

*Silvija Batoš, Tereza Matić - Ivušić, Dubravka Zakarija\**

## **The Role of English in the 21 st. Century Journalists' Education'**

### **Summary**

This paper analyses the importance of the English language and culture in the education of modern journalists. The global role of today's media implies the necessity for the active usage of English, this adding to the profession's competitiveness.

Although English is a compulsory language from the very beginning of schooling, a misuse of borrowings or derivatives found daily in the media reflects poor knowledge of not only English but of Croatian as well.

In addition to the mistakes arising out of the contrastive analysis of the two languages, cultural differences, also leading to unsuccessful communication, should be observed.

**Key words:** journalists' education, language contamination, contrastive analysis, usage, bi-lingualism vs. bi-culturalism

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\* Authors are lecturers at the University of Dubrovnik

*Silvija Batoš, Tereza Matić - Ivušić, Dubravka Zakarija\**

## Uloga engleskog jezika u obrazovanju novinara 21. stoljeća

### Sažetak

Ovaj rad ukazuje na važnost poznavanja engleskog jezika i kulture pri obrazovanju suvremenih novinara. Globalna uloga današnjih medija nameće nužnost aktivnog korištenja engleskog jezika u svrhu kompetitivnosti struke i njene izvrsnosti koji se mjere u svjetskim okvirima.

Iako se engleski kao obvezni jezik počinje učiti od samoga početka školovanja, pogrešna uporaba tuđica iz engleskog jezika ili izvedenica iz istoga u brojnim primjerima dnevnoga tiska i ostalih medija, upućuje na zaključak o nedovoljnom poznavanju engleskog, pa čak ni hrvatskog jezika.

Uz pogreške koje proizlaze iz kontrastivne analize dvaju jezika ističu se i kulturološke razlike koje dovode do pogrešne, odnosno neuspješne komunikacije.

**Cljučne riječi:** obrazovanje novinara, jezična kontaminacija, kontrastivna analiza, dvojezičnost i dvokulturalnost

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\* Autorice su nastavnice Sveučilišta u Dubrovniku

## Introduction

Journalists should have complete knowledge of English, a *lingua franca* in the profession. At the same time, the knowledge of the mother tongue is very important, i.e. Croatian for the Croatian journalists.

«*An average Croatian reader cannot read Croatian newspapers without a good English dictionary.*» (N. Opačić, MA, Croatian Radio, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

«*The media have an educational role, and they must be aware of their role.*» (J. Gvozdanović, PhD, Glas Koncila, 46/09).<sup>2</sup>

Taking the above two quotations as the starting point for our presentation, one will readily conclude that the conference theme should read: «What Level of Education Should 21st-Century Journalists Receive?» The role of English in their education is immense, but it does not mean that English should replace our mother tongue, Croatian in this case.

This presentation has been prompted by the numerous linguistic errors and misuse that are an **insult** to a reader of daily newspapers, weekly and monthly magazines, TV subscriber, and internet user. Well, Croatian citizens whose mother tongue is Croatian, should read Croatian newspapers, and listen to Croatian radio and TV programmes in standard Croatian – without any English additions or, as a great number of the media people would say, «improvements». What every reader, listener or spectator is exposed to in the media day after day is far from an improvement. It is language **contamination**. In ancient times, when philology or linguistics did not exist as independent disciplines, the concept of language **corruption** was introduced, implying that good care was taken of language. Today, it is worse than corruption.

Sadly, the fact that many people, including journalists and other media people, claim that they express themselves more efficiently with the help of English, warns us of something that requires special attention: a) something is wrong with the journalists education; b) we have a great number of «journalists» who have - or even worse - have not graduated from faculties other than journalism.

«The inflation of the media irrevocably leads to the inflation of journalists. The so-called citizens-journalists are becoming increasingly popular. They are encouraged to write about or report on more or less scandalous events.» (Christoph Sodemann: The Media Agency for South-

Eastern Europe).<sup>3</sup> The language used is then taken for granted by readers or listeners.

