

## TEACHING A SPECIALIZED LANGUAGE (BUSINESS GERMAN) - A REAL CHALLENGE FOR THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER

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### Introduction

#### The concept of “specialized language”

Specialized language is the language used in a **specific field** or relevant to and characteristic of an **industry**. Specialized language is also intended to mean one that differs from the general language by **specialized expressions and specific terminology**. Specialized languages, together with the spoken language, dialects and regional variants, constitute the countrywide language of a nation.

Specialized languages are based on and constantly interact with the general language. The specialized language contains characteristic **words and expressions**, as well as **foreign words (loanwords) / internationalisms** primarily from the specific terminology. This language is almost unusable outside its intended field, or individual words from it may have a completely different meaning in the colloquial language. The grammar and even intonation may also differ!

Specialized languages belong to the **standardized** language variants. They also perform the function of group languages and spoken languages among specialists from the respective industry, however the aforementioned standardization distinguishes them from other non-standardized languages of population groups in different regions and from the colloquial language. Each **term** used in a certain specialized language is called **Terminus technicus**. The totality of all terms constitutes its **terminology**. Many terms undergo changes as a result of the rapid development of science.

The **professional language** used in various scientific fields is changing also because of the increasingly growing number of foreign words seeping into it, mostly from the English language.

Specialized terms can be found in dictionaries compiled specifically for a particular field (economic, medical, legal, etc.). The different types of dictionaries contain either a straightforward translation, or include explanations and interpretations of the terms.

The **purpose** of this study is to present the various aspects of the **nature and complexity** of teaching a specialized foreign language (German), and to identify the

expected results and benefits from it, while the **object** of the study is the **entire process** of teaching, including the specific criteria, prerequisites and requirements to both sides, and the different strategies and methods used in this difficult endeavor.

## 1. Prerequisites for studying a specialized foreign language

### Existing theoretical background in the respective field

The first precondition for studying a specialized foreign language is the students' **good understanding of the theory** in their mother tongue. The in-depth knowledge of the specific problems and vocabulary/terminology of a certain field in the mother tongue would be a solid ground for those undertaking to master these in a foreign language.

### General languages skills

Second comes the command of the respective **general foreign language** at least at level A2 (Goethe Zertifikat A2 or ÖSD Grundstufe Deutsch 2). In this case, the training in a specialized foreign language would correspond to that level of language skills. This would be conducive to satisfactory results of students with average goals as regards their foreign language training.

However, proficiency in a specialized language (in any field) requires advanced skills in the **general foreign language** corresponding to language levels **B2-C1** (Goethe Zertifikat B2 / ÖSD Mittelstufe Deutsch 2 or Goethe Zertifikat C1 / ÖSD Oberstufe Deutsch). The higher the language level, the better!

### Personal motivation

The motivation of students of any degree course for foreign language learning is essential.

Motivated people are much more active in this respect compared to unmotivated people. Furthermore, we should never ignore the fact that a person's **attitude** towards the tasks assigned during the learning process is crucial for the final result. Foreign language learners have a chance of success only if they believe they are up to the task, and, on the other hand, they are bound to fail if the endeavor is preconceived as too hard or even impossible for them to undertake.

Existence of theoretical background in their mother tongue, good command of the general foreign language and the personal motivation of students are a sure guarantee for successful mastering of the specialized language.

## 2. Prerequisites for teaching specialized foreign language

### Fluency in the general foreign language

The excellent **language** skills of teachers is a must if they want to take up such a responsible task as the teaching of specialized foreign language. Their language skills must correspond to the highest levels: **C1-C2** (Goethe Zertifikat C1/ÖSD Oberstufe Deutsch or Goethe Zertifikat C2).

### Good command of the specialized foreign language

The solid skills in the **general** foreign language allow further training in a **specialized** foreign language. This is not easily achieved and takes a long time. When preparing for this new task the teacher has to read a large volume of specialized literature both in their mother tongue and in the relevant foreign language, in order to get familiar with the nature and specifics of the specialized terminology of the respective field. It takes time and requires serious reflection on unfamiliar subjects. Furthermore, it requires some serious ambition if the teacher wants to be well versed and competent in this new field. However, all efforts are worthwhile, if the teacher wants to establish himself/herself as a specialist at the necessary level. This is truly a great challenge!

