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Teaching foreign languages at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Rijeka: A historical overview

ABSTRACT

This paper offers an overview of the development of teaching foreign languages at the Department of Social Sciences and Medical Humanities, Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka, and its influence on the growth of the Faculty of Medicine in general. The specialization of teaching foreign languages will be considered from its introduction up to the present day when there are different foreign language courses for each study programme. In analysing the collected material, a historical approach was taken, and methods of analysis and synthesis were used. The development of teaching foreign languages began with the English language, and today the teaching of Italian and German has also been introduced. Teaching foreign languages is an integral part of all studies, either as a compulsory or elective course. Foreign language courses introduce international medical terminology and enable students to follow the development of modern medicine. Teaching foreign languages enables both teaching and scientific staff to have a certain freedom in creating teaching materials and referring students to relevant foreign literature. All this has resulted, on the one hand, in faster and better involvement of the Faculty of Medicine in European and world trends of modern medicine, and on the other hand, has given students the necessary skills they are going to need in their professional continuous education.

Keywords: teaching foreign languages, introduction in different study programmes, medical English, Italian, German, textbooks

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Introduction

To trace a specific development, it is important to know *how* and *when* it all began. Therefore, this paper, which discusses the development of teaching foreign languages at the Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka, starts from the foundation of the Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka, and the establishment of the Department of Social Sciences and Medical Humanities, and the introduction of foreign languages in different study programmes. The course of the development of teaching foreign languages and its key events are summarized and they stress the importance of foreign languages in higher education and the modern world in general.

Historical overview of the establishing of the Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka

After the end of World War II the only Croatian faculty of medicine was the one in Zagreb. Due to the consequences of the War on the social situation in our region and a constant lack of medical personnel it was necessary to provide medical education for those interested in it. The idea of establishing the faculty of medicine in Rijeka as a branch of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Zagreb appeared because an increasing number of medical students came from the Kvarner Bay and neighbouring regions.

An act for the foundation of the Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka was passed in the parliamentary session on the July 12th 1955. Professor Silvije Novak was elected an acting dean. He held the introductory lecture, "*The meaning of the internal medicine today*", on the 21st of November, 1955 in the Town Hall, and that date is marked as the official beginning of the academic year 1955/56 at the Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka.¹ The first academic year enrolled six students in the fifth year of study and twelve graduands.

First teaching staff of the Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka was selected from the experienced and highly respected heads of hospital departments for the clinical courses and available professors from already existing universities in Zagreb and other towns of former Yugoslavia for pre-clinical courses. They all played a significant part in establishing and developing the Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka.

The independence of the Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka was declared by the Executive Council of the Republic of Croatia on the 20th of June 1957. Thus the Faculty of

¹ Anton Škrobonja (Ed.), *Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci 1955.-2005.*, Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci, Rijeka, 2005., pp. 19- 20.

Medicine in Rijeka became the first such institution founded in Croatia outside Zagreb. The enrolment of 100 students to the first study year began in the academic year 1957/58.²

The Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka offers today three university programmes of study – Medicine, Dental Medicine, and Sanitary Engineering. There are also five professional undergraduate programmes: Nursing, Midwifery, Physiotherapy, Radiologic Technology and Medical-Laboratory Diagnostics.

Foundation of the Department of Social Sciences and Medical Humanities

Although the foundations for the Department were laid in 1962 when Duško Berlot, philosopher and educator, held the first lecture in the course "*Fundamentals of the social sciences*", the Department of Social Sciences was founded in 1965.³

In the academic year 1965/66, the course was taken over by Božo Pavlinić and continued for the next ten years. In mid-seventies, due to the reform of education in former Yugoslavia, in all schools and faculties were introduced new courses– "*Theoretical basis of Marxism*" and "*Theory and practice of socialist self-management*". The first lecturers of these courses at the Faculty of Medicine were a philosopher Nenad Mišćević and a law graduate Đorđe Roganović.⁴

In 1976, a politologist, Ivan Šegota, became the first Head of the Department of Social Sciences.⁵ Due to the efforts of Ivan Šegota and in collaboration with the Faculty of Medicine in Zagreb, in mid-eighties new courses on medical sociology were introduced. Medical sociology was a new scientific discipline already developed in the USA and other European countries, which provided an excellent basis for the development of new interdisciplinary courses that naturally evolved following the changes in the social and political system of the nineties. New courses were: Hippocratic Oath Today (1991/92), Medical Ethics (1992/93), and Introduction to Bioethics (1993/94).⁶

