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Methodology of English Language Courses for Construction Engineers and Managers in Poland and Portugal

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Abstract. The paper presents chosen tasks and partial results of the project in the frame of Leonardo da Vinci titled: "Improvement of the Linguistic Skills of Polish and Portuguese Construction Managers and Engineers - Recognition of Needs and Preparation of Courses in "Construction English Language"", promoted by the Institute of Construction Engineering and Management, Faculty of Civil Engineering at Warsaw University of Technology, Poland. The project deals with development of the system of mutual recognition of managerial skills in construction, as well as comparison and certification of managerial qualifications in the European construction industry, throughout improvement of linguistic skills in the area of management. The paper presents methodology and various curricula and didactic materials and tools for modern linguistic education of construction engineers and managers in Poland and Portugal. Linguistic skills in the area of English language used within European construction industry will facilitate the access to labour market of Polish and Portuguese construction engineers and managers.

Introduction

Leonardo da Vinci project titled: "Improvement of the Linguistic Skills of Polish and Portuguese Construction Managers and Engineers - Recognition of Needs and Preparation of Courses in "Construction English Language"", conducted by Institute of Construction Engineering and Management, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Warsaw University of Technology was created on the base of the Polish and Portugal construction industry needs. LdV project leads to improvement of the mutual recognition of construction engineers and managers qualifications across Europe throughout betterment of English language used among construction industry employers. The main goal of the project is to increase employment capabilities of Polish and Portuguese engineers and managers at construction market of enlarged European Union.

Background of the Leonardo da Vinci project

In the European countries there are diversified didactic and engineer professional education systems. In the German language countries, which cultivate the study style of the so-called "German school", the graduates of construction faculties obtain necessary qualifications. These qualifications allow to fulfil specific construction functions, without getting any additional entitlements and qualification certificates.

These qualifications are obtained through the specially created programmes of studies and directed training periods. The studies are subjected to the profession needs.

The training includes subjects covering the most important functions of the construction staff.

In the countries adhered to the traditions of the so-called "English school", Universities educate only in the area of the basic-theoretical knowledge. The professional qualifications are mastered by specific work positions. These qualifications are officially confirmed by appropriate organizations, which represent the construction market participants (employers, engineer's chambers and societies etc.). These organizations realize the strictly described verification procedure. This procedure check the knowledge obtained through the studies period and specialized complementary courses. It also check the experience obtained through the professional work. This procedure is created to establish the data needed to make a decision to regard the candidate's qualification level as sufficient to admit the candidate among other organization's participants, issue the qualification certificate including linguistic certification, etc.

The qualification procedure's aim is to enable the accreditation programme of the studies. The accreditation's task is to determine the graduate's degree of preparation to begin the professional career in construction. Fifty years of the centrally planned construction industry in Poland led to the current situation that the construction engineers are able to work only as technical-administration workers, without the possibility to lead the independent economic activity. The system of studies realized by state Universities, dominated by theoretical-technical teaching, was subjected to the technical-administration qualification profile.

The entitlements to fulfil the technical function in construction were issued by the national administration organizations after the specified duration of work experience on the building site. According to the new law, introduced in Poland in 2002 - the professional construction engineer chambers would issue the entitlements to fulfil the technical functions. Accreditation of the study programmes would be realized by bodies of scientific experts with clear preferences for the scientific study standard.

In recent years the number of international investments in the construction sectors in Poland and Portugal has increased significantly. There is a need for an improvement of English language skills among Polish and Portuguese personnel working in the construction industry, as well as among students of Civil Engineering Faculties and didactic staff. Additionally the Polish language education system suffers from lack of trained teachers of the English language for engineers and managers.. The project helps to meet the training needs of people at risk of exclusion from the labour market. Insufficient command of the English language is a disadvantage on the labour markets in Poland and in Portugal.

Specialised training in the English language within the Portuguese and Polish construction industries is important due to the following issues:

- an increasing number of foreign construction companies working in Portugal and Poland - the project will facilitate access to the Portuguese and Polish construction markets and labour forces, at all levels of employment: from foreman to managers and engineers,
- a growing number of Polish and Portuguese engineers working abroad - the project will facilitate their access to foreign labour markets, as well as improve communications with potential employers within member states of the European Union,
- recognition of qualifications of Polish and Portuguese construction engineers and managers (the project will allow Polish and Portuguese engineers and managers to apply for certification and then pan-European qualifications (e.g. Eur. Eng.). Technical knowledge, even at the highest level, is not sufficient for full international recognition of qualifications. Transparency of qualification is not possible without use of a common language between interested parties,
- the growing use and importance of International Contract Conditions (European Union Conditions of Contract, or FIDIC), where usually the contract documents are drawn up in English. The project will allow Polish and Portuguese engineers for better use of International Contract documents, facilitating the management of contracts financed by International Agencies (e.g. European Investment Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development or World Bank). Proper knowledge of contract language is particularly important for other EU Commission supported projects (like Framework V, Structural

Funds, or as currently in Poland, the ISPA Programme and soon, in Poland and Portugal - the Cohesion Funds),

- changes to the legal system in Poland - adjustment of law/legal regulations and standards, and the introduction of new European Directives. The project will facilitate the use of English language and terminology, regulations and directives, as well as allow for the transfer of information and greater influence of Polish and Portuguese construction experts in common European Law,
- an increasing number of research contacts between Polish and Portuguese students and didactic staff at universities, with their counterparts from other European countries. The project will facilitate these contacts, together with access to foreign textbooks, construction magazines and papers, improving the linguistic skills of researchers as well. The project will also give a solid background to students for the future recognition of their qualifications.

