

# Rethinking the Roles of the LSP Practitioner with Regard to Internationalization of Higher Education

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## **Abstract**

The objective of courses for languages for specific purposes (LSP) within the higher education curriculum is to help students develop a new type of “literacy” in languages for specific purposes, which will enable their participation in various academic and (inter)cultural contexts. Due to a steady growth in students’ international educational experiences, LSP practitioners need to consider these new trends in tertiary education when designing LSP courses. Thus, the course syllabus and the resources used in the courses should ease the adjustment process of students in international educational settings. This report focuses on the contribution of LSP practitioners to their students’ academic achievement in the international arena by assuming various roles in the teaching and learning process, i.e. the role of a teacher, course designer and materials provider, collaborator, researcher, and evaluator. It highlights necessary changes LSP practitioners need to undergo in performing these roles in order to integrate the international and intercultural dimension into the course.

**Key words:** LSP practitioners, roles, internationalization of higher education, student mobility.



## 1 Introduction

The process of globalization has made an impact on every aspect of society, including the sector of higher education. It has resulted in the internationalization of universities, i.e. collaboration among universities on a regional, international and intercontinental level. This report discusses how the process of internationalization affects the teaching of LSP courses, in particular the effect it has on performing various roles LSP practitioners assume in the teaching process. It briefly outlines the classification of these roles and defines the term internationalization. The main focus of the report is on the positive aspects of this process, as well as the challenges to which LSP practitioners need to respond in order to adapt the roles they perform to the new teaching context. Finally, in this report we address some of the challenges we encounter in our own teaching settings, i.e. the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Mining, Geology and Petroleum Engineering, University of Zagreb.

## 2 The roles of the LSP practitioner

In today's world, a person teaching any language can no longer be called a teacher. The more appropriate term in LSP today is practitioner. Although we are still teachers, we are also expected to be many other things at the same time: course designers, material providers, collaborators, researchers and evaluators. The classification is taken from English for specific purposes (ESP) (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998), since the majority of available literature stems from that field, but it can be applied generally, to any language acquisition process.

The primary and most traditional role of any language teacher is to teach students a foreign language. The role of an LSP practitioner is not very different from the role of a general English teacher. However, teaching LSP demands the ability to blend language teaching skills and knowledge with subject knowledge, which is not the case in general English teaching. Although we strive to teach our students the material, sometimes the roles become reversed and students themselves become the source of information regarding their field of study. In a manner of speaking, they may become our teachers while we turn into their students. Generally speaking, a student-teacher relationship is basically a partnership where a practitioner is expected to remain interested in the subject content, curious and open to the influx of new ideas and subject-specific knowledge (Bojović, 2006). It is generally believed that we do not have to be experts in the field (Cheng, 2015), although other views are present (Anthony, 2011).

LSP instruction represents a specific type of language instruction, namely the one focused on very specific vocabulary, therefore the materials also have to be specifically designed. In order for us to be able to cater to the needs of our students better, the needs analysis (what are the particulars that must be learned) has to be performed as the first thing in course design. The LSP practitioner must also take into account what teachers of professional subjects need the students to know and be able to express in a foreign language. As LSP practitioners, we must also be aware of the time that can be dedicated to the learning of a professional foreign language as well as the material means that can be used for that purpose. Only when all of this and many other factors are taken into account the course material creation can begin.

Designing teaching materials is a long and arduous process, which requires the LSP practitioner to delve into research and select the materials which seem to best fit the needs of our students. Although an LSP practitioner should be well aware of the students' needs, abilities, he/she is still usually not completely competent in the subject content. This is where the role of the collaborator comes into

play. As a course- and teaching materials' designer, an LSP practitioner must collaborate with people proficient in the specific field, and ask their advice and guidance in the creation of course books and other materials. This type of collaboration refers to discussions and advice-giving as it is not expected that any of the experts will participate in the teaching process itself.

Another role of an LSP practitioner is that of a researcher. Each LSP practitioner should mainly be focused on keeping up with the latest scientific work connected to both our field of study and the field of study we teach. We are also expected to do our own research in our classrooms, which should enable us to improve our materials and teaching methods as well as keep up with new discoveries and trends. This has traditionally been done by reading books and journals specific for the field. However, today there are a number of specialist blogs and numerous Internet-based resources that can be used freely. Also, forums created by and visited by ESP practitioners represent a useful resource that can help resolve issues, offer guidance, exchange information and provide advice.

