

Teaching English and German for Specific Purposes to Agricultural Engineers as a Path to Better Career Opportunities on the Foodstuff Market

Výučba odbornej angličtiny a nemčiny poľnohospodárskych inžinierov – cesta k lepším pracovným príležitostiam na potravinárskom trhu

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Abstract

We deal in this paper with teaching foreign languages for specific purposes (LSP) the future agricultural graduates, which plays a major role at the Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra as part of its language education system. Besides specialized terms and definitions, it also covers mastering the specific functional style of a given foreign language. Graduates from this university have shown their competence in various agricultural fields of study, as well as foreign language use in professional placement abroad. To be good at one's specialization means to follow the latest news and the newest forms of research constantly, to read professional magazines proficiently, to be able to write scientific papers and present them in public, and to be ready to lead international teams in various agricultural projects. Our paper deals with the research we have provided at the Department of Languages. The goal of research was the four year monitoring of the group of 156 students of the Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra who were supposed, within their language UNlcert®, level III (C1) exam, to write their projects on varied specific topics of their own choices, to prepare and perform their presentations in the English or German languages, as well as evaluation of their results. The mentioned research was carried out in the years 2007 – 2010. The students were, through this exam, verified their complex skills in creating their own texts as well as their ability to present them in public.

Keywords: evaluation, language for specific purposes, presentation, specialized terminology, UNlcert®, level III (C1)

Abstrakt

V článku sa venujeme odbornej jazykovej príprave budúcich poľnohospodárskych absolventov, ktorá zohráva v rámci výučby cudzích jazykov na Slovenskej poľnohospodárskej univerzite v Nitre prioritnú úlohu. Okrem odborných termínov a definícií zahŕňa aj osvojenie si odborného funkčného štýlu daného cudzieho jazyka. Absolventi tejto univerzity preukazujú svoju kompetentnosť v rôznych poľnohospodárskych odboroch, ako aj pri využívaní cudzích jazykov pri profesionálnom uplatnení sa v zahraničí. Byť dobrý vo svojom odbore znamená neustále sledovať novinky, najnovšie formy výskumu, čítať odborné časopisy, písať odborné vedecké články, prezentovať ich na verejnosti, byť pripravený viesť medzinárodné tímy pri riešení rôznych poľnohospodárskych projektov. Cieľom našej práce bol štvorročný monitoring skupiny 156 študentov Slovenskej poľnohospodárskej univerzity v Nitre, ktorí mali v rámci jazykovej skúšky UNICert® úroveň III (C1) napísať projekty na nimi zvolené témy, pripraviť a zrealizovať ich prezentácie v anglickom alebo nemeckom jazyku. Predmetný monitoring bol zrealizovaný v rokoch 2007 – 2010. Touto skúškou sme overovali komplexné schopnosti študentov pri tvorbe ich vlastných odborných textov, ako aj ich zručnosť prezentovať ich pred publikom.

Kľúčové slová: hodnotenie, odborný jazyk, odborná terminológia, prezentácia, UNICert® úroveň III (C1)

Podrobný abstrakt

O nevyhnutnosti ovládania odborného jazyka v súčasnosti už niet pochyb. Proces vzdelávania nemôže existovať bez psychickej aktivity študenta, ktorú vyvoláva stav motivácie (Horňáková, 2009, s. 85). Ak hovoríme o odbornom jazyku, musíme si uvedomiť, že jeden odborný jazyk, spoločný všetkým odborom neexistuje, nakoľko nemôže obsiahnuť vlastnosti všetkých odborných jazykov. Každý odbor má svoj špeciálny jazyk. Rozdiely medzi jazykmi jednotlivých odborov sú zrejmé už na prvý pohľad, a to predovšetkým v lexike. Napriek tomu, že sa lexika ako základný jazykový prostriedok významne podieľa na formovaní jednotlivých rečových zručností, nevenuje sa jej postaveniu a interpretácii v cudzojazyčnom vyučovaní potrebná pozornosť. Tento problém súvisí aj s tým, že stratégie sprostredkovania a osvojovania slovnej zásoby a špeciálne odbornej lexiky sú v literatúre ešte stále celkovo málo rozpracované. S narastajúcou úlohou vedy a techniky vzrastá záujem o vedecký a odborný jazyk. Intenzívna medzinárodná ekonomická a vedeckotechnická spolupráca prináša so sebou rozvoj terminológií rôznych odborov, čo vyúsťuje v ešte väčší záujem o teoretické a praktické otázky odbornej komunikácie. Termín je súčasťou odborného jazyka, a preto jeho vhodnosť posudzujú na rozdiel od slov v bežnej lexike nielen jazykovedci, ale aj špecialisti z daných vedeckých a technických odborov (Borsuková, 2007, s. 4 - 13). Odborné termíny je potrebné vždy dávať do konkrétnych logických, sémantických a syntaktických vzťahov, zodpovedajúcich komunikačnému zámeru autora. Práve v tejto tzv. potenciálnej zložke odborného jazyka možno nájsť podstatné rozdiely medzi jednotlivými jazykmi (Hlavičková, 2011, s. 68).

