Languages for special purposes (LSP), still frowned upon by many philologists as being non-academic, has become a firmly established element in a fair number of higher education courses. It is often seen as bridge between the traditional approach to philology and the seemingly modern concept of language teaching for non-philological job openings. Thus, most courses tend to use the well-trodden paths of language tuition via translation, grammar and communication courses. This paper looks at the feasibility of a tri-lingual approach to classroom communication, be it by appropriately qualified teachers or by forms of team teaching.

Traditionally teaching languages for special purposes (LSP) at tertiary level has involved a twofold approach:

1) providing philology students of languages acquired at secondary level with subject-specific language skills in their target language usually at a fairly advanced level (i. e. C1 to C2 in the CEFR = common European reference framework) as a voluntary or compulsory module of their degree programme or, in some cases, by means of intensive courses, providing them with adequate skills in a newly started language to allow them to pursue their philological studies of that language and literature and

2) teaching non-philology students to upgrade their existing language skills with a subject-specific element, usually English, or to provide them with basic skills in a new language (often a compulsory requirement in a science course in higher education, e. g. German for chemistry students) with the aim to enable them to read and understand subject-specific literature in the required language.

While in the past the vast majority of foreign-language graduates made a career in teaching, the heavily increased needs for foreign language skills in almost all imaginable subject areas has entailed a dramatic shift in openings for these graduates towards jobs requiring communication skills in a large variety of specialised fields. Thus, for a fair percentage of modern language students their philological competences are no longer required. On the other hand graduates of non-philological arts subjects (i. e. especially graduates in economics, law or social sciences) and also graduates in sciences and engineering find that their employment prospects can be enhanced considerably with proof of advanced and subject-related foreign-language skills, preferably, but by no means only, English.

With English having become the «lingua franca» in a globalised world in the past three decades the teaching of that language must now aim at achieving several objectives other than straightforward general language competence:

— enhance the students’ general language skills far beyond the levels achieved at school-leaving age in all the 4 recognised skill areas, i. e. understanding, reading, writing and speaking;

— ensure that students are given the opportunity to develop language skills also in their specific subject area to an advanced level of competence to enable them to communicate in their given field of specialisation with considerable ease; this entails tiered language course offerings (usually in English) leading to a high degree of linguistic penetration of the relevant subject area;

— enable students to transfer their subject-specific and their native language-based skills and conventions to perform adequately in another language, usually English, in a variety of communication situations;

— create awareness for often complex communicative situations (e. g. French, German, Russian or Japanese native speakers communicating with each other in English in a meeting/
at a conference, in a social environment, by mail or voice media) entailing both good general-language and almost equally well developed specific language skills;

— create intercultural awareness and develop appropriate competences for smooth interaction in business-related and also social contexts;
— introduce students to code-switching in different situations and environments.

The requirements outlined above for English can equally be postulated for any other language that is used in international communication by business or institutional agents, although the frequency of language use is considerably lower. This applies in particular to languages with a larger number of native speakers, i.e. French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Russian, but increasingly also Chinese and Japanese and even Arabic.

Increasingly, a market is developing for graduates with a second foreign language in addition to English. Market demands are somewhat restricted, however, and still often depend on the specific needs of an internationally active employer. This is particularly true for international bodies (government and non-government) and global players with strong local operations in foreign countries.

In many countries, especially smaller countries whose economies strongly depend on a high level of trade of goods and services, language teaching programmes in secondary education, esp. in vocational colleges, and above all in tertiary education, have reacted to these requirements. Early language learning programmes (some of them starting in play school or kindergarten or in the first year of school) and bi-lingual secondary education projects (in some cases even involving so-called smaller, i.e. less frequently spoken languages) are notable proof of the awareness of educationalists for the need of much enhanced foreign-language skills.

