

MATERIALS DESIGN AND RESEARCH IN ESP: THE UNWE PRACTICE

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Abstract

The paper aims to present an overview of the publications and research activity in English for specific purposes of the faculty of the Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics at UNWE for the period 2020-2022. The department has a long-standing tradition in teaching foreign languages and a team of professionals. However, it was more focused on its teaching activity rather than on research. Recently, a change has occurred and resulted in strenuous scientific work involving a great part of the English lecturers and leading to detailed studies and surveys that are expected to improve the academic ESP course results along with the intensive efforts to design materials tailored to the needs of the UNWE students.

Keywords: ESP, UNWE, materials design, needs analysis in ESP

JEL: Z13, Z18

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to make an overview of the latest books and research in the field of English for specific purposes (ESP) by the academic faculty of the Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics at the University of National and World Economy (UNWE). Hence it invariably falls within the scope of foreign language teaching at the university, which boasts a long-standing tradition. As part of the Faculty of International Economics and Politics, this department offers specialized language instruction for students majoring in International Economics and Business, International Relations, European Studies and Political Science. English is taught as the first foreign language to students who have successfully passed an entrance exam at the B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). English is also taught as the second foreign language at the B1 to B2 level under the CEFR to students who have been admitted to university without an exam in the English language.

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For the centennial anniversary of the department, a similar attempt was made by the academic staff at the department, namely by Daniela Koch-Kozhuharova for foreign language teaching in general (Koch-Kozhuharova, 2022), by Kalina Ishpekova-Bratanova for books and textbooks published for teaching Spanish (Ishpekova-Bratanova, 2021) and by Albena Stefanova for textbooks and study manuals written for teaching English for the period 1980 – 2020 (Stefanova, 2021e).

The paper presents three monographs, a textbook, four study manuals, a dictionary and a project – impressive work for a two-year period. Needs analysis is in the core of cutting edge educational activity, which is why along with the work on materials design, the focus of the ESP faculty at UNWE has shifted to studying the attitudes, perceptions and views of our students and modern generations. Detailed research has been carried out by Dilyan Gatev, Lilyana Todorova-Ruskova Kalina Ishpekova-Bratanova and Albena Stefanova. The individual research of the first two faculty members is to be officially presented in the coming months. Highlights from a study financed by the university are included here. The study was conducted by an interdisciplinary team of experts in ESP and statistics, and UNWE students. The department researchers and project participants were Albena Stefanova, Dilyan Gatev and Kalina Ishpekova-Bratanova.

The monographic works reveal the variety and depth of the faculty research interests and at the same time expose the combined utilisation of theory and practice in order to optimise the educational process, on the one hand, and to promote scientific enquiries and development, on the other.

The study manuals and the dictionary contribute to the enhanced effectiveness of learning and facilitate ESP acquisition by providing for learner autonomy and increased engagement based on exemplification, authentic materials and peer production.

Academic output

Monographs

The monograph *The Multimodal Construction of Euroscepticism in The Economist 2008 – 2020* by Kalina Ishpekova-Bratanova (Bratanova, 2020b) can attract the attention of a broad circle of experts and practitioners in the sphere of cognitive and applied linguistics, political and social sciences, mass media and public communications. In particular with regard to the academic training at UNWE, this book can be used as a teaching material for the students majoring in International Relations and in European Politics and Economics.

The monograph addresses a topical and strongly debatable topic in the European political process and in political theory in general concerning European integration. Hence the research object is a series of 38 articles in the period 2008 – 2020 on the

European Union and the construction of the EU's image through the political cartoons published in the Charlemagne rubric connected with the image of Ms Europe.

The research goal is to establish *how* and *why* the commentaries and their accompanying caricatures construct the EU's image in the period 2008 – 2020. What has been subject to examination is the discursive and cognitive mechanisms (multimodal metaphors, metaphorical scenarios and mini-narratives, together with symbols, intertextuality and figures of speech) with which this global British media outlet constructs and EU's image and frames the debate on the EU. The research topic pertains to the exposure of the relation between EU's image and the British identity of the global media outlet *The Economist*. It is related to how language constructs politics and shapes public attitudes, expectations, sentiments, stereotypes.

In theoretical and methodological terms, the monograph combines critical metaphor analysis, including critical discourse analysis and the theory of conceptual metaphors, social semiotics and framing analysis of media discourse.

