

## TEACHING PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE FOR AGRICULTURE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

EDIT MÁRI<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Szeged, Faculty of Agriculture, Institute of Economics and Rural Development, Hungary  
e-mail: mari@mgk.u-szeged.hu*

**Abstract:** *The Hungarian University of Szeged, Faculty of Agriculture offers professional agricultural language courses for students both in German and in English. For teaching the subject a special textbook is used which was published in the Faculty. In this paper I introduce the teaching material and gather the teaching experiences and some teaching methods of the past decade.*

**Key words:** *agriculture, professional language, teaching methods, teaching experiences*

### INTRODUCTION

At the University of Szeged, Faculty of Agriculture students with an intermediate level German or English state language examination have the possibility to take part in an optional course called Professional Language for Agriculture. For teaching the subject, the material of a special textbook is used, which was published in the Faculty both in English and German languages financed by a project source in 2005 [1., 2.]. The texts were compiled of materials on the topics concerning Hungarian agriculture, plant production, animal production, wildlife management and economy. Also, there is a supplementary CD to the textbook which contains additional material, charts and diagrams in PPT format. In this paper I gather and summarize the teaching experiences of the past decade. In any Hungarian institution of higher education a prerequisite for getting the diploma is to pass an intermediate level language examination.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Foreign language teaching starts from the lower grades of elementary school. The first chosen foreign language in the majority is English. The second foreign language, which is not compulsory for pupils, is introduced from the sixth grade, in general. English is followed by German regarding the popularity list of foreign language learning in Hungary.

All through the four grades of secondary school these two languages dominate concerning foreign language learning. Therefore the University of Szeged, Faculty of Agriculture also offers English and German language courses for students as optional courses. The students in our Faculty have access to a total of 120 hours. Usually they take up the subject in the first four semesters 2x2 hours a week. By the end of the fourth semester the students' language knowledge reaches an average intermediate level, and by that time most of them obtain the intermediate (B2) language examination.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

The optional course called Professional Language for Agriculture is recommended for those students who have average intermediate level language skills. Ideally, those students who choose this optional course have already passed the intermediate (B2) language examination.

In any case, we expect students to possess with the basic knowledge of grammar that facilitates and enables effective professional language learning.

The Faculty offers undergraduate (BSc) Agricultural Engineer and Game Manager programs. The study period of the BSc programs is of 7 semesters (3.5 academic years) that is 6 academic semesters and 1 semester comprehensive professional training. Agricultural engineer undergraduate program enables students to work on various fields of agriculture.

The Faculty puts extreme emphasis on practical training. Practical trainings are based on the Pilot Farm of the Faculty.

Besides animal husbandry and crop production activities the duty of the Pilot Farm (est. 1976) is to train students, to do postgraduate technical courses and scientific researches. Besides the 400 acres of arable land, a Dutch-type Holstein Frisian dairy farm, a FUNKI system pig farm, a Hungarian merino type sheep stock, a Hungarian speckled hen genetic preserving farm belong to the Pilot Farm. There is a family-size Dutch-type milk processing unit and a New-Zealand-type sheep farm where students can refresh and use the terms and professional language for agriculture in practice.

Compulsorily eligible specializations of the BSc course are agricultural entrepreneurship, agricultural environmental protection, agrarian economics and logistics, animal husbandry, horticulture and crop protection.

Naturally, the material of the Professional Language textbook is closely connected to these specializations.

The **first unit** as an introduction gives information about the **history of the Hungarian agriculture**.

The **second unit** deals with **plant production**.

In the first lesson students can get familiarized with the vocabulary of **botany**.

In the second text we focus on the field crops in **plant production**, and describing work processes.

The **horticulture** lesson helps students understand the names of different vegetable plants and fruits and their major characteristics.

In this context, the importance of soil conditions, nutrient needs, planting distance, climate, and the time and mode of work processes can be clarified.

In the lesson about **plant protection** we can read about soil treatment, wash-off spraying, the different modes of soil disinfection, as well as various types of pests that will require different types of defense.

Cultural historical reading materials supplement the basic texts. One of these readings describes **the historical background of baking bread**. A text introducing the **wine-making methods** and the culture of **wine tasting** that is especially preferred by students.

At the end of this unit we can find a reading material entitled “**The economy of plant production**” where the students can be familiarized with basic terms such as production costs, product sales, supply and demand, yield, and profit mark.

The **third unit** is about the management of companion animals.

In the first lesson the domestic **animals and their environment**, the climate-, and temperature conditions are mentioned, while in the second lesson the definition of **animal breeding**, then horse-, and cattle breeding, milk production and poultry production are at the center.

The third lesson deals with **feeding**, in which we can read about the composition of the forage, the preparation of the different forage types, and the method of storage.

The following text discusses the prevention of **animal diseases** and the curing methods.