By introducing bioethics as an integral part of almost all courses as well as other professional programmes at the Faculty of Medicine, the Department of Social Sci-

² A. Škrobonja (Ed.), *Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci 1955.-2005.*, p. 21.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁴ Juraj Sepčić (Ed.), *Medicinski fakultet u Rijeci 1955.-1995.*, Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci, Rijeka, p. 237.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁶ A. Škrobonja (Ed.), *Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci 1955.-2005.*, p. 192.

ences largely approached the global trends in medical education. The Department has become connected with the leading scientific centres and bioethical institutions all over the world which has led to a rich international cooperation with world's leading bioethicists. Highly successful work of lecturers and research associates of the Department is also reflected in their publishing and editing activities (journal "*Bioethical Gazette*", numerous scientific and professional articles or papers quoted in many databases and indexes, books, handbooks, journal "*Jahr*" - an annual of the Department,...), international scientific projects, organizing international symposia and congresses on bioethics, round tables and similar.

After the retirement of Professor Ivan Šegota in 2008, the Department has been headed by Associate Professor Amir Muzur. Presently, the teaching and scientific staff has been contributing with their hard work and dedication to educational and scientific development of the Department and the Faculty of Medicine in general.

The Department of Social Sciences was renamed as the Department of Social Sciences and Medical Humanities by the decision of the Faculty Council on the 19th of January 2010.⁷ The courses on the history of medicine, communication with the deaf, physical education, and foreign languages are also taught within this Department.

Foreign language teaching

The knowledge of foreign languages is increasingly important in the world today. Foreign languages are one of the essential components of modern education, and are part of the curricula of all study programmes at the Faculty of Medicine.

The teaching of foreign languages at the Department of Social Sciences was launched in the academic year 1987/88. The first lecturer was Tatjana Paškvan Čepić, a teacher of English and French, who held courses on foreign languages from 1987 to 1994. English language course was introduced as a mandatory course in the first and second year of the Study of Medicine. The following year English was also introduced as a mandatory course in the first and second year of the Study of Dental Medicine.

The academic year 1988/89 brought some changes in the teaching foreign languages. With the arrival of lecturer Anamarija Gjuran-Coha, a teacher of English and Italian, students were offered foreign languages as a mandatory course in the first and second year of study, with a possibility of choosing between the three languages, i.e. English, Italian or French. Tatjana Paškvan Čepić taught English and

⁷ Amir Muzur (Ed.), *Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci 2005.-2010.*, Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci, Rijeka, p. 79.

French, and Italian was introduced by Anamarija Gjuran-Coha, who also held courses in the English language. In the academic year 1989/90, foreign languages were introduced in the programmes of professional education for Nursing, Medical-Laboratory Diagnostics and Physiotherapy. The course in foreign language for these professional study programmes was mandatory in the first and second year of study.

The teaching of foreign languages was also mandatory in the first and second year of a new university four-year study programme for sanitary engineers organised in the academic year 1990/91. In the following years the third and fourth year students of Sanitary Engineering were offered foreign languages as an elective course.

In 1992, a new lecturer Brigita Bosnar Valković, a teacher of English and German, joined the Department of Social Sciences. She lectured English at the Faculty of Medicine till the end of 1995. In the academic year 1993/94 the course on foreign languages was introduced to students of Radiologic Technology as a mandatory course in the first and second year of study. This has not been changed until the present day.

The academic year 1994/95 marked certain modifications of the curricula of the Faculty of Medicine.⁸ All study programmes were reformed and elective courses were introduced in all study programmes. Foreign languages included 30 hours of seminars in each semester and the course on foreign language could be elected as a major elective course. The choice of foreign languages was between English, Italian and German. Some changes occurred in the same academic year for students of Dental Medicine. Foreign language was abolished as a mandatory course, and offered as an elective course. This has remained unchanged till today. In the same academic year the students of Sanitary Engineering could choose the course on foreign language as an elective course but only in the first year of study.

In 1996 a teacher of English and French, Arijana Krišković was employed as a new lecturer. Some of the courses were also held by a lecturer Suzana Jurin, a teacher of English and German, who was a collaborator from 1997 to 2009.

