

Reflecting on the roles of LSP teachers

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ABSTRACT: This chapter is dedicated to the multiple roles taken by teachers of languages for specific purposes (LSP). The question can be approached from the perspective of social psychology, by addressing the needs and expectations of all the parties involved in the analysed educational processes, but also from the angle of foreign language methodology, by expanding on traditional roles of foreign language teachers. After some initial insights are made into the social nature of LSP instruction, traditional roles of foreign language instructors are considered and juxtaposed with the tasks and expectations faced by LSP practitioners. The case of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) practitioners is reflected on afterwards.

The following part of the chapter is dedicated to the specific demands involved in working with older adolescents and young adults who are about to enter the career ladder.

Clearly different from all other roles, this one may actually prompt LSP instructors to step in as mentors. Finally, some conclusions are drawn, and recommendations are made regarding specific actions required on the part of LSP practitioners so that the learning process can be, indeed, meaningful and effective.

KEYWORDS:

- language for specific purposes (LSP)
- LSP pedagogy
- teacher roles
- Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
- teaching adolescents and young adults

1. Introduction

From the perspective of social psychology, it is obvious that there are specific roles and functions assumed in the group to which one belongs (Aronson et al., 2015). This also applies to groups learning languages for specific purposes (LSP) and their teachers. Importantly, although these roles are not directly the source of one's behaviour, they may – due to their internalisation – affect one's self-perception, functioning in the group and the emotional-volitional sphere (Branscombe and Baron, 2017, p. 381). In the case of LSP teachers, internalised roles may therefore exert a substantial influence not only on the content but also on the formula, atmosphere and – ultimately – on the quality of their classes. Even though specialist languages have been studied and taught for decades (Dudley-Evans, 2001, p. 131), as Graham Hall (2011, p. 194) notes, the development of methodology in this area has not resulted in the creation of a canon of LSP teaching principles. However, one can find some distinguishing features in LSP teaching methodology, such as its orientation towards effective communication in specific professional or academic situations. The unavailability of commonly accepted guidelines and certain shortcomings of the core curriculum, syllabus, and often the textbook, provide practitioners with greater (than in the case of teaching general language skills) flexibility in the selection of materials and the way the learning process is organised. As Robinson (1991) points out, this situation requires teachers to adapt to a new professional role, both when teaching LSP after previously teaching general language skills, and when the learner moves from one field to another. These roles are demanding insofar that to develop appropriate relations it may be necessary to verify the beliefs concerning one's own attributes (Dudley-Evans, 1998, p. 189). This, in turn, may increase the teacher's sense of uncertainty and, consequently, compromise their well-being, which translates directly into the quality of classes (Mercer and Gregersen, 2020). From this perspective, reflection on the roles of LSP teachers seems particularly important.

2. Traditional roles of foreign language teachers and LSP teaching

The starting point for studies on the roles of an LSP teacher can be the list of tasks for foreign language teachers and, more generally, the thematic content of foreign language teaching methodology textbooks. In this first approach, the analysis



may concern a whole range of functions that are constantly evolving and verified in a dynamically changing reality.

In the textbooks by Jeremy Harmer (1983; 2001; 2020), which have been important reading for generations of students of teacher training colleges and foreign language teaching programmes, these functions are related to specific tasks the implementation of which is part of the daily work of foreign language teachers. These tasks, according to an assessment from the beginning of this century, include (Harmer, 2001, pp. 57–67):

- controlling the course of classes, or in a broader sense – the processes of learning and teaching a language;
- organising the learning process, starting from stimulating the interest of a learner through instruction in the strict sense, classroom activities, taking up learning by a learner and providing feedback on the learning process and learning outcomes;
- evaluating the learning process and learning progress;
- providing continuous encouragement to learn – through the use of various types of incentives and stimuli;
- participating in planned activities both during the class and after its completion (e.g. as a listener, interlocutor or partner in a language task);
- providing necessary information about knowledge resources and language skills (especially those needed at a given moment, resulting from a specific situation and a specific context of language use);
- language tutoring, including support in the selection of appropriate learning strategies optimal for specific language tasks;
- observing the teaching process and the progress made by learners.

