

# Language Education at the Faculty of Pharmacy of the Comenius University in the Newly Accredited Program UNICert®

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**Abstract:** Knowledge measurement and evaluation is an important factor in learning foreign languages. Quality of university language education cannot be measured by any tests or an oral examination. The real language skills are determined by the ability to communicate in life situations and use the foreign language efficiently in the professional working environment. In 2017, the Faculty of Pharmacy of the Comenius University was accredited to offer language courses in the international certification system UNICert®, which enables it to define complex conditions for obtaining an internationally recognised language certificate with a comparable proficiency language level at various universities focusing on general language study or a specific study field. The article deals with the study of languages at the Faculty of Pharmacy of the Comenius University and the new certification program UNICert® *The English and German Language for Pharmacists*, and it identifies essential aims of the program.

**Keywords:** language education, certificate, UNICert®

## 1 Introduction

Being able to speak a foreign language and use it actively in the professional communication empowers students in a variety of ways. It can support their studies and increase access to information sources while using the foreign language. It gives them a chance to study abroad and gain international experience in various mobility programmes. It extends their knowledge and professional skills and improves their employment opportunities.

A language taught in the higher education system is called a Language for Specific Purposes (LSP). LSP courses are aimed at a specific target language, and they are designed to prepare students for real-life situations. The methodology, the objectives and the teaching depends on the specialized needs. (Trace, Hudson, & Brown, 2015, pp. 3) Common examples are English for Aviation, Spanish for Pharmacists or German for Doctors.

Stevens (1988, pp. 1-2) describes the specific purpose instruction as teaching practices designed to meet the learner's requirements aimed at the specified content (topic-based) related to occupations or a field of study. That means *Language for Specific Purposes* focuses not only on linguistics but also on the content area knowledge. To create an LSP course, it is important to define clear aims of the course and find out the needs of the learners. The curriculum is driven by students of the specialized field of study. Course development should be systematic and focus on students and their requirements.

When we speak about measurement of knowledge and its evaluation, we need to have a closer look at its definition. Hunt (2003) defines knowledge as a belief that is true and justified. Measurement can be also based on the correctness of answers. Correct and incorrect answers can clearly indicate if the person knows something. But as Hunt suggests, these methods have deficiencies, such as a level of certainty. We can add there is not a single test on quality and sufficiency of language knowledge. We have established a new program that is aimed at ensuring quality of language education in the university environment.

The main goal of our paper is to describe the terminology education at the Department of Languages at the Faculty of Pharmacy of the Comenius University, analyze the current foreign language teaching practice, introduce the certification and language teaching system UNICert®, and define objectives of the new language curriculum, which can lead to an internationally recognised language certificate of English for Pharmacists or German for Pharmacists.

The first part will focus on depicting terminology education at the Department of Languages. The next part will deal with detailed description of Academic Language Preparation in the English and German languages. Then, the international certification and language teaching program UNICert® will be introduced. The fifth part will concentrate on objectives of the new language programs *English for Pharmacists* and *German for Pharmacists*. After analyzing of language goals, further action will be suggested.

## 2 Terminology education at the Department of Languages

The Department of Languages at the Faculty of Pharmacy was established in the academic year 1993/94 and it still has the same organizational structure. (Ozábalová 2007, pp. 127) The essential task of the Department is the terminology education and its main goal is to provide students with terminological knowledge, enhance their communication skills and prepare them for professional life.

The language education at the Faculty of Pharmacy involves courses in Latin-Greek pharmaceutical and medical terminology for future pharmacists and students of the Bachelor Study Programme *Medical and Diagnostic Devices*, the Academic Language Preparation in the English and German languages and seminars in the Slovak language for international students.