At the beginning of 2005, the Croatian system of higher education was affected by major changes due to the Bologna process. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was adopted into all the study programmes, as it was at other European universities. At the Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka all undergraduate and graduate studies were reformed to agree with the principles laid out in the Charter *Magna Charta Universitatum* signed in Bologna in 1988.⁹ These reforms have contributed to growing popularity of foreign languages and thus emphasized the teaching of fo-

⁸ A. Škrobonja (Ed.), *Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci 1955.-2005.*, p. 32.

⁹ A. Škrobonja (Ed.), *Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci 1955.-2005.*, p. 33.

reign languages as one of the significant elements in the education of future academics. Namely, the alignment between the systems of higher education and improvement of the quality of teaching are aimed at achieving better cooperation of the faculties and collaboration with scientific institutions abroad, and greater mobility of students. Foreign languages teaching at the Department of Social Sciences was also remodelled to meet the new requirements of the Bologna process.

Medical English has become a mandatory course of the Study of Medicine and has been extended through all six years of study. The teaching is held in the form of seminars and includes 20 hours of seminars each year. During the course students have to prepare a seminar paper in English on topics related to the professional (main) courses of the particular year. While writing the seminar paper students are referred to use literature in English which may include textbooks, manuals, encyclopedias, research and professional articles, Web sites, etc. The purpose of writing and oral presentation of a seminar paper is multiple. The students take an active part in writing a paper, engage their creative potentials, and are focused on integrating all the skills around a certain topic. They deal with the familiar topics, and establish the correlation with the material they have already learnt about in the main courses. Therefore, they are more confident to express their own ideas, thoughts and more open to talk about their personal experience which boosts their self-awareness in the adoption of English.

The Study of Dental Medicine has not undergone any significant changes regarding the course on foreign languages. Foreign language teaching remained an elective course, held in the first and second year of Study of Dental Medicine and the same applies to the Study of Sanitary Engineering. The two languages offered to students were English and Italian, and since 2010 with the arrival of a new lecturer Katja Dobrić, a teacher of English and German, the German language has also been offered as a course. The courses are organized in the form of seminars – 30 teaching hours each year. They are based on the professional themes and topics that are interesting and relevant to students. The intention of the course is to help students to relate the foreign language to their profession and to apply the knowledge they acquire to every day life. For example, students of dental medicine who attend the English course are introduced to medical and dental terminology. During the course students read and translate professional texts, write abstracts, discuss certain topics, write and present their seminar papers. The course material consists of a textbook "*English for Dental Medicine Students*" written by Arijana Krišković and published in 2004. There is also a textbook "*English for Graduate Sanitary Engineers*", written by Anamarija Gjuran-Coha.

An entirely new mandatory course Business English in Medicine (30 teaching hours) was introduced in the first three years of study of Organisation, Planning

and Management in Healthcare in the academic year 2005/06 when the new study programme was established. The textbook "*English in Management*" used during the course was written by Anamarija Gjuranc-Coha in 2007.

As far as the three-year professional programmes in Nursing, Radiologic Technology and Midwifery are concerned, foreign languages are taught in the first and second year of study as a mandatory course. And for students of Medical-Laboratory Diagnostics and Physiotherapy, the course on foreign language is mandatory in the first study year. The students of professional study programmes attend 30 hours of seminars, except for students of the Study of Medical-Laboratory Diagnostics and of the Radiologic Technology who attend 40 hours of seminars a year. The textbook "*English in Physiotherapy*" for students studying physiotherapy was written by Arijana Krišković and published in 2009.

The scientific development and professional accomplishments of the Department of Social Sciences and Medical Humanities are evident in the active work of the lecturers of foreign languages, their great efforts to improve the teaching process, participation in congresses and symposia, collaboration in scientific projects and also their publishing activities. Presently there are two lecturers who teach foreign languages at the Department, and one collaborator for the German language. The lecturer Anamarija Gjuranc-Coha, who defended her doctoral thesis entitled "*Calques and loanwords of English origin in medical terminology*" on the 17th of January 2008, holds today the academic position as Assistant Professor.¹⁰ She has written many scientific and professional papers quoted in different databases and several textbooks. Some of them, written for the English courses, have already been mentioned, but there are some more textbooks used in foreign language courses - "*Selection of texts in English for students in the 1st year of study*", and "*Selection of texts in English for students in the 2nd year of study*" – that were co-authored by Anamarija Gjuranc-Coha and Tatjana Paškvan Čepić, and published in 1994. The Assistant Professor Anamarija Gjuranc-Coha is also an author of the textbook "*Selection of the texts in Italian for students of Medicine*" and a new textbook - "*English in Nursing*" is to be published soon. The lecturer Arijana Krišković was elected in 2007 to the teaching position of senior lecturer, and on the 24th of June, 2008, she defended her doctoral thesis entitled "*Metonymy in English and Croatian of biomedical sciences: cognitive linguistic analysis*".¹¹ Arijana Krišković is also author of scientific and professional papers, several textbooks (already mentioned in the text above) and presently prepares a new textbook - "*English for Radiologic Technologist*".

