

Developing an Institution-Wide Language Policy: A Case Study

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As a result of the Bologna Process and Hungary's accession to the European Union, it is of primary importance for future graduates to possess high levels of communicative competence in at least two foreign languages, intercultural competence as well as an ability to learn languages in an autonomous way. The paper takes these challenges as a starting point, and describes the major elements of and the strategic and pedagogical considerations behind the language policy which was developed during the first part of 2003 at Kodolányi University College, Hungary. As a consequence, the three major components of the foreign language teaching programme at present are (1) teaching LSP exclusively to all undergraduate students, (2) introducing subject-specific courses in foreign languages, and (3) the development of an independent learning centre. The language policy has been implemented since September 2003, which means that we already have some preliminary results. The paper gives an account of these as well.

Introduction

As a result of the Bologna Process and Hungary's accession to the European Union, it is of primary importance for future graduates to possess high levels of communicative competence in at least two foreign languages, intercultural competence as well as an ability to learn languages in an autonomous way (Council of Europe 2001: 168). All these are regarded as essential from the point of view of the European employability of graduates, their citizenship and personal development. This is why the Berlin Communiqué, signed by European Ministers of Education on 19th September 2003, also stresses the necessity of promoting linguistic diversity and language learning within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

This paper focuses on the importance, possible role and future of foreign language instruction in Hungarian universities within the framework of the Bologna Process. Since it is every university's own right and responsibility to determine the aims, focus, content, possible outcomes and amount of language instruction, it is of primary importance what decisions an institution takes. The paper argues for a possible model with the help of theoretical considerations and through the introduction of a concrete example: the development and implementation of a new language policy at Kodolányi University College during 2003.

The Hungarian context

Hungarian institutions of higher education, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, have already carried out a considerable amount of work in order to develop transparency and comparability between the currently very diverse academic programmes of higher education throughout Europe, as is stated in the Bologna Declaration. (For the full text of the declaration see <http://www.univie.ac.at/eua/>) Notably, as far as the structure of the academic programmes is concerned, Hungarian stakeholders and experts have reached a consensus to offer students a linear study system instead of the presently existing dual one, and, therefore, to develop two cycles, where the undergraduate cycle leads to a Bachelor degree and the graduate cycle leads to a Master and later a Doctoral degree. There also seems to exist an agreement regarding the number and the exact titles of the future Bachelor programmes as well as the field of study to which the individual programmes will belong. At present, the development of new degree requirements is under way. The requirements will focus on competences rather than factual knowledge, and will regard the development of relevant competences as the major outcome of a study programme in both cycles. The degree requirements, in the form of a ministerial decree, will provide a framework for institutions of higher education to develop their own Bachelor and Master programmes.

As has been indicated above, Hungarian higher education is currently experiencing a massive academic reform. There is at least one area, however, where we cannot expect considerable changes. The approach of the new degree requirements towards foreign language learning and teaching will, very likely, remain almost the same. (It is important to note that this claim does not apply to Bachelor and Master programmes in languages.) On the one hand, it is and will remain determined at a national level that graduates cannot receive their degree without the successful completion of an accredited state foreign language examination. The required level can be basic, intermediate or advanced. The required focus is mostly general language, but in a few cases language for specific purposes is required. These criteria of the necessary language examination differ according to field of study. (It is beyond the scope of the present paper to discuss to what extent such a differentiation is valid and useful. For a

discussion see Sárdi 2003). On the other hand, however, it is up to individual universities to decide whether they regard it as necessary and useful to include language instruction in their study programmes at all. It needs to be mentioned here that Hungarian institutions of higher education do offer foreign language courses of some kind mainly for full time students, and it is the institutions' right and responsibility to determine the amount and aims of foreign language instruction. For this reason, the range of language courses varies considerably.