Learning Latin and Greek terminology is essential and compulsory for the medical practice as well as for the study of pharmacy, which is also stated in the *Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications*. Hamar (2017, pp. 19) concludes that Latin is “an indispensable part of the training of future pharmacists”. Since 1990, there have been two compulsory courses of Latin-Greek terminology (*Latin Pharmaceutical Terminology I.* and *Latin Pharmaceutical Terminology II.*) for future Pharmacists taught, which offer the basic terminology and necessary vocabulary used in the subjects like anatomy, botany, pharmacognosy, and others. The Latin language is essential for scientific communication in the field of pharmaceutical sciences and as Hamar (2018, pp. 269) explains, this is the key reason why students start with learning the Latin language and essential Greek expressions immediately in the first year of study. The courses involve learning the basics of botanical nomenclature, the fundamental grammar with the morphological and syntactical structures used in the medical and pharmacological terminology, the pharmaceutical terminology, mainly related to medicine and drugs, the terminology of medical prescription as well as pharmaceutical Latin abbreviations (Hamar, 2018). Students can use the specialized dictionary *Trojazyčný latinsko-slovenský slovník pre študentov farmácie a medicíny* by Ozábalová, Vallová and Hamar to enhance their vocabulary and find Latin and English translations. The dictionary consists of the professional terminology in the Latin, English and Slovak languages. The main goal of the dictionary is to help students of pharmacy and medicine work with textbooks and materials in the Slovak and English programmes. The dictionary is organized alphabetically and updated regularly. It provides the latest list of words and expressions used in pharmacology, complying with the latest publication the *European Pharmacopeia* for pharmacists. Students of the international programme have an opportunity to learn the Slovak language, which can help them to communicate and make themselves understood in the Slovak study environment. Klišanová (2018, pp. 45) concludes

that almost all international students of the Faculty are interested in learning the Slovak language in order to develop a good command of language for professional communication.

### **3 Academic English and German Language Preparation**

Besides Latin and Greek terminology, students have an opportunity to learn the English and/or German language. There are 5 courses of Academic Language Preparation offered in the English language and 5 courses of Academic Language Preparation offered in the German language. The main target of the courses is to enhance students' proficiency level in the languages, deliver the specialist terminology and prepare students for professional communication in a foreign language in the field of pharmacy.

Academic English Language Preparation (1-3) is compulsory in the Bachelor Program *Medical and Diagnostic Devices* and is focused on preparing students for professional work in the medical and pharmaceutical environment. Students can continue with voluntary elective subjects Academic English Language Preparation 4 and 5 as they are necessary for the certification examination.

Academic English and German Language Preparation (1-5) in the Master Study Programme can be studied as obligatory elective courses since the second semester of the studies. They are carried out in the Slovak and English study programmes during five semesters. The contents of these specialized professional courses closely follow the contents of other professional courses taught in the relevant semesters.

*Academic Language Preparation 1* in the English Language is designed for students of the first-year study who have the intermediate level of English. It involves topics such as Parts of the Body, Skeleton, Five Senses, Body Systems, Aches, Pains and Disorders, Pharmaceutical Practice and Laboratory. The course materials can be found in the textbook *English for Pharmacists 1* by Holá, Kližanová and Žufková, which has been recently published by teachers of the Department. It consists of authentic articles followed by reading comprehension exercises and videos with reading and listening comprehension exercises and vocabulary practice. The aim of the introductory course is to make students familiar with the essential professional vocabulary used in the pharmaceutical and medical sciences. Similarly, the course *Academic Language Preparation in the German language* provides students with the essential medical and pharmaceutical terminology and improves the students' German language skills.

*Academic Language Preparation 2* in the English and German languages is designed to continue in acquiring professional vocabulary in the field of pharmacy and medicine. The main topics comprise Factors Influencing our Health, Health and Environment, Ozone Layer and Protection against the Sun, Drugs and Addiction, Bacteria and Viruses, Flu, AIDS and other Infectious Diseases, Disease Transmission and Disease Prevention. Students learn to describe symptoms, differences between viruses and bacteria and treatment of various illnesses and disorders. They can deal with common health issues, ask relevant questions about illnesses, analyse a specific health problem and suggest a suitable solution. A new textbook *English for Pharmacists 2* by Holá, Kližanová and Žufková has been published this year to help students learn topic-based terminology and enhance their communication skills. The textbook will be followed by *English for Pharmacists 3*, which is being prepared to be published in the following semester.