The content is organised and presented in three chapters. The first chapter offers an interpretation and argumentation of the theoretical and methodological framework of the piece of research. The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of euroscepticism and its connection with BREXIT and the specificity of Britishness. The third chapter contains a cognitive-pragmatic analysis of the selected empirical material and the conclusions are presented.

The monograph ends with conclusions about the essence of the effects of the discourse strategies used by *The Economist* for the representation of the EU as a disintegrating community and their role for the enhancing of euroscepticism in the European societies and member states. The monograph addresses a topical issue pertaining to cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis, on the one hand, and to the theory and practice of political and public communications, on the other.

The research contributes to the analysis, synthesis and conclusions about issues connected to the construction of the EU's image via *The Economist's* framing strategies that integrate the intermodal effects of headlines, subheadings and the accents in the explored commentaries with the visual impact of the cartoons accompanying the text.

The year 2021 was the period when two monographs based on a two-decade experience at UNWE were published by Albena Stefanova. *Motivating Students for Greater Engagement in ESP Acquisition* and *Ideas for Interactive ESP Acquisition* (Stefanova, 2021c, 2021d) offer an applied scientific perspective to ESP teaching and learning in terms of student functional communicative competence. Both works build on previous research and the author's own pedagogical model aimed at encouraging student involvement in the learning process by combining conventional or traditional teaching with new innovative practices and modern technologies.



Picture 1. *Source:* author



Picture 2. *Source:* author

The monographs address the concepts of task, project, case study, motivation and student engagement with relation to the success of the learning process. Further on, they deal with the peculiarities of the new generations of learners and focus on the teaching approaches, methods, procedures and techniques used in foreign language teaching. Special attention is paid to interaction and interactivity with the Internet, multimedia and team work seen as means of inspiring students to reveal their creativity, develop critical thinking and analytical skills by using the generation's ways of communication, perception and learning.

Both monographic works include the author's original tasks, projects and case studies aimed at motivating the acquisition of ESP knowledge and skills along with soft skills so as to prepare students for a successful career within a highly competitive, multinational and globalised professional context. Ideas are shared of a winter camp high in the mountain and in the national sports base of Bulgaria, of various activities creating authentic situations and learner response as well as productive practices and effective resources.

Among the advantages of the proposed teaching techniques are empowerment and the balanced and integrating way of acquisition of the four skills with the teacher and students working as teammates throughout all stages of the educational process, including assessment, content creation and learning control. Since UNWE has an economic and socio-political profile, the research and teaching focus is on the ESP for economics, political studies, international tourism, international relations, real estate and facility management. The original assignments conceived and developed in the monographs contain illustrative material and online resources, which can be used as the basis for a materials bank. The issues they are related to are ones that are of interest to students or familiar to them either because of their nature or because they affect them, their friends and relatives. Thus learners are provoked and encouraged to get involved and find out more so as to come up with a solution or to get in-depth insights into the essence of a problem. Cultivating the skills for work with information sources, judging their reliability, crosschecking data, processing and analysing information increase student engagement, create an atmosphere of authenticity and provide valuable practice that can be used later on in the students' professional development. There is social impact as well for grasping the subject matter in an interactive and more learner friendly environment. What is more, students gain experience in leadership and active citizenship that could contribute not only to career success but also to society welfare.

The research and practice considered in the two monographs are related to the specific features of the ESP courses at UNWE which is why their parameters are dealt with in detail. It is on these features that the author's novel techniques and pedagogical model are based. The introduction of the novelties increases

student motivation and engagement, and boosts course effectiveness and learner performance. Working in teams of different configurations, students can teach and learn from peers how to cope with difficulties related to the honing of some skills.

Bulgaria boasts a long-standing tradition in foreign language teaching. The foreign language department at UNWE was founded one hundred years ago and has become a respected unit. Most experts in the country and the language faculty at UNWE, however, are excellent practitioners who prefer teaching to doing research. This is the reason why the three monographs fill a gap in Bulgarian science by bridging theory and practice and thus raising the awareness of Bulgarian good practices and achievements in the teaching of English for specific purposes and English in general.

