of extensive group work of any format as it develops communicative skills in situations close to real. Many scholars in our country and abroad think that the most appropriate technique organizing principle is doing special tasks [5]. We define a task as a situation to be solved, a piece of instruction for doing something during the acquisition of a language course. Usually students practice real practical tasks based on the analysis of learner's needs. They are supposed to interact with content in a cognitively demanding way. The creative tasks involved may be «describe...», «explain...», «give reasons for...». A needs analysis provides an inventory of the target tasks which may be both real world and pedagogic. All tasks are academic in nature and style, for example, essay writing, making presentations, summaries, reading reports, taking lecture notes, participating in class discussions, preparing study summaries, etc. A significant aspect of academic tasks involves comprehending material at a certain level of cognitive difficulty and problem-solving tasks.

The question of special importance that needs discussing is the level of authenticity and complicity of tasks. Extreme representatives consider that highly specialized spheres of communication are to be preferably taught while their more moderate opponents insists on a balanced approach, taking into account

different linguistic and thematic competence of ESP students. Indeed, not all non-linguistic University students have a good command of English as well as a wide range of technical vocabulary. Very often professional problems discussed in the texts are not familiar to them as English is taught for only one year of study. Due to these reasons the aims and expectations should be realistic as well as techniques and methods used. In these conditions the most reasonable aim is not acquiring fluency in the language as such, but rather at learning to use the language adequately in specific professional contexts. First-year students only learn to perform different job-related functions and get ready to participate in various academic programmes. The opposite case is master course students. They seem to be much more motivated than undergraduates. They know better their field of study, job-related tasks, have practical experience of using ESP. They learn faster since subject-matter knowledge gives them more chances and opportunities to operate professional contexts and cases.

Proceeding from these assumptions we choose adequate techniques and methods of teaching separate for each class and study component. Of course, it is possible to use key elements of modern communicative methods adapting them to the professional sphere of communication. But specificity remains in the focus of attention. In foreign language methodology special attention is paid to linguistic competence as the basis for any successful communication. Teaching vocabulary in context is its main component. ESP vocabulary is specific in many ways as it consists of professional terms, common scientific and international words, collocations, etc. There is also radical difference in its character, origin, meaning and use. Despite all of these differences the main stages to vocabulary teaching remain the same, that is presentation, storing and recycling [6]. Ways of presenting new items are considered to be effective and memorable. The systems of storing should be diverse, not only in chronological order but using some alternative ways of organizing vocabulary, such as topics and categories, spidergrams, word trees, etc. Recycling is vital, and it may happen one or two

days after the initial input. It is also possible to use task-based learning and recycling.

To meet the requirements of ESP functioning professional vocabulary is trained in context in the process of reading, understanding and discussing. The meaning and collocability is contextualized, new lexical units are practiced, the consistent repeating of new words supported by the tailor-made programme of vocabulary exercises aimed at memory training is a perfect supplement to work with texts.

From the point of view of technical assistance we can't but mention the role of video in ESP. Its use offers no remedies for all the problems associated with an ESP programme, it is recognized as a valuable aid and an effective tool for ESP curriculum specialists, material designers, classroom instructors, and teacher trainers. By examining authentic samples along with other necessary reference materials, the curriculum specialist is able to more accurately determine the structures necessary to be mastered, the registers desired, which skills are most useful, and what type of language situations the student will be exposed to.

In addition, the valuable paralinguistic, nonverbal features, such as hand movements, eye contact, facial gestures, and deictic reference to charts, diagrams, and graphs can be recorded and prioritized for introduction into the course. These authentic language tapes may also help determine the terminal goals for the student, and aid the inexperienced instructor to better understand the course content.

Summing up all observations and personal experience we would gladly state that nowadays the general orientation at non-linguistic universities can be defined as teaching language in a professional context. As a ESP specialist who has been teaching in a content based curriculum for many years I find this trend valuable especially in the framework of competence approach which has been introduced in our educational standards. What students really need is practical application of their knowledge in real life professional, academic, social and occupational situations. This approach to FLT teaching and learning is well expressed by Dewey's quotation: «Education is not preparation for life, education is life itself».

## References

1. West R. F., Stanovich K. E., Mitchel H. R. Reading in the real world and its correlates. *Read. Res. Q.* 1993. No. 28. P. 34–50.
2. Strevens P. *New orientations in the teaching of English.* Oxford, 1997.
3. Gianelly M. C. Thematic units: creating an environment for learning. *TESOL J.* 1991. No. 1. P. 13–15.
4. Master P. *Responses to English for Specific Purposes.* San José, 1998.
5. Snow M. A., Brinton D. M. *The content-based classroom: perspectives on integrating language and content.* New York, 1997.
6. Zaremba-Jaworska K. What is ESP? *Seeking most effective methods at different levels – organization, methodology, tools* : Int. Lang. Teach. Conf. (Warsaw, 17–18 March, 2008). Warsaw, 2008.

*Received by editorial board 22.02.2016.*