*Academic Language Preparation 3* in the English and German languages focuses on Macronutrients, the Role of Vitamins and Minerals, Healthy Nutrition, Malnutrition and Eating Disorders, Cosmetics, and First Aid Guidelines. Students learn to offer advice about healthy

eating habits and speak about the risks of obesity and bad nutrition. They can provide patients with information on problems with vitamin deficiency and give instructions to administer the first aid in a foreign language.

*Academic Language Preparation 4* in the English and German languages concentrates on Common Disorders and Their Treatment, the Home Medicine Cabinet, Comparison of Traditional and Alternative Medicine, and Medicinal Plants.

*Academic Language Preparation 5* in the English and German languages deals with the Health System in Slovakia, Regular Check-up, Allergies and Immunity and Trends in the Pharmaceutical Industry. The course is also preparation for the certification examination and provides students with guidelines for presentation preparation and practice, listening comprehension training and written production of formal letters and abstracts.

#### **4 Certification program UNICert®**

**UNICert®** is an international certification and educational program in foreign languages, which is nowadays employed by 53 European universities. It is the only academic language learning program in Central Europe which guarantees a high standard of professional and academic oriented language skills training. **UNICert®** represents a comprehensive and transparent language learning system unifying the different education systems in the university environment, including awarding certificates which are centrally managed and subject to strict rules. This means that it can ensure foreign language education with the same quality at diverse universities, which allows student mobility in Erasmus or other mobility programs based on the compatibility of language programs and the uniformity of certification exams. Students can study not only the academic language but also the language focused on their study field and improve in the area where they will work and gain experience (Hamar – Jurišová, 2017).

Since the inception of **UNICert®** in 1992, more than 100,000 certificates have been issued in 29 languages. Unlike other certificates, **UNICert®** is an open educational system targeted at university students of non-linguistic studies. Its main mission is to provide a comprehensive and transparent system of language training, and it considers specific university conditions, objectives and needs typical for students of diverse higher education institutions.

The level of **UNICert®** certification is determined by the level of language proficiency:

- B1 (UNICert® I),**
- B2 (UNICert® II),**
- C1 (UNICert® III)**
- C2 (UNICert® IV),**

which is defined by **the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.**

After successful completion of the program in the **UNICert®** system, graduates obtain an internationally recognized certificate which can be issued only by universities that are accredited and authorized. In Slovakia, such authorization is granted by the Institute for Accreditation of Language Teaching at Universities in Central Europe called UnicertLUCE.

#### **5 Objectives of the new language programs, the English and German language for Pharmacists**

The primary objective of professional language education in the **UNICert®** system at the Faculty of Pharmacy of the Comenius University in Bratislava is to build up language skills in

the target language in the field of pharmacy. Students will develop their ability to comprehend written texts and shorter lectures related to the field of their studies. They learn to understand media broadcasts on professional topics, create a longer text on a number of general and professional life topics ranging from 300 to 400 words, using common and specific phrases from the study area. They will be able to gather information in the professional field, establish and maintain working contacts and communicate in a domestic and foreign working environment.

### **5.1 The content of the courses**

Language Academic Training focuses on systematic training of language skills, including acquisition of new language skills. In addition to specialist vocabulary, professional terminology, and grammatical-stylistic features, lessons will also involve practising communication in real-life situations and acquiring linguistic knowledge in the area of the target language of pharmacy. The language program also includes expert themes using popular scientific content. Students learn to distinguish between popular scientific and scientific language.

### **5.2 Language skills**

The linguistic preparation concentrates on acquiring knowledge and skills in using lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. The biggest emphasis is put on practising vocabulary and grammar issues in diverse structural, substitutional, gap-filling and communication exercises. Professional language training deals with word formation and terminology acquisition needed in all the skills involved in issues related to the students' field of studies and to the area of their interest. Special attention is devoted to practicing receptive vocabulary (contextual analysis of word meanings), understanding of essential linguistic and sociolinguistic characteristics in the professional style, and productive training of linguistic structures in general and professional texts.

The language program will develop the following language skills:

#### **5.2.1 Listening comprehension**

Listening with understanding focuses on developing the ability to understand monological or dialogical speech in the target language on current general and expert topics of the study area. Students acquire the ability to select the essential information needed to understand a spoken text. While developing these skills, the emphasis is placed on the following strategies: the ability to identify the main idea, highlight the basic facts, answer questions provided by the teacher, select relevant information, understand the meaning of unknown words from the context and reproduce the text by making notes.