Of course, the main responsibility of all foreign language teachers cannot be overlooked, which is providing learners with a stable source of understandable language, adapted to their current level of linguistic competence, which Maria Dakowska (2005, p. 152) supplements with enabling learners to interact in a target language and facilitating the communicated content. It is not different in the case of a LSP when instructors provide both the language resources and their distribution in specific activities, often assuming the role of managers who not so much determine arbitrarily the content of the classes but rather negotiate it with the recipients/participants and specialists competent in specific fields (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998, p. 149).

The role of LSP teachers can also be extrapolated based on a review of the issues discussed in textbooks on teaching methodology. The review shows that LSP teachers are also responsible for the learning planning processes, dealing

with the issue of the choice of teaching methods and techniques, selecting and creating materials, managing the class (e.g. by maintaining discipline in class), optimising the conditions for the sustainable development of all skills and language subsystems, as well as adapting the content of the classes to the specific needs of their participants (to the age and level of linguistic competence in particular) (Komorowska, 2009; Ur, 2012). In the updated version of the already quoted publication by Jeremy Harmer, today's generation of young adepts of applied linguistics preparing for the teaching profession will also find a list of the characteristics of a good foreign language teacher, which can be interpreted as a set of expectations that must be met by an educator/linguist. Based on a review of research devoted to the characteristics of good and bad teachers, Harmer (2020, p. 114) suggests that good teachers are those who can motivate learners and be their mentors in the educational process. Those teachers are patient, passionate and enthusiastic, they build a good rapport with the group and respect their students. Therefore, they can engage students in interesting activities, for them, it goes without saying that teachers themselves are competent users of the language they teach. Of course, these postulates apply also to LSP teachers – and the list of requirements could go on.

The differences between the specificity of the roles of foreign language teachers and LSP teachers should therefore be sought not through eliminating but through specifying and – possibly – supplementing instruction with new functions, tasks and expectations. Although the thesis of Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters (1987) that the main distinguishing feature of specialist foreign language classes is their subordination to the specific needs of learners may seem controversial in an era when the learner, not the method, became the focus of didactic research (Richards, 2015), tailoring the classes to the needs of their participants seems to be a necessary condition for achieving educational success. This view is also expressed in contemporary publications on teaching and research on LSP (Paltridge and Starfield, 2013; Işık-Taş and Kenny, 2020).

However, it is necessary to supplement this distinguishing feature of LSP classes with new elements – at this point, it is worth mentioning, for example, the concept of the four pillars of a specialist language course, which include: needs analysis; learning objectives; materials and methods; and course and progress evaluation (Anthony, 2018, p. 46). The needs analysis – functioning as a keyword in the literature on the subject – can be understood as determining what the course is to be about and how it is to be conducted – i.e. activities that, according to Lynne Flowerdew (2013, p. 325), are to precede the preparation of the curriculum, selection of materials, teaching methods and tools for evaluating the course and assessing the progress of learners. According to Tony



Dudley-Evans (2001), LSP teachers must not only have the competence to analyse the rights and needs of class participants but also be "genre doctors". Michael Long (2005) proposes task-based needs analysis which includes, among others, reviewing job descriptions or getting to know the desired effects of work. This could be an alternative to relying on the discursive features of the language of a particular field. He is in favour of this option as it is anchored in practice and embedded in sector-specific realities and, consequently, it offers the possibility of utilising the expertise of representatives of various fields and is not limited to the linguistic aspects of text analysis per se. Helen Basturkmen (2010), on the other hand, opts for an integrated learning approach where the process of creating a curriculum for specialist language courses requires conducting:

- analysis of needs resulting from the specific situational context, learning goals and potential difficulties on the part of learners;
- research on the specifics of the discourse in the language of a given field and the use of this language by professionals, so that it is possible to devise a curriculum based on specific didactic materials and planned for a specific time, cultural and institutional framework.

Referring to the whole range of tasks carried out by LSP teachers, Raney Jordan (1997) compiles the following list:

- analysing the specificity of a particular language and the situational context of its use;
- evaluating teaching materials (textbooks and other materials);
- evaluating learners' progress;
- formulating learning goals for learners;
- designing and interpreting syllabuses;
- developing work patterns;
- formulating learning and teaching strategies;
- integrating classes;
- developing teaching materials;
- organising the teaching process and lessons;
- evaluating the level of achievement of the assumed learning goals;
- acquiring practical knowledge in the field of teaching a specialist language;
- supporting learners in transition to independent living (e.g. moving away from home and parting with the family);
- cooperating with educational institutions in the field of LSP teaching.