## **The Foreign Language Teaching**

The history of foreign and second language teaching is a history of consecutive changes in the stated objectives of teaching accompanied by sometimes dramatic changes in the form and content of teaching materials. During the twentieth century, these changes, based on institutions and experiences of eminent language teachers, came to be increasingly influenced by advances in linguistic research on language and language acquisition, and more recently also by the results of discourse analysis and findings in related humanities and social sciences. As a result, during the 1970s and 1980s the communicative approach to language teaching was widely accepted and a new generation of textbooks appeared. It seems that now, thanks to a growing body of pragmatic and cross-cultural research, we are about to witness another addition to the list of objectives of language teaching: the achievement by the learners of cross-cultural competence, i.e. the ability to relate to differences between the learners' native and target cultures and thus enhance the effectiveness and quality of communication (Crozet and Liddicoat, 1997, p. 3).

Culture has to be integrated into the language classroom from the very first day of language learning and that culture must be taught in conjunction with language, not as an adjunct. (Crozet and Liddicoat, 1997)

## **Communication and language**

There are a number of ways in which we can communicate, but natural languages, such as English, French, Italian, Chinese, Croatian are certainly the most frequently used and most efficient carriers of messages between people. A natural language is sometimes described as a communication tool consisting, in most simple terms, of a vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation and spelling rules, i.e. a list of words and a

system of rules governing their use in speech and writing. If every item in the vocabulary had only one, unchangeable meaning, and if the grammar consisted of a finite number of fixed rules for every day conceivable utterance, one might say that, in order to communicate effectively, the participants in a communicative act must both be competent in the use of the same vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and spelling rules. This is indeed the case with **artificial languages** (e.g. computer languages), but not with natural languages, where both the vocabularies and the grammar offer practically unlimited possibilities for producing new, original messages.

The question is: If even the majority of native speakers of a language are incapable of using fully the existing vast potential, what about learners of English as a foreign language in their native country?

Every language functions in a community within the framework of its culture and, consequently, successful communication depends to a large extent on such things as what the content of the utterance actually refers to, which of the grammatically correct words, phrases or sentence patterns suit a given situation, and which do not, when to say things and how or, for that matter, whether to say anything at all.

Languages differ from one another not just as linguistic system but also as cultural universes, as vehicles of ethnic identities. (A. Wierbicka, 1985, p. 187)

It means that, to communicate effectively, the learner must be able to combine linguistic competence with the ability to operate within the accepted set of cultural rules of communication of a social group using it.

No one knows 'the whole' of any language, or how to use it appropriately in all possible situations of language use. He acquires those parts of it which he needs in order to play his part in society. As he grows older, the roles that are ascribed to him or that he acquires change and develop, and as they change he learns more of his language (he may also forget some). (S. P. Corder, 1973, p. 201)

## Communication and culture

In its broadest sense, culture may be understood as a comprehensive view of history. It encompasses politics, economics, social history, philosophy, science and technology, education, the arts, religion and customs. Culture includes the spiritual aspect of a society, embracing its ideological, artistic and religious trends. It also may be understood as a picture of everyday life, including everyday activities and entertainment, clothing, fashions, living conditions, family and social relations, customs, beliefs, morality, acceptable patterns of behaviour and rituals. Finally, social consciousness, which is expressed in the language of events and processes, institutions and organizations, social values and artistic creativity are also part of culture expressed in the language.

It is seemingly permanent, yet constantly changing reality, which is ever present to all individuals belonging to the same cultural group. (B. Suchodolski, 1986, p. 5)

The political, social and economic history of a given cultural group, as well as its spiritual heritage, form an important source of background information that allows members of the language community to respond correctly to allegories, figures of speech, symbols and behavioural patterns which relate to its history. For example, if one knows the old story of King Arthur, one will comprehend better the idea of a 'Round Table'.

Not only do we have to deal with a multitude of culture specific patterns in communication, but also with the more recent social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual history of the group, especially that covering the life span of the people we communicate with. Having participated personally in a number of events, having had access to everyday local and national news, as well as personal communication with other people, adult members of a language community share a store of information built over a period of many years, and they use it actively in everyday communication.