#### **5.2.2 Speaking**

The main goal of oral production is to enhance language speaking skills and abilities to discuss various professional topics spontaneously and continuously, argue about various issues, properly cite and interpret information from literature and available online resources, and logically connect ideas in larger entities. Students learn to get involved in dialogues or discussions and express themselves on the discussed subject<sup>9</sup> as well as respond promptly to questions. They will be able to express, justify and defend their own opinions, make objections

and provide constructive criticism, comment on events and ask additional and clarifying questions. Conversations in specific situations and role plays will be also performed.

### **5.2.3 Reading**

Students learn to select, compare and organize information in longer texts of medium difficulty, understand the context and take measures, look for logical relationships, capture detailed and specific information in common and professional articles and texts and distinguish explicitly and implicitly expressed thoughts. Developing these skills focuses on the following strategies: identifying the main idea, keywords and relevant information in the text, searching for predetermined information, deducing the meaning of unknown words from the context, excluding redundant information from the written text, and identifying true and false statements based on the written context.

### **5.2.4 Writing**

Written production is focused on mastering writing of longer texts (300-400 words) on general and simple expert topics. Students learn to identify the formal and informal style and their appropriate features. They will acquire principles of various writing styles in social and professional communication using standard linguistic and stylistic means and become familiar with basic units of the formal written style, such as a resume, an application, a motivation letter, an e-mail, etc. They will also develop creative writing, text processing (transformation, expansion, reduction) and note-taking while listening to lectures, identifying significant information and its subsequent classification, writing a summary of articles and practising of writing on a chosen topic.

When writing a project, formal letters or an abstract, students deal with formal and content aspects of using proper language structures. They will learn how to use bibliography and refer to scientific resources. They will deal with ways of introducing quotations and standards for paraphrasing ideas listed in the bibliography.

## **5.3 Socio-cultural and intercultural skills**

Professionally oriented language teaching focuses also on understanding the culture of target countries with the focus on intercultural differences, which are crucial in terms of students' own culture but also in terms of their field of study and future occupation. The language curriculum deals with culture-specific phenomena, supports the student's tolerant perceptions of other cultures, and develops empathy to be sensitive to cultural differences.

## **5.4 Study skills**

Teaching practice of vocational language education is based on the principles of the communicative approach including all forms of social work (group work, plenary work, pair work, use of pictorial material, project work, etc.) and developing strategies of autonomous learning (conscious forms of learning, creating good habits in the learning process, working with keywords in the selection of topics). Special attention is given to designing of teaching units so that students' suggestions can be implemented in the classes. Individualization of the learning process focuses on unlocking students' personal and educational potential and considering their needs and individual learning styles.

## **5.5 Methods and Materials**

Language teaching involves up-to-date and authentic materials, including the Internet sources and scientific journals, simulation of job interviews, and solving tasks similar to real-life situations as well as project work. The language training comprises also training of fluent and spontaneous pronunciation, the correct and confident use of the grammatical features of the target language, and acquisition of specific professional terminology. Equally important is promotion of creativity and development of research and study skills for independent study and independent performance of the profession and development of creative and critical thinking.

## 6 Conclusion

Learning languages in the university environment means many advantages for students as they usually want to learn a foreign language to improve their communication skills and increase professional vocabulary in their study field, and their intrinsic motivation becomes more intensive while preparing for a future occupation. The main aim of the newly accredited language programs *English for Pharmacists* and *German for Pharmacists* is to prepare students in all four language skills for understanding vocational issues in the authentic form concerning the pharmacy and health issues. They promote development of students' speech production and their ability to communicate in the English or German language without any problems in common situations as well as in the professional world of pharmacy. After defining the main objectives of the courses, it is necessary to focus on learners' needs and develop an efficient system of language education in order to achieve their goals. The next step is to revise the existing teaching materials, develop new materials for the courses *Academic Preparation 4 and 5* and design online materials for vocabulary, grammar and examination practice.

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