The role of an LSP practitioner as the evaluator of our students' knowledge and proficiency is especially demanding. Evaluation in itself is a complicated and long-lasting process which begins even before the start of the course by the evaluation of students' needs. It spans for the duration of the course itself, via the monitoring of class advancement, depending on different methods of teaching and, in the end, by the evaluation of achievements of our students, the effort and work they invested and their performance through different kinds of written and oral examinations. There are numerous types of evaluations, ranging from student testing, course evaluation and self-evaluation, student polls (which are conducted at the University of Zagreb every semester and allow students to evaluate the work of their teachers), all the way up to different kinds of standardized tests, such as IELTS or TOEFL.

### 3 Internationalization of higher education and the roles of the LSP practitioner

#### 3.1 Defining the term internationalization of higher education

The term internationalization has been part of the political and economic context through centuries, but as far as the education sector is concerned, it came into use in the early 1980s. The preferred term before that period was international education, a term which is still used nowadays, together with many other related terms regarding the context of the internationalization of education that appeared over the last three decades, e.g. cross-border higher education, international studies, multicultural education, global education, intercultural education, studying abroad, academic mobility, etc. Some of the terms that marked the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are transnational education, borderless education and cross-border education. Knight (2003, p. 2) discusses the aforementioned terms, and contrasts the terms borderless and cross-border education by making an interesting observation that they both reflect the context of education that we can experience today. On the one hand, there is a tendency to cross borders and connect, but on the other hand, the borders do exist, and many processes in terms of "regulatory responsibility, especially related to quality assurance, funding, and accreditation" take place within one country's border.

One of the first definitions of internationalization that can be found in relevant literature was given by Knight (1994, p. 7) who first defined internationalization as "the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution". How the process has evolved can be seen in the new, updated definition Knight proposed almost a decade later (2003, p. 2), according to which "internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education". This updated definition includes the term "global", which highlights the more extensive sphere in which the process takes place. It



also stresses the importance of the collaboration between the government, the education sector and higher education institutions (HEIs) when it comes to supporting and enhancing the process of internationalization.

De Wit (2002, pp. 83–102) lists four rationales for internationalization: political, economic, social and cultural, and academic. These rationales usually vary by country and region, and their importance and dominance may change over time. Currently, the more dominant rationales are probably the economic rationales. Furthermore, Knight (2008, p. 25) discusses some rationales that have emerged at the national level (e.g., human resource development, strategic alliances, income generation/commercial trade, nation building, social/cultural development and mutual understanding) and at the institutional level (e.g., international branding and profile, quality enhancement/international standards, income generation, student and staff development, strategic alliances and knowledge production).

According to literature (e.g. Khorsandi, 2014), internationalization encompasses the following six components: “a) international students’ recruitment; b) student and scholar mobility; c) research and knowledge exchange and technical assistance; d) marketing and expansion of university campuses and branches abroad; e) internationalization of campus curricula; and f) virtual transnational internationalization (like MOOCs)” (pp. 24–25). This list of components suggests that the process of internationalization is not only about scholar and student mobility, and cross-border collaboration, but also about developing programs, policies and strategies that will help the HEIs carry out the process. Internationalization takes two directions—external and internal. External internationalization refers to internationalization abroad, i.e. cross-border education, and internal to internationalization at home. The internationalization abroad includes the collaboration between universities, international projects, and recruitment of international students and academic staff. Knight (2004) states that the terms cross-border education and internationalization are very often used interchangeably when we refer to external internationalization, but warns that they should not be used as synonyms, since the term cross-border does not include the at-home aspect of internationalization. Internal internationalization, on the other hand, aims at creating a framework within which an institution’s structural, cultural and curricular changes would take place. These changes should enable the implementation of intercultural and international programs and courses.

### **3.2 Internationalization and the roles of the LSP practitioner**

In the first part of the paper, we discussed the five roles that the LSP practitioner assumes when teaching LSP courses.. In this part of the report, we will look at the same five roles from the perspective of internationalization of higher education (HE), and explore the benefits and challenges that this process brings with regard to the above listed roles.