The teacher's extensive knowledge in the respective field is crucial to the selection and preparation of educational materials and to the teaching itself. These constitute the solid ground for the teacher to step on.

### Consultations with specialists

Teachers of a specialized foreign language can hardly be the greatest specialists in the specific field. Therefore it is often advisable to consult **professionals** who could help them understand and make sense of the scientific literature they have read. Teachers are not experts (economists); they usually have a degree in philology! However, they make great efforts to master all the intricacies and peculiarities of the specialized terminology before coming to the lecture hall to teach it.

The high professionalism of teachers proficient in general and specialized foreign language and the consultations with experts in the respective field can ensure the successful overcoming of all difficulties related to their immediate work.

## 3. Methods of teaching a specialized foreign language (Business German)

Before examining the **methods** and **strategies** applied in the specific task of teaching a specialized foreign language, we must be aware of our exact **goals** and the desired **final results** of our professional activities. Another important factor is the students' year of study and degree course. Their **language level** should also be taken

into account in order to have clarity on the foundation for accumulating new knowledge.

For instance, students from year 2, 3 and 4 have already acquired both general training in the basic (economic) subjects in their **mother tongue** and general language training in the **foreign language**. However, when they encounter difficulties in the mastering of the specialized language, they feel they cannot cope with the challenge. The specialized language, as is well known, contains a large volume of terms and mastering it is a very demanding task. Great effort and diligence are required, and the personal motivation is the main driving force. That is why it is so important for the teacher to consider very carefully his/her teaching strategies and select the appropriate methods to be used.

In principle, it is advisable to include **conversation-oriented** exercises and tasks in the specialized language training. This involves teaching methods which **stimulate** the students and train them to cope **by themselves** with some assignments. Central among these methods are the ordinary repetitions, variations and finally students' own language production in improvised role plays. **Dialog exercises** are particularly appropriate for achieving this objective. Listening, understanding and **adequate** language reactions in a given situation should become routine. Their automation can be facilitated by including strategies employing pantomime or game elements. Developing **conversational skills** and creating **own language production (oral and written)** are two of the main **objectives** that should play a main role in teaching.

It is also necessary to develop exercises for **team work** such as production of educational posters, organizing discussions (possibly beyond the scope of the relevant field), suggestions for project work and essay writing requiring selection of necessary materials from the Internet or other sources.

### Relevance to the practice

At the beginning of each *subject/chapter* of the textbook it is appropriate to suggest a **practical situation** through which the learning process aimed at achieving active conversational activity would be greatly facilitated. With the help of this situation the students would imperceptibly delve into the new target subject. Only their belief that the subject studied will be useful and is based on the **actual** practice would allow them to achieve the desired end result.

### Gradual introduction to the specifics

Language teachers in universities of economics need to constantly follow the latest and newest ideas, theories and trends in the theory and practice of corporate management, marketing, tourism, banking, accounting, etc., and then **gradually** in-

introduce them to the students. A guiding principle is to start from the lighter language material and from there **gradually** expand and deepen the knowledge. The application of European law influenced by the processes of expansion and unification should also be taken into account. This applies mainly to corporate management and the choice of legal form of the enterprise.

In the specialized foreign language classes teachers should further take into account the influence of the internal European market on the national economy of the individual Member States and the current trends in this area. For example, they may discuss how the economic activity is influenced by policies related to environmental protection, and by social problems. Due attention should be given also to **intercultural aspects and specifics**. Here the starting point could be the relationships existing on the European and American market. Information regarding the typical German economic reality could be given by the teacher primarily through real practical examples taken from the German economy, or statements made by leading German managers, and through topical texts, specially prepared and if necessary **adapted** for the purpose of language learning. The leading principle in their selection should be the **gradual** introduction to the specifics and the practicing of **specialized terminology** through examples taken **directly** from the economic reality, but appropriate for the level of the language learners.

This approach gives good results and is suitable for use in the language teaching process.

### **Methods of teaching and practicing the specialized international vocabulary**

The task of teaching **specialized terminology** is always oriented to taking decisions and concrete steps and is invariably associated with a particular **scientific field**. To achieve these ambitious goals the teacher needs to develop specific **strategies** reflected in specially designed exercises.