On the other hand, Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggie St. John (1998, pp. 13–17) perceive the functioning of a specialist language teacher through the lens of five main roles:

- of a partner in the learning process (as opposed to the classic role of lecturer, which results from the fact that an LSP teacher is often not an expert on the topic at hand – the area of expertise/professional competence – related to the language learning process);
- of the author of a language course (with regard to the syllabus and specific content) and provider of teaching materials created from scratch or requiring adaptation;
- of a researcher who goes beyond the analysis of the learner's needs and analyses the specificity of the discourse and interaction in the field in which the language is taught;
- of a practitioner/user of a specialist language and a collaborator of experts in a specific field (this role enables the acquisition of syllabi for majors, consulting in the process of creating a syllabus for an LSP course, and even organising expert teams to evaluate specialist projects in a foreign language and taking into account other forms of participation of field experts in LSP classes);
- of an evaluator (assessing both the progress of learners and the courses with their teaching materials) – like in the case of the author of a language course, the function of evaluator may require the development of tests from scratch due to the lack of ready-to-use evaluation materials.

In a more recent publication, Laurence Anthony (2018, p. 52), on the basis of the above functions, added supporting learners after the completion of institutional learning and creating systemic solutions for such support (e.g. participation in creating career development programmes or even support for HR management) to the list of responsibilities of LSP teachers. Due to these aspects, a LSP teacher is perceived as a practitioner in a particular field rather than a language teacher. On the other hand, Sandra Gollin-Kies et al. (2015, p. 126) underline that the distinguishing feature of specialist language teachers' work, apart from greater freedom in the selection of content and the specific nature of the verification of learning progress, involves reliance on knowledge not only in the field of foreign language teaching methodology, but also on knowledge acquired from the subject-specific area, a key factor in the development of curricula and the implementation of classes. The latter area of competence is developed in the process of continuous professional development of teachers



not only through their participation in methodological conferences and self-education but also through close cooperation with experts in a particular field. Such cooperation can be implemented in a variety of ways: from ad hoc contacts in the workplace, through more intentional and institutionalised cooperation, to conducting classes in teams (Dudley-Evans, 2001, p. 226). It should be noted, however, that the last form is rarely used, both in Poland and abroad, as it is much more time consuming than the previous two.

3. Roles of a teacher in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

The expectations and requirements for foreign language teachers using the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology are particularly high. In line with the European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education (Marsh et al., 2011), they can be divided into eight areas:

- ability to reflect, especially with regard to one's own content-specific and linguistic competences, as well as developmental needs;
- ability to build inclusive and constructive rapport with students and other participants of the integrated education process, including, but not limited to, relating the content and language classes to the school ethos and embedding them within the core curriculum;
- language and content awareness, including the ability to use a learning strategy (in the content and language area) and to activate habits of personalised learning;
- methodology and evaluation – an area covering various issues: from effective self-motivation, development of autonomy, through self-assessment and monitoring of progress or identification of key subject content, to the construction of evaluation tools and command of portfolio solutions (such as the European Language Portfolio, ELP) (Pawlak et al., 2006);
- conducting and evaluating research, especially action research conducted with colleagues, learners and other participants of the content and language integrated learning process;
- learning resources and learning environment – the area of designing language and content-appropriate materials, formulating criteria for the development of resources (including multimedia materials corresponding to the main functions of CLIL teaching) and issues related to the integrated curriculum;

- managing a class team based on the integration of learning content, language and skills, including sharing responsibility for educational processes (e.g. by changing configurations in groups, differentiating forms of interaction and improving group leadership skills);
- managing the educational process of CLIL learning through professional and personal self-development, shaping change management skills and cooperation with other participants in the process.

