Zbornik posvetovanja
z mednarodno udeležbo

10. POSVETOVAJJE
ORGANIZATORJEV DELOV

Portorož
29.-31. marec 2000

Management v novem tisočletju

1. knjiga
THE MOST EFFICIENT WAYS OF MASTERING ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

English language has become almost an obligatory course of studies at the universities all around the world, as well as in Croatia. That especially refers to social and human fields. Very often English language is studied through all four years and it is attended by both full - time and part - time students. As the knowledge of English language is necessary, not only for mastering the foreign language programme at university, but also for general international communication, the aim of this course of studies is to make it easier and more efficient for students to learn it.

Achieving the set goal also depends on the methods used during the courses, so this article is the kind of contribution to the research of the students' attitudes to the most efficient ways of studying English language at the university.

The research has been carried out among the students of the Faculty of Economics and Tourism “Dr. Mijo Mirković” Pula, during 1999.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term of Business English is difficult to define and limit in linguistic terms. Pickett (1986) pointed out the fact that there is more than one face to business communication with some of it being a lot nearer the everyday language spoken by the general public than many other segments of English for specific purposes.

The diagrammatic representation we use suggests two particular aspects to business communication: communication with the public and communication within (intra) a company or between (inter) companies:

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  GENERAL ENGLISH
    ↓  ↑
    COMMUNICATION WITH PUBLIC
    ↓  ↑
    BUSINESS ENGLISH
    ↓  ↑
    COMMUNICATION AMONG BUSINESSES
    ↓  ↑
    SPECIALIZED LANGUAGE OF PARTICULAR BUSINESSES
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In similar way, Sykes (1997) mentions that Business English can be divided into three broad teaching categories.

Probably the largest category is teaching general English to people in “business”. The second category is the lexical approach, which was a variety of different forms and tends to concentrate on vocabulary and “word partnership” used in business. The third category is the

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contextual approach, which encourages the students to use and learn Business English in specific and general business situations.

The courses and the exercises of English at Faculty of Economics and Tourism aim to enable the logical continuation of acquisition of knowledge and skills which is performed within “ESP” (English for Specific Purposes – Business English) from the previous years.

The aim is achieved by the enrichment of professional lexis on the texts from the business world and on the topics from micro and macro economy.

At certain case studies of business experience the students are preparing to solve specific problem from the international business practice. They are taught to participate individually in business negotiations and in conversations in English.

Considering the English language from the point of its ever increasing importance in the international communication where it has almost become “standard” in spite of objections of some countries because of “neglecting” of their language (France against domination of English language on Internet); the positions of university studies in Croatia, where their graduate students used to be the sources of science – teaching personnel; as well as the level of development of modern technologies related to informatics (computers, Internet) there is a need for a new approach to the achievement of English teaching courses.

While choosing a new approach it is of great importance to know also the opinion of students – immediate participants in teaching process and finally of those to whom the elected approaches would be applied.

Equally important cognition about those approaches is for relevant state authorities who approve of the university curricula as well as means for providing optimal conditions for their realization.

Because of the above mentioned, the main aim of this article is to present the results of the research of the students’ attitudes to the most efficient ways of English language mastering.

The research was carried out among the students of the Faculty of Economics and Tourism “Dr. Mijo Mirković” in Pula. It was realised during 1999.

2. THE PROCESS OF RESEARCH

The research was carried out on a sample of 189 students through all four years at the Faculty.

As for years there were 72 students of the first year, 66 in the second year, 27 in the third year, 24 in the fourth year.

78 % of the main group was covered with it so that the obtained results are relevant for drawing a conclusion.

The students’ attitudes were collected on basis of the questionnaires and their filling in was performed during the English lessons under the supervision of English teacher.

The questionnaire along with the student’s name and surname, course of study (finance, marketing and tourism), age, number of years of learning English language and mark from the subject from last year, contained 10 questions related to ways of learning English language.

The student estimated the questions on the scale of Lickert’s type.

For chosen answers the following evaluations were predicted:

5 – I fully agree
4 – I agree
3 – I hesitate to give an answer
2 – I do not agree
1 – I do not agree at all
3. RESULTS OF RESEARCH

The obtained results were elaborated per years of studying, so that the average mark for each question was calculated per years of studying – from the first to the fourth year.