The most obvious areas of culture-specific communication would be jokes, especially political jokes, but also sayings, metaphors, indeed most references to the not so distant past in the life of the language community.

Larson and Smalley relate culture more directly to human behaviour, also linguistic behaviour:

Culture guides the behaviour of people in a community and is incubated in family life. It governs our behaviour in groups, makes us sensitive no matters of status, and helps us know what others expect of us and what will happen if we do not live up to their expectations. Culture helps us to know how far we can go as individuals and what our responsibility is to know how far we can go as individuals and what our responsibility is to the group. Different cultures are the underlying structures which make Round community round and Square community square.

S.M.Cutlip gives the profile of the 21 st ct. journalist:

Besides personality traits required for journalism, every journalist should have complete knowledge of English, a *lingua franca* in the profession, and good comand of at least one more foireign language.

## **Journalism and our worldview**

Journalism has a permanent effect on our worldview – from global terrorism to the American presidential elections, celebrity scandals to the latest environmental disaster. So every journalist is faced with practical, political and professional decisions. Contemporary political struggles interact with private and public media. When a fever of terrorist bombs caused carnage in London in July 2005, the most dramatic television news pictures were supplied from the mobile phones of travelling Londoners.

Since the telecommunications network is global, journalism has become a global enterprise. For professional journalists, this has very big implications. The global nature of the new communications network means that individuals can consume journalism made all over the world, and discuss it across national boundaries. One result is that the intellectual property rights involved in news are made more valuable. More important, journalism has become a multidirectional force field , rather than the one-way street of the traditional newspaper or television news bulletin. Also,

because the technology of news-making and distribution is much cheaper and simpler, almost anyone can join the journalistic melee. Today's newsrooms are, essentially, collections of networked personal computers. Today's mobile phones can record and transmit pictures, sound, and text, turning them into primitive television stations.

### **Headlines in English newspapers, grammatical features**

**Headlines** are important because they persuade potential consumers to buy a newspaper, help readers decide which stories to read, and help define the style and personality of the newspaper.

Could you explain these headlines?

1. *Man attacks neighbour after noisy party*
2. *TV's Dave to star in Hollywood blockbuster*
3. *Priceless vase stolen*
4. *Fans angry after 5-0 defeat*
5. *Jail break father held again after kid visit*
6. *Prime Minister in call for tax cuts*
7. *Voters angry as prices soar*
8. *Manager sacked over sexist comments*
9. *Global warming: new evidence*
10. *Heavy winds, floods expected in south*

### **Slant**

It refers to a particular way of presenting information so that it appeals to certain groups in society. It is open to debate whether slant is a way for powerful media owners to influence readers' opinions, or whether readers want and expect slant, in order to reinforce views they already hold.



Newspapers in the UK tend to have a clear **political slant**, which inform their reporting of political and social issues. Those considered to be the centre-right of political spectrum include the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail*, and the *Sun*. The *Independent* is aimed at the middle to centre-left of the spectrum, while the *Guardian* and the *Daily Mirror* are considered centre-left.

### **Emotive language**

Language of journalists designed to create a strong emotional reaction in readers, such as disgust, shock or sympathy. An important aspect of slant is the use of different types of **vocabulary** to present certain information in either a positive or negative light. For example when one article speaks of wildlife, destruction of habitats and traditional methods of farming, another might describe the same concepts as pests, economic development and out dated techniques. This use of vocabulary is particularly apparent with emotive vocabulary, such as brutal attacker vs. brave fighter; tragic accident vs. unforgivable lapse; and stubborn vs. tenacious.

### **Bias and its types**

Bias means the same as slant, but has strong negative connotations. Journalism can never be completely objective and neutral: there will always have to be editorial choices about what stories to include, how to approach each story, which should be lead stories, etc. Strict objectivity may also lead to unsavoury results, for example if the perpetrators of crimes are treated as sympathetically as their victims. But newspapers are often criticised for spinning a story one way or another, leaving readers unsure where the truth lies.

