

# Analysis of academic texts in the process of language training of future diplomats

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**Abstract** The paper deals with the analysis of the academic texts from the point of view of the language analyse. It compares the text from the special and the language point of view. After the introductory characteristics of the professional text and professional language, we focus on the criteria for selecting an academic text for the needs of language teaching in the fields of international relations, diplomacy and political science. Afterwards it deals with detailed analysis of the individual steps of the language analysis. Towards the end, the paper emphasises the necessity of the language analysis of the academic texts in the process of language training for specific purposes of the students of diplomacy and political science.

**Key words** Academic text, terminology, interdisciplinarity, language analysis, country studies, political history, intercultural communication

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Current linguistic trends abandon the separate study of individual linguistic disciplines, subjects, phenomena and increasingly prefer interdisciplinarity. This tendency is reflected not only in cooperation between linguistics and other social sciences (psychology, sociology, history and others), but also in cooperation between different linguistic disciplines. We follow similar developmental changes in the area of our interest in the teaching of a foreign language at non-philological faculties. In the last two decades, the interest of linguistics (especially under the influence of changing social conditions) has focused on communication, functional, pragmatic and cultural-anthropological focus, the key concepts of which have become the terms *field of study*, *text*, *communication*, *context* and *culture*. In connection with the current trend of the educational society, professional communication has gained an important position in the entire cultural and social existence of every educated individual. It has become an important part of the language disposition of members of society in addition to everyday communication and has helped them to function more effectively in everyday life and professional practice. As we have stated in the previous lines, the current trend in linguistics is the interconnection of several scientific disciplines and disciplines. The linguistic view is confronted with sociological, psychological and cultural research, which results in the analysis of professional communication in many scientific disciplines - in science and technology, but also in the

economic, legal and political science fields. Such a comprehensive approach to research includes not only linguistic but also professional requirements, which in turn results in more effective communication of experts on a global scale.

## 2. LANGUAGE TRAINING AT THE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, MBU

An essential part of the teaching program of non-philological faculties of the humanities, e.g. law, political science, economics and other types of faculties is the teaching of foreign languages. Mastery of at least two of the world's most widely used languages is currently a matter of course for graduates of international relations and diplomacy.

In this paper we will provide our view on the conditions for successful study of foreign languages at non-philological universities, entry criteria for students and textual material, together with the expected final output. We are based on the current language program for teaching academic English at the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. Language teaching at our faculty is not focused on general language, but on acquiring and deepening lexical knowledge in the field of study, therefore the main source of new language knowledge is political science texts, texts on international relations, basics of law and economics and humanities according to the chosen language – country studies and history of selected countries of the given language area. In the English-speaking field, we focused on the political studies and history of Great Britain and the USA.

## 3. CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL TEACHING OF PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE AT NON-PHILOLOGICAL FACULTIES

### 3.1 Academic text in the process of teaching a foreign language

The basic focus and goal of the professional text is defined by J. Mistrík as the mediation of work information, publication of acquired knowledge and recording of important ideas acquired through scientific research, reflections and experiences of people. (Mistrík, 1977) This intention is supported by the choice of means

of expression that are strongly contextually bound, interrelated and overlap with other styles. All of these are conceptual expressions that are able to transmit the results of the human intellect quickly, in a condensed form and with maximum accuracy. (Mistrík, 1977) The above definitions indicate the dominance of the reference and metalanguage function of the academic text, which is reflected in the choice of language means, mostly of a terminological nature. Non-terminological means, including phraseology, are used to a lesser extent due to the function of professional texts. Nevertheless, it is necessary to pay attention to them and detailed research, because their atypicality and unexpected occurrence in the text disrupts the conventional understanding of the content and function of the academic text and contributes to their attractiveness. However, the primary functions of academic texts remain descriptive, directive and instructive functions, which are dominant and essential even in political science texts.

### 3.2 Criteria for selecting an academic text

The basic precondition for successful language teaching is a qualified selection of an academic text according to several qualitative and quantitative criteria. The first criterion is the focus on the field of study. With the current demands placed on students, it is not effective to deal with academic texts that are unrelated or only very marginally related to a given scientific area. In our case, we give priority to areas related to political science, such as international relations, political science and the political history of Great Britain and the USA. The latter texts are the subject of our practice and therefore we pay attention to them in further analysis.