**The technical terms** should always be defined and, if necessary, interpreted in detail. Here are two possible options for action:

#### **• Option 1:**

The activation of **situative thinking** helps a lot in the interpretation of the large number of **foreign words** and **internationalisms** found in every specialized terminology. Very often the students are **already familiar** with these words from the lectures and seminars on the relevant discipline in their mother tongue. The students, as future professionals, should be given the task of explaining each **term** in their **own words** in the **foreign language** (German). Thus they will have additional incentive to speak, and such incentive is much needed and could be very useful to them. And,

when provoked in this way, in most cases the students will **themselves** gradually identify the (*German*) *synonym(s)* of the foreign word and its translation.

**e.g.: der Rabatt** = der/das Skonto / der Preisnachlass / der Zahlungsabzug / der Abzug vom Preis.

Most importantly, learners should not be just **passive** recipients, but become **active** participants in the studies. If we can get them to think, speak and participate, then we have achieved real success!

### ● Option 2:

The teacher often explains **in German** specialized terms that are **unknown** to the students: internationalisms, i.e. explains descriptively their meaning in the **foreign language** (German) and only then gives the accurate **translation in the mother tongue**, focusing on their polysemy, if such exists. In some cases, as already mentioned, the students themselves arrive at the correct translation.

This method can be illustrated by numerous examples here, however, cite only two that are sufficiently indicative.

### ● Foreign words:

#### - Logistics\*

The meaning of this term, which is one of the basic concepts of economics, is in most cases confused with that of the word “logic”. In such situations it is explained first that **in economics** “logistics” means “the aggregate of all the activities of a company starting from the supply of materials and ending with the transportation of finished products.” The concept, however, has a second meaning: “formulation of logical laws using mathematical symbols (mathematical logic)”. This meaning should also be mentioned.

#### - Diversification\*

Very often the meaning of this word is confused with that of the word “**diversion**”. “**Diversification**” means **in economics** “the expansion of the range of goods and products of an enterprise.” **The other** meaning of this term is “variety, change”. This meaning is also explained.

Here it would be appropriate to explain what exactly the meaning of “diversion” is:

1. side attack
2. sabotage by the (class) enemy.

In this manner a maximum clarity is achieved, and from now on every student will distinguish between the two concepts represented by foreign words.

Thanks to this method of teaching, the specialized language learning plays an

important **complementary** role in the study of economic subjects in the mother tongue. It significantly enriches the student's specialized vocabulary of **both** languages.

This fact can only make us happy, because in this way we contribute to the expansion of the future professionals' knowledge in general. They feel truly satisfied that it is precisely during the specialized language learning that they have learned something new and important. Both sides participating in the learning process – students and teachers – experience satisfaction.

### Stimulating logical thinking

Students constantly and inevitably encounter in the texts new, unfamiliar to them **specialized German expressions and terms**. Well, this is where it is our turn to act! Our task is to explain these **descriptively**, using the already **known** words and phrases. In case there are relevant **synonyms** of the new **German** concepts in the form of internationalisms, these should necessarily be mentioned and written down. A mandatory rule is to give all the **synonyms** and **antonyms** of the unfamiliar expression, so that the learners can remember them more en bloc.

**E.g.:** - **synonyms:** **der Fremdenverkehr** = der Tourismus / die Touristik / das Tourismusgewerbe / das Gastgewerbe  
- **antonyms:** **harter** ↔ **sanfter** Fremdenverkehr.

Thus the **logical** and **associative** thinking of the students is activated, and in this sense it is a much more effective approach than the rendering of direct translation into the mother tongue. Due to this kind of thinking the students can **themselves** grasp the meaning of unfamiliar words.

And so we reach out to the students, guide them skillfully on the path to understanding the meaning of the specialized terminology and as a result they translate **by themselves** the unfamiliar concepts and expressions. The effect of this is incredible! Learners feel genuine satisfaction when this happens and they arrive at the correct translation. They are truly satisfied with the achievements and even proud of themselves. In this way their personal motivation for learning this difficult subject matter increases significantly and they want to learn more and more new things; they are simply won for the cause of "specialized foreign language". The sense of confusion and helplessness is completely gone.

