

100 YEARS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES TEACHING AT THE UNWE: TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Daniela Koch-Kozhuharova¹
e-mail: koch_kozhuharovad@unwe.bg

Abstract

The paper examines certain aspects of the methodology of Foreign Language Teaching (FLT), final examinations, scientific research, some publications and international activities, provided by one of the largest and oldest departments of the UNWE. Traditionally perceived in our academic community as providing basically practical training in English, Spanish, Russian, German and French, as well as Bulgarian language for foreigners, our foreign language department has made serious progress in the research field. Furthermore there has been a significant increase in the publications in the area of academic books and scientific research, despite the drastic downsizing of its academic faculty of lecturers. Different periods of FLT have been interpreted and examined. The article is dedicated to the centenarian anniversary of the University of National and World Economy, the biggest higher school of economics and business in South-eastern Europe.

Keywords: FLT, history of FLT, UNWE, final exams, Erasmus mobility, linguo-didactic archeology

JEL: Z13, Z18

Introduction

Foreign language training at the University of National and World Economy has invariably accompanied our university throughout its history – foreign language training in German, French, Russian and English was also conducted in the Free University founded by Stefan Bobchev's predecessor 100 years ago. The Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics, which is commissioned to perform the training in foreign languages and in Bulgarian language for foreigners, is among the oldest and largest departments of the University of National and World Economy. Today, in a different geopolitical setting, the Department provides specialized foreign language instruction in English, Spanish, Russian, German and French, which are studied as first and second foreign languages. Our foreign language department is an integral part of

¹ Prof., PhD, Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics, University of National and World Economy, Sofia, Bulgaria

the Faculty of International Economics and Politics, where the greatest importance is attached to foreign language instruction and whose students acquire knowledge and skills in specialized foreign language in the field of business communications, commercial correspondence, international relations and diplomacy. Training mainly but not exclusively in English is carried out in other faculties of the University of National and World Economy. The Department is also in charge of carrying out state exams as first and second foreign languages, exams in a foreign language for applicant doctoral students. Furthermore, the Department has also offered preparatory courses in a foreign language for university applicants. The Department has prepared the exam banks for prospective students with a foreign language. Fellow philologists are among the most eligible beneficiaries of the Erasmus programme. Foreign language training has been conducted by our colleagues in the Institute for Postgraduate Training, founded in 1969. Among the most serious challenges in this language instruction is that the insufficient number of students by level and time periods creates difficulties in forming groups and accordingly training may prove unprofitable.

Foreign languages teaching at the UNWE from a diachronic perspective²

In 1920 the Free University was founded – a modern educational center for its time, called on to provide the young Bulgarian kingdom with young staff to meet the needs of our national economy, including those for financiers, insurers, traders, diplomats, commercial attachés, consuls, administrative employees, etc. The foresight of The Free University founder Prof. Stefan Bobchev (1853 – 1940) as well as his team – Prof. Dr.Sc. (Econ.) C. Zlatarski, Prof. Dr.Sc. (Econ.) P. Stoyanov, Prof. Dr.Sc. (Econ.) D. Mishaykov, Prof. Dr.Sc. (Econ.) A. Ishirkov and others led to the attraction of elite polyglot academic lecturers that use both in their research and teaching several foreign languages, among them foreign language lecturers. Among the renowned university lecturer-philologists in the 1920s and 1930s were Prof. Dr. Georges Atto (French). M. Popruzhenko (Russian and Slavic culture), academician Stoyan Argyrov (Czech and Bulgarian), Georges Nurijan (Italian), Galab Galabov (Turkish), Botyu Stanov (German), among many others. Foreign languages were included in the first curricula of the Free University adopted by the Academic Council in 1922 “Archival sources show that foreign language courses are widely attended by students as they are in line with the university’s general policy of expanding the linguistic potential of graduates and facilitating their future international connections and contacts” (Vesselinov, 2019, p. 178).

² See Vesselinov (2019) for more information about FLT from the perspective of the linguo-didactical archeology.