Problematike práce s textami sa venuje aj Spoločný európsky referenčný rámec pre jazyky (2006, s. 95). Termín text používa na pokrytie ľubovoľnej časti jazyka, či už ústnej

výpovede alebo písaného textu, ktorý používatelia/učiaci sa prijímajú, produkujú alebo si ho s niekým vymieňajú. Preto nemôže existovať žiaden akt komunikácie

prostredníctvom jazyka, ktorý nemá text. Holúbeková – Moravcová (2009, s. 81) pokladajú text za kľúčový pre každý akt jazykovej komunikácie. Text je podľa nich akýmsi vonkajším spojivom medzi tvorcom textu a jeho príjemcom.

Textotvorný zámer odborného jazyka podmieňujú znalosti autorov odborných textov, ktorí v textoch prejavujú výraznú textovú koherenciu. Koherencia ako sémantická spojitosť v texte sa viaže na sémantickú štruktúru v texte. Prijímateľ chápe text ako koherentný vďaka svojim predbežným jazykovým a mimojazykovým znalostiam. Konexiu, čiže viazanosť textu, netvorí len koherencia, ale aj kohézia. Tá sa viaže na povrchovú štruktúru textu, ktorú tvoria konektory ako prvky spájania pri textotvornej činnosti. Propozíčným prístupom k textu sa rozumie postup od vety k textu, t.j. od jednotlivých častí k celku. Text stojí na vrchole hierarchie jazykovedného systému. Predstavuje jazykovokomunikačný útvar, ktorý je komunikačným produktom. S ucelenosťou textu súvisí jeho komunikačná úplnosť a uzavretosť. Informácie, ktoré zamýšľa odosielateľ vysloviť, realizuje práve v rámci textu (Mandelíková, 2011, s. 197).

V akademickom písaní pracujeme väčšinou s učebnicami, odbornými časopismi a odbornou literatúrou. Čítanie sa vyznačuje selektívnymi procesmi, pričom vyberáme to, čo je potrebné pre naše ciele a naše pochopenie. Lingvistická analýza rôznych odborných textov nám dovoľuje rozpoznať a pochopiť dôležité.

Cieľom našej práce bol štvorročný monitoring študentov Slovenskej poľnohospodárskej univerzity v Nitre z oblasti odborných cudzojazyčných zručností z jazyka anglického a nemeckého, pričom sme sa zamerali na prácu s odbornou literatúrou, písanie a prezentáciu odborných textov. Zisťovali sme rozdiely v jednotlivých rokoch 2007 – 2010 a rozdiely medzi oboma jazykmi. Našou úlohou bolo navrhnúť a predstaviť námety, ktoré mali pomôcť študentom pri výbere témy a usmerniť ich prácu pri príprave prezentácií. Pri hodnotení sme sa orientovali na najčastejšie sa vyskytujúce nedostatky v prezentáciách študentov a na ich pohotovosť a pripravenosť pri vyjadrovaní vlastného stanoviska v diskusii.

Introduction

There are huge amounts of technical terms in various fields of study, they are „full of them“. On average, specialized lexical units form 20 – 25 % of the text units. This is the reason why a good level of vocabulary is so important for work with any professional and technical kinds of literature. If we want to acquire a specific kind of vocabulary (lexis) and to understand it, we have to know which lexical units belong to this or that particular specialized vocabulary, how they are formed, and which function they are to perform within the texts. It makes the work with such specific texts easier.

Special text is the starting point as well as the goal of the systematic education in the language departments of non-philologically oriented universities. Specialized texts of individual languages are characterized by certain attributes common for all languages and all fields of study, which results from the characteristics of special verbalization such as correctness, simplicity, clarity, and logical strictness (Borsukova, 2007, p. 47).