Types of media bias:

- a) ethnic or racial; ex. racism
- b) corporate bias; ex. sympathetic reporting of the interests of the owners of the newspaper or its sponsors/advertisers
- c) political bias; ex. bias in favour of or against a particular party, candidate or policy

- d) religious and cultural bias
- e) bias based on sex, age, background, education, language, etc.
- f) bias in favour of the exceptional over the ordinary = sensationalism
- g) exaggerated influence of minority views = a tendency to emphasise the news and the different over the status quo or existing consensus
- h) bias towards ease or expediency; ex. quick and easy topics such as the personal lives of celebrities, or crime reporting, particularly street crime, tend to be favoured over investigative journalism, which tends to require more time and research, and thus more money, to produce
- i) national bias; far more coverage of news in the home country, and to a lesser extent its neighbours and allies, than remoter countries

### **Cohesive devices and the ways of achieving cohesion in a newspaper article**

They are links between sentences and paragraphs which enable the readers to understand the article as a whole. Cohesion can be achieved in following ways:

1. the repetition of vocabulary, or use of pronouns, synonyms or general names to refer the same object
2. the use of articles to show new/known information
3. the use of word groups
4. the use of collocations
5. variations in word order to put old information towards the beginning of sentences, and new information towards the end; this often requires structures such as passive voice to change the normal word order of subject-verb-object
6. the use of linking words such as conjunctions (*and, although*), prepositions (*despite, as well as*) and edverbs (*meanwhile, secondly*)
7. omission of words which are clear from the context, typically to avoid repetition

## House style

House style helps create consistency in a newspaper, so that articles reflect the personality and preferences of the publication rather than the individual journalists. It is the preferred style of spelling, punctuation, etc. used in a publishing house or by a specific publication. Newspapers tend to use a **style guide** to ensure all writers and editors follow the same rules. They also promote clarity and professionalism, and warn writers against making common mistakes, for example spelling. It is important to realise that English offers many choices of style, so what is correct for one publication would be unacceptable in another. Ex. one publication might write the **Prime Minister**, the **President**, the **Queen** idolize the well-known singer John Smith. *The Economist* according to its style guide might write the same information as the **prime minister**, the **president**, the **queen** idolise John Smith, **a** well-known singer.

House style includes elements such as:

- preferred sentence length
- spelling, ex. British or American
- treatment of abbreviations, ex. N.A.T.O. or NATO, Mr. or Mr
- treatment of quotations, ex. "Yes" or 'Yes' or Yes
- syntax, for example active or passive voice, use of there is /are
- use of headlines
- paragraph length
- capitalisation of personal titles, for example Prime Minister
- punctuation, for example commas before *and* in lists
- levels of formality, for example balance between long noun phrases (more formal) and verb phrases (more informal)

## The Anglo-Saxon tradition of journalism

The Anglo-Saxon tradition of journalism refers mainly to the style of UK and US newspapers. Within this tradition, journalism can often be less formal than in other countries. People from other traditions are

sometimes surprised by the chatty, playful or humorous nature of some language even in serious newspapers such as *The Economist*.

It is quite possible that our journalists may never have to write newspaper headlines in English during their careers, but they will almost certainly have to read them, and could well have to write something similar in their own language. Headlines are not confined to newspapers – they are also of central importance in advertising, magazines, brochures, websites, presentations and many other forms of communication, all of which the journalists could well have to write, either in English or in their own language.

## **Language as the Profession's Main Tool - Mother Tongue First**

All language mistakes, including those made in foreign languages, proceed from the lack of knowledge of one's mother tongue. Therefore, journalists are expected to acquire a high level of literacy .

The question is whether other issues are dominant, or is it language that should occupy the leading position in the education of journalists, PR people, and even managers?

The profile of Croatian journalists requires a detailed analysis, but one question should be raised here:

*What faculties or courses of study have the people that call themselves journalists graduated from? Or, have they received adequate training at all?*

## **Examples of Journalism Studies**

**Great Britain** is fast re-discovering the importance of university education as opposed to on-the-job training (The Changing Face of Journalism Education in the UK, EJ640776).<sup>4</sup>

### **The Faculty of Political Science, Zagreb**

A Socio-linguistic Basis has been introduced there, special attention being paid to the vocabulary – **standard**, **substandard**, and **regional**. It

is very important to raise the awareness of the social element in language study as lack of it leads to misunderstanding.