I cannot but comment, with some sadness, on the situation then, in which, unlike today, foreign language training was ensured in all majors and faculties. In more recent times, this tradition or best practice, as it would be fashionable to call it today, was abolished in 2005, and an electable foreign language was studied in the first two years of study in all majors, with a horarium of 2 hours per week, that is, 60 hours per academic year for two semesters. The argument for dropping the comprehensive foreign language learning was the insufficient horarium. Indeed, it would take 120 hours to cover level A1 under the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), yet the correct solution would have been to double the horarium rather than remove foreign language training altogether from all specialties without exception. Yet let us go back to the Free University, which a century ago introduced the compulsory study of a foreign language from the first year. Students were given the opportunity to choose among French, German, Russian or English. Optional training in Italian, Romanian, Greek, Czech and Turkish was also offered, with a horarium of three hours per week, and the goal was that foreign language should be used in writing and speaking both in daily communication and for professional purposes.

It was back then and today that expert instruction in foreign languages helps to attract a large number of prospective students. However, unlike today, when the language groups number up to 39 students by virtue of a decision of the Academic Council of 2017, then they numbered as many as 60 people. Most popular was French, after which came German, the interest in which in the 1930s grew for geopolitical reasons, while English came third in the ranking. Interest in English at the Free University was also on the rise, given the growing power of the American and British economies – a trend in line with the opening of American and British colleges in the country. Russian was also studied as an affiliated language. During The Second World War, in 1940, the Free University was transformed into the Higher State School of Business and Administrative Sciences, which was headed by Dimitar Dobrev (1880 – 1961). In compliance with the geopolitical environment, German came to the fore, although other foreign languages did not lose their relevance either. After the end of the Second World War and under the Higher Education Institutions Act in 1947, the Higher State School of Business and Administrative Sciences merged with the State Business Department of the Faculty of Law of Sofia University. As a result Faculty of Business and Social Sciences was set up, whose dean became Dimitar Dobrev, a prominent expert in the field of accounting. The curriculum also included a Western Language and after the country fell into the Soviet zone of influence, a special place was dedicated, *mutatis mutandis*, to the Russian language, the intensive study of which also includes specialized language for economic and diplomatic purposes. In language training, the eclectic division by kinship – Russian and Western languages

was introduced, this time according to the geographical location of native speakers. As the country advanced towards the Soviet orbit and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance was established, the Council of Ministers took a decision on 30 December 1951, in accordance with Decree No 1958, to have the Faculty of Economics at Sofia University set up as an institute, the Karl Marx Higher Institute of Economics, which had 4 faculties and 15 specialties. The Institute of Foreign Languages was then given a worthy place. What is more, a language department with an applied character with a changing structure was set up over the years and a horarium of 30 hours of lectures and 10 hours of seminars was introduced in the study of Russian and one what was then referred to as Western language. An entrance exam was also introduced. The major of Economics of Foreign Trade was the pioneer at the state level in introducing the study of a second Western language. Teaching Bulgarian for foreign students was on the rise. By the geopolitical changes after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Higher Economic Institute was renamed as University of National and World Economy. The Department of Russian Language was disbanded. Some Russian hardly survived in the Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics. In 2002 for a short period of time a Department of English was separated from the Department, but returned to the lot in 2006 by virtue of a decision of the Academic Council.

About the Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics³

As a legitimate successor to foreign language studies at our university, the Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics is one of the oldest and largest departments in the University of National and World Economy. The Department offers general language and foreign language for specific purposes in English, Spanish, Russian, German and French, which are studied as first and second foreign language. Our foreign language department is currently included in the structure of the Faculty of International Economics and Politics, a faculty where the greatest importance is attached to the preparation of foreign languages. The students in the four majors of the faculty – International Relations, International Economic Relations, European Policy and Economics and Political science acquire knowledge and skills in general and specialized foreign language in the field of business communications, trade and diplomatic correspondence, international relations and diplomacy. Training in foreign languages is also carried out at other faculties of the University of National and World Economy, with English coming to the fore. The department is also commissioned to perform the