The Language for specific purposes (LSP) is part of the standard language, but while the standard language is a polyfunctional phenomenon, the LSP is a monofunctional one. It doesn't have all the features of the standard language such as polysemy or expressivity. On the other hand, there are certain qualities characteristic for the language for specific purposes which don't exist in the language for non-specific purposes, such as the specific terms use, non-linguistic means of communication, tendency to formalization, language standardization, as well as specific verbalization, which is directly connected with internalization. A more specialized language differs from a non-specialized one by greater verbalization accuracy. The most important part of the language for specific purposes is its lexis (specific terminology). It is characterized as a set of terms of a given field of study forming an informative-carrying part of the particular specialized language (Borsukova, 2004, pp.10 -11).

The major focus of the foreign language education of graduates from the Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra is to prepare experts with a good command of the foreign language, who will be able to prove competent in the world market. It is also for this reason that design of the language syllabus always refers the content of individual subjects, which is part of the accreditation procedure of the correspondent language program. The LSP study is aimed at the specialized vocabulary from a given field of study, reading and listening to authentic texts, working with specialized articles, as well as writing specialized texts. The subject Communication expands on the acquired skills in the subject *Special Language I*. It is aimed at communication in the situations which students may encounter in their future professional lives, such as conference programs, management of various events, discussions, case studies from the field of marketing, etc. Within the subject of Business Communication, students familiarize themselves with verbal and non-verbal communications in negotiations, they learn various negotiation tactics necessary for successful business deals, and they also become familiar with cultural differences in international negotiation backgrounds. The aim of the subject Business Presentations is to teach students some regularities and conventions regarding academic writing (selection of topics, pre-research, methods in terms of preparation for writing, structure of academic texts, etc.) as well as techniques related to writing and presentations (Holubeková – Moravcová – Klimentová, 2010. pp.196 - 198).

Communication is an important part of daily life. Even when we are completely alone, we are communicating with ourselves and, in a certain way, with other people. Our success in a career, position, or organization will depend greatly on our ability to communicate. Business people will have to spend far more time communicating. All relationships with other people are built on communication (Maďarová, 2011, p. 189).

The organization of ESP conferences aimed at the Language for Specific Purposes has the increasing tendency in order to involve information and communication technologies into the ESP education process, which means innovative education in courses using CALL and e-learning (Kučírková, 2010, p. 29).

Material and Methods

The goal of our research was monitoring of the exam results of the group of 156 students of economic and agrarian sciences of the Slovak Agricultural University in

Nitra. They were challenged, within their language UNlcert®, level III (C1) exam, to write their projects on various specialized topics, to prepare and perform their presentations, which were followed by discussions on the given topics completely in the English or German languages which they had studied. This monitoring was done during the years 2007 – 2010. As stated before, 156 students took the exam and our goal was to evaluate their final results.

We chose the following methodological procedure in order to achieve the stated goal:

- To monitor those students who in the observed period of the four stated years took the UNlcert® C1 exam from the English and German languages;
- Based on the monitoring, to perform the classification analysis of the grades received from both English and German languages within the first and second exam terms ;
- To compare the achieved results, to evaluate them and to elaborate the corresponding graphs and tables;
- Out of the available results, to define problems regarding working with specific literature, writing specific articles and their presentation, as well as to correctly perceive the diagnosed problems.

We evaluated the achieved results, compared them with one another according to individual parts of the exam and according to total classification. Our detailed mathematic-statistical data processing was done in the statistical programme – SAS Version 9.1. We have used the multifactor analysis of variance with testing the contrasts by means of the Fisher LSD test (Moravcová, 2012).

Results

1. Project Presentation

By the act of "presentation" we mean the text which is briefly modified and processed by the students in writing. In the larger sense it is a message encoded by the student, a sender, and verbally transmitted to the receiver (teachers, audience) through the verbal communication channel (by means of words), who has to decode it. The visual support is usually realized in the form of Power point.

Presentations became part of everyday life in many professions and they are more and more frequently performed in the foreign language. A presentation is one of the social-communication skills (soft skills) which was verified by the needs analysis of the goal professional background as „very important“. After the initial distrust and even aversion of students, there are very positive feedbacks regarding this activity. It must be "managed" though, as it cannot be accomplished at the expense of other curricula activities. It has to have clear rules, and a student must get a feedback. It is considered ideal if outcomes are part of the student's portfolio, which actually forms the continual evaluation (Miština, 2010, pp. 50 - 51).