As regards the role of the teacher that LSP practitioner performs, the process of internationalization of HE, especially international cooperation and mobility, have enabled LSP practitioners to experience teaching LSP courses abroad as guest lecturers or job shadowing through short-term and long-term programs, mostly funded by the Erasmus Program. Furthermore, through similar programs practitioners can undergo teacher training which aims at their professional development with a special focus on intercultural learning and the use of new teaching tools in the classroom. LSP practitioners need to teach their students how to cope with their studies at home, but also prepare them for the international arena, e.g. when they participate in exchange programs and spend a semester or longer abroad. This means that, besides the language and study skills, the LSP courses also include the aspect of cultural orientation which can help students adapt to university life abroad. They can acquire intercultural competence which will ease the adjustment process and help them better understand the cultural shifts they have to make in a new environment. Thus, LSP

practitioners need to adjust to these circumstances and make necessary changes in their practice in order to satisfy the needs of their students.

Regarding the role of a course designer and materials provider, we can notice certain changes in the course syllabus and the students' needs. Since students nowadays participate in various international academic contexts, the needs analysis we usually carry out at the beginning and the end of the academic year produces different results. The new context requires from the students to acquire a new literacy in LSP, i.e. skills like intercultural competence, group work skills or presentation skills. Thus LSP practitioners need to adjust the materials to the students' needs and take them into account when planning the course and designing the course syllabus. For example, students increasingly participate in international conferences and need to know how to write a speaker proposal or an abstract, as well as learn how to deliver the talk at the conference, therefore materials that enhance the development of such writing and presentation skills should be included in the course. Another change that can be noticed is in the motivation of students. As the content of the LSP course is now more tangible than before, LSP students can actually apply the skills and competencies they develop in the course in real life for the purposes of their studies at home and abroad. LSP practitioners can see a substantial increase in students' motivation to gain knowledge that could help them be successful academically in various intercultural contexts. This shows how important it is for LSP practitioners to know and/or learn what their students need to be successful academically in international contexts, and to create such materials, which will help in achieving the outcomes of the course.

The third role that the LSP practitioner assumes is the role of a collaborator. The process of internationalization has brought this role to another level. Before, the collaboration was rather local and/or within the institution, but today, due to advancements in technology, it is possible to collaborate with LSP practitioners and subject specialists from abroad not only in person, but also through new media and social networks. It is possible to have a subject specialist, who is a native speaker of the language that we teach, deliver a talk over Skype, which allows students to experience a lecture they would normally attend in a foreign country, and even participate in a discussion. Furthermore, LSP practitioners could achieve collaborations through online projects. The advantage of online projects is the ability to participate from the comfort of your own home or office. It should be highlighted that such collaborations also contribute to intercultural learning, since they include national and/or cultural specific elements in terms of approach and method.

With regard to the next role of a researcher, LSP practitioners can become familiar with new findings of the research in their own profession through various types of mobility, e.g. job shadowing, participating in international conferences, attending seminars, etc. In case of a lack of funding, there are also numerous webinars which are organized by various associations that may also provide an insight into the new findings in LSP. By connecting with foreign practitioners through international projects and building an international network, LSP practitioners are also in the position to be involved in the research and make their own research results public.

Finally, regarding the role of an evaluator, LSP practitioners often have to evaluate their students' proficiency in a foreign language by administering various tests or helping them prepare to take international exams in order to help their students participate in the international arena and embark on their studies abroad (e.g. IELTS or TOEFL for the English language; the Goethe-Institute examinations, i.e. the German test for academic entrance exams recognized by many German institutions). The proficiency in a foreign language is needed so that students can satisfy the foreign language entry requirement set by a university in order to be successful in their future academic studies.

So far, we have only addressed the positive aspects of internationalization in terms of the five roles, e.g. improving the quality of teaching, learning and research, the commercial advantage, achieving



academic excellence, enhancing the curriculum with international content, strengthened research, international awareness, partnerships and collaboration, knowledge and language acquisition, and many others. However, there are also risks associated with internationalization of HE. According to Knight (2007, p. 8) the most serious risks are “commercialization and commodification of education programs, the increase in the number of foreign ‘degree mills’ and low-quality providers, and brain drain”, whereas the risks that are no longer considered so important are “the loss of cultural or national identity, jeopardy of the quality of higher education, and the homogenization of curriculum”.