³ See Koch-Kozhuharova (2021, pp. 7-34) for more information about the Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics at the UNWE in Conference Proceedings, Jubilee International scientific conference.

training in Bulgarian language for foreigners. The lecturers from the Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics have a philological profile and participate in national and international interdisciplinary and educational projects in the field of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, political science, theory and practice of translation, etc. Furthermore, they take part in international scientific conferences, contribute to conference interpretation at conferences in national and international forums, provide translation of economic texts and literature, documents and regulations for Bulgarian and international organizations, publish educational methodological and scientific literature, edit dictionaries, among other activities. The lecturers of foreign languages at the University of National and World Economy have had a longstanding close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science in connection with the national Olympiads in Spanish, French and Russian, as well as with state exams and in English and German, in their capacity as committee chairs, expert evaluators, examiners, etc. Actively engaged in these annual events of national importance were the lecturers from the Department Antonia Pencheva, Olga Lavova, Maria Ananieva, Daniela Koch-Kozharova, Stefka Kozhuhariova, Tatyana Ivanova, among others. The Department has also organized year-round language courses for university applicants in the School of Foreign Language Learning at the University of National and World Economy. Traditionally perceived in our academic community as providing mainly and only practical training in foreign languages and in Bulgarian for foreigners, in recent years our foreign language department has made incredible progress in the research field with a serious increase in the publications of educational, methodological and scientific literature, despite the dramatic downsizing of its faculty. In a 20-member staff, the department has one professor of Spanish, one associate professor in English, Russian and Spanish respectively, and two competitions for associate professors with German and English are underway. There are a total of nine doctors and three PhD students in the department.

Foreign languages at the University of National and World Economy in numbers

After the transition to democracy quite expectedly English turned out to be leader in foreign instruction at UNWE, given that it is the *lingua franca* of our modern days, the language of the victors in the First and Second World Wars, as well as the winners of the Cold War. The study of the first foreign language at the University of National and World Economy takes place after an entrance examination, though in recent years alternative possibilities have been suggested – state maturity exams and internationally accepted certificates

validating the proficiency of the foreign language. The entrance exam is in paper and electronic format and takes place during the regular exam sessions in summer and during several preliminary exam sessions. The second foreign language in the fields and specialties that it is provided, follows a valuable tradition and is elective. Spanish, German and Russian have traditionally been the major rivals for primacy. Spanish is the “youngest” language at UNWE – introduced as a second foreign language in the 1970s, which may be attributed to the friendly bilateral relations with Cuba. Upon Bulgaria’s reorientation to the EU, including Spain, Spanish was offered as a first foreign language in 1991. Spanish marks the most accelerated development in students’ interest, for which contribute Spain’s policy of disseminating the language abroad through the Cervantes Institute and the educational services of embassies. Russian, which suffered a catastrophe for geopolitical reasons after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites, has recently seen a slow but steady rise, gaining a worthy place in UNWE’s language palette. Currently, the least interest is in the French language but, *mutatis mutandis*, this has not always been the case.

Chronos and *topos* are invariably determinants in the training of a foreign language in a small Bulgaria, whose official language, Bulgarian, is not widespread and whose weight in the world economy is negligible. There is nothing new on the foreign language front, but let us go back to the numbers that speak eloquently and unambiguously, and are largely determined by the curricula that reflect the policies of the departments that lead specialties, as well as the policies of the rectors, invariably and by default related to Bulgaria’s geopolitical orientation.