¹⁰ A. Muzur (Ed.), *Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci 2005.-2010.*, p. 79.

¹¹ A. Muzur (Ed.), *Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci 2005.-2010.*, p. 79.

The collaborator Suzana Jurin defended her doctoral thesis entitled "*Text types in the corporate management*" on the 19th of February, 2010.¹²

The textbooks written in foreign language for a specific study programme contain professional medical texts with relevant topics and many vocabulary and grammar activities that enable students to acquire grammar units, and offer them to use language independently while retelling stories, summarising, writing abstracts of an article, expressing their personal opinions on professional topics and issues. The topics are relevant and stimulating for students and their professional interests and they provide a basis for further personal development that enables students to use the professional literature in foreign language.

Conclusion

Foreign language teaching is an integral part of all medical programmes at the Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka, either as a mandatory or elective course. Each course programme is based on different professional interests and specializations of students. Foreign language introduces students to international medical terminology which helps them in consulting foreign literature, journals, Web sites, etc., and thus enables them to keep track of the development of modern medicine. Many activities of future physicians require the knowledge of foreign languages. One of them is easier monitoring and thus better understanding lectures and presentations of experienced foreign scientists, who are invited as guest lecturers from abroad. Further, oral communication skills in a foreign language, which is one of the principal aims of the course, provide students more options in selecting the course of their professional growth. Thus, they will have a possibility to apply for different scholarships or internships. For example, international student exchange, as one of the goals of higher education, includes professional practice in world reputable centres, gaining experiences in partner institutes abroad, working on different research projects, etc. With the developed written skills future physicians, researchers and scientists will be able to write and publish scientific and professional articles in foreign language which also gives them an opportunity to achieve the indispensable professional reputation. This has resulted, on the one hand, in faster and better involvement of the Rijeka Faculty of Medicine in European and world trends of modern medicine, and on the other hand, has given students the necessary skills needed in their professional continuous education.

¹² Ibid., p. 80.

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Povijesni pregled nastave stranih jezika na Medicinskom fakultetu u Rijeci

SAŽETAK

Članak nudi prikaz razvoja nastave stranih jezika unutar Katedre za društvene i humanističke znanosti u medicini Medicinskog fakulteta u Rijeci, te kako je to utjecalo na razvoj Medicinskog fakulteta u cjelini. Praćen je tijek specijalizacije nastave stranih jezika od početka do diferencirane nastave stranih jezika za pojedina studijska usmjerenja. U obradi prikupljenih informacija korištene su povijesna metoda, metoda analize i sinteze i komparativna metoda. Razvoj nastave stranih jezika tekao je stupnjevito i pratio je razvoj Medicinskog fakulteta. Počelo se s nastavom engleskog jezika, a danas se na Katedri održava i nastava talijanskog i njemačkog jezika. Nastava stranih jezika je integralni dio svih studijskih programa Medicinskog fakulteta, bilo kao obvezatni bilo kao izborni kolegij. Po studijskim programima diferencirana nastava stranih jezika studente je upoznala sa internacionalnom medicinskom terminologijom i olakšala im praćenje suvremenog razvoja medicine. Nastava stranih jezika za studente omogućuje znanstveno-nastavnom osoblju slobodno kreiranje nastavnog programa i upućivanje studenata na relevantnu stranu literaturu. Sve to rezultiralo je, s jedne strane bržim i kvalitetnijim uključivanjem Medicinskog fakulteta u europske i svjetske tokove suvremene medicine, a s druge strane pružilo je studentima neophodne vještine potrebne za njihovo profesionalno cjeloživotno obrazovanje.

Ključne riječi: nastava stranih jezika, različiti studijski programi, medicinski engleski, talijanski jezik, njemački jezik, udžbenici