Another criterion for selecting a text is its topicality. Nowadays, it is necessary to adapt professional texts to rapidly advancing changes and updates in all areas of study. In the case of texts from history, topicality is ensured by additional materials from contemporary journals, which are directly or indirectly related to the analysed topic.

An important criterion for choosing an adequate text is the language level of the target group of students. According to the required level, it is necessary to choose the text of reasonable difficulty. Poor assessment of students' previous knowledge leads to too fast processing of material, lack of activity in seminars and poor knowledge and language progress. Overestimation of student abilities and knowledge by submitting too demanding a text leads to disgust, demotivation and does not have the required didactic qualities leading to effective progress. The opposite situation also has a negative effect, when the students are presented with a text that is too simple and thus does not represent any enrichment of their lexical or proficiency. A similar effect is brought by the disproportionate length of the text, so in our case we proceeded to create our own teaching texts, which provide an overview of the political development of Great Britain and the United States in a condensed form, focusing on the most important events, personalities, contexts.

### 3.3 The position of academic language

The struggle concerning the definitive determination of the position of academic language in the linguistic system, which is taking place between linguists dealing with general and academic language, has been going on for many levels at a long time. Academic language is sometimes wrongly considered "insufficiently scientifically based" and is included in a not very important branch of lexicology. In the first half of the 20th century, some members of the Prague Linguistic Circle drew attention to the theoretically professional

function of language. We met with the most concise definition of professional language in English Special Languages by Sager, Dungworth, McDonald from 1980 - special languages are semi-autonomous, complex semiotic systems based on and derived from general language; their use presupposes special education and is restricted to communication among specialists in the same or closely related fields. (Sager, Dungworth, McDonald, 1980)

### 3.4 Academic language

A general prerequisite for the effectiveness of education in academic language is the use of academic terminology. Academic texts combine instructive, descriptive and directive function with communicative function. The carrier of academic communication is academic language. Academic language is defined as a set of language items that are tied to a certain area of human activity. (Drozd, Seibicke, 1973) Borsuková understands academic language as an abstract concept, which does not exist as a separate linguistic expression, but is updated in academic texts. (Borsuková, 1995) This author further characterizes academic language as a summary of lexical and syntactic starting points, as a potential for the creation of professional, that means not only strictly educational communications. Academic communication is characterized by any structure with bound semantic content. It aims to convey information from various fields of science, research and human thinking. We encounter the use of academic terminology not only in texts of educational style, but also in administrative and journalistic style. With the growing level of education and expertise in all spheres of society, academic terminology is penetrating many areas of human activity, it is becoming a natural part of everyday communication. However, academic terms lose their strict terminological character in ordinary communication. (Jelínek, 1995) In connection with the expansion of academic language, there is an internationalization of terms and the emergence and gradual establishment of new technical terms, reflecting the latest trends. On the other hand, older terms disappear. Simultaneously with this process, academic terms penetrate into ordinary language and vice versa. The language of academic texts is used to name subjects and terms, so it is oriented towards a specific vocabulary, which in this case has a reference function. The term in academic language becomes a linguistic feature with a strictly defined content. With respect to terminological normalization, which is based on the precision of naming, the technical term is perceived as an axiom that is exactly defined and independent of context.

## 4. LANGUAGE ANALYSIS OF THE ACADEMIC TEXT

If the text meets all professional and linguistic criteria, we proceed to the linguistic analysis itself. We divide it into several parts, while due to the complex processing it is necessary to go through all stages and it is recommended to follow the order of individual parts of the language analysis.

### 4.1 Semantic analysis

The first part is semantic analysis. Depending on the level of students and time constraints, this stage can be solved by home self-study or collective processing in seminars. Semantic analysis is closely related to the second stage of linguistic analysis of an academic text and that is the lexical part. These two parts cannot be separated or skipped because they represent an understanding of the content of the text, an explanation of unknown terminology, and these activities are necessary for further work with the text. To

master the content and lexical side of the text, it is necessary to work with a quality dictionary, preferably monolingual, again depending on the achieved language level of students. The work cannot be limited to monotonous reading and translation of the text, because this type of activity will soon become not only inanimate for students, but also tiring and will not bring the desired result or interest in further work with the text. The best is the independent work of students, who first master the text using the scan reading method to get acquainted with its approximate content. They also deal with detailed reading, in which they underline the unknown terminology. Finally, it is possible to select the terms that are necessary for understanding the text and, depending on the language level of the students, there is a realistic assumption that they will not be able to master them.