Table 1: Students, studying foreign languages at the UNWE
for the period 2017 – 2022

2016-2017	TOTAL	2651
1	2	3
2017-2018	ENGLISH	1425
2017-2018	BULGARIAN	27
2017-2018	SPANISH	277
2017-2018	GERMAN	285
2017-2018	RUSSIAN	225
2017-2018	FRENCH	99
2017-2018	TOTAL	2338
2018-2019	ENGLISH	1362
2018-2019	BULGARIAN	39
2018-2019	SPANISH	266

Continued

1	2	3
2018-2019	GERMAN	265
2018-2019	RUSSIAN	283
2018-2019	FRENCH	63
2018-2019	TOTAL	2278
2019-2020	ENGLISH	1330
2019-2020	BULGARIAN	41
2019-2020	SPANISH	289
2019-2020	GERMAN	215
2019-2020	RUSSIAN	275
2019-2020	FRENCH	43
2019-2020	TOTAL	2193
2020-2021	ENGLISH	1126
2020-2021	BULGARIAN	36
2020-2021	SPANISH	259
2020-2021	GERMAN	192
2020-2021	RUSSIAN	154
2020-2021	FRENCH	43
2020-2021	TOTAL	1656
2021-2022	ENGLISH	1087
2021-2022	BULGARIAN	19
2021-2022	SPANISH	289
2021-2022	GERMAN	198
2021-2022	RUSSIAN	124
2021-2022	FRENCH	28
2021-2022	TOTAL	1745

Final State Exams in Foreign Languages at UNWE

“The format and level of state examinations in English, Spanish, Russian, German and French and Bulgarian as a first or second foreign language are harmonized with and correspond to the curriculum and programs of the respective specialties with foreign language instruction. They also comply with the international certification systems for levels of linguistic competence and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), as recommended by the Council

resolution of the European Union of November 2001 establishing systems for the validation of language skills. The aim is to provide a learning, teaching and evaluation method to be applied to all languages in the EU. According to the principles set out in the CEFR, the organisation of language learning and subsequently its assessment are based on the needs, motivation, characteristics and real capabilities of the learners” (Koch-Kozhuharova, Kozhuharova, 2012, p. 5).

Students majoring in International Relations, European Policy and Economics, International Economic Relations and International Economic Relations with instruction in English master the second foreign language to varying degrees depending on their preparation, as well as the horarium set out in the curricula, which corresponds to level B1/ B1+ of the six reference levels widely accepted as a European standard for classification of proficiency in foreign languages. Level: B1+ International Relations, European Policy and Economy (horarium of 360 academic classes) Level: B1 International Economic Relations and International Economic Relations with instruction in English (horarium of 300). Level B1 meets the specifications of the so-called threshold level, which are related to its main function – maintaining communication (oral and written) and achieving in different situations goals such as tracking the main points in a longer information chain or discussing both general and personal topics. The state exam is conducted in two parts: written and oral, with a duration written (3 hours) and Oral (up to 10-15 minutes per student). The overall exam score is the average between the grades of the written and oral part, and the successful intermediate written examination (3) is allowed. In state exams in the first foreign language, “the four language competencies are tested, with the first, written part focusing on the competence in listening comprehension and writing, and in the second oral part – understanding in reading and speaking, all of which are of particular importance for the knowledge of grammar and its successful application. The mentioned language competencies are at level C1, which guarantees the fluent use of the language. This means that students should presumably understand longer and complex texts on a socio-political or economic topic, according to the specifics of the training at the University of National and World Economy, as well as understand implicit ideas; express themselves successfully in writing in both grammatical and lexical terms, and, in view of their educational profile and their future professional realization, they should master the relevant terminology. Future bachelors are expected to be able to speak clearly and logically on more complex topics in the relevant field.” (Koch-Kozhuharova, Kozhuharova, 2014, p. 5). Students studying a foreign language at the University of National and World Economy and subject to the state examination are entitled to sit for an exam up to four times, the sessions being as follows: Autumn – September/October, Winter – February/March or Summer session – June/July sessions. For

the convenience and self-preparation of the students, the Publishing Complex of the University of National and World Economy issued manuals in the respective foreign languages as a first or second foreign for preparation.

