Developing language competences for Management Tourism students

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Abstract

At present due to the economic crisis, many companies cut costs, including the work positions. Therefore, only the people who possess the right and extensive skills for the required job, might hold their position. Thus, the purpose of this article is to explore and emphasize the language knowledge and skills which might help students of tourism to get their job and which are also a must for their further careers. The paper also discusses which strategies and techniques these students need to achieve language level B2-C1 according to the Common European Reference Framework for languages. Furthermore, the theoretical knowledge is compared with the practical outcomes, based on student’s questionnaire responses. Finally, a model syllabus is provided in order to meet both MT students’ and teachers’ needs.

Keywords: language competences; knowledge; skills; tourism; students;

1. Introduction

Nowadays, graduates of Management of Tourism find quite difficult to get a job. However, if they are well equipped with management and language skills, they might be successful in getting the job they want. This article provides an answer to latter one - the language skills since the authors of the article have been for more than 15 years involved in the teaching of English for the students of tourism. Moreover, currently, within Interdisciplinary, Information Cognitive, Linguistics, and Modular Development of Study (IKLIM) project, they are working together with their colleagues from the Department of Applied Linguistics at the Faculty of Informatics and Management (FIM) of the University of Hradec Kralove (UHK) in the Czech Republic on the methodology of developing language competences for these students.

2. Language skills for the Management Tourism (MT) students

In order to succeed in present market, the language level of MT students should reach B2-C1 according to the Common European Reference Framework (CERF 2.6.2012) for languages. In this sense, they should be able in the area of speaking:
• express themselves fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly (Frydrychova Klimova 2011a);

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Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Ferhan Odabaşı
have a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions;

• use the language fluently, accurately and effectively on a wide range of general, academic, vocational or leisure topics, marking clearly the relationships between ideas;

• communicate spontaneously with good grammatical control without much sign of having to restrict what they want to say, adopting a level of formality appropriate to the circumstances;

• engage in extended conversation on most general topics in a clearly participatory fashion, even in a noisy environment;

• sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker;

• easily follow and contribute to complex interactions between third parties in group discussion even on abstract, complex unfamiliar topics;

• take an active part in informal discussion in familiar contexts, commenting, putting point of view;

• give a lecture, make a fluent telephone call, or make a presentation in the target language.

In the area of the **written speech** MT graduates should be able to:

• express themselves with clarity and precision, relating to the addressee flexibly and effectively;

• express news and views effectively in writing, and relate to those of others.

• write formal and informal letters/ reports, projects, for example from their study stay abroad, write qualified papers, such as dissertations (Frydrychova Klimova 2012).

In the area of **listening comprehension** MT graduates should be able to:

• understand enough to follow extended speech on abstract and complex topics beyond their own field, though they may need to confirm occasional details, especially if the accent is unfamiliar;

• recognise a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, appreciating register shifts;

• easily follow complex interactions between third parties in group discussion and debate, even on abstract, complex unfamiliar topics;

• keep up with an animated conversation between native speakers;

• follow lectures, discussions and debates with relative ease (Hubackova 2011).

In the area of **reading comprehension** MT graduate should be able to:

• understand in detail lengthy, complex texts, whether or not they relate to their own area of speciality;

• obtain information, ideas and opinions from highly specialised sources within their field;

• read with a large degree of independence, adapting style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes, and using appropriate reference sources selectively;

• have a broad active reading vocabulary, but may experience some difficulty with low frequency idioms;

• scan quickly through long and complex texts, locating relevant details;

• understand both formal and informal documents, such as articles, news items, reports, manuals, leaflets and formal and informal correspondence.
3. Questionnaire results

In the summer semester of 2011/12, a small-scale survey was carried out among MT students in order to find out what language skills they feel worth developing in the above mentioned four language areas, i.e. speaking, writing, listening and reading. 30 respondents submitted the questionnaires. The results are as follows:

In the area of **oral speech** they consider important to develop:
- both common daily/informal and formal communication;
- business communication;
- extensive communication;
- professional terminology from the field of tourism and its pronunciation;
- idiomatic and slang expressions.

In the area of **writing** they would like to improve their writing of:
- formal and informal correspondence, qualified papers, such as a Bachelor paper, essays, or C.V.

In the area of **listening comprehension** they want to improve:
- understanding of common conversation,
- understanding of announcements in a noisy environment, such as at the airports or railway stations;
- listening to a conversation of different native speakers with different accents;
- keeping up with a faster communication;
- understanding of news and documentaries.