In addition to this context, let me also mention some facts and data in connection with the foreign language knowledge of Hungarian university students (Statisztikai tájékoztató 2003):

- Language instruction in one foreign language is obligatory from the age of 10 (grade 4 of the primary school).
- By the time a student enters higher education at the age of 18 or later, s/he has learned a foreign language for at least 9 years and another foreign language for at least 4 years.
- State foreign language examinations have a long tradition, high prestige, and face validity in Hungary. Therefore, the foreign language knowledge of citizens is usually determined on the basis of whether they have successfully taken such an examination.
- In September 2003, 60 percent of the newly admitted first year students did not yet have a successful state language examination at any level.
- At the same time, 4 percent of the newly admitted first year students already had a successful basic level, 30 percent an intermediate level, and 6 percent an advanced level state language examination.
- In summer 2003, 20 percent of graduates did not obtain their degree because they did not pass the required state language examination.

Taking this background as a starting point, it is possible, and indeed necessary to raise two basic questions in connection with the future of foreign language teaching in Hungarian higher education institutions. It is important to point out that these questions are not new. The reason why we need to address them now is that the international and national context of the issue is in constant change. In order to respond, in an appropriate way, to these changes we need to re-formulate the answers and take decisions accordingly. In my opinion, the following core questions need to be considered:

1. Should language instruction be part of the study programme at all? On the one hand, foreign language teaching is one of the most important elements of curricula in public education. At present, it is a powerful argument in Hungary that perhaps it is the role of public education rather than that of higher education to teach foreign languages. On the other hand, public education does not seem to be able to fulfil this requirement, and many students enter higher education without an appropriate command of foreign languages. Perhaps universities should accept that, in order to increase students' chances of passing a state language examination and of receiving their degree at the end of their studies, a compromise is necessary and they should invest time, money and energy into language instruction. Also, students who enter higher education with a foreign language certificate may lose their knowledge if they do not continue their language studies. Therefore, they may also need further language instruction.

In any case, if the answer is 'no' to this question there is no need to ask anything else. But if the answer for some reason is 'yes', we also need to consider the following:

2. What should be the goal of foreign language instruction? Taking the previous argument further, perhaps the goal needs to be determined on the basis of the degree requirements. As an example, where an advanced level foreign language certificate for general purposes is required this should be the focus of language courses, whereas in the case of an intermediate level language requirement for specific purposes the focus of the language course will change accordingly. In other words, the main goal of language instruction may be to prepare students for the relevant state language examination. But in this case what happens to students who already have the necessary language certificate? Are they also required to continue their language studies in some form? How?

At the same time, it is very likely that the exam requirements do not correspond to the long term language needs of the students. They may need the foreign language for academic and/or professional purposes. Perhaps they wish to continue their studies, find practical placement or a job in another country, or they would like to carry out secondary research for their thesis in a foreign language. To support these aims, the language course may be developed on the basis of some kind of needs analysis rather than the requirements of a foreign language exam.

Given the fact that each university can take its own decisions on how it wishes to define the parameters of language instruction, answers given to these questions and the reasons behind the answers will determine the future of foreign language teaching in any given university.

Developing an institution-wide language policy

Below, I will report on the answers Kodolányi University College gave to the above questions. I will discuss the principles (some with theoretical some with more practical bases) which helped us form our language policy, and will describe its elements. In order to do so, however, it is also necessary to provide the reader with background information about the elements of our previous language policy. The policy related to five study programmes of the university college: Economics, Media Studies, Tourism, Catering and International Relations.

According to the degree requirements, an intermediate level general state language certificate is needed in Economics and Media Studies, an intermediate level specific purpose state language certificate is necessary in Tourism and Catering, whereas two certificates are required in International Relations at an intermediate level focusing on specific language. Table 1 indicates the amount of language instruction according to study programme before September 2003. The number of foreign language lessons was determined on the basis of the degree requirements. For a general language certificate students received 360 hours of instruction, whereas students studied a language for 480 hours if they needed to take a specific purpose language exam. Students majoring in International Relations had the highest number of language lessons because they had to pass specific purpose language examinations in two languages. Table 1 also indicates that language instruction was entirely the responsibility of the Department of Modern Languages.