The first English-language aid for students from the political science department was issued in 2012 by the author Boyka Bozukova, Diana Dimitrova and Kalina Bratanova and offers comprehensive exercises on the components of the state exam in several sections – the lexical-grammar part, the specifics of writing a descriptive or argumentative essay on a topical social or political issue, summarizing in English a text written in Bulgarian and taken from leading media and listening to current programs in the same field. In the same year 2012 the Spanish Language Manual as a second foreign language for students from the fields Political Science, Economics and Economics with English teaching was published, developed by the author Daniela Koch-Kozhuharova and Stefka Vasileva Kozhuharova, which offers 10 sample tests for the written exam, as well as a sample speaking test. In 2014, the Spanish-language Manual was published for students with Spanish as first foreign language, again by Koch-Kozhuharova and Vasileva Kozhuharova. The elements for the written exam are Listening comprehension, Written expression /essay/ and Text commentary.

In 2015, the Manual *Sample Tests for State Exam in English as a Second Foreign Language* was published, designed to help and improve the preparation of students majoring in International Economic Relations, International Relations, European Policy and Economics and Political Science, who study English as a second foreign language and are about to take a state exam. In addition to presenting the format of the exam, the Manual by Albena Stefanova offers six key tests for students in International Economic Relations and International Relations respectively. Thus, learners have the opportunity to prepare in the exam format and gain experience thereof and “there is emphasis on the vocabulary concerned” (Stefanova, 2015, p. 1).

Some doctoral dissertations

Colleagues issued monographs based on their doctoral dissertations – Albena Stefanova, Kalina Bratanova, Tatyana Ivanova, Silvia Vasileva, Antonia Pencheva, among others. Ivanova’s book is dedicated to the feminisation of the Spanish language in political speech. The main emphasis in the monograph of Albena Stefanova, lecturer in English, is placing the work with an authentic specialized text on a linguistic basis. Bratanova’s monograph is on the relationship between identity, image and national brand, in whose context Bulgaria’s image is interpreted in the British political debate 2001 – 2015 (Ishpekova-Bratanova, 2020, p. 11). The Germanist Silvia Vasileva compared in her doctoral thesis the features of journalist texts on an economic topic in German and Bulgarian, concluding

that “in German there is a more pronounced tendency to attach more citations of experts as well as to institutes and organizations, as opposed to Bulgarian” (Vasileva, 2020, p. 148). Antonia Pencheva, lecturing in Russian, also makes a comparative analysis between Russian and Bulgarian in her PhD thesis, not in the field of Economics but in Diplomacy. Pencheva draws the conclusion that “необходимым лингвистическим условием объявления аутентичными текстов дипломатических документов, в частности – международных договоров, является их функциональная и семантическая эквивалентность. Эквивалентность определяется лексическими, терминологическими, структурно-семантическими особенностями текста и создает предпосылки для эффективного функционирования международного договора как нормативного акта международного права” (Pencheva, 2013, p. 5).

Conclusion

In the 100-year history of the University of National and World Economy, which includes its legitimate predecessors – High School of Economics Karl Marx and the Free University - foreign language instruction has invariably been carried out. In small Bulgaria, with a minority official language, an insignificant share in the world economy and therefore a peripheral role in world politics, there is no way that the largest economic university, not only in Bulgaria but also in the Balkans, could not prepare the country’s future elite in the field of foreign language competence.

Foreign languages have always been given priority in academic training according to the geopolitical orientation of the country. Hence today English has taken the lead as the first foreign language, whereas Russian was dominant in the era of soviet influence. It was German that was given priority as Germany gained power before and during the first phase of The Second World War. Back in 1920, when the Free University was founded, foreign language instruction was also provided in the languages of the neighboring Balkan countries – Turkish, Greek and Romanian. Today at the University of National and World Economy, the least interest is in French, Spanish has gained the most momentum becoming the most popular among students second foreign language, while Russian has been steadily, albeit slowly, restoring its positions. Over the past decade, the Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics Department has seen an increase in the area of science and research.