Description of the LdV project

Following organizations participate in the project: Institute of Construction Engineering and Management (the Promoter, PL), Polish British Construction Partnership Ltd. (the Co-ordinator, PL), National Chamber of Construction (PL), Polish Agency for Entrepreneurship Development (PL), Minho University (PT), University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UK) and European Construction Ventures Ltd. (UK).

LdV project has started with the recognition of language improvement needs among Polish and Portuguese construction industry personnel, didactic staff and students of Construction Faculties. For this purpose extended questionnaires and Focus Group methods were used. Special WEB site for the project was created for: organisation of the questionnaire, gathering the responds from future participants of the courses, for dissemination of the results of the project and for use as one of the distance learning tools in the future.

See (www.il.pw.edu.pl/~itiopb/leonardo/info-eng.htm).

On the basis of the questionnaire among construction industry employees and employers the Project Team created detailed curricula and methodology for both technical and managerial English courses.

Creation of different types of courses is foreseen, depending on the competence levels of construction industry employees:

- Intermediate courses: aimed at the level of foremen in industry, and at the level of students of Technical Universities. There will be two intermediate courses created for construction technical language and for management basis in construction.
- Advanced courses: aimed at engineers and managers from industry, including representatives from Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, and didactic staff at Technical Universities. There will be six advanced courses created, covering the areas as follows:

international contract conditions, procurement procedures, construction and project management, quality management, cost management, joint ventures and partnering in construction industry.

It is assumed that all participants of proposed training courses should have some basic knowledge of the English language. The structure and format of the courses will be developed on the basis of co-operation between the construction industry and Technical Universities, in close co-operation with a number of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) experts from University Language Training Centres at Warsaw University of Technology, University of Minho and University of Manchester.

The project will provide tools for the training of tutors for English language courses. Training will cover all content-related aspects of the courses, as well as the technical preparation of tutors in the use of modern techniques.

During the project, various types of courses will be tried, with the participation of selected representatives of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, students and specialised didactic staff from Technical Universities in Poland and Portugal. Tests will help with the selection of the most appropriate method of running the courses, and in the creation of the final versions of the proposed subjects. The project will provide a basis for future linguistic certification of Polish and Portuguese construction engineers and managers.

The project will conclude with the creation of material (basis and structure) for Portuguese - English, and Polish - English dictionaries, in the field of technical and managerial construction terminology.

This project will strengthen co-operation between training organisations, including universities and vocational colleges, and the corporate sector, including Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. A better knowledge of the English language will facilitate mutual recognition of qualification and future international certification of Polish and Portuguese construction engineers.

Created methodology for English language courses

The courses are designed to help managers and professional personnel from construction industry in communication and understanding documentation in English. The main aim is to facilitate the role of professional personnel who deal with matters and documentation related to wide aspect of management in construction and to give confidence in dealing with such documentation in English.

It is hoped that the course will also lead to an increased awareness and greater knowledge of the concepts of modern managerial skills and procedures in the construction industry. By working through the materials learners should become more accurate and more appropriate in a range of key technical contexts.

The course learners:

- need English as a language of international communication and documentation in professional context,
- need to develop fluency and accuracy,
- need to extend and develop their active and passive vocabulary,
- have limited time available for study,
- can develop strategies to enable them to take control of their own learning. The predominance of the use of English in internationally funded construction investment projects in Poland and in Portugal means those wishing to succeed in winning contracts are required to understand the English language thoroughly both from practical and legal viewpoints.

Courses attempt to meet the demands of professional personnel whose first language is not English and whose knowledge of the management in construction is still developing. Throughout the course students are encouraged to use their own experience and opinions in order to maximize involvement and learning. A step-by-step approach to the subject has been adopted, initially covering the basic principles of the managerial knowledge in construction and then explaining the individual components of the management procedures and rules.

The courses are aimed at professional personnel whose English language level is Intermediate to Upper Intermediate and Advanced. Designed modules cover 30 (for Intermediate level) up to 45 hours (for Advanced level) of teaching with additional learning hours generated by the case studies. The topics have been chosen following research among civil engineers and managers in construction industry to establish what are the areas of widest possible interest to the majority of them.

English for Managers in the International Construction Industry is an ESP course (English for Specific Purposes). It aims to enable learning on two levels: the subject level (various managerial aspects in construction industry) and the linguistic level (awareness and use of English language).

The main skills practiced in the course are: reading, speaking and writing. There is some Listening included as well.

