

## LINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING OF LANGUAGE IN HEALTH CARE

---

**Anna Horňáková**

**Abstract:** The aim of the present paper is to draw our attention to the importance of linking theory and practice in the vocational training of language in university education of future health care professionals. Specialization course of university education in medical field is one of the important assumptions of linking theory and practice in the vocational training of language. We monitored vocational language use in practice, its implementation for future employment and motivating factors for learning professional language. We also tried to find some need for self-education out of educational system. It is also important to rouse an interest in vocational language learning in elderly age, particularly among students of part-time forms of study, develop and consolidate the process of continuous lifelong learning.

**Key words:** vocational language, communication, practice, theory, health care, lifelong learning

### Introduction

Foreign language is not only a means of communication but determines the way we think and perceive our inner and outer world.

Communication and development of competencies in foreign languages are important for mobility within the EU allowing citizens to enjoy freedom, work and study in one of its member countries. Bajtoš (2004: 43-48) points out that “Economic and social changes in society modify the profile of basic skills that would be available to help anyone actively participate in work and family life, as well as in society, whether on local or European level”. Mastering a language learning as “lifelong education” allows each individual to live according to their own liking and satisfaction. It is necessary to take into account new knowledge and access to it, global network of communication, new teaching and learning, new teaching aids and teaching resources, new pedagogy, new space and time in which the learning process takes place.

Language learning should be student-oriented, should support multisenses stimulation to make progress in several ways using multimedia, sources of information technology, cooperation, information interchange, encouraging critical thinking and creativity. Teachers

should take note that today's employers require sufficient language knowledge in competent field of work and it is subject to creativity, multidisciplinarity, flexibility, synthesis and analysis, intercultural communication and problem resolving skills.

The basic principle of vocational language training based on competencies is to ensure that the student:

- is able to handle everyday situations in a foreign country and their solutions can help foreigners
- is able to exchange information and ideas with young people and adults who speak different language and express their own thoughts and feelings,
- more and better understands the way of life and thinking of people from other cultures and their cultural heritage,
- is able to put theoretical knowledge into practice in the field of study.

Communication teaching at universities should focus its attention on the actual language of the user in a particular situation in regard to the relationship of partners and communication objectives. The aim of successful communication teaching should be a practical training of students to communicate in different situations. Induced situation model, the environment, as well as the general trust, can create very good conditions for the selection and application of modern methods and indicates personal and professional communication skills in students, which must be fully developed and practised in this type of education.

Professional language teaching at universities should prepare students for academic needs, but also for practical job requirements. It is vital to build them together with other professional skills, so that they can respond promptly and properly in the new labor market situations and solve any problems in the target language. Nowadays it is not sufficient to master a foreign language, it is also necessary to maintain social skills with respect to rules and communication standards, principles of social interaction, linguistic knowledge (knowledge of the language system) and performance in communication capability (to have relevant knowledge in various communication situations). According to Manak (2011: 257-271) in modern society theory and practice have wide, often different background, but still exist the close connection between them.

## Experiment

### *Aims*

The objective of this paper is to draw attention to the importance of linking theory with practice in vocational language training. The impulse for writing this paper were the numbers of students who start working in their field of study after finishing Bachelor or Master study at the Faculty of Health and student experience who attended student mobilities in foreign countries – Germany, Austria, Norway, Poland and Hungary. The study focuses on the future employment level of university graduates in health care system and self-education needs in using the vocational language outside the teaching process. It is important to ascertain whether respondents are able to use their vocational language knowledge in practice, or have problems with its using, next we want to know what language has the greatest practical use, and what are their most motivating factors for vocational language learning.

### *Material and Methods*

In examining the problem the method of questionnaire was used and the return of questionnaires was 100%. The experimental group consisted of 116 (84 women and 32 men) respondents from the Faculty of Health Care, University of Prešov in Prešov, full-time and part-time students in courses of nursing, midwifery, physiotherapy and emergency health care (5 students attended the student mobility in foreign country in Erasmus Programme). The average age of participants was 35 years. The survey was conducted in January 2010 – February, 2012. The results are reported in tables below.

### *Results*

In the research it was found out that almost all respondents (97%) answered positively that during the practical training in hospitals they had already used vocational language to communicate with patients, especially from other cultures and only 3% answered negatively (tab. 1).

According to answers of the respondents 12% used the vocational language many times in their practice, 48% more than once, 37% only once and 3% of the respondents did not use it (tab. 2).