### **The High School of Journalism, Zagreb**

English is studied in the second semester – *English Basis for Journalists* – and in the third semester – *English as the Media Language*. The name of the subject suggests that the language used by future journalists should differ from that in other fields of activity. Unfortunately, we witness the abuse of both English and Croatian every day, *i.e.* a kind of mixture of these two languages is being created.

### **The University of Dubrovnik**

English is a compulsory subject, while French, German, Italian and Spanish are elective subjects at the **Department of Mass Communications**, and at the **Media and Socio-Cultural Studies**.

The introduction of other, optional, languages means that even better care should be taken of the mother tongue.

Having compared the curricula of several universities, faculties, or departments, one may think that the Croatian public enjoys reading newspapers, and listening to or watching certain programmes. Unfortunately, the prospect is far from optimistic.

## **Croatian as an LLD vs. English**

*«Croatian historically justified words form the Croatian identity, where foreign\* words do not have such identity. Yet, if a foreign word can be easily adapted, including Croatian suffixes, we can not forbid it. The question of language efficiency should also be observed.» (ibid.)*

If we accept that language is proof of a nation's identity, sociocultural diversities in communication should be observed. Knowledge or use of English does not imply that English words or expressions can be directly transferred to Croatian.

There is no end to examples of such transfers. What is more, their number seems to be increasing every day, but the paper analyses only the most frequent ones.

## Pronunciation

**Manchester United** – mispronounced by over 90% of Croatian sports journalists;

**premiership** – mispronounced, Croatian case suffixes are added;

**tender** – stressed incorrectly, misused.

## Usage

**brand** – misused (often used for people), Croatian derivatives, used in excess;

**celebrity** – used in excess;

**cross-over** – (a famous Croatian cross-over pianist);

**image** – misused (in Croatian used in its original form instead of *look*), used in excess;

**involve (to get involved)** – has completely replaced the Croatian verb *umiješati se* (u što);

**junction** – directly “imported” from English, not yet translated adequately;

**prime time** – with Croatian case suffixes.

The position of the adverb *ever* is directly «imported» from English to be used at the end of a Croatian sentence:

**English:** «*This has been their biggest success ever.*» **Croatian:** «*Ovo je njihov najveći uspjeh ikada.*»

instead of: «*Ovo je njihov do sada najveći uspjeh.*»

The verb *to contact (sb.)* is again directly translated into Croatian, to read:

«*Kontaktirat ćemo vas.*» instead of: «*Kontaktirat ćemo s vama.*»

### **Attributive use of a noun**

Nouns are increasingly used attributively in Croatian sentences. It is no doubt journalists who are responsible for this, as such constructions are alien to any kind of Croatian literature; consequently the public becomes familiar with such expressions through the media.

**golf teren** instead of **golfski teren** or **teren za golf**;

**H1N1 virus** instead of **virus H1N1**;

**internet stranica** instead of **internetska stranica**;

**vaterpolo reprezentacija** instead of **vaterpolska reprezentacija**;

**Zagreb arena** instead of **Arena Zagreb**.

### **Fields of Activity Directly Affected by the Use of English**

*Economy;*

*Information Technology;*

*Pop-Music;*

*Sports;*

*Telecommunications;*

*Tourism Industry;*

and many others.

We are all aware of the profound influence of the Internet as well as globalisation, but the media people should also be well aware of their educational role and of their identity, expressed through the correct usage of their language.