Textbooks



Picture 3. *Source:* author

Advanced English for International Relations and European Studies by Kalina Ishpekova-Bratanova (Bratanova, 2020a) is a textbook designed for students majoring in International Relations, European Studies and Political Science. The thematic targeting of specific spheres of public life largely determines the selection of lexical and stylistic peculiarities on which the tasks and exercises in this textbook are focused.

In terms of the overall structure, the textbook is divided into three basic parts. In the first introductory part, the intention is to get students familiarised with the types of tasks that they encounter in their work in class or during their individual preparation. What is presented is limited lists of collocations, phrasal verbs, modal verbs, idioms or fixed phrases, etc. The second major part of the textbook contains eight thematic units, each of which comprises three sections – a) a terminological section the goal of which is, through listening and reading comprehension tasks, to introduce a range of vocabulary typical of the respective thematic field (terms, idioms, phrasal verbs, characteristic lexical items, etc) as well as a range of expressive devices typically used in the description of charts, diagrams and tables; b) media coverage is the section of every thematic unit that presents the typical journalistic style in the thematic field (based on authentic materials from media texts) and c) exam practice that offers the task types that are included in real-life exam materials for the students studying at the University of National and World Economy, majoring in International Relations, European Studies and Political Science.

With regard to the thematic range, the selected topics encompass mainly the areas of international relations, current political events and the important phenomena and issues in the modern world. In addition to journalistic texts, reports, legal texts and regulatory documents in the sphere of diplomacy and international relations are further included as materials for reading and listening comprehension and for vocabulary exercises. Furthermore, what has determined the material selection, is the desire and attempt to include texts that are saturated with culture-specific norms for the linguistic coding of the specialised area. More specifically, the topic selection encompasses English as a lingua franca, the post-World War II development of international relations, the post-1945 problems with the arms race, the Cold War, and certain international organisations – the United Nations, NATO, non-profit organisations, European integration and the European Union – history, major policies and institutions, decision making and various types of legal texts (directives, regulations, etc). The third part of the textbook contains a detailed answer key to all exercises and tasks presented in the previous part, together with the audioscripts for the listening comprehension tasks. This makes the textbook appropriate for self-study as well.

The types of tasks included in the separate parts of the textbook are as follows: Reading comprehension, listening comprehension (more specifically gap filling, replacing a word with a synonym and summarising information in the form of an open-ended question), multiple choice cloze and open cloze. What is also offered is interpretation and analysis of charts and diagrams, writing tasks, etc.

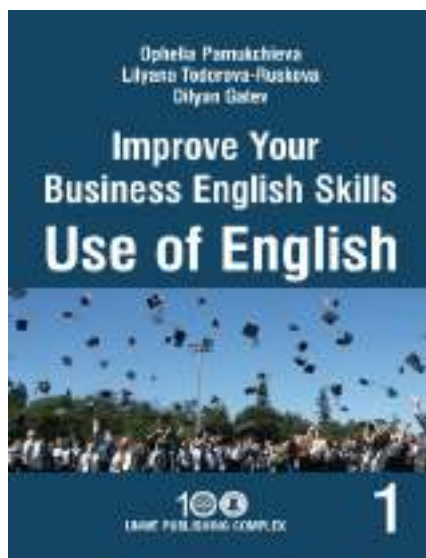
In line with the latest technological developments and taking account of the interests of the young people in Bulgaria, the coursebook offers a digitalised exercise, among others, through which students are expected to reaffirm and further develop their knowledge about the various countries and nationalities across the world by using the *Otellus.com* interactive platform.

Study Manuals

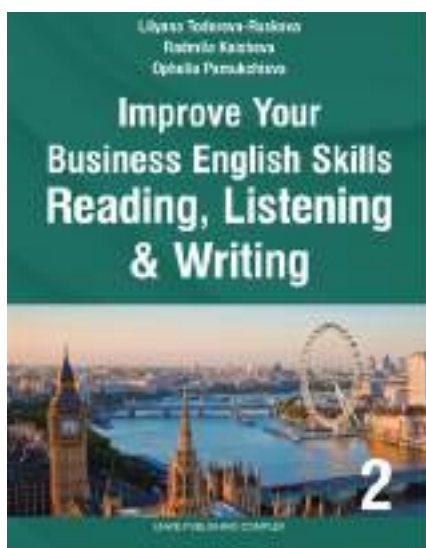
Improve Your Business English Skills: Use of English and *Improve Your Business English Skills: Reading, Listening & Writing* by Dilyan Gatev, Lilyana Todorova-Ruskova, Ophelia Pamukchieva and Radmila Kaisheva were our faculty's response to student demand for study manuals that allow learners to work on their own based on their different needs in terms of particular specific skills and on peer works analyzed and evaluated as well as with reasoned explanations and references to evaluation requirements. In addition, the authors provide tips on each skill and component thus facilitating learners' retention and improvement. Hence lecturers can use the study manual to improve their students' functional communicative competence and business vocabulary, and students can use it as a most reliable aid to prepare for the university state exam in English as well as to improve their performance during the ESP course.