#### 4.2 Lexical analysis

The selected (not only unknown, but also above all key) terminology is the subject of further processing in lexical analysis. Subsequent exercises are used to confirm comprehension of the text (comprehension tasks) and to work with terminology. Questions analysing text comprehension can take several forms:

- control questions for which the creation of precise answers according to the content of the text is required,
- yes-no questions, in which students decide whether opinions are true or false, again depending on the content of the text,
- multiple-choice questions, that means questions with multiple answers provided, from which students have to determine the right one.

Lexical analysis, that means work with vocabulary, presents endless possibilities for further processing. Some of them are:

- search for synonyms,
- searching for oppositions,
- creation of Slovak equivalents,
- explanation of meanings, as well as
- elaboration of abbreviations is a very good possibility for consolidating new vocabulary, its further use and searching for connections with other terminology.

Familiarization with the new terminology should be followed by consolidation of new knowledge and practice of old ones:

- use of new terms in sentences,
- creating your own sentences, not content-related to the text,
- adding words to sentences, as well as
- combining words with their meaning, these are all exercises that strengthen the newly acquired terminology and contribute to a better understanding of the text.

#### 4.3 Morphological analysis

The third part of the linguistic analysis of an academic text is the morphological part, which uses the newly acquired vocabulary and deepens the knowledge of the grammatical structure of the language. Possible alternatives are:

- completion of appropriate prepositions,
- giving the verbs into the proper tense,
- creating new part of speech,
- search for metaphorical expressions.

#### 4.4 Verbal expression

The last stage, but very important for consolidating all the acquired knowledge and skills, is verbal word processing. This can take many forms, the most commonly used being:

- discussion
- presentation.

Both forms require not only the use of newly acquired vocabulary, but also the development of students' expressive abilities, either in verbal or written form.

The development of students' language and communicative competences corresponds to the priorities that determine them in their future professional practice:

- ability to communicate professionally
- to develop, promote and increase students' cultural awareness
- to be able to adequately orientate oneself in cultural peculiarities and institutions
- cultivate sensitive behaviour in contact with people from a foreign language environment as one of the determining factors of successful international contacts.

The language program of a faculty of any kind and department requires two main characteristics: complexity and continuity. Complexity in this context means above all the connection of language teaching with the field of study. This means not interfering in other scientific disciplines, but developing language knowledge and skills in the field. The basic precondition for continuity as another factor influencing the language program is the fact that students come to university at a certain level of knowledge of a foreign language. Further language study thus represents a certain "superstructure" - it does not focus on basic language knowledge, but develops and expands the knowledge already acquired by gradually adding additional language information, not only in the grammatical, morphological and syntactic areas, but especially in the lexical area.

#### 4.5 Practical application

For the specification of the given issue and the application of my own experience from teaching, I will prefer the analysis of the English language at our faculty. The language program is divided into different levels, depending on whether it is a first or a second foreign language, but the system and content remain the same. The program is based on the main subjects - landscape science and history of English-speaking countries, academic texts from international relations, political science texts, the basics of economic law, texts on the European Union. Due to time constraints, current professional texts in an optional form are included during the semesters. In the academic texts of individual types, students get acquainted not only with specialized knowledge (this is mainly the role of specialized subjects), but especially with their lexical side. After completing the courses, the student must be able to present their specialized knowledge in a foreign language. Against the background of increasing specialized knowledge, these texts are also used for further expansion and deepening of language knowledge from the morphological and syntactic point of view.

The country studies as well as the history of the selected region depend on the chosen language. In the English-speaking area, it is Great Britain and the USA. On the example of the history teaching system, we will also offer a specific system of one of the basic subjects of the language program of our faculty. The basic goal is to

mediate and consolidate knowledge about the historical development of society, the political and governmental system, as well as about individual significant events and contexts in the history of the mentioned countries. The topic is chronologically divided into chapters. These gradually touch on the most important periods. Their basic characteristics and subsequent analysis of individual events, personalities and contexts provide students with a general overview of history, develop their vocabulary and language and communication skills.