In many university and college courses foreign-language modules have been given an often compulsory slot. Furthermore, some subject-specific teaching has been switched from using the native language of the students to English as the classroom language. Such a move may be desirable, if the aim is to attract foreign students and also to subject domestic students to near-total immersion in the subject-related language thereby enabling them to take a more active part in academic and professional discourse. Yet this well-intended approach seems to at least partially ignore the much more practice-oriented requirements of the job markets (that is a sound training in the chosen subject area as a first and foremost priority) and does not fully take into account the linguistic skill levels of the vast majority of students which often are nowhere near adequate enough for students to fully benefit from this two-pronged approach of combining the teaching of subject matter with foreign language exposure. The demands made on the teachers of the subjects in question are quite high as well. Teaching complex subject matter is, as a rule, a big enough challenge even for the more experienced teacher; and having to teach specialised subject matter in a foreign language may be overtaxing the abilities of many a member of the teaching profession, unless the teachers involved have had a lengthy exposure to the language and culture in the country whose language they are using for their teaching.

The French approach to teaching LSP may largely have gone unnoticed outside France. There are now more than 50 institutions in tertiary education all over France offering courses in applied foreign languages (LEA = langues étrangères appliquées). In such programmes, students combine the studies of two or more foreign languages with high-level courses in law, business studies, management, cultural studies, media studies, international communication to name but the most important. Due to the geographical position of France, the most frequently offered languages apart from English are German and Spanish. But there are also course offerings involving the study of Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Russian, Italian, Dutch or Scandinavian languages. Teaching in a possible third or even fourth foreign language will mostly start at beginners’ level.

The primary aim of such courses is to enable graduates to find job openings outside teaching and language mediating. The LEA websites list sectors such as management, trade and commerce, web-marketing, tourism, government and law. The science subjects are virtually ignored. These offerings in France not only reflect the changing needs of the international
community in all spheres of life, but also the very concrete situation in the European Union, where skills in more than two foreign languages are highly desirable, if not a «must», in addition to highly specialised skills in at least one non-language field. The French approach can be seen as an interesting alternative to the more traditionalist practice of cursory language training for specialists in a given subject.

As yet, however, the intentions of the programme developers do not seem to be fully reflected in the reality of teaching practice. The students’ native language is still largely used for the tuition in the non-language subjects, thus leaving it to the student to acquire the respective specialist vocabulary and the language patterns used in the particular subject area by themselves. And, unfortunately, very often even in language courses the students’ native language, i.e. French, is used as the means of communication in the classroom. Translation is still regarded very highly as the key to language acquisition.

All these programmes rely heavily on the traditional course organisation, whereby the languages taught are allocated their separate slots in the students’ timetable; and the language teaching is done by specialists for a particular language and/or skill often without close coordination with the core subject teachers. It is generally assumed that the language teacher is sufficiently qualified to cope with the specific demands of the subject, be they law-related, science-related, economics/business- or trade-related for example.

In such a set-up a tri-lingual approach to language teaching might be worth considering. This means bringing into the classroom at least two of the foreign languages chosen by the student and making more efficient use of native or near-native speakers for language tuition. These objectives can be achieved by employing well-qualified language teachers with considerable subject-related experience or by using forms of team-teaching involving two language specialists sharing the same native language and each having a highly developed level of subject-related competence in at least one of the languages taught.

On the surface the team-teaching option may seem human-resource-intensive; but this is compensated for by the fact that the subject matter needs to be explained only once and that language activities in the two languages can be based on one set of information and text input. The additional benefit for students is that they derive considerable motivation from the interaction of the teaching staff, the resulting liveliness and variety of classroom activities, as both teachers bring in their individual personalities, their experience and knowledge, their methods and tools of teaching, not to mention the benefits derived from the need for the teaching staff to coordinate course content, classroom activities and to some extent also teaching methods as well as forms of testing and assessment.