Along with the three sections, each of which devoted to a particular part of the exam, the first publication includes ten tests with a key and appendices focused on English affixes and dependent prepositions. The second collection has a similar structure, but with a focus on three of the four key skills – reading, listening and writing. The writing section elucidates the basics of business correspondence and summarizing. Another difference is the number and accent of the appendices – three ones containing a list of linking words and phrases, a list of alternative words, and useful vocabulary and grammar. Furthermore, there are marked peer writing papers with explanations about the way they were assessed. This provides a benchmark, on the one hand, and cultivates the skill for editing and assessing, on the other.

Last but not least, the recordings have been selected by the authors to suit the needs of our specific audience, which is another impressive achievement because of the challenge listening comprehension tasks pose to lecturers. The texts are authentic, taken from a variety of sources and are accompanied by tapescripts and guidelines.



Picture 4. *Source:* author



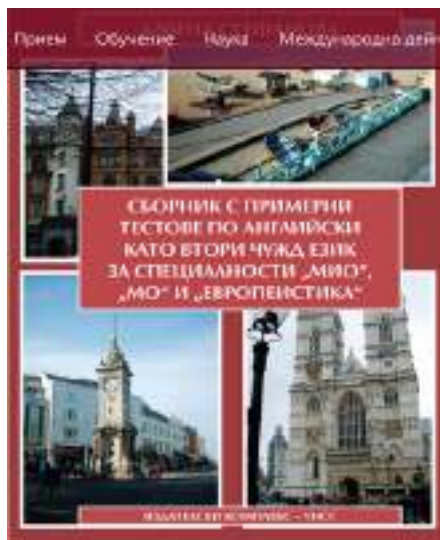
Picture 5. *Source:* author

The *Sample Tests for the State Exam in English for Students of Political Studies* and *Collection of Sample Tests in English as a Second Foreign Language for Students Majoring in International Economic Relations, International Relations, and European Studies* (Stefanova, 2021a, 2021b) are collections of tests aimed at

giving the UNWE students the opportunity to work on their own and prepare for the state exam in English as a second foreign language by doing additional exercises in the format of the exam as well as improving their writing skills by doing the sample tasks for business communication or writing discursive essays. In addition, there is a section on the basics of summarising with tips on the most frequently used structures and the steps to follow in order to prepare a good summary. The tests can be used by alumni or any learner interested in honing their communicative competence in English. The first collection contains eight tests, while the second one includes twelve tests – six for students of International Economic Relations and six for students of International Relations and European Studies.

The texts in the tests are carefully selected, and adapted where necessary, with regard to the subject matter and syllabi for each specialty to ensure that specialised vocabulary and lexico-grammatical structures are tested and to help those doing the tests brush up their skills and knowledge of English. The format of the exercises is similar to that of the Cambridge certificate exams, IELTS, TOEFL and BEC. Hence they offer valuable practice for the users of the study manuals who are preparing for these exams.

In each study manual, there are appendices with the most common irregular verbs, recommended literature for exam preparation and bibliography with paper and e-sources. This way users can follow the links and find more texts to improve their linguistic competences.