Due to the ageing of the faculty and especially in the conditions of the new rules guiding the academic workload, by virtue of a decision of the Academic Council of 2017, the staffing levels at the department saw a drastic decline. The three scientific and applied seminars of the Department held at the Ravda Training and Rehabilitation Base for the period 2017/2019, had a strong contribution

to the scientific and applied exchange between the different language sectors of the Department and provoked heated scientific and linguistic debate. Furthermore, methodological and scientific literature editions in the department over the last 10 years has seen significant growth. The cooperation with the University Publishing House of the University of National and World Economy, as well as with the specialized editions of the University, is at a very good level. Since the beginning of the global crisis caused by Covid 19 and the accelerated digitization of training, foreign language lecturers have become well grounded in the specifics of new technologies, alongside their colleagues from different specialties of the University of National and World Economy.

References

- Веселинов, Д. (2019). Чуждоезиковото обучение в Университета за национално и световно стопанство, Чуждоезиково обучение, том 46, с. 176-187. (Vesselinov, D., 2019, Chuzhdoezikovoto obuchenie v Universiteta za natsionalno i svetovno stopanstvo, Chuzhdoezikovoto obuchenie, tom 46, s. 176-187).
- Кох-Кожухарова, Д. (2021). За някои добри практики в обучението по чужди езици в ИСК и по-конкретно по испански език, в 50 г. продължаващо обучение в УНСС-добри практики и предизвикателства, Издателски комплекс – УНСС, с. 79-86. (Koch-Kozhuharova, D., 2021, Za nyakoi dobri praktiki v obuchenieto po chuzhdi ezitsi v ISK i po-konkretno po ispanski ezik, v 50 g. prodalzhavashto obuchenie v UNSS-dobri praktiki i predivzikatelstva, Izdatelski kompleks – UNSS, s. 79-86).
- Koch-Kozhuharova, D., Kozhuharova, St. (2012). Español como segunda lengua extranjera, Помагало за държавен изпит испански като втори чужд език, Издателски комплекс – УНСС. (Koch-Kozhuharova, D., Kozhuharova, St., 2012, Español como segunda lengua extranjera, Pomagalo za darzhaven izpit ispanski kato vtori chuzhd ezik, Izdatelski kompleks – UNSS).
- Koch-Kozhuharova, D., Kozhuharova, St. (2014). Español como primera lengua extranjera, Помагало за държавен изпит испански като първи чужд език, Издателски комплекс – УНСС. (Koch-Kozhuharova, D., Kozhuharova, St., 2014, Español como primera lengua extranjera, Pomagalo za darzhaven izpit ispanski kato parvi chuzhd ezik, Izdatelski kompleks – UNSS).
- Стефанова, А. (2015). Примерни тестове за държавен изпит по английски като втори чужд език, Издателски комплекс на УНСС, София. (Stefanova, A., 2015, Primerni testove za darzhaven izpit po angliyski kato vtori chuzhd ezik, Izdatelski kompleks na UNSS, Sofia).
- Ишпекова-Братанова, К. Ф. (2020). Идентичност, образ, национален бранд: България в британския политически дебат 2001 – 2015 г., Унисон Арт.

(Ishpekova-Bratanova, K.F., 2020, Identichnost, obraz, nacionalen brand: Bulgaria v britanskiya politicheski debat 2001 – 2015, Unison Art).

Василева, С. (2020), Текстолингвистични особености на публицистични текстове с икономическа тематика на немски език в сравнение с български. Дисертационен труд, Издателски комплекс УНСС, София. (Vasileva, S., 2020, Tekstolingvistichni osobenosti na publizistichni tekstove s ikonomicheska tematika na nemski ezik v sravnenie s bulgarski, Izdatelski kompleks na UNSS, Sofia).

Пенчева, А. И. (2013). Типы межъязыковой эквивалентности в текстах дипломатических документов на русском и болгарском языках. (Pencheva A., 2013, Tipuy mezhduyazikovii ekvivalentnosti v tekstah diplomaticheskih dokumentav na ruskam y balgarskam yaziikah).