As noted by David Marsh et al. (2001), such expectations towards teachers working with CLIL methodology constitute a set of idealised competences. Commenting on their volume, one can refer to the diagnosis by Katarzyna Papaja (2013) who argues that work based on CLIL methodology requires skills that go beyond communication in a given language. Teachers choosing the CLIL approach should be familiar with the language register of a given field and apply this knowledge in class, skilfully juggling lexical and subject resources. At the same time, they can afford relatively wide-ranging autonomy, limited, of course, by certain factors – not only external but also internal (Wiśniewska, 2007, p. 123). However, there are concerns about whether a language teacher might be competent in an area other than linguistics. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that she or he often has additional, parallel professional qualifications. The report prepared annually by the AMU Foreign Languages Teaching Centre for the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Modern Languages shows that nearly a quarter of the teachers employed with the Centre have a second major or completed postgraduate studies. With employees who completed vocational courses in fields other than foreign language teaching, the percentage of teachers with two degrees increases to almost one-third of the total of over 130 members of the academic staff.

4. LSP teachers

– mentors of young adults

The aforementioned needs analysis is likely to be effective if an LSP teacher knows the participants well. While specialist language learners are certainly not a highly homogeneous group, teachers can view them as a community to be able to pinpoint and diagnose their needs. Therefore, one can argue with the view of Dudley-Evans (2001, p. 131) who postulates that the needs should be narrowed down only to those that result from the specificity of a particular field – whereas certain characteristics of learners, such as those related to their age, should be



considered, as well as the fact that they gradually become experts in the specific field the language learning concerns.

In Poland, participants of specialist language classes, apart from professionals improving their skills in companies, are primarily students of higher grades of sectoral vocational or technical schools and students of specialist language courses at universities (often second-cycle studies – as general language classes still predominate in first-cycle studies). The fact that a significant proportion of learners are at the same level of development allows for the projection of their characteristics in relation to the areas in which they can develop. Using a synthetic list of developmental tasks (cf. Newman and Newman, 2018), it can be stated, for example, that participants in specialist language classes are self-aware, also in terms of belonging to different groups (e.g. related to gender, age, interests), can relate to the system of moral values, are at a relatively advanced stage of emotional development. Other attributes developed at earlier stages of development, which can be attributed to people aged 18–24 (late adolescence) and 24–34 (early adulthood), include the ability to make friends and participate in playing games with peers, the ability to work in a team, as well as the ability to learn and the experience of being in a relationship and building rapport with another person (cf. Newman and Newman, 2018). Profiles of class participants can be a good starting point for reflecting on how LSP teachers may perceive their roles. Moreover, ignorance of these characteristics may lead to attribution errors, with dire consequences for group relations (Branscombe and Baron, 2017, p. 108).

The specificity of LSP courses, as opposed to other types of activities related to professional content, also consists in the possibility of direct reference to the above-mentioned skills, their application and further development. LSP teaching involves not only the ability to play or work in a team, but also the development of competences enabling learners to participate in academic education and career advancement is taken care of. Communication oriented at building social relations and developing skills necessary for self-support, obtaining the desired goods and enabling access to services is also used (Nunan, 1985).

As the learning process is not carried out – especially in LSP courses – in the form of teacher-learner knowledge transfer (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998, p. 13), it is extremely important to build partnership relations in class and take advantage of mutual learning opportunities. At this point, it is once again worth taking a closer look at the partners of an LSP teacher, i.e. young adults. Anna Brzezińska (2005, p. 438) assigns them the following attributes influencing the learning process:

- dialectical, meta systemic and relativistic thinking;
- high effectiveness of learning in the areas concerned;

- ease in identifying and solving practical problems;
- high efficiency of long-term and short-term memory;
- IQ increase;
- peak of fluid intelligence performance, dependent on the functioning of the central nervous system.

The characteristics of working with people fitting the above description requires, of course, the selection of appropriate teaching materials and the use of techniques corresponding to the skills they have previously developed. In addition, high sensitivity and mentalisation skills are required while developing relations with individuals entering the phase of independence from their parents, making decisions about their careers and embarking on the professional development path, and at the same time discovering their gender identity and becoming participants in intimate relationships, considering the possibility of starting a family and raising children. Specialist language classes therefore involve work with individuals who are in the process of determining and shaping their development path, striving for self-realisation. Carl Rogers (1983, pp. 197–221) believes that to foster the development of such learners, a teacher should:

- recognise that all learners have the ability to learn;
- include learners' interests in the teaching process;
- create a learning atmosphere (i.e. a friendly environment where learners do not fear humiliation);
- enable learners to actively participate in classes and take into account their initiatives;
- boost learners' self-esteem;
- guide learners' orientation towards the process, not the product.