One of the priorities of foreign language education at colleges and universities is to teach students how to correctly present the topics, which requires an adequate foreign language command. The presentation seminars are oriented at:

- a) Language preparedness of the presenter,
- b) Posture, the way the presenter appears, as well as the presentation itself,
- c) Psychological preparedness of the presenter.

The project presentation is highly focussed on various specializations and provides us with evidence about the student’s preparedness, as well as his/her independent, fluent, and grammatically correct speech. A student presenting a project of the special character answers the questions and argues about the issue, which makes him/her use a particular technique of the compensatory verbalization, which means to substitute unknown lexical units with synonyms or adequate descriptions. All the named aspects are evaluated during the project presentation, which is, as stated before, aimed at the student’s particular field of study. The project extent is minimally ten pages.

We have found out the statistical provability of the monitored group of 156 students in the exam part of the project presentation between the years 2007 and 2008, 2007 and 2010, 2009 and 2010 (Table 1). The worst results were recorded in 2007.

Table 1: Project Presentation

Contrast	Pr > Diff	Significant
2007 vs 2008	0.028	Yes
2007 vs 2010	0.022	Yes
2007 vs 2009	0.074	No
2009 vs 2008	0.188	No
2009 vs 2010	0.039	Yes
2010 vs 2008	0.843	No

Figure 1 shows 9 participants (6.43 %) failed in the first term, while all the participants passed the exam in the second term. Even 76.28 % of the participants (in both terms) achieved the marks from A-1 to C – 2, which we consider good.

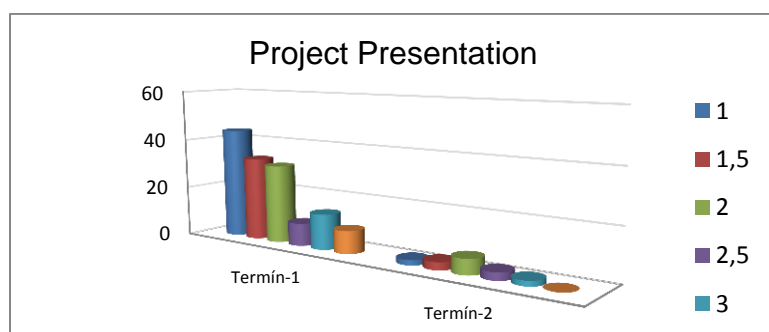


Figure 1: Project Presentation

Comparing the English and German languages we found in this part of the exam statistically provable worse results in the German language (Table 2).

Table 2: Project Presentation. Comparison of the English and German Languages.

Contrast	Pr > Diff	Significant
NJ vs AJ	0.020	Yes

Legend: NJ – German Language, AJ – English Language

2. Discussion to the Project Defence

In the final discussion of the project defence we have evaluated individual parts of the verbal interaction. We were observing the speech fluency, spontaneosness of the verbal interaction, the range of vocabulary, ability to understand the authentic language of the specific character, ability to easily keep a discussion, as well as appropriate reactions and a persuasive defence of his or her formal position. We assume that the universal language competence is even more evident in a discussion, especially on the lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological and orthoepical levels (if we speak in terms of the language competences), or on the levels of the extent, accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence (if we speak in terms of the quality aspects of the verbal demonstration).

In this analysis, we have also recorded statistically provable differences between the year 2007 and other years (Table 3). In terms of classification, the year 2007 was evidently the weakest one. The classification was relatively balanced in the other observed years.

Table 3: Discussion to the Project Defence

Contrast	Pr > Diff	Significant
2007 vs 2008	0.008	Yes
2007 vs 2010	0.009	Yes
2007 vs 2009	0.026	Yes
2009 vs 2008	0.157	No
2009 vs 2010	0.088	No
2010 vs 2008	0.624	No

Figure 2 shows a discussion to the project defence. The participants showed also in this part of the exam relatively good communication skills. We recorded in students who took the exam in the first term more than a half of evaluations from A-1 to B – 1.5 (64.29 %). In the second term, grading D-2.5 mostly prevailed.