Type of courses	Economics	Media Studies	Tourism	Catering	International Relations
Language(s) for general purposes	360	360	480	480	720
Social Sciences Obligatory	-	-	-	-	-
Social Sciences Optional	-	-	-	-	-
Subject specific Obligatory	-	-	-	-	-
Subject specific Optional	-	-	-	-	-
Altogether	360	360	480	480	720

Table 1 Number of foreign language lessons according to study programme until September 2003

Before the 2003-2004 academic year, each student could decide, upon entrance, which of the three foreign languages (English, German or French) s/he wanted to learn. Among other things it meant that a first year student, after several years of studies in one language in public education, could decide to start another language as a beginner. The main focus of language instruction was to teach languages for general purposes. Only students at an intermediate level were offered a language course which prepared them for the relevant state language examination (general or specific). If a student passed the required state language examination at any point during the study period, s/he could finish his/her language studies immediately. Courses with a clear LSP focus other than the actual requirements of a specific state language exam were very rare and only optional.

At this point, it would be possible to criticize almost every aspect of the language policy described above. This will be done by discussing the principles behind and the elements of our new language policy.

Forming principles

In the previous section, two very important questions were asked regarding the place of language instruction in higher education. In the light of the new challenges, Kodolányi gave the following answers:

1. Should language instruction be part of the study programme at all? Yes. Young graduates face several linguistic challenges due to globalization processes, the expansion of the EU and the development of the EHEA. These linguistic challenges clearly determine university students' long term linguistic needs. Also, many students plan to continue their studies after graduation in another country, or they would like to spend a semester abroad within the framework of Erasmus, Leonardo or other international programmes. This will be possible only when they possess the necessary competences to do so.

Furthermore, students have many short term linguistic needs which relate closely to their university studies. For example, they need to be able to deal with subject-related texts in a foreign language for different purposes such as writing a home assignment or a dissertation. Or, when an international guest professor gives a certain number of lectures where the working language is not the students' mother tongue, students can benefit from such opportunities only if they are also able to cope with the linguistic requirements.

There is also a danger that the level of many students' foreign language knowledge would probably decrease without formal language instruction. This is partly because language courses within the framework of public education do not seem to emphasize enough the importance and usefulness of autonomous learning, and they do not focus on independent language learning techniques either. Also, the reason can partly be found in the characteristic features of young adults. Many of them are not very conscious about their future linguistic needs and are not determined enough to continue their language studies individually. Therefore, they would certainly benefit from the guidance which is provided in the form of a language course. It needs to be mentioned at this point, however, that it is essential for students to become independent language learners. This is because they will probably have more chances to make a conscious effort to continue their language studies or start learning another foreign language after graduation if they are aware of the importance and usefulness of independent language learning techniques and they have the necessary skills to use such techniques.

2. What should be the goal of foreign language instruction? As has been mentioned above, it is the mission of Kodolányi University College to prepare students for the requirements of the (international) labour market and to provide students with a degree of high value. Therefore, it lies in the interest of the institution to help students meet linguistic challenges. In order to do so, Kodolányi aims to further develop the linguistic competences of all students. The expression 'to further develop linguistic competences' is very important here because it indicates that it is not our aim to introduce languages at a beginner level. This is because our students have already learned at least two foreign languages for several years by the time they enter higher education (for details see the section on the Hungarian context above). We regard it as a waste, both from a pedagogical and a financial point of view, to disregard students' existing language knowledge, and the time and energy they have already invested in language development.

On the basis of what has been said about the degree requirements in the previous section, we must not forget that students need to be able to pass the required state language examination during their university studies if they wish to enter the labour market or continue their studies at a postgraduate level as soon as possible. Despite this fact, however, we maintain that it is not the aim of our language programmes to devote time for the preparation of a general language examination. We do not regard it as a role of higher education to take up the responsibility of public education and teach students what they failed to learn during their primary and secondary school years. We strongly believe that 9 years of language study in public education should, in theory, lead to a successful intermediate language examination. In the cases when it fails to do so, language programmes at the university cannot be expected and required to accept the role of a language tutor. (This need not mean that the university college does not offer remedies at all. The important point is that such remedies cannot be part of the study programmes.)