In the following examples, we will present some examples of the application and validation of new knowledge and skills selected from the *History of Great Britain university textbooks* (Benčková, 2011).<sup>1</sup> The basic goal of teaching history is to mediate and consolidate knowledge about the historical development of society, the political and governmental system, as well as about individual significant events and contexts in history. The topics are chronologically divided into individual chapters. These gradually touch on the most important periods in history. The basic characteristics and subsequent analysis of significant events (war conflicts, rulers, courts, presidents, governments) give students a general overview of historical contexts, develop their vocabulary and language skills. Based on the studied materials, students present a brief overview of the historical period and a more detailed description of the most important, respectively the most interesting facts (that is, events, personalities) against the background of world history. Related presentations deepen the knowledge provided in the basic texts and provide students with the opportunity for individual presentation. They verify the acquired knowledge by elaborating lexical exercises, answering questions and discussing them. The teaching process is focusing on the development of several language skills that follow each other.

#### 4.5.1 Vocabulary selection

In this necessary procedure, students independently, by reading a selected academic text, select an unknown vocabulary, especially in the field of specialized terminology, which they then process in cooperation with the teacher, specialized literature and in semantic contexts. The next step is to set aside the keywords that most accurately characterize the individual texts.

*Example:*

Useful vocabulary:

tribe – a large group of people who live in the same area and share a common language, religion and customs; a social division of (usually preliterate) people

literacy – the ability to read and write

clan – a large group of families that are related to each other

BC – before Christ; abbreviation used after a date to show that it refers to a time before the birth of Jesus Christ

AD – anno domini, abbreviation used after a date to show that it refers to a time after the birth of Jesus Christ (Benčková, 2011, s. 12)

#### 4.5.2 Comprehension check and topics for discussion

Necessity for the verification of the knowledge acquired during the seminars is the correct answer to the comprehension check questions, which always follow the individual chapters. Students must not only answer the control questions at the end of the text, but

also the specific and detailed questions of the teacher, they must combine the knowledge already acquired with the newly acquired on the basis of historical and political contexts. The answers to the comprehension check questions may be the subject of discussion.

*Example:*

What were the reasons for the Hanoverians to come to the English throne?

Characterize the first Cabinet and its functions.

Summarize the foreign conflicts of Britain during the 18th century. (Benčková, 2011, s. 57)

#### 4.5.3 Practicing lexical and grammar skills

With the use of historical and political texts, it is also possible to practice language skills. Usually, a specific text is used, passages from which are adapted to various grammatical activities. Practically all phenomena from morphology and syntax can be practiced. The teacher, at his / her own discretion and as necessary, complements his / her own phenomena, for example in the field of phraseology (the position of phrases in professional text and in teaching will be addressed in one of the following papers).

*Example:*

Fulfil the gaps with an appropriate preposition:

Methodism was a religious movement, led \_\_\_\_ Charles and John Wesley and \_\_\_\_ George Whitefield, which originated as a reaction \_\_\_\_ the apathy and the emphasis on logic and reason that characterized the Anglican Church \_\_\_\_ the early 18th century. The term was originally applied \_\_\_\_ a religious society which was established \_\_\_\_ Oxford University in 1729 by Whitefield and the Wesley brothers (nicknamed the "Holy Club," its members were young men who, \_\_\_\_ order to promote piety and morality, observed strict rules of fasting and prayer)... (Benčková, 2011, s. 58-59)

The division of the topic into separate units - the History of Great Britain and the History of the USA gives us the opportunity to focus on important milestones in the development of these two countries, as well as their comparison. The diversifying component of teaching is examples of contemporary literature, presidential speeches, portraits, maps, and graphs. At present, within the possibilities of the faculty, we are inclined to use multimedia and modern technology in the teaching process. As part of our topic, we present interactive exercises, but also additional information, e.g. graphs, diagrams of individual dynasties, sketches of war conflicts using power-point presentations. A similar form of presentations is recommended for students in the preparation of seminar papers on selected topics. Using this form of presentation is excellent for easier remembering of facts, because students will receive information in written, verbal and visual form.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The aim of the paper was to emphasize the importance of linguistic analysis of the academic texts in the process of teaching foreign languages at non-philological universities. It is not possible or beneficial to separate this teaching from the specialized part. On the contrary, the combination of both elements leads to the consolidation and practice of not only new specialized knowledge and skills, but also the language aspects of the study. Given that these are usually students with a higher language level, it is not appropriate to separate the specialized and language parts of the

<sup>1</sup> BENČKOVÁ, M. History of Great Britain. Vysokoškolské učebné texty. 1. edition. Banská Bystrica: UMB, 2011. 85 p. ISBN: 978-80-557-0236-0

study, but on the contrary, their symbiosis in favour of further education is welcome. Linguistic analysis of the academic texts represents the concept of an interdisciplinary application of the connection between the department and language education with a focus on the development of intercultural communication.

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