

Savka Blagojević*

Faculty of Philosophy
University of Niš, Serbia
savka.blagojevic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

ORIGINAL TEXTS AS AUTHENTIC ESP TEACHING MATERIAL – THE CASE OF PHILOSOPHY

Abstract

The idea of using authentic language material in teaching a foreign language is generally approved by the vast majority of language teachers, especially in teaching ESP, where it is hoped to be used for achieving a 'real-life communicative purpose' (Lee, 1995: 324). However, if this material is to be used effectively it has to be carefully chosen in order to be relevant to students' actual and anticipated needs and interests. Also, it has to be accompanied by authentic classroom activities in order to raise students' motivation. This paper offers an example of how to deal with authentic teaching material, in this case with original texts in philosophy. It gives some suggestions as to how to design an ESP coursebook for students of philosophy, the criteria that should be applied in text selection, and authentic learning tasks which should accompany the original texts in order to enhance their authenticity.

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Key words

authentic language material, ESP coursebook, philosophy, university level.

* Corresponding address: Savka Blagojević, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Nišu, Ćirila i Metodija 2, 18000 Niš, Srbija.

Sažetak

Upotrebu autentičnog jezičkog materijala u nastavi stranog jezika uglavnom odobrava najveći broj nastavnika jezika, posebno u nastavi engleskog jezika struke, gde vlada uverenje da će se takav materijal upotrebiti za ostvarenje "komunikativne namere u stvarnom životu" (Lee, 1995: 324). Međutim, da bi se ovakav materijal efikasno koristio, mora se pažljivo izabrati kako bi bio relevantan za trenutne i očekivane potrebe i interesovanja studenata. Isto tako, autentičan materijal moraju pratiti autentične aktivnosti u učionici zarad povećanja motivacije studenata. U radu predstavljamo jedan način upotrebe autentičnog nastavnog materijala, u ovom slučaju, izvornih tekstova iz filozofije. Cilj rada je da se daju određeni predlozi u vezi sa sastavljanjem udžbenika na engleskom jeziku za studente filozofije, kriterijuma koje je potrebno primeniti pri izboru tekstova, kao i autentičnim nastavnim aktivnostima koje bi pratile izvorne tekstove i doprinele njihovoj autentičnosti.

Ključne reči

autentični jezički materijal, udžbenik engleskog jezika struke, filozofija, univerzitetski nivo.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although the idea of using authentic language material in teaching a foreign language is generally approved by the vast majority of foreign language teachers, there is still some hesitation when it comes to its application in the classroom. Teachers are often reluctant to use authentic teaching material for several reasons. Firstly, using these texts relates too much to the cultural and situational background. Secondly, this material constantly requires extensive explanations that may hinder or slowdown the pace of a planned language class, which is a significant element of a tightly packed syllabus. This is especially true of ESP courses at university level, where time constraints exert additional pressure on ESP teachers. Teachers struggle to find the best way to achieve the course objectives in the set time frame. On the other hand, the nature of these courses requires the use of authentic teaching material. It is the 'real life' material which prepares students for performing their professional tasks.

Authentic teaching material can be viewed from different aspects, but this paper will discuss only one of them, the use of original texts and their application in teaching ESP to students of philosophy. The ultimate aim of the paper is to show

that even highly demanding texts (in terms of their language complexity and the intellectual requirements that have to be met to understand them), such as philosophy texts, can be successfully applied in teaching ESP.

However, before giving examples to support this claim and offering some suggestions as to how to design a coursebook made up of original texts, we discuss the very idea of achieving authenticity in foreign language courses, with a special reference to its importance for ESP courses.