This teaching method is highly recommended and has proved repeatedly successful in the long teaching practice.

### **Illustrating the teaching material - an additional occasion for speaking and writing**

The teaching material should be illustrated with **tables, charts, posters, pictures**, etc., in order to achieve a better **visualization** and give the students an overview of the subject matter. These visual aids could be discussed and serve as basis for drawing conclusions or making predictions.

To these can be added **graphs** and **diagrams**, which can also be discussed or commented, interpreted and explained. All such activities require knowledge and use of special verbs, clichéd phrases and whole sentences. These are used to check the acquired knowledge alongside the traditional tests, or could be included in such tests. This oral or written exercise would significantly increase the language skills of the learners.

### **Stimulating the creativity of students**

The results of the learning largely depend on whether students are able to work **independently** with the foreign language outside classes, and then in class compare their own language production with that of the other participants in the course and assess their actual language skills. Very suitable for this purpose are the **discussions** in which they are actively involved, e.g. discussion of their answers to the home assignments: reading comprehension texts with possible answers **Yes / No / No information available in the text**. Such a discussion would be much more useful than the ordinary reference to the answer key in the relevant textbook.

What is important, however, are not only the **results** of the learning, but also the **path** to completion of the very **process of learning**. In its final stage it is appropriate to assign tasks dealing with **comparing** the economic situation in **other countries** to this in their **own country**. Tasks of this kind are an additional impulse for creativity, i.e. for creating students' own language production (oral or written). Such exercises do not seek to define precisely the similarities and differences of domestic and international economic realities, relationships and processes, but rather to allow for a **repeated** usage and exercising the already mastered specialized concepts in a new context that **personally** affects the learners themselves. The ability to apply the acquired knowledge would undoubtedly be useful to the students in their future **intercultural** communication on economic issues with partners and colleagues from abroad.

### **Freedom of choice**

One of the most important methods of teaching has always been to provide the students the **opportunity for personal choice**. This means that at the end of each topic/chapter there should be **at least one pair** of related **subtopics, case studies or sit-**

uations or a couple of questions for discussion, presentation, etc. from which they themselves can choose **one** case study or question, **one** subtopic or situation according to their **own** criteria and **personal** interests.

A famous German proverb says: “**Wer die Wahl hat, hat die Qual**” (Whoever has the choice, has the torment) In this case, however, this saying does not apply! On the contrary, students easily identify the more interesting and closer to them subjects and immediately sift out the boring, uninteresting and tiresome stuff. After all, every undertaking should be approached willingly and enthusiastically if there are to be any positive results! In this way the achievements would increase manifold. The attitude towards any human activity, as is well known, is crucial to its success. Another German proverb says: “**Lust und Liebe zum Ding macht alle Arbeit gering**”, i.e. “**Loving your work makes it feel easy**”. No task should be forced upon students, as it would be perceived as a major annoyance, and would only trigger their negative reaction. Students should always feel **pleasure** from their foreign language (German) studies and with that feeling it would be **a lot easier** to walk the long road to proficiency. This is how our mentality is wired and we must always take this fact into account.

From a psychological point of view it is precisely the **active** use of the foreign language in a **casual** atmosphere that is a guarantee for good results. If we can eliminate the element of **compulsion** in the exercises, then the learning process would proceed much easier and produce much better results.

During the course of study the students have practiced sufficiently the grammar and vocabulary of the respective language level. Everything learnt so far is now automated and the students can now quite naturally apply it **actively** in practice. At this stage we can “**spur**” the **creative thinking** of the people we work with. They experience as a real challenge the task of formulating and expressing their own thoughts in the foreign language; they demonstrate in this direct way the knowledge and skills they have acquired and are proud of their achievements, which in turn brings them real satisfaction. The transition to this stage goes quite **unnoticed**, which is the most valuable thing in this long and hard process!

But what happens in the meantime? – Reaching the level of proficiency sufficient for creating one’s own language production and being able to converse in the studied foreign language is a very complicated process, even if learners are not fully aware of this fact. During their oral or written presentations they make some mistakes (both grammatical and lexical). However, it is more important that the course participants already have gained the courage to express their own opinion on the **topic, issue or thesis** chosen by them, in front of an audience. They start to speak! The initial worry of possible mistake and most fears and inhibitions are finally overcome! This is

already a step forward, a true victory for them. They have achieved a higher level of language skills.