It has been repeatedly pointed out in the literature that matching course design desiderata to real learner needs is a necessity which impacts on many of the variables in the language acquisition process (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998, Kurtán 2003, West 1994), and techniques have been developed to carry out needs analyses. It has been possible to identify university students' and young graduates' linguistic needs in Hungary and elsewhere (see for example Noble 2001, Sárdi 2002). Some of these needs have been mentioned in this paper. The fact that the long-term and short-term linguistic needs of students can be defined calls for the development and implementation of a needs-based language programme. We strongly believe that it is the task and responsibility of higher education to ensure that students develop the linguistic competences which are necessary to cope with tasks in academic and professional domains. It is, therefore, essential that linguistic needs are taken into account when designing a language programme for university students. We maintain that this aim can be reached in two ways: (1) offering language courses that focus on LSP determined on the basis of learner needs (academic and professional), and (2) teaching subject-specific content through a foreign language. The latter is often referred to as content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in the literature (Marsh 2002).

The development of CLIL is based on the assumption that a foreign language is learned most effectively when it is used to convey informational content that is of interest and relevance to the learner (Brinton et al. 1989). There are several arguments that underlie this claim. One of them is that CLIL takes into account the interests and needs of learners. It also gives students opportunities to use the foreign language in a variety of settings and contexts in order to prepare them to operate successfully in different academic and work situations. Also, from a

European point of view, students need support in developing specific and inter-cultural as well as linguistic knowledge, skills and strategies in order to function as autonomous and mobile European citizens (Coyle 2002:27). Furthermore, several examples of practical experience exist where results show that it is possible and successful to combine language instruction with a focus on content (e.g. at the Free University in Berlin, and the University of Ottawa, for details see Brinton et al.1989, Marsh 2002).

To summarise, the following principles played a role in forming the new language policy for the university college:

1. It is an important role of higher education to further develop the language knowledge and competences of students which they gained during their studies in public education.
2. It is the aim of language programmes in higher education to develop LSP courses on the basis of students' linguistic needs.
3. It is also the aim of language programmes in higher education to integrate language learning and subject matters. Therefore, content and language integrated learning needs to be an essential element of degree programmes.
4. Students need to become aware of the possibility and usefulness of individual language learning during their studies and after graduation. In order to reach this aim, independent learning techniques need to be encouraged as part of the language programme.

Elements of the new language policy

On the basis of these principles, the elements of the new language policy were developed through discussions between language experts, subject lecturers, department heads and members of the management at Kodolanyi University College. It has been decided to fully integrate foreign language teaching into the degree programmes offered at the university college. It has been shown in Table 1 that language instruction was an add-on to subject courses within our curricula until 2003. From the beginning of the 2003-2004 academic year, however, students are offered degree programmes where foreign language learning plays an organic role in every curriculum. Table 2 shows the number of lessons with a foreign language focus according to degree programmes. If we compare the data in Tables 1 and 2, it can be seen that the number of instruction hours focusing on a foreign language either increased or remained the same in the case of the new language policy, although the number of lessons within the languages block has been lowered.

Type of courses	Economics	Media Studies	Tourism	Catering	International Relations
Language(s) for specific purposes	240	240	240	240	480
Social Sciences Obligatory	60	-	90	90	90
Social Sciences Optional	30	-	30	30	90
Subject specific Obligatory	60	120	60	60	90
Subject specific Optional	60	-	60	60	60
Altogether	450	360	480	480	810

Table 2 Number of lessons in a foreign language according to study programme

Our new language policy has three major components. The first one is the introduction of LSP courses based on students' linguistic needs. The second component is CLIL, where content teaching is integrated with language learning aims. The third component of the language policy focuses on independent language learning, and aims at encouraging students to use independent learning techniques.

According to the new language policy, foreign language instruction is organised along the following guidelines:

1. Students continue to study a foreign language building on the knowledge and competences they gained in public education. Therefore, courses at a beginner level are not offered.
2. The focus of language instruction is teaching language for specific purposes rather than teaching language for general purposes in the case of every degree programme, regardless of the degree requirements.
3. Within the framework of our Adult Education Centre, students have the opportunity to take extra general language courses. Students pay for these courses.