2. AUTHENTICITY AND AUTHENTIC MATERIAL IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

It is assumed that achieving authenticity in the classroom makes an important segment of modern language teaching. However, a bone of contention among language teachers is the language learners' level and the age at which authentic language material should be introduced into the classroom in order to achieve the best results. So, while Kilickaya (2004) and Kim (2000) think that authentic material can be used only with upper intermediate and advanced language learners, that is, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, at B1 and C1 levels, other methodologists (McNeill, 1994; Miller, 2005) believe that it can also be introduced to lower level language learners. This can be justified by the flexibility of language tasks, which could be successfully adapted to learners at any level, including beginners. Thus, for example, Richards and Rodgers (2001) suggest that beginners in learning foreign languages may even use newspaper reports as authentic language material. Learners may listen to them or read them in order to, for example, identify the names of countries or towns, or of well-known people. On the other hand, the same material can be used to encourage advanced language learners to perform highly challenging tasks, such as interpreting, summarising or giving opinions about the information conveyed by the texts.

An authentic language sample can be successfully selected out of a variety of the 'real life', materials which communicate messages of different kinds, content, length, and have different aims and purposes, and then they can be used for pedagogical purposes, i.e. for foreign language teaching. This very statement, however, contains an apparent contradiction, since authentic language material is commonly defined as "texts produced by native speakers for a non-pedagogical purpose" (Bacon & Finnemann, 1990), or "as the material which has not been especially designed for language teaching, but produced for purposes other than to teach language" (Nunan, 1988: 99). This 'controversy' poses the question as to whether authentic material ceases to be authentic the moment it is brought into the classroom, or as Chavez (1998) puts it, whether it becomes less authentic if taken out of its original context and removed from the audience it is aimed at. The

next question is whether authentic material remains to be authentic, only if it is used in the way which is not authentic and does not reflect the real language use, but just imitates it. For this reason, the question of authenticity, as some authors suggest (Pérez Cañado & Almargo Esteban, 2005), includes both the question of the use of authentic language material and that of the organisation of teaching activities which require authentic language tasks.

Without further elaboration and discussion whether authentic materials are only those which belong to the real world and are designed to meet its demands, and not the ones used in a classroom, we shall focus on the language teaching material which comprises authentic texts that have not been written to make up a teaching sample which will be the subject of certain language analyses. These texts are not either simplified to be easily understood, or organised to suit grammar and lexical exercises. They are sometimes called 'genuine texts' (Widdowson, 1998) because of their characteristics, while their use in language teaching is not necessarily authentic and depends on the given circumstances and situations.¹ In this paper, the term 'genuine texts' will be used to signify the original texts which could be successfully used in a language classroom as authentic teaching material, provided they communicate with their recipients in an authentic way, and are used for a "real-life communicative purpose", as Lee (1995: 324) puts it. In our case, it means that these texts are used in the same way similar texts written in students' mother tongue are used to present the subject matter of their academic discipline, within "their own community" (Widdowson, 1998). The texts under consideration are original, i.e. genuine texts written by British and American philosophers, selected as teaching material and collected in a coursebook for students of philosophy at bachelor and master's degrees.² Before we explain the way they can be successfully used in teaching university students, we shall discuss the types of authenticity which are possible to identify in a language classroom.

When explaining language authenticity, some language teaching methodologists focus their attention solely on authentic language material. Thus, Rogers and Medley (1988) describe authenticity in terms of language samples – both oral and written – that reflect the naturalness of form, and appropriateness of cultural and situational context. On the other hand, Widdowson (1983: 30) insists on the idea that authenticity in language teaching means attaining "[...] the communicative activity of the language use, [...] the engagement of interpretative procedures for making sense, even if these procedures are operating on and with textual data which are not authentic in the first sense." Bearing in mind both attitudes towards authentic language material and its use for teaching purposes, in

¹ Widdowson (1979; cf. 1998) refers to these texts as possessing "genuineness" – a characteristic of the text or the material itself – and he claims that this is distinct from "authenticity" which refers to the uses to which texts are put. So the claim here is that texts themselves can actually be intrinsically "genuine" but that authenticity itself is a social construct.

² The selection of the texts for the above-mentioned coursebook has been made and the coursebook itself has been designed by the author of this paper (see Blagojević, 2008).

this paper the notion of ‘authenticity in teaching foreign languages’ will be regarded as an integrative use of original texts and the language learning tasks which enable their successful application in language learning.