The skills with the highest focus are reading and speaking. This is because communication in English is required for professional personnel who deal with management in construction. Each section of the course manuals contains a pre-reading activity, skills work (including reading and writing), word study, language study and a discussion point. Selected sections have a case study, which is a longer task-based exercise and aims to synthesize skills and consolidate knowledge.

Each module of the course is organized into 10 sections and will contain:

Starting up - an introductory activity which sets the scene for the presentation topic. This activity aims to stimulate interest, to find out what learners already know about the

topic, and to introduce and check vocabulary. It is either a brief discussion stimulus- e.g. questions, photos or extracts which give vocabulary and background information to the topic. It is designed as a whole class activity.

Vocabulary - essential vocabulary is presented and practiced throughout a wide variety of exercises. Students learn new words, phrases and collocations, and are given tasks which help to activate the vocabulary they already know or have just learnt. Vocabulary is introduced, practiced and revised both in Pre - Reading and after the text sections.

Reading - texts are authentic or adapted from authentic sources in learner's field of interest. The target topic is presented in a realistic context. Comprehension is checked by questions and other tasks. The aim is to develop learner's reading, understanding and vocabulary. He/she should also be able to discuss the ideas and the issues in the texts. At the same time there are introduced a variety of strategies for organizing and learning vocabulary effectively. It has two stages; a) introduction of topic related vocabulary, and b) demonstrating a particular learning vocabulary learning strategy. A follow-up practice activity is necessary to activate the vocabulary introduced.

Listening - the aim of this exercise is to develop listening skills, although in a limited degree.

Discussion point - the aim of the discussion point is to try to get course participants to activate their passive knowledge of English language, to promote confidence and oral fluency. The discussion points are not only job-specific, i.e. related to e.g. procurement procedures but also more general, therefore giving all course participants an opportunity to express views.

Language review - this section focuses on common problem areas at the intermediate and advanced level. It enables a learner to become more accurate in his use of language.

Practice - This provides a series of activities, moving from controlled to freer practice, designed to enable learners to gain fluency and confidence in using the target structures and vocabulary both in speaking and in writing. There is a variety of individual, pair-work, and group-work activities which maximize opportunity for intensive practice. They build up the learner's confidence in using English and improve his fluency through discussion activities.

Skills - this section helps develop essential communication skills such as taking part in meetings, negotiating, telephoning and using English in social situations.

Case study - these activities are based on realistic problems or situations and allow learners to use the language and

communication skills developed while working through two or three modules. They give the opportunities to practice learner's speaking skills in realistic situations. Students are involved in discussing problems and recommending solutions through active group work. Each case study ends with a writing task.

The order of the elements of the section is flexible to some degree and some elements can be omitted in some sections.

The exercises are designed to challenge the reader's understanding of the subject and their ability to express their answers in English.

Each module encourages individual, pair and group work. The case studies encourage team work and team building within the group and mirror activities and decisions that take place in an occupational setting.

In addition, each module includes a *glossary* specific to the subject texts, providing an immediate reference aid to the reader and a full list of acronyms used.

The whole manual contains a *dictionary* which is the most up-to-date source of reference in English for engineers and managers in construction industry in Poland and Portugal today. Compiled from a wide range of text sources, it allows users rapid access to clear, straightforward definitions of the latest terminology in this field.

A *Teacher's Book* containing some tips for the teacher and answer key will be available for each module

Conclusions

The project will provide the English courses for civil engineers and managers with courses which do not exist on the Polish and Portuguese markets. Project Partners foresee implementation of the courses not only on the domestic markets (mainly in Poland and Portugal) but also extensive dissemination of the idea to other European countries (especially new members of European Union, like Latvia or Lithuania), as well as in the pre-accession countries like Romania or Bulgaria.

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Anglų kalbos kursų statybos inžinieriams ir vadybininkams metodologija Lenkijoje ir Portugalijoje

Santrauka

Straipsnyje pristatomi Leonardo da Vinci programos projekto „Lenkų ir portugalų statybos vadybininkų ir inžinierių lingvistinių įgūdžių gerinimas – poreikių pripažinimas ir kursų „Statybos anglų kalba“ parengimas“, kuri remia Varšuvos technologijos universiteto Statybos inžinerijos ir vadybos instituto, Statybos fakultetas (Lenkija), uždaviniai ir daliniai rezultatai. Projekte nagrinėjamas vadybinių įgūdžių, reikalingų statybos srityje, sutartinio pripažinimo sistemos plėtojimas, taip pat vadybos kvalifikacijos Europos statybos pramonėje lyginimas ir įvertinimas per lingvistinių įgūdžių vadybos srityje gerinimą. Straipsnyje pateikiama metodika ir įvairios mokymo programos bei didaktinė medžiaga ir priemonės šiuolaikiniam statybos inžinierių ir vadybininkų lingvistiniam ugdymui Lenkijoje ir Portugalijoje. Anglų kalbos lingvistiniai įgūdžiai, panaudojami europinėje statybos pramonėje, padidins lenkų ir portugalų statybos inžinierių ir vadybininkų galimybes darbo rinkoje.

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