4. Students are given the opportunity to take mock state language examinations which provide them with information on how well they would perform at such an examination at a given point in time.
5. Upon passing the required state language examination during the study period, students can be absolved from their LSP courses only. CLIL still remains part of their study programme.
6. A number of subject-specific courses are offered in foreign languages (CLIL). Students are required to obtain a certain number of credit points for subject-specific courses in a foreign language.
7. LSP courses partly precede foreign language subject-specific courses, and partly run parallel with them.
8. Independent learning techniques are introduced and their use is encouraged by language teachers and subject lecturers.
9. An Independent Language Learning Centre is developed using the expertise of the Department of Modern Languages and that of language experts at the university college and in partner institutions, and managed within the framework of the University Library.
10. In-service training is organised for language teachers and subject lecturers who participate in the new language programme of the university college. The in-service training focuses on the linguistic, subject-specific and methodological aspects of the newly developed and implemented language programmes.
11. An institution-wide campaign is organised in order to inform students about the aims, the elements and the advantages of the new language policy.
12. At present English, German and French is taught at Kodolányi. The institution will make a conscious effort to increase the number of foreign languages offered on the basis of students' needs.

Preliminary results

From September 2003, first year students are offered language programmes on the basis of our new language policy. During the first academic year of the degree programmes, students are offered LSP courses at different levels, and the aims and content of a language course is determined taking into consideration the focus of the actual degree programme students attend. CLIL will be introduced from September 2004, during the second year of the degree programme. Our Independent Learning Centre was opened in April 2004 in order to provide an opportunity for students to develop their foreign language knowledge outside the classroom. However, many tasks need to be completed in the near future in order to fully develop, implement and make the most of the new language programmes and our language policy.

In my view, an important result we have reached so far is that we have started the development and implementation of the new programme in a relatively short time. This has been possible due to the active cooperation of colleagues of different background. Their willingness to cooperate and arrive at a consensus indicates that our academic staff is aware of the linguistic challenges students and young graduates have to face, and that they also regard it as the responsibility of higher education to focus on these challenges.

It is also a very important result that now it is possible to identify tasks that remain to be fulfilled (there are many), and to develop action plans regarding their realisation. The most important tasks are (1) to develop cooperation between language teachers and subject-lecturers involved in CLIL so that they can consult with each other to make their work as effective as possible; (2) to provide in-service training for subject-lecturers focusing on both the linguistic and the methodological aspects of CLIL; (3) to explore and fully exploit the possibilities of an independent learning centre; (4) to provide an opportunity for language teachers to discuss and give feedback on the objectives and content of language courses, and to make the necessary changes on the basis of the feedback; and (5) to design and carry out an action research project which runs parallel with the implementation of the language policy so that we draw the necessary conclusions and make the necessary changes in the programme.

Conclusions

In this paper I have investigated the linguistic challenges young graduates need to face in Hungary and other European countries due to the Bologna Process and the expansion of the European Union. In the light of these challenges I have argued that it is of primary importance for students not to stop language learning at the end of their secondary education. Instead, undergraduates should continue learning languages within the framework of degree programmes in order to gain a greater perspective of their specific field of study and to be able to exploit opportunities to ensure their professional development.

It has also been stated that language programmes for undergraduates need to be designed carefully taking results of relevant theory and research into consideration along with students' long term and short term linguistic needs. The advantages of teaching LSP, the usefulness of content-based teaching as well as the importance of the

development of independent learning skills have been pointed out, and a number of principles have been defined on the basis of these considerations.

In the second part of the paper, I have introduced the aims and the components of the new language policy of Kodolányi University College. The language policy is in close connection with our principles because it takes these principles as a starting point and suggests how they can be put into practice so that it helps students' foreign language development effectively.

The main aim of the new language policy is to fully integrate the language programmes into the degree programmes of the university college. This aim is achieved by dealing with content through language (CLIL) and language through content (LSP). Furthermore, it is also an essential element of the language policy to prepare students for life-long language learning. This is done by encouraging the use of independent learning techniques and providing students with the facilities of an independent learning centre.

Since the new language programmes based on the language policy were only introduced in September 2003, there are only preliminary results. An important result is that the tasks that are necessary for the successful long-term implementation of the language policy have been defined and further work has started. I strongly believe that the outcomes of our project will be informative and helpful for higher education institutions in Europe that face similar challenges.

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