The idea that authenticity in language teaching refers both to authentic material and the way it is incorporated into the language classroom is strongly supported by Breen (1985) who specifies four types of authenticity in language learning, stressing their close interrelations.³

The concept of authenticity thus explained does not regard language classroom as the place which deprives authentic learning material of its authenticity; on the contrary – it makes it valid and purposeful (Pérez Cañado & Almargo Esteban, 2005). What encourages the use of authentic materials in ESP courses is this approach to authenticity, which can be described as an integrative approach to language teaching, in which an authentic interpretation of the given language material plays a significant role. This is a specific kind of a language course, because language learners are much more interested in the *content* presented in language than in *language forms* themselves (Wegener, 2008). Learners should also possess a certain degree of knowledge of a foreign language. However, the prior knowledge of their subject matter is even more important.

3. AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE MATERIAL IN TEACHING ESP

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The use of original texts, without being simplified and adapted in order to serve language learning purposes, has always been considered an important constituent of ESP courses. Long (2007: 121) remarks that, unfortunately, “texts in language teaching materials bear little resemblance to the genuine target discourse samples learners encounter in the world outside classrooms”, and that “every study in which language teaching materials – even supposedly LSP materials – and genuine texts have been compared has found the former to be unrepresentative in important ways”. That is why he sees the use of genuine (authentic) texts a crucial component in teaching ESP.

Wegener (2008: 137) enumerates three functions of authentic texts in teaching ESP:

First, inviting authentic materials from the learners’ work environment to the classroom the teacher offers assistance (...). Second, the ESP teacher always looks for texts that are as close to the learners’ target situations in their jobs as

³ They are the following: (1) authenticity of text used as *input data* for learners and it refers to the *quality* of the text in consideration; (2) authenticity of the learners’ own interpretation of such texts; (3) authenticity of the tasks conducive to language learning; and (4) authenticity of the actual social situation in the classroom.

possible (...). Third, authentic texts serve as sources of information for the teacher and may already be collected during the needs analysis period.

However, as mentioned earlier, language teachers are somehow reluctant to use the authentic texts written by professionals and experts and intended for other professionals and experts.

According to Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) there are arguments *for* and *against* the use of such texts. The use of authentic texts in ESP courses is justified on the assumption that simplified or adapted, unlike the 'real life' material, non-authentic texts which are constructed solely for language teaching purposes cannot provide the material appropriate for the classroom. Simplified texts are often deprived of their original and subtle meanings and cannot adequately prepare language learners to face real-world situations. On the other hand, every authentic text is not inevitably authentic for any language class or any group of language learners, or better to say, the very authenticity of a text does not automatically make it relevant to every language situation. Another argument against the use of authentic texts is that they can be more harmful than useful to language learners because they are often written in a language far too complex for foreign language students.

Gilmore (2007) emphasises another characteristic of the language complexity of authentic texts used in ESP courses: as authentic texts reflect the real-life language, they contain a great diversity of grammatical and lexical elements, which means that they are much more abundant in language forms than the texts constructed for language teaching purposes. However, from a language teacher's point of view, such an abundance in linguistic devices may be considered a disadvantage. The language elements are less frequently repeated in this language sample than in the texts designed for language teaching courses, in which the elements planned to be taught are repeated several times in order to be easily recognised by language learners. Those who support the idea of using authentic texts in ESP courses can easily turn this situation to their advantage. Thus, Torregrosa Benavent and Sánchez-Reyes Peñamaría (2011) suggest that teachers should expose their students to a great number of short authentic texts instead of exposing them to longer passages. They believe that the quantity of texts will provide a high enough level of frequency of the language elements aimed to be taught in the classroom and will help students recognise them. This is generally known as the prerequisite and the first stage in acquiring foreign language elements. This means that ESP teachers should offer their students not only authentic language texts which are relevant to them in the sense that their content suits the subject matter of their studies, but they also have to provide a variety of short authentic texts which will allow their students to recognise and remember the lexis and structures easily.