## Survey

- Respondents: Media Studies students of the 1st, the 2nd and the 3rd year
- Number of respondents: 115
- Survey questions and results:

I. Do you read English newspapers?

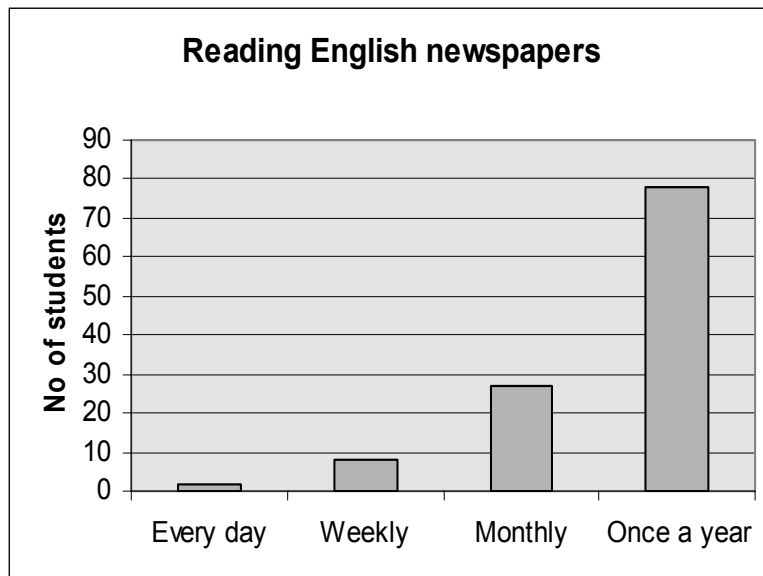
II. Do you find it difficult to read?

III. Do you find English newspapers more objective than Croatian?

IV. Are Croatian journalists educated?

V. Where would you like to work after graduation?

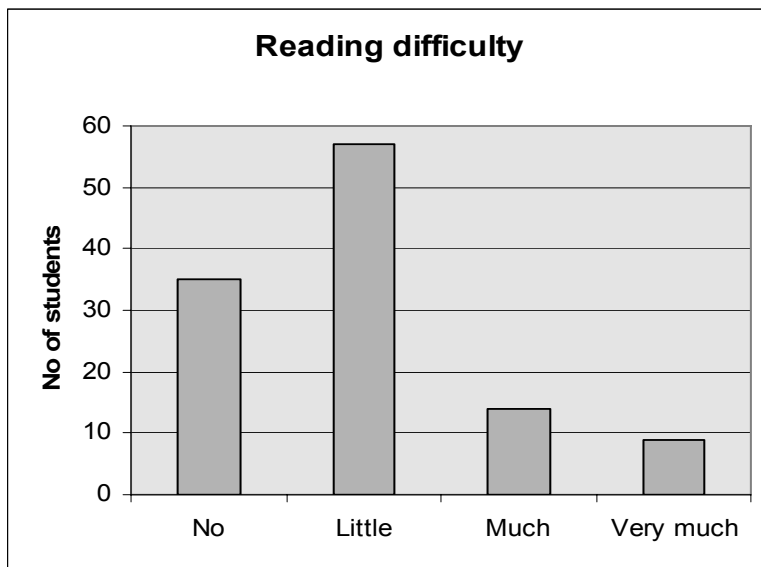
### I.



Out of 115 respondents, **68%** read English newspapers once a year, **23%** monthly, and only **0.09%** weekly or every day.