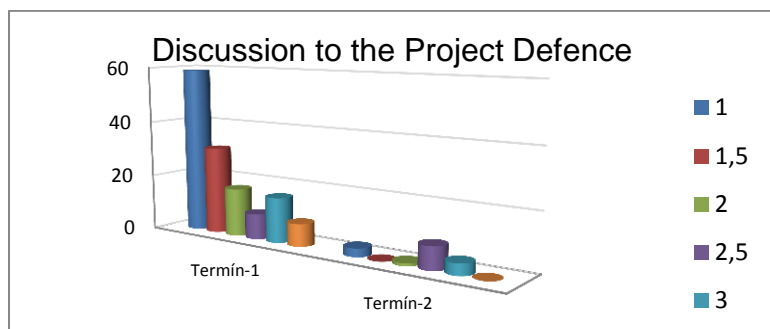


Figure 2: Discussion to the Project Defence

We recorded a statistical provability in the classification between the English and German languages (Table 4), where English language was recorded better marks as it was in the case before.

Table 4: Discussion to the Project Defence. Comparison of the English and German Languages.

Contrast	Pr > Diff	Significant
NJ vs AJ	< 0.0001	Yes

Legend: NJ – German Language, AJ – English Language

We expected the examined students to have serious problems in the process of discussion evaluation, especially in terms of their ability to immediately react to the questions related to their projects. They were not supposed to have any time for preparation. However, we were positively surprised to see students didn't underestimate the discussion and they had studied the necessary materials regarding their presented projects.

We can affirm our statement that it is necessary to be aimed at students' specializations as well as purposeful development of their language skills from the viewpoint of their perspective professional placements. It often happens that if selecting potential candidates for the jobs, some qualification, particular specialized and managerial experiences, as well as the language skills are often taken into account.

E-learning has become priority of the current dynamic education. We can discover over and over brand new virtual backgrounds where users can educate themselves, mutually exchange their experience and in such a way expand their knowledge. Foreign language course makers integrate various texts and exercises in their units enabling learners a certain kind of self-evaluation, animation, sound records, and video sequences in order to get involved most of the learners' senses. Individual chapters consist of the information units and they are gradually introduced to the learners in adequate parts. LMS Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) also belongs to the virtual education background designed to support full-time, but also distant and extramural forms of education through the online courses.

The Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra makes use of the electronic learning management system (e-learning, LMS) MOODLE in an effort to improve the quality of language education. At present, university students can choose from a few foreign language courses. One of them is the special course for doctoral students offered by the University in the German language. The course is designed for the third stage of all the faculties of the Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra and it is aimed at writing and presenting the scientific papers. Doctoral students analyse some partial research results of their doctoral theses implementing them into scientific papers in the final phase of the course. In general, doctoral students improve the following skills: studying specialized literature, reading and translation of the specialized texts, writing specialized articles, working with visuals, graph,- table,- and picture descriptions, preparation of presentations and presenting them in public (Figure 3).