When dealing with authentic texts in ESP courses, it is important not to neglect teaching principles (Widdowson, 1979). Disregarding these principles may

lessen the effect of using authentic material in the classroom, since every authentic text does not automatically produce an adequate, authentic reaction in every situation. Teachers, who are not experts in students' subject matter and often face the problem of how to present the material in a foreign language (Hutchison & Waters, 1982: 56–57), should bear this in mind when teaching ESP courses. Methodologists who support the use of authentic texts in ESP courses suggest as a solution to this problem the collaboration between ESP students and their teachers. The collaboration will be aimed at selecting authentic texts according to students' choice and preferences. This activity should result in establishing the proper interaction between students and teaching material, even when such material is primarily used for presenting vocabulary and grammar (Clarke, 1989). It is clear that the selection of adequate ESP material is a time-consuming activity. Also, collecting and arranging this material into a coursebook requires both patience and skill. In the part of the paper that follows we shall deal with the complexity of this process by discussing authentic texts and their use in teaching students of philosophy.

4. THE USE OF AUTHENTIC TEXTS IN TEACHING ESP TO PHILOSOPHY STUDENTS

Authentic texts in teaching ESP are used in the group of language learners of the same age and who are, more or less, at the, same level of prior language knowledge. However, these texts have some specific features, conditioned both by the academic discipline to which they belong and by particular language course objectives they have to meet. As for ESP course objectives for students of philosophy, they may be described as following: first to master the basic philosophical discourse in English in order to be able to improve further the knowledge of that discourse. These objectives can be reached only by using authentic philosophy texts, not adapted as to be used in language teaching, since this is not the intention of their creators. As expected, the texts selected for an English coursebook for students of philosophy have to be written by well-known philosophers from English-speaking countries.

The coursebook under consideration differs from the coursebooks intended for teaching general English, the ones which are commonly thought to be the least authentic among coursebooks, since they are, according to Sweeny (2006: 4), "just the products of combined ideas and technical skills of their authors and editors, comprising just few language inputs introduced by language experts, invited to give their contributions in coursebook design". This coursebook does not only contain original texts, but authentic types of learners' tasks as well, which will enable the authentic use of these texts.

In order to make an adequate and purposeful selection of the texts which are to be included in an ESP coursebook, it is necessary, first, to undertake several analyses which will help us start this process:

1. The needs analysis of students' particular academic discipline, which includes students' both actual and anticipated needs, adjusted to the general and specific objectives of an ESP course;
2. The analysis of students' prior knowledge of a language;
3. The analysis of students' prior knowledge of a discipline.

The selection of texts and their use in teaching ESP to philosophy students are based on two assumptions: 1) students have reached a high enough level of English grammar, that is, linguistic competence, and 2) students are able to understand language expressions necessary to have a conversation on general topics. The role of these texts is to assist students to activate the language competence which they already possess. It also enables them to relate their newly acquired knowledge and language experience, which are relevant to their future profession, to those previously acquired while learning English for general purposes. We can assume that ESP philosophy coursebooks should not be considered only an effective means of learning a foreign language in isolation, or a vehicle solely intended for teaching students' subject matter in English. On the contrary, both of the learning aspects should be taken into consideration when establishing a successful communication between the texts as a teaching tool and ESP students as their active users. Only then does the content itself become more interesting and language difficulties successfully handled.

The process of text selection for a philosophy coursebook should be performed in several stages, which would include an ESP teacher:

1. Collecting a great number of texts, taking into consideration the opinions and suggestions of other ESP teachers, especially those with a substantial experience in this issue;
2. Selecting an adequate number of texts out of the collected ones, taking into consideration their language complexity;
3. Arranging the selected texts in the following order: a) less difficult language elements precede more difficult ones; b) the elements students are familiar with precede those unknown to them; and c) more frequent language elements precede the less frequent ones.