These goals correspond to the role of a teacher in supporting the adaptation of the student's tasks to the learning process – the teacher's impact is crucial here, as they create situations that require adaptation. Maciej Wilski (2011, pp. 155–158) lists several basic teacher's tasks in this regard:

- getting to know students;
- individualisation of teaching;
- maintaining a balance between course requirements and capabilities of learners;
- avoiding situations in which a teacher provokes students' anxiety;
- managing the natural activity of students.



These tasks seem to be particularly important in project work which offers the possibility of focusing on a specific task with a longer time horizon of implementation (Stoller, 2002).

To fulfil the above tasks well, a teacher must have specific knowledge. Anna Brzezińska (2005, p. 684) indicates that a teacher should be familiar with:

- students' current level of development as compared to their peers;
- competences of the person concerned and areas where competences may require support;
- stage in the development cycle of a person/a group to whom a specific activity is addressed;
- life story of a person/a group, their plans and aspirations;
- form of assistance that a particular person/group is ready to accept;
- actual extent to which a person/group is ready to accept assistance.

Brzezińska also mentions adjusting the forms of support offered in the development process to the verbalised expectations of a person/group and considering recipients' living conditions while planning for supporting activities.

When analysing the issue of the desirable skills of LSP class participants, one may be tempted to create a comprehensive list of their key competences – in that case a foreign language is only one of a number of measures. Objective indicators of transition to adulthood may serve as a reference point here (Brzezińska et al., 2015, p. 297):

- achieving professional and financial independence;
- new place of residence;
- marriage or long-term relationship;
- parenthood;
- career choice.

Of course, one may speculate to what extent LSP classes will bring learners closer to achieving independence and how teachers are to support learners in choosing a career. Taking the common learning outcomes for teaching foreign languages for vocational purposes in Polish secondary education as a reference point, it can be stated that they are quite general and focus on substantive issues related to language learning. Pursuant to the Regulation of the Minister of Education of 31 March 2017 on the core curriculum for vocational education (Journal of Laws 2017, item 860), these include:

- using linguistic (lexical, grammatical, spelling and phonetic) means enabling the performance of professional tasks;

- interpreting statements concerning the performance of typical professional activities articulated slowly and clearly, in a standard language;
- analysing and interpreting short written texts concerning the performance of typical professional activities;
- formulating short and understandable statements and written texts enabling communication in the work environment;
- using foreign-language sources of information.

Although these outcomes can be treated as a certain synthesis of skills, only LSP teachers are able to adopt a holistic approach to learners in the learning process – and therefore consider the aforementioned indicators. Bearing in mind that the development of communication skills is the focal point of language classes, only LSP courses offer the great opportunity to refer to all the aforementioned aspects of transition into adulthood – in particular, entering the career path. The keys to taking advantage of this opportunity are, of course, the competences and commitment of teachers.

5. Summary

A discussion of the roles of LSP teachers can be the starting point for specifying the activities expected of them.

Firstly, in terms of the organisation of classes, it is necessary to focus on the individual. This should be done through recognising proficiency levels and groups according to specific specialities, obtaining information about the educational difficulties of learners, as well as through continuous observation and evaluation of their learning progress. Such activities enable teachers to build a unique bank of information about course participants. The value of such knowledge about learners, supplemented with their own references to their experiences in the foreign language learning process, was appreciated, among others, by the authors of the European Language Portfolio, who pointed to the potential resulting from supporting students' autonomy (Pawlak et al., 2006).

Secondly, the continuity of the evaluation process and relation with learners enables the ongoing analysis of the effectiveness of educational activities and triggers a feedback mechanism, adapting the curriculum content to the needs of course participants. At this point, it is worth mentioning the factors influencing the learning process; according to Biggs and Tang (2007, pp. 15–19), these are:



- individual characteristics of students, including talents, intelligence level, interests;
- educational activities of teachers, including the use of specific teaching techniques;
- students' activities and the level of their involvement.

Thirdly, both the structure of classes and the content of curriculum implemented as part of LSP classes should be directly related to the issues that are of importance for the personal development of an individual, whereas development should be treated much more broadly than just cultivating language competences. Noteworthy opportunities are offered by the CLIL methodology which, however, requires both continuous upgrading of teachers' qualifications and building partnership relations between teachers and participants.

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