Table 1 The most efficient ways of mastering English language and corresponding average marks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>1. year</th>
<th>2. year</th>
<th>3. year</th>
<th>4. year</th>
<th>Σ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Watching movies or programmes o English language</td>
<td>3,9</td>
<td>3,8</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>15,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Watching movies or programmes in English language with Croatian translation</td>
<td>3,6</td>
<td>3,5</td>
<td>3,6</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>14,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Watching movies or programmes in English language with subtitled words</td>
<td>3,8</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>3,8</td>
<td>15,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Using computer programmes</td>
<td>3,1</td>
<td>3,1</td>
<td>3,5</td>
<td>3,7</td>
<td>13,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Using Internet</td>
<td>3,5</td>
<td>3,6</td>
<td>3,9</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>15,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Reading magazines and books in English language</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>16,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Listening to music in English language</td>
<td>3,5</td>
<td>3,4</td>
<td>3,5</td>
<td>3,8</td>
<td>14,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Communicating with friends in non obligatory conversations</td>
<td>3,8</td>
<td>3,5</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>15,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Communicating with relatives, tourists and friends from English speaking countries</td>
<td>4,6</td>
<td>4,4</td>
<td>4,8</td>
<td>4,8</td>
<td>18,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Studying English language during the university courses</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>16,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Σ</td>
<td>38,0</td>
<td>37,5</td>
<td>39,7</td>
<td>40,4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then the total amount of obtained average marks was calculated which presents the attitude of students of all years in each question (Figure 1). As results did not show any significant statistic differences between courses of studying, results are presented for the whole sample.

N. B.: on ordinate there are the amounts of average marks
Figure 1. Account of the amounts of average marks

From the graph it is seen that students consider communicating with relatives, tourists and friends from English speaking countries the most efficient way of learning English language (18,6).

It can be explained with the fact that this kind of communication is easier, it is going on in real time, it allows quick corrections, there is no "sign" of mistakes and in it you can use auxiliary materials (gestures, mimicking and similar things).

Something that undoubtedly contributed to this statement as the best is that this communication is going on among persons from English speaking countries. That can also be seen if compared with marks given to the question communicating with friends in non obligatory conversations, which students evaluated with the mark 15,4.

As far as the number of obtained marks is concerned, the second position belongs to the studying English language during the university courses (16,4). That is a good result which shows that education provides systematic in learning, as well as the programme and the methodical wholeness of the problems related to the educational subject and the course of study.

A very high position was achieved at the item reading magazines and books in English language, whose sum of average mark amounts to 16.3. That can be interpreted by the wish of the students to read original literature when they are alone, so that they can improve their reading and pronunciation skills, and by using dictionaries for the adoption of new words.

The third group of students orientation is made of those which contained active use of English language, and they are as follows: watching movies and programmes in English language (15,8), watching movies or programmes in English language with subtitles words (15,7) already mentioned communicating with friends in non – obligatory conversations (15,4) and using Internet (15,0).

Maybe in this estimates the item using Internet (15,0) falls behind, but if it is taken in consideration that in Croatia only 16% of households have a computer (www.mzt.hr, 27th October 1999), it can be concluded that the use of Internet significantly contributes to learn (or improve) English language.

The fourth group consists of those orientations which were evaluated between 14 and 15. So, here are listening to music in English language (14,2) and watching movies or programmes in English language with Croatian translation (14,8). Maybe the type of music, the possibility of approaching that kind of achievements, music talent or love toward some
genre influenced the lower average mark of the first of these two orientations, while the other choice offers learning of English language in a higher spectre.

Nevertheless, it can be said that orientation for learning by using computer programmes does not earn such a low average mark (13, 4). Such result could be explained, maybe by low percentage of owning computers, and in connection with that, limited approach to different programmes, as well as to the programmes for learning English language.

By watching the amount of average marks for all courses of study per years of studying, the highest one is by students at the fourth year (40, 4), then the third year (39, 7), the first year (38, 0) and at the end the second year (37, 5). These results can be understood as maturing consciousness about the need for knowledge of English language in term of communicating, using professional literature for mastering educational programmes and operating business.

Individually, the highest average mark was given to the choice communicating with relatives, tourists and friends from English speaking countries (4, 8) and that with students of the third and fourth year. The lowest mark of that kind was given to the item using computer programmes (3, 1), which was given by the students from the first two years. Maybe such results were expected taking into consideration that students from higher years have a quite formed opinion on the efficiency of the way of learning (and using) English language, while students from the first two years do not use computers enough in educational process.

4. CONCLUSION

There is a growing demand for learning Business English from wide variety of students and this demand will increase and accelerate in future years. Why? Sykes (1997) answers because English is increasingly recognised as the international language for communications, while telecommunications, globalisation and worldwide transport and travel are all expending at a relentless pace.

Consequently the demand for international language, English will continue to grow.

The aim of this work is to find out which is, by the students opinion, the most efficient way of mastering this international language, which is recognised by EU as the official language of Banking, and we know that Banking will always have a big impact commerce. As we want to join the EU, our students are highly motivated to be able to communicate in English to effectively participate in the commercial opportunities that become available.

We must admit that we were not very surprised by the obtained results in which are seen that our students beside learning English, during the courses at university, believe that communicating with relatives, tourists and friends from English speaking countries is the most acceptable form of learning English language.

It is understandable in a way because our district is especially oriented towards tourism as its primary economic branch.

Therefore, a great number of our students work in tourist centres all over our district during their summer holidays.

We consider that it would be interesting to compare this piece of information with those obtained in similar researching at other universities, at home and abroad.
LITERATURE


5. Owning and using personal computers in households in Croatia, www.mzt.hr, 27th October, 1999