In the fifth lesson students can get the basic knowledge and professional vocabulary about **livestock economy**.

The **fourth unit** summarizes the definition and significance of **logistics and marketing**.

The topic of the fifth unit is **wildlife management**.

The unit begins with a basic description of the **zoology of game**, which includes the general characteristics of birds of prey and mammals.

In the second lesson within **game breeding** a specific paragraph deals with the intensive fowl and small game breeding systems and also we can read about the criteria of big game breeding as well.

In the third lesson we can gain information about the **hunting tools and methods**, and we can get an insight into the Hungarian law and legislation of the governing rules of hunting, and information can be found about the duration of the hunting season and about small and big game species that can be hunted.

There are, of course, up-to-date professional topics, articles found in journals and on the internet that are particularly well suited for a student's thesis topic or research field.

These readings of their wide range of topics (e.g. plant breeding, animal husbandry and feed management efficiency by increasing the renewable and alternative energy sources, wildlife-control, agrarian logistics, agricultural marketing) are processed in different ways.

#### **Teaching methods and teaching experiences:**

We have been teaching professional language using our special textbook since 2005. It can be stated based on more than ten years of educational experience that students learn the professional language in a foreign language usually with interest, they prefer to deal with it more than with the general language courses. I find the reason for this is primarily owing to their affinity with agriculture and wildlife management. They have a greater and prompt sense of achievement since most of the time the students immediately recognize the unknown terms, the new meaning of the word and find its Hungarian equivalent due to their competence in the field of agriculture.

Another motivation is that students are aware of the fact that they will need the knowledge of the professional language in a foreign language e.g. in research activities, technical cooperation with foreign partners, on joint-hunting organizations for foreigners and for countless other cases.

While we study the professional texts we also find some **lexical** items, **grammar** issues that have previously been studied and their timely refreshment is often essential for understanding, in addition it is ideal from the perspective of the topic.

Processing the professional texts has a variety of options. Nowadays, translating texts from a foreign language to our mother tongue is considered to be out of fashion, and the majority of the accredited language examinations do not require proficiency in the field of **translating**, but practice shows that this is a necessary and useful exercise.

Once we have comprehended the text, generally, we find some **questions** and by **answering** those, students can expend their vocabulary and improve their speaking skills. We do not have to rely solely on the textbook questions; students can also ask each other in relation to each of the specialized text; they can have a query about some specific details regarding the text.

We can practice short (one word) answers, or answering in full sentences.

In the textbook, regularly, there are tasks related to some **images**. One of them is connected to the description of different kind of leaves of plants. This task requires a one-word answer for each picture: you have to name the illustrated leaf variety in the picture.

Often we can find tasks using a **montage of pictures** where students have to write sentences with the help of some given keywords.

**Defining terms** is considered to be a difficult task, in general. It is easier if the words and definitions are given, only they should be connected to each other.

Another possible way is to decide whether the content of some ready-made definitions are true or false.

**Gap-filling** exercises are usually considered to be difficult, even if the words and expressions are available at the end of the exercise. This type of exercise, however, is usually involved in the written language examinations, therefore it worth practicing.

For writing a **professional article**, students get a 15-20 word list as a help, some of which should be included in their article. Those words forming the title of the article are also given for the students. Before starting the essay writing, first they must unscramble the title. Complex language skills are required for doing such exercise.

At the end of each unit you can find a **revision part** with exercises. For example, at the end of the unit of livestock breeding students should make a report with the help of some photos and pictures for foreigners about the Saint George's Day Shepherd Contest which is a co-organized event by the Faculty and by the Hungarian Great Plain Animal Husbandry and Agricultural Days.

The purpose of this exercise is multiply complex: in addition to the use of keywords under the pictures we can also introduce those events connected to our Faculty and to our Town. We can make reports not only about our professional experiences but also about local cultural events as well; furthermore, we can practice the communicational forms of giving information.

Professional language courses are special occasions for refreshing and practicing those grammar rules that have previously been learnt. In the following, I present two randomly selected materials for grammatical repetition, and the possibilities of deepening grammar.

While reading professional texts we frequently come across with the **passive** structure, which is a particular characteristic for both the English and the German written communication.

Converting passive sentences into active ones is a very useful exercise in both languages.

**Comparing adjectives** can be practiced with the help of charts and the words and phrases associated with them [3.].

## CONCLUSIONS

Students in the active phase can practice the rules of comparing adjectives by using self-made diagrams and sentences. For example, comparing the distribution of land acreage in 1990, 2000, 2010, based on documented data.

A figure found on the CD annex, made for the horticulture unit, shows that the apple production on a given area in that year was the most important sector of fruit production. Thus, pear production is less than apple production. While peach production is the least, less than the apricot production. Similar diagrams can be provided by students about their own family farms for example, within the topics of animal husbandry and plant production.

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