Picture 6. Source: author



Picture 7. *Source:* author

The Bulgarian-English thematic dictionary of political terms by Blaga Blagoeva and Stoyan Apostolov (Blagoeva, Apostolov, 2022) is structurally organised in twenty-four units or thematic fields and is aimed to fill in a specific academic niche as the authors claim, namely at providing for the needs of the UNWE students majoring in Political Studies. Learners can find the English equivalents to terms related to political systems and parties, diplomacy, political culture, ideology, power, domestic and foreign policy, elections, political institutions and regimes, among other. Hence Blagoeva and Apostolov have taken into account the curricula and syllabi of our academic institution. The dictionary is structured in a way that facilitates the search of terms and, apart from the use of alphabetical order, the authors give the name of the scientist who introduced a certain term. In addition, the dictionary contains appendices with information about the key Bulgarian and European institutions, the political system and governments of some countries, major international organisations as well as a list of the internationally recognized sovereign countries in the world. Another distinct advantage of the dictionary is that it has been compiled by academic faculty of an interdisciplinary nature – a team including a philologist and a lecturer in political studies. The variety of topics makes the publication an asset contributing to the quality education of UNWE students.



Picture 8. *Source:* author

Projects

While materials design means the efforts of the faculty to design textbooks and study manuals that are tailored for the university ESP courses and best meet the requirements of Bulgarian educational institutions, UNWE and the business, academic research is focused on the scientific activity aimed at improving educational quality and maximising the effect of the ESP courses by studying the needs of the particular ESP learners. This is in line with the view shared by ESP experts and practitioners, according to which each ESP course is specific given the specific needs of its participants. Furthermore, unless these needs are studied, course effectiveness will not be maximised (Chambers, 1982; Basturkmen, 2010, 2006; Gatehouse, 2001; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Allwright, 1982; West, 1997; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998). A contribution in this respect is the project headlined “*English for a successful career: A study of the needs of the students majoring in economics and socio-political studies*”. It has been carried out with a university grant and aims to enhance course effectiveness by optimising course parameters. Another reason to implement the project was the fact that there has not been done much research in this field and students’ needs have not been studied extensively in Bulgaria regardless of the traditions and

achievements in foreign language teaching in the country and in ESP teaching in particular. Hence the main objective of the project is to examine the ESP needs of the students majoring in economics and socio-political studies in order to optimise and improve the academic ESP courses offered by academic institutions profiled in economics and socio-political studies. The research tasks determined by the project objective are:

- To study the ESP needs of the students majoring in economics and socio-political studies
- To study students' attitudes and motivation with regard to the academic ESP courses for economics and socio-political studies
- To establish the key criteria that will help to prepare recommendations for optimization of the academic ESP courses for economics and socio-political studies (Stefanova, 2022)

Apart from the review of the research on the issues of needs analysis in ESP and in order to gather empirical data, the project involved two surveys. The participants in the first survey were 1106 students from 11 countries – Bulgaria, Albania, the Republic of North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Spain, China, Brazil, Lithuania, Latvia and Serbia. The Bulgarian universities whose students participated in the survey have the same profile as UNWE and include New Bulgarian University, University of Economics – Varna, Sofia University, Plovdiv University and D.A. Tsenov Academy of Economics- Svishtov. Of these students 939 were from Bulgaria with 567 respondents from UNWE and 372 respondents from the rest of the universities, and 167 foreign participants. The second survey was intended to complement the first one by examining lecturers' attitudes and observations and comparing them with those of the student respondents. The respondents were 32 UNWE lecturers teaching English and/or subject. The surveys included 26 questions of three types – open, with a five-point Likert scale and multiple-choice ones. The questions were intended to help obtain detailed information about students' necessities - needs, wants and lacks (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

The empirical data was processed recently and will allow the team to find out if there are differences in the attitudes and perceptions of UNWE students and the rest of the students in Bulgaria and abroad, differences in the views of the two respondent groups (students and lecturers) and, finally, what students feel they need and expect. The findings, in turn, will provide the basis for the recommendations on the ESP courses optimization at our university and at any higher education institution interested in enhancing their ESP course effectiveness.

Conclusion

The variety of tasks offered in the textbook and study manuals discussed so far aims to develop students' linguistic and discursive competences such as: reading and the thorough critical comprehension of political and economic texts and texts connected with foreign policy; active listening and comprehension of texts from the above-described spheres; note-taking, paraphrasing and summarizing information; the use of thematically and generically appropriate expressive devices; the fluent and well-informed discussion of various issues in the respective thematic fields, with a clear expression of one's personal position.

The study of students' needs reveals the potential of the faculty for scientific work as well as the ability to take advantage of the combination of teaching experience and research, thus making the local and international ELT and ESP community aware of the UNWE achievements in foreign language teaching.

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