The tri-lingual approach allows above all for constant code-switching whether initiated by the teacher(s) who may switch languages from one sentence to the next or even within one sentence. The switch may well come from the students themselves, as they react to a statement made by another person in the classroom in another language. This is a reflection of real life situations in a variety of oral communication situations between partners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Not only is this approach to classroom interaction intellectually challenging as the level of attention and flexibility required in such a complex communicative setting is very high. But the participants’ linguistic ability is also stretched much more, as they are forced to react to an utterance made using the language tools of one language with the tools of another language. Code switching involves aspects of grammar (word order, e.g. flexibility of syntax in Russian versus strict SPO pattern in English or French and also vs. verb separation in German; diverse patterns of syntax and tense systems) and also of vocabulary, phraseology, idiom as well as mode (e.g. preferred nominalisation in German vs. preferred verbalisation in English). Experience shows that, at the learning stage in foreign language acquisition, many students tend to refer back to the familiar patterns of their native language as a point of departure for an utterance in a foreign language. In a communicative situation involving code switching the immediate reference to the speaker’s first language seems to gradually disappear; and utterances tend to be much less influenced by thought processes in this language. The established language pairing of speaker’s first or native, that is to say «habitual» language, and a foreign language is replaced by a pairing of two foreign languages.
with the «habitual» language being clearly backgrounded. Experience has shown that, as a result of code switching, participants in such a course environment become more aware of linguistic similarities and certainly also dissimilarities of given language pairs. Once this has been fully realised, they tend to find it easier to adopt the target language structures.

What does this entail for language work inside and outside the classroom? The following is based on the author’s experience with such situations during teaching assignments in Socrates staff exchange schemes with a university in France and also in an exchange scheme run under the auspices of the French Ministry of Education and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD — Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) and run by the Department for Romance Studies at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum/Germany, where it was possible to try out such forms of teaching albeit only for short periods of two weeks or one semester.

Communication in the classroom was tri-lingual with the students’ habitual language, in this case French, playing only a very minor role. This implied a considerable challenge for the participants, as they were mostly used to reverting to their habitual language as a means of communication and work in the classroom (translation and interpreting). In our case the language work was solely based on German or English text/input material (mainly business and law-related). As translation still plays a major part in foreign-language examinations in France, it was also used in the Bochum course offering and involved the translation of prepared and unprepared foreign-language texts into French and subsequently into the second foreign language. Summaries based on foreign-language texts (English or German) and selected by individual students were made in the second foreign language with French as an intermediary for vocabulary work only. In classroom discussions, whether subject-related or on matters of language, code switching was used throughout.

As for vocabulary work, students were familiarised with the language used in the verbalisation of figures and percentages and the up and down movement, in the description of charts and the designation of public and private bodies and government departments in the two foreign languages. They were asked to prepare in teams tri-lingual lists of the words and phrases used and discussed in the classroom and to add synonyms and antonyms and also other relevant language material pertaining to the topics and issues dealt with in class. A three-column format was adopted for this task to enable participants to discover similarities and dissimilarities of usage, to become aware of word families and word formation patterns and to allow them to memorise language material in some form of context thus facilitating the learning process. The tri-lingual approach also resulted in an increased awareness of intercultural differences and the need to take this into consideration in the communication process. The progress in linguistic performance resulting from the tri-lingual approach still needs to be monitored by appropriate surveys. The participants’ self-assessment and motivation seem to underline the advantages of a tri-lingual language teaching at tertiary level.

КУЛЬТУРНО-ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЙ КОММЕНТАРИЙ В ОБУЧЕНИИ ИНОСТРАННЫХ СТУДЕНТОВ РУССКИМ ФРАЗЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИМ ЕДИНИЦАМ

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Одна из функций фразеологических единиц в языке — это хранение культурной информации о человеке и мире и передача ее из поколения в поколение. Следовательно, для того чтобы лучше понять культуру и историю страны, менталитет народа, нужно знакомиться с фразеологическими единицами изучаемого языка, а для того чтобы лучше понять и правильно употреблять фразеологические единицы в речи, необходимо изучать культуру, историю и жизнь народа, особенности национального сознания. Эти направления в обучении языку взаимосвязаны и взаимообусловлены.

Для практического изучения русских фразеологизмов в иностранной аудитории необходимо предлагать фразеологические единицы, наиболее традиционные и частотные в русской речи, а также фразеологические единицы, которые употребляются в произве-