In the area of **reading comprehension** MT students want to be able to:
- read books and newspapers in the target language without searching for words in dictionaries;
- read books from their field of study and understand their professional terminology.

As the results reveal, practical outcomes match the theory described above on the basis of CERF.

4. Model syllabus for MT students

In order to satisfy students needs and on the basis of CERF and students’ questionnaires, a model syllabus was created for a one-semester course. Its aim is to improve general and professional knowledge and other general competences of MT students. The entry level of student’s target language should be B2 according to CERF. The optional course, based on this syllabus, is going to be run at FIM UHK in the winter semester of academic year 2012/2013. However, before the syllabus was created, it was necessary to identify participant’s needs, i.e. what language skills and other competences they need and want to develop, what their strengths and weaknesses are …..

Moreover, course goals had to be determined. In addition, the course content had to be set and course materials had to be carefully selected and/or created. Their distribution had to be well thought of. Finally, methods of assessment, evaluation and testing had to be included.

The content of the course might be as follows:

1. **Identification of strengths and weaknesses from the language skills point of view** (this can be done with the help of a computer programme DIALANG and CERF self-evaluation forms)
2. **Ecotourism and geotourism**
   (development of reading skills, speaking skills, professional vocabulary within the above mentioned two topics; practice of writing formal abstracts and summaries)
3. **Ecotourism and geotourism**
   (development of listening skills and professional vocabulary by using Deutsche welle and National Geographic videos; practice of writing formal abstracts on the basis of listening)
4. **Grammar structures and presentations**
   (repetition and practice of problematic grammar structures; practice of presentation skills)
5. **Participant’s team presentations from the area of ecotourism and geotourism of the Czech Republic**
   (development of team cooperation, speaking and listening skills and vocabulary)
6. **Telephoning and teleconferences**
   (development of listening skills and quick speaking skills; practice of writing formal reports)
7. **Intercultural communication I**  
(development of intercultural communication skills in written and spoken English; cultural specifics of foreign countries)

8. **Intercultural communication II**  
(development of presentation skills on cultural specifics of foreign countries based on participant’s own choice; practice of writing a professional article on the basis of presentation)

9. **Meetings**  
(development of meeting skills, necessary terminology and speaking skills through reading; model meetings)

10. **Final consolidation**  

An inseparable part of the syllabus is of course literature and materials for student’s self-study. Among the recommended language books are:

- Frydrychova Klimova, B. 2006. *A guide to dissertations written in English.* UHK: Gaudeamus.
- Frydrychova Klimova, B. 2009. *Business English basics.* UHK: Gaudeamus.
- Murphy, R. 1985. *English grammar in use.* Cambridge: CUP.
- *Oxford collocations dictionary for students of English.* 2009. Oxford: OUP.

The area of ecotourism and geotourism includes the following sources:

- Dowling, R. & Newsome, D. (eds.) 2005. *Geotourism.* Elsevier Ltd.
- Higham, J. (ed.) 2007. *Critical issues in ecotourism: understanding a complex tourism phenomenon.* Elsevier Ltd.
- Paskova, M. *Složky o geoturismu a ekoturismu.* Retrieved May 3, 2012, from N:\UKAZKY\Paskova.Martina.
- *Recreation, tourism and nature in a changing world.* 2010. Retrieved May 1, 2012, from http://edepot.wur.nl/148461.

All the sources, resources, prerequisites, assignments and credit/exam requirements can be uploaded into an online eLearning course. FIM UHK staff members create such courses in a virtual learning environment (Learning Management System) called Blackboard Learn. As Frydrychova Klimova (2011b) states, at present, more than 170 e-courses are offered, with more than 45 of these being foreign language courses. Some of them, such as *Teaching Written Business English,* can be taught completely on-line. However, most of them are blended as there are usually a few tutorials. At tutorials (face-to-face teaching) students usually discuss the problems they come across when doing different types of tasks or writing assignments. Moreover, sometimes there are regular classes and e-courses are used as reference courses (i.e. students can once again read the information obtained in class and do some additional exercises to practise their knowledge) for further self-study or revision of the lecture. This is, for example, true for teaching *Culture of Great Britain* or *History of the USA.*

5. **Conclusion**

As it can be seen from the above outlined syllabus, students, if they want to succeed in their future jobs, must not only acquire the necessary language skills, but also other communication competences, such as social and cultural skills. These competences in present global world fundamentally influence everyday’s basic communication, but also communication on which the international business is done. Moreover, universities also have to consider a modification of their existing study programmes in case they want to succeed in the present competition and attract their potential clients – students (Frydrychova Klimova & Poulou 2011).

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