

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING FOR ACADEMIC AND SPECIFIC PURPOSES FOR ADVANCED COMPUTING EDUCATION

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As part of the TEMPUS Joint European Project for Advanced Computing Education, the University of Bristol Language Centre was asked to provide a specialist English language training programme for students and staff from the Technical University of Wroclaw and the Higher College of Engineering in Zielona Gora.

1. The Language Centre

The Language Centre was established to provide courses in applied languages to overseas and home students from all faculties of the University. The Centre operates in three main areas:

1.1. English as a Foreign Language

There is a well established pre-sessional and in-sessional programme in English for Academic Purposes. Courses are designed for non-native speakers of English who need to improve their command of English for more effective academic study. It aims to help students communicate accurately and appropriately in a range of situations such as lectures, seminars and tutorials. Emphasis is on developing the specific language skills required for successful academic study such as notetaking, summarising, paraphrasing, evaluating data and the presentation of ideas and arguments in both written and verbal forms. Reading texts are selected which reflect the students' chosen subject areas and include textbooks, journals and conference proceedings, and writing practice is provided in areas such as dissertations, projects, proposals and literature reviews.

1.2. Applied Languages for Specific Purposes

The Centre runs courses in French, German and Italian for students in the faculties of Engineering, Sciences and Medicine. These courses provide consolidation and improvement of general language structures and functions. There is practice of specialist concepts and terminology to enable students to develop their existing language skills into areas related to their fields of study. Communications skills such as those necessary for presentations, lectures and seminars are developed to enable the students to function effectively in a European academic environment.

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1.3. Testing and Assessment

The Centre is the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) testing centre for the region. The testing system is used by all British and Australian universities to gauge a candidate's ability to cope with the specific English language demands of higher education. It tests them in the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking in subject specific areas. The IELTS experience of the Centre has been transferred to develop a battery of examinations in other European languages for British students who are attending the Foreign Language programme. These tests are used for diagnostic/placement purposes and to assess whether the student will cope with the linguistic demands of a period of study in Europe.

2. The English Language Training Programme

Following the request from the project co-ordinator a plan was devised for the design and implementation of the language training programme:

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| Stage 1 | Needs Analysis and Diagnostic Testing |
| Stage 2 | Course Design and Implementation |
| Stage 3 | Course Evaluation |

2.1. Needs Analysis and Diagnostic Testing

During the spring a detailed linguistic needs analysis was carried out in the Universities of Bristol, Wroclaw and Zielona Gora. This involved interviews with staff and students from the faculties involved. The objectives of the needs analysis were to determine the type of English that students would face during their period of study at the British universities and in their subsequent professional lives. As regards staff, the needs analysis aimed at determining the type of English that academic staff from Polish universities would need to help them perform effectively within the JEP.

As part of the needs analysis all participants were asked to take a specially designed Language Centre diagnostic test. The test was designed to gauge the candidate's ability to undertake a period of study in the UK, and to enable Language Centre to carry out a detailed error analysis to determine the content of the pre-sessional and staff training courses. The test comprised four sections: a) use of English in a general academic context b) an academic reading text based on subject specific material c) a subject specific listening comprehension component and d) an oral interview.

2.2. Course Design and Implementation

On the basis of the needs analysis and assessment procedure two separate courses were devised: a one-month pre-sessional course for students to take place in September 1991; a two-week intensive course for academic staff to take place in February 1992.

1. *The Pre-sessional Course for Students, September 1991.*

The specific aims of the course were:

- to improve the students' command of English in connection with their subject areas,
- to familiarise them with the study skills necessary for study at a British university,
- to familiarise them with the social English they would need to settle down and concentrate on their studies.

The syllabus of the course included the following:

Reading skills. Adopting appropriate reading strategies; Improving reading speeds whilst maintaining levels of comprehension; Understanding the meaning of words through their context; Drawing conclusions from context.

Writing skills. Planning and organising written assignments; Overcoming structural errors; Using satisfactory spelling and punctuation; Developing an appropriate written style.

Listening to lectures and taking notes. Identifying the relevant points in a lecture; Predicting accurately and anticipating information; Recognising verbal and paralinguistic cues; Dealing with different speeds of delivery, accent and lecturing styles.

Effective participation in seminars and tutorials. Using appropriate communicative strategies in group discussions; Interrupting and contradicting without causing offence; Asking for repetition and clarification.

Study skills and methods. Taking the responsibility for learning; Making effective use of University resources; Planning and structuring study time.

Examination techniques. Organising a timetable of revision activities; Being familiar with types of examinations set; Writing under pressure of time.

General and social language. Understanding English in everyday situations; Understanding different accents; Aspects of cross cultural communication.

In addition it was decided that all students would be required to complete a subject specific project. The aim of the project work was to provide a link between the language course and the actual degree course. Students were thus given the possibility of producing a prototype of academic work. The projects were presented in written form and orally to develop academic presentation skills. Students were given detailed feedback by Language Centre staff on grammar, style and the academic conventions involved. The project titles were allotted to the students on the basis of consultation with their departments and in this particular case were:

- A comparison of logic circuit families
- Programme documentation using VDM
- Basic algorithms in image processing
- A review of personal computers on the market
- New features in Windows 3.1

- Specification of sequential circuits using ASM (algorithmic state machine).
- 2. The Staff Training Course, February 1992.**

The following general objectives were taken into account when designing the course:

- Strategic competence (Canale 1980). The students should master verbal and non-verbal communication strategies: a) to compensate for possible breakdowns in communications and b) to enhance the effectiveness of communication.
- Self-confidence. Many non-native speakers, even those with a high level in a particular language, experience "communicative anxiety" when communicating with native speakers. Self-confidence levels should be increased through the creation of a relaxed and supportive atmosphere within the language training group, regular feedback sessions and individual guidance.

The specific aims of the course were:

- to improve the participants' command of English in connection with their subject areas.
- to familiarise them with the communication skills necessary for effective participation in an academic exchange programme.
- to enable the participants to present the programme of studies of their home university.

The syllabus of the course included the following:

Reading skills. Development of appropriate reading strategies using authentic subject specific material and Erasmus/Tempus course reports.

Writing skills. Input and practice of writing course reports and letters to project co-ordinators from other universities.

Negotiating skills. Practice of negotiating in English with specific reference to budgets, student numbers and course design.

Meeting skills. Chairing and participating in formal and informal meetings.

Presentation skills. Input and practice of making a formal presentation including description of graphs, trends, statistical and tabular information.

General and social language. Understanding English in everyday situations; Understanding different accents; Aspects of cross cultural communication.

3. Course Evaluation and Conclusion

At the end of the language training programmes and during the academic year a thorough evaluation process was carried out which included questionnaires sent to staff and students and a summative language examination to measure levels of progress. The results were extremely positive. The students felt that the intensive September course was particularly useful since it gave them the opportunity to concentrate on developing their existing language skills into their subject specific areas prior to commencing their courses in the Faculties of Engineering. In addition, those students who remained at

Bristol were given the opportunity of further English language support during the academic year. Feedback from the staff training programme was generally positive although the participants and Language Centre staff felt that the course length could have been extended. This will be taken into account for the planning of future courses.

The close liaison between the Language Centre and students and staff members of the Faculties of Engineering in Britain and Poland has meant that subject specific language teaching material has continued to be developed for the expected extension of the project in the academic year 1992/93.

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