Half of the respondents (51%) identified the English language as a foreign language the most widely (frequent) used in practice, 23% considered the German language as the most useful in practice, 18% of the respondents identified the Russian language and 8% other languages – Ukrainian, Hungarian, Polish and Romany language (tab. 3).

More than half of the respondents (57%) consider professional communication as the most important skill in the specialized language training (tab. 4). Other skills followed in this order: writing (24%), reading (13%) and listening (6%).

Table 5 shows that out of the classroom language training at university 23% of the respondents get (gain) their professional language skills by the Internet, 18% of the respondents by studying the professional literature, 12% of the respondents by watching TV and listening to the radio, 7% of the respondents extend their language knowledge by contacting foreigners and part-time working abroad. However, we found out that 40% of the respondents do not have any experience with other ways of language learning and they are not interested in training of vocational language outside the university education.

Table 6 shows that only 9% of the respondents are able to communicate in their field of university study without problems, 75% of the respondents with some small problems, and 16% use only the basic specialized terminology. The results also showed that there was no respondent who was unable to use at least the basis of specialized terminology in practice.

As we can see in table 7, desire to work abroad in the field of study (37%) is the most important motivating factor to learn the vocational language. Other motivating factors followed in this order: better financial possibilities of foreign work evaluation (34%), ability to communicate in another language as a mother tongue (17%), desire for higher educational level (8%) and better opportunities for career development (4%).

The data in the table 8 shows that 75% of the respondents consider the vocational language training as a very important part of their university study, 17% of the respondents consider the vocational language learning not so important and 8% of the respondents do not consider it important at all.

### Tables

Table 1: Vocational language using in practice

Vocational language using in practice	The number of respondents (n = 116)	Percentage %
yes	113	97
no	3	3

Table 2: Frequency of vocational language using in practice

Frequency of specialized language use in practice	The number of respondents n = 116 respondents	Percentage %
many times	14	12
more than once	56	48
only once	27	37
not at all	3	3

Table 3: The most frequently used foreign language in practice

The most frequently used foreign language in practice	The number of respondents n = 116 respondents	Percentage %
English language	61	51
German language	25	23
Russian language	21	18
Other language (Hungarian, Polish, Romany)	9	8

Table 4: The most used skills in vocational language

Types of skills in specialized language	The number of respondents (n = 116)	Percentage %
communication	63	57
writing	23	24
reading	9	13
listening	5	6

Table 5: Ways of gaining information in foreign language outside the vocational language training at the university

Ways of gaining information in foreign language outside the vocational language training at the university	n = 116 respondents	Percentage %
from the Internet	25	23
from professional literature	22	18
from TV and radio	17	12
contacts with foreigners	6	7
no other ways	46	40

Table 6: Problems with vocational language using in practice

Problems with specialized language using in practice	Number of respondents (n = 116)	Percentage %
no problems	8	9
small problems	89	75
only basic vocational terminology	19	16
do not speak at all	0	0

Table 7: The most important motivating factors to learn a vocational language

The most important factors motivating respondents to learn a vocational language	Number of respondents (n = 116)	Percentage %
work in the field of study	43	37
better financial possibilities	39	34
possibilities to communicate in a foreign language	23	17
desire to get a higher education	7	8
better possibilities to develop their own career	4	4

Table 8: Importance of vocational language teaching in university study programmes

Importance of vocational language teaching in university study programmes	Number of respondents (n = 116)	Percentage %
very important	89	75
not so important	20	17
no importance	7	8

### Discussion

The globalization process in society requires a new profile of the university graduate, including language skills. According to Bromme&Tallema (1995: 261-267) curriculum of language education is designed to create learning experience and creative thinking skills by requiring the students to define the tasks, set goals, establish criteria, activate basic knowledge, generate additional ideas and questions, organize, analyze and integrate all theory into practice.

Most teachers try to support various vocational language courses which could be the important opportunities in linking theory with practice in university education. Some researchers have emphasized that learners are responsible for their own learning (Manak, 2011: 257-271). As Horňáková (2008: 12-13) points out in case of increasing motivation for learning the vocational language it is recommended to promote learning and language training outside the formal university education, for example during after-school activities. It is also

important to activate an interest in language training at advanced age, in part-time forms of university study or various specialized courses (Farkašová et al., 2005: 216, Horňáková, 2009: 85-87). It will be necessary to try to encourage the development of master's programmes, other higher education programmes aimed at developing the professional and language skills. One of the most influential authors in the area of motivation learning was Abraham Maslow (1954). In Maslow's theory (1987: 306) all of the factors influencing motivation are joined into one model and desire for self-realization is considered to be one of the most important motives of language learning (Horňáková, Bérešová, 2008: 74). This paper tried to confirm this theory by motivating factors in the research such as desire for developing the higher educational level and better opportunities for career development and do well in the labour market.