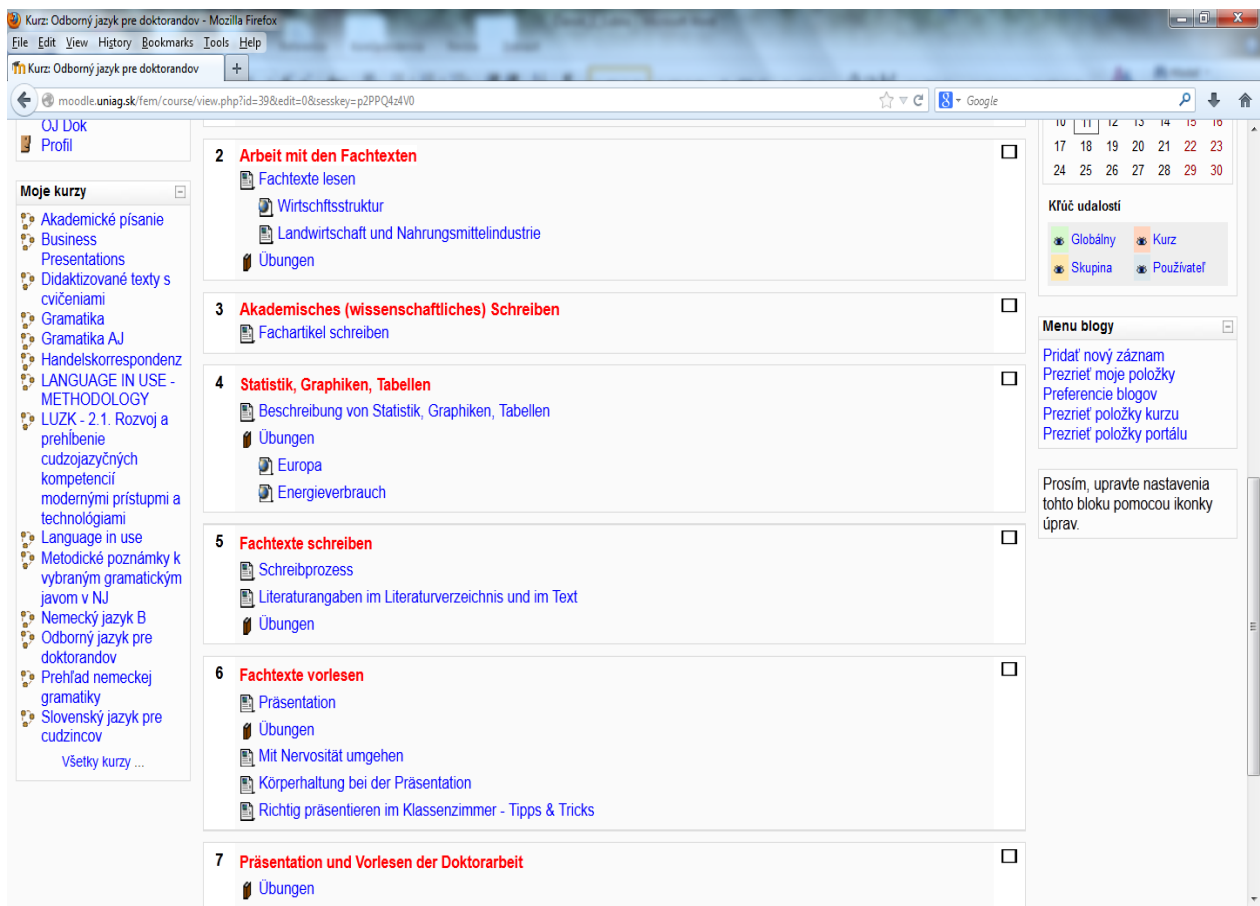


Figure 3: Language for Specific Purposes for Doctoral Students in the LMS MOODLE Education Background

We agree with Eliášová (2012, p. 61) that if preparing a written or oral draft of an article, it is important to start from one's own personal preferences. It is important to aim at such a field of study which is going to be a long-term subject matter of the author's interest. It might also engage the interest of the author if he/she wanted to learn more about it.

Because report from one's own research is an obligatory part of the final written exam, students should pay enough attention to their research work in their oral presentations. It can be done through a short summary of the basic research results illustrating the core topic or through a more complex overview of the results with their sufficient interpretation.

Conclusion

The major role of the foreign language education of the future graduates from the Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra is to prepare professionals with a good command of the foreign language who will be competent in the world market. It is also important that design of the language syllabus refers the content of individual subjects, which is part of the accreditation process of the correspondent language program. During their study, future graduates from the Agricultural University in Nitra are permanently motivated to study foreign languages to be ready to show competence in their future professional work. They are aware of the fact that being good in one's profession means following the news consistently, studying the newest forms of research, reading professional literature, writing specialized articles, presenting them in front of scientists, as well as leading research teams.

Foreign language education at the Slovak Agricultural University is aimed at the language for specific purposes with the goal to teach students to work with specialized literature and to familiarize them with the lexical terminology of their chosen fields of study. They are to learn how to write and present their own scientific articles. Project presentations in the chosen language of study are specially oriented to enhance and emphasize students preparedness, fluency and grammatically correct presentation ability.

Based on the hypothesis regarding the evaluation results, we followed the aim that there would be differences between the project presentations and discussions. Our hypothesis was not confirmed as the students from both parts of the exam have shown the same average (Table 5).

Table 5: Total Classification

Variable	Observations	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Std. Deviation
Project Presentation	156	1.000	4.000	1.8	0.828
Discussion to the Project	156	1.000	4.000	1.8	0.876

We have come to conclusion (from the achieved results) that even though our University students come from elementary and high schools with some basic command of the foreign language, the primary task of our University foreign language education is to educate the future professional experts who will be able to easily orient themselves in

the world market. We see this guarantee - to acquire high quality foreign language competence - in the direct proportion: a student's effort ↔ motivation ↔ a qualified educator.

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