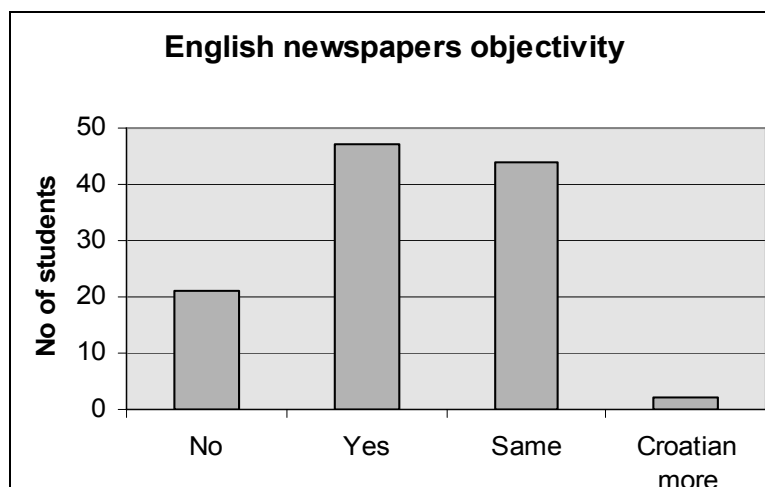


## II.



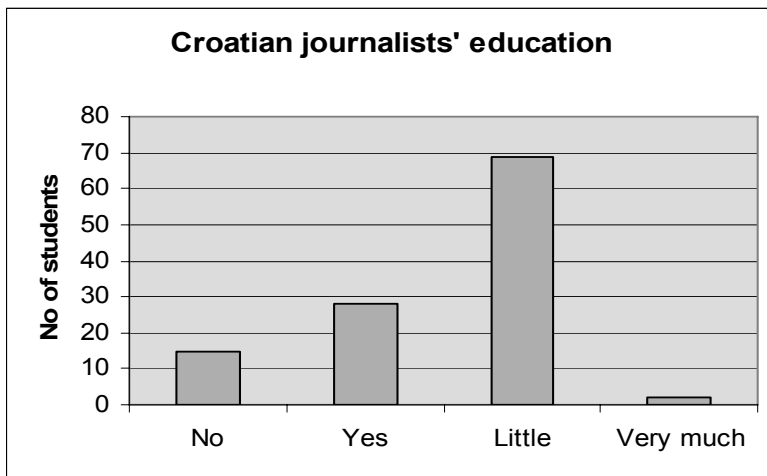
The majority of the respondents find it easy or fairly easy to read (80%), while the rest (20%) have a lot of difficulties in reading English.

## III.



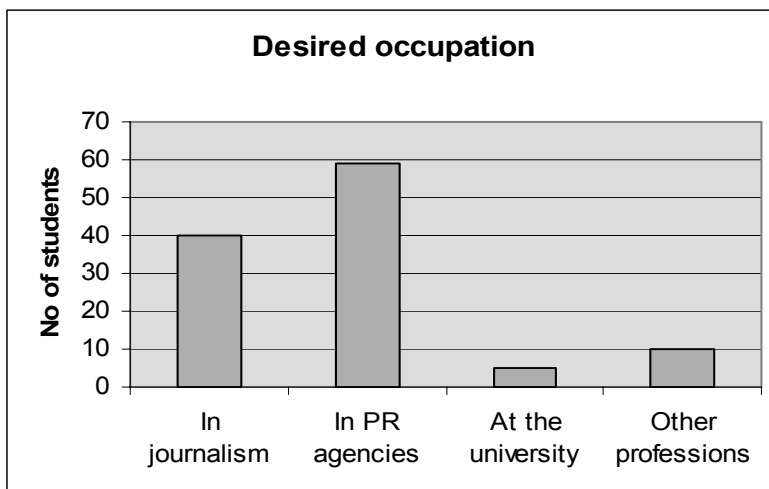
The majority found English papers more objective (41%), or as objective as Croatian (39%), while 20% of the respondents found Croatian newspaper more objective.

#### IV.



The majority of the respondents think that Croatian journalists are poorly educated (74%).

#### V.



The majority would like to work in PR agencies (**52%**), **35%** in journalism and **13%** in other professions.

### **Results of the survey:**

- The interest for the reading of English newspapers among our students is very low.
- The opinion about Croatian journalists' education is low as well as the interest for that profession. Only 35% of respondents would like to be journalists.

### **Conclusion**

Every journalist should have complete knowledge of English, a *lingua franca* in the profession, and good command of at least one more foreign language.

Social consciousness expressed in the language of events and processes, institutions and organizations, social values and artistic creativity are certain parts of culture expressed in the language.

Once Croatian journalists, and all those communicating with the public, understand the importance of the sociocultural element in communication, and start applying it in their work, the situation in the Croatian media will be more optimistic from the linguistic point of view. English expressions will no longer be simply "copied" from English and "pasted" into Croatian, and the Croatian sentence will no longer "suffer" under the influence of English syntax.

The results of the survey suggest that the interest for the reading of English newspapers among our students is very low. The opinion about Croatian journalists' education is low and the interest for that profession is also low, only 35% of respondents would like to be journalists.

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