We in turn have to be very careful in our reactions to their mistakes – we have to correct the mistakes, so that students can learn from them and never again make them, which however should happen very **delicately**. We can also direct their attention to the specific manner of expression in the relevant industry and offer alternatives for formulating their own thoughts and structuring the text they themselves have created. In any case, it is necessary to encourage their initiative and the fact that they have chosen and worked on a topic or answered a question.

### Ensuring the desired results of the learning process

At the end of each unit there should be tasks that would help to **consolidate** the new knowledge and skills acquired during that unit and to put them into practice. These tasks are generally aimed at reviewing the knowledge already acquired, but serve also to expand and enrich that knowledge by providing **additional** texts. The tasks are not at all obligatory for everybody, but allow a deeper insight into the topic. This type of tasks could be performed in class, **individually** or **in groups, orally** or **in writing**, but could also be assigned as homework, if their completion requires more time, for example for collecting and processing additional information, carrying out some kind of research or analysis, i.e. if they contain a creative element.

During classes the teacher can make suggestions/offer ideas for action, which would facilitate the individual work related to the foreign language, but this time in a **completely different, extracurricular environment**.

Students could be provided with information on **relevant sources**, e.g. **educational literature** such as *specialized textbooks/ reference books/ dictionaries*, or specialized *newspapers/ magazines/ websites* that would help in the preparation of papers and presentations, and would enable them to further develop their knowledge in their areas of interest.

### Summary

In conclusion, I want to emphasize the fact that the specialized terms should always be taught in a **practice-oriented** specialized language training. They should no more be perceived by the future professionals as something completely remote and unfamiliar. A minimum of **500 terms** would be sufficient for the students to expand their language competence so that they are able to express themselves **accurately and competently** in their future professional environment. The specialized terms should be selected according to the criteria “usefulness”, “frequency of use”, and “**constant occurrence in practice**”.

It is recommended that the fundamental and most important **terms** or **expressions** are written in different font and in bold type in the various textbooks so as to stand out clearly in the text. This **contrasting** technical representation is very important for their fast and easy mastering.

These **fundamental** and “inevitable” for the respective field terms would provide students **access** to any specialized literature of the field they find interesting. The new knowledge and additional **current** information acquired from this literature would noticeably enrich the students’ experience and professional skills. Their written or verbal **communication** with colleagues from abroad would improve significantly, from which they only stand to gain.

Language training in the professional field aims to increase the **motivation** of students throughout the course of study. They themselves must realize that their future employers will value ever more their **general language skills** and **language competence** in the **respective field**. And this is quite **specific** for each area of professional activity.

The solid language competence would help the future managers and employees of **foreign companies in Bulgaria** to contact and maintain smooth relations with companies from the German speaking region. The solid language skills would be very useful for interns **in companies abroad** and also for the students at universities of economics. Such skills are another open door on the way to their professional realization and career development. Students of such background will be able to participate in international projects, forums, conferences and discussions, which would allow them opportunities to express their own opinions and present their works and ideas.

The good command of a specialized foreign language would be of significant help to all those interested in passing exams for obtaining a **certificate of proficiency in the relevant specialized language**, for example the **Wirtschaftsdeutsch International** and **WiDaF** exams.

Finally, our professional goal would also be achieved!

## TEACHING LANGUAGE FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES (BUSINESS GERMAN) – A REAL CHALLENGE FOR THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER

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### Abstract

The article reviews the multi-aspect approach of the peculiarities and specifics of teaching of languages for specific purposes (Business German). The author departs from trying to define the meaning of the term „language for specific purposes“, which is then followed by explaining the reasons of the need for studying languages for specific purposes, as well as the

requirements and challenges for the teacher of such subjects. This is followed by a suggested detailed itemized eight-step methodology for the delivery of this challenging subject matter. Methods include close relation of teaching material to business practice, perpetual introduction of students into specialized themes and concepts, varieties of teaching, practicing and learning hints of specific terminology, encouraging of critical thinking, use of graphs and other illustration of teaching materials, etc. encouraging student creativity activities for ensuring positive learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** *German for business, key competencies, language for specific purposes, teaching business German at University.*