When it comes to negative aspects of the internationalization of HE and how the process affects teaching LSP courses, we would like to draw attention to the following issues which can usually be noticed on national level: quality insurance of LSP courses, lack of materials for international contexts, lack of opportunities for LSP practitioners to develop professionally, lack of guidance in terms of dealing with the process of internationalization and its implementation in the curriculum. Since internationalization of HEIs in non-English countries entails English-medium instruction (EMI), i.e. academic subjects taught in English, we need to address the role of ESP, and thus the role ESP practitioners can assume in EMI programs at universities. However, it is first necessary to address the difference between EMI and ESP in terms of learning outcomes, as well as explain why Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), i.e. an approach usually associated with secondary education, should be mentioned in this context. While ESP has only language learning outcomes, EMI focuses on content learning outcomes. On the other hand, CLIL is a combination of these two approaches since it encompasses both language and content learning outcomes, i.e. something the EMI context lacks (Kırkgöz & Dikilitaş, 2018). This is why ESP courses could, in the future, play a more important role in the internationalization of HE, because they can complement EMI programs which often present challenges to both the content teachers and students taking the course. They would provide students with language skills which they will need in order to succeed both academically and, later, professionally in the international arena, and thus enable a more successful implementation of EMI in HE.

### 3.3 Internationalization of higher education in Croatia

In Croatia, the process of internationalization of HE has also evolved, therefore every higher education institution (HEI) needs to cope with all of the challenges this process presents. Various institutions are involved in building a strategic framework which would enhance the internationalization of HEIs. Some of the major contributors to internationalizing HE in Croatia are:

- a) *The Agency for Mobility and EU programs (AMPEU)*. It was established in 2007. Its scope of activities includes education, youth and science, and its purpose is to help improve the education system by internationalization through international system and cooperation. In 2011, Croatia gained full participation in the programs, and in 2014, the National Agency started implementing the program Erasmus +.
- b) *Agency for Science and Higher Education*. Part of the (re)accreditation process of every HEI in Croatia is to meet certain standards that concern internal quality assurance, study programs, students, research, and resources. Internationalization and mobility are also among the standards HEIs need to meet, and this is why they need to have procedures, rules as well as resources to support international activities.
- c) *Sector for Quality of Higher Education, International Cooperation and European Affairs from the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education*. This sector also has the objective of internationalizing HE and currently works on the implementation of the Action Plan for Internationalization of Education for the period 2018–2020. This Action Plan aims to enhance institutional capacities of HEIs for internationalization, increase the number of foreign language courses,

encourage participation of vulnerable groups in mobility schemes, increase the availability of information on studying in Croatia, etc.

- d) *Institute for the Development of Education*. On the website of the Institute we can find the mission statement of the Institute: “The Institute for the Development of Education contributes to the development of higher education policy, provides expert support to institutions, connects domestic and international experts and enables individuals in Croatia and the region to achieve their educational goals.” It supports projects related to internationalization, participates in Annual Scholarships and Higher Education Fair in Zagreb, Rijeka and Zadar, and has been an Education USA Advising Center for Croatia since 2000.

Despite all the work that the above listed contributors undertake with regard to the internationalization of HE in Croatia, and the effort that HEIs put into their international activities, we can notice in our own contexts, i.e. at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Mining, Geology and Petroleum Engineering, University of Zagreb, that this process raises issues and represents a challenge in terms of the adjustment of both academic staff and students to the new circumstances. It seems that most of the activities related to internationalization at our institutions refer to outward mobility and collaboration with foreign universities in terms of conducting research in tandem. We still have to put more effort into encouraging inward mobility and internationalizing the curriculum to attract foreign students to study at our institutions. Finally, it is necessary to point out that our institutions mainly receive funding through the Erasmus Program, and that we lack our own financial resources to help internationalize our programs and our institutions in general.

## 4 Conclusion

The internationalization of HE in general is a demanding and challenging process, let alone in countries like Croatia, where it has only recently become a central issue for HEIs. This means that we still have a lot of work to do before it evolves in the way it has in the countries with the leading education systems. LSP practitioners have, because of the nature of their job, and being language teachers, always been part of the international arena and aware of the importance of the intercultural dimension in the teaching process. However, this does not mean that LSP practitioners are knowledgeable enough about internationalization, that they have enough international knowledge and experience, and that they don't need further development. On the contrary, we also struggle with issues like limited international skills, resistance to change, uneasiness with new routines, fear of unfamiliarity and otherness. It is because of these issues that we argue that LSP practitioners need guidance in this process of internationalization, more information and professional development, so that they can eventually become even more important contributors to the process of internationalization.

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