The field of communication usually focuses on the fact how people use message to generate meanings within and across various contexts, culture, channels and media. Communication goals are linked to another person's thoughts and feelings. It is necessary to keep in mind that contemporary modern therapeutic communication techniques can expressively improve an interactional relationship between a health care professional and a patient. As Meece (1991: 261-286) points out the goal of communication is sharing the meanings and the primary function of communication research should help to the new knowledge formation and maximize achieving the goals best. According to Farkašová et al. (2005: 216) it is important to educate health care professionals in communication theoretically but also practically not only in school lessons at the secondary schools and universities but also in various seminars, workshops or courses. 62% of nurses think that communication in their mother tongue and also in a foreign language is the basic skill in nursing care and that is why they suggest improving it. In the present research it was found that more than half of the respondents (57%) consider professional communication as the most important skill in the vocational language training. Unfortunately, 40% of the respondents are not interested in any other form of language training outside the university education.

Based on the research results it is possible to suggest a few ways of motivation of learning foreign languages and encourage them to develop new interests in their afterschool activities. Practice recommendations are:

- ♣ educate health care professionals in communication theoretically but also practically not only in school lessons at secondary schools and universities but also in various seminars, workshops, courses and other free-time activities outside the teaching process
- ♣ encourage vocational learning in students at higher age, e.g. part-time form of university study support developing of Master study programmes and other educational programmes focused on professional and language skills which should be developed continuously in long-life learning

## Conclusion

We came to the conclusion that we agree with Bromme&Tillema (1995: 262) who presented the fact that in the highly-developed countries a professional training for difficult professions is the main task which is transferred to universities and practical training should be a part of their study programme. Our results showed the importance of linking theory and practice in the vocational training of language in health care. We suggest that future health care professionals should be theoretically prepared in vocational language learning, they should continue studying vocational language after finishing the study, they should take part in professional seminars and conferences, read foreign professional literature and take advantage of opportunity to be in touch with the vocational language as often as they can.

## References

- Bajtoš J. 2004: *Location of key competences for lifelong learning 21st century*. Acta Humanic of teachers in the information society. Žilina 2004; 1: 43-48; ISSN 1336.
- Bromme R. & Tillema H.1995: Fusing experiences and theory. The structure of professional knowledge. *Learning and Instruction* 5 (4), 261-267.
- Farkašová D. 2005. *Ošetrovateľstvo – teória*. 2. vyd. Martin. Osveta, 2005. 215 s. ISBN 80-8063-182-4.
- Horňáková A. 2009. *Zvyšovanie motivácie na učenie sa odborného jazyka*. Odborný jazyk na vysokých školách V [elektronický zdroj]: sborník prací z mezinárodní konference. Praha: Česká zemědělská univerzita v Praze; 2009. 85-87. ISBN 978-80-213-1901-1.
- Horňáková A. 2008. *Motivácia učiť sa odborný jazyk*. Kvalita jazykového vzdelávania na univerzitách v Európe II. medzinárodné sympózium – zborník príspevkov. Bratislava: CASAJC, 2008; 73-80; ISBN 978-80-225-2647-0. Príspevok vyšiel aj vo forme abstraktu. Kvalita jazykového vzdelávania na univerzitách v Európe II: zborník abstraktov. Bratislava: CASAJC, 2008; 12-13.

Horňáková A., Bérešová A. 2008. *Relaxation method of increasing the quality of life for future health professionals*. Health and social work 2008; 3; 3-4: 74. ISSN 1336-9326. – The abstract is also published in English version. – The journal contains abstracts of the IV. scientific-technical conference with international participation "Quality of Life and Health" held on 24th-25th October 2008 in Kosice.

Manak J. 2011. K problému teorie a praxe v pedagogice. Pedagogická orientace, 2011, roč. 21, č. 3, s. 257-271.

Maslow A. 1987. *Motivation and Personality* (3rd edition) New York, Harper and Row, 1987; 306

Meece J. L. 1991. The classroom context and students' motivational goals. *Advances in motivation and achievement*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press. 1991; 7: 261-286.

---

**Author**

RNDr. Anna Horňáková, PhD., University of Prešov, the Competence Centre for Lifelong Learning, Institute of Language Competence, Ul. 17. Novembra 1, 080 78 Prešov, e-mail: ahornak@unipo.sk

---