When designing a coursebook, the problem that ESP teachers frequently face is whether the selected texts are relevant to the time when they are presented, i.e. the degree of their actuality (current importance) is often questioned. It is well known that some academic disciplines develop so rapidly that the texts which present current scientific research or prevalent opinion may easily become

outdated. This means that coursebooks have to be constantly updated with new texts which are in line with modern academic and discipline trends. The permanent need for text updating gives an important argument to ESP teachers who disapprove of the use of authentic texts in teaching ESP, because updating always requires additional funding. Fortunately, this problem concerns philosophy only to a minor extent, since this academic discipline uses original philosophical texts from different epochs in order to demonstrate a variety of philosophical thoughts throughout the history of humanity. Philosophy texts are said to be timeless and current at any moment in time. This fact makes the course designers' task easier in terms of the text selection. On the other hand, this very discipline imposes other demands on ESP teachers who are willing to use authentic philosophy texts as a language teaching material.

5. THE COURSEBOOK DESIGN

Philosophy is an academic discipline hard to understand when its content is presented in students' mother tongue, let alone in a foreign language. That is why it is not easy to decide what kind of texts to include in a coursebook: complex and mentally highly demanding original texts, or those which are adapted and simplified in order to become more accessible to non-English students.

In case an ESP teacher decides to include only original texts in the coursebook, he/she has to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent should the selected texts be in accordance with other curriculum subjects?
2. What concept to apply when designing a coursebook in order to enable students to understand authentic texts?
3. What authentic teaching activities should be used when introducing authentic texts in the syllabus?
4. What is the best way to motivate students to use authentic texts?

An academic discipline such as philosophy simply *imposes* the use of original texts. Otherwise, any adaptation or simplification of philosophy texts may turn out to be teacher's personal interpretation of the texts, so that one is never absolutely certain whether an abridged text presents the author's original attitudes and ideas, or just an individual interpretation. Another drawback of philosophy texts that are adapted for language teaching purposes is that they may lose some of their meanings which are important for establishing a certain point of view (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001: 182), thus leading us astray.

In order to enable students of philosophy to understand philosophy texts in English, it is essential that coursebook texts should comply with the content of other subjects of the curriculum. Prior knowledge of the subject matter often helps

ESP students understand these texts even better than native speakers who are not experts in the field (Mishan, 2005: 40). Students will understand complex philosophy texts much better if these texts are written by philosophers whose points of view students have already become familiar with in the philosophy courses in their mother tongue (e.g. History of Philosophy). If students have already been acquainted with certain philosophical ideas in their mother tongue, they will readily recognise them in English texts. This principle – to present the content in a foreign language only after it has been mentally processed in the mother tongue – is almost an imperative when selecting authentic texts from this specific academic discipline.

While designing an ESP philosophy coursebook, two groups of questions may be posed. The first group refers to designing the coursebook to meet the methodological requirements which will help students to understand complex philosophy texts and further develop their language skills. The second group focuses on the way language tasks are organised so as to correspond to authentic language activities and lead to a better understanding of original philosophy texts.

A possible solution that can contribute to understanding philosophy texts is to offer students a list of unfamiliar words and expressions crucial for text comprehension *before* the actual text is presented. The explanation of these words and expressions should be in English, and students may refer to this list while reading the text as well as after they have completed their reading. Besides, each text should be accompanied by some additional information about the text itself, such as a short biography of the author of the text, or about the philosophical movement to which his/her ideas belong, etc. If there are some metaphors or references to mythology (very common stylistic devices in philosophy texts), short explanations should be added to the original text in a section of the coursebook which may be conveniently called *Notes and commentary*.

The significant components of this type of coursebooks are designing and introducing some technical devices which will enable students to check on their own comprehension. In the coursebook under consideration, this is done by means of offering the students two types of questions (general and specific ones). The number in brackets shows the students which line in the text contains the correct answer to the question. The number of the lines in the body of the text is also indicated on the margins (every fifth line), so that this technical device helps students easily orient themselves through the text and compare their own answers to those given in the text. The coursebook should encourage language activities which are focused on the development of language skills, relevant for mastering English for specific purposes, such as: 1) reading comprehension skills, 2) translation skills, which include translation from English into the mother tongue and vice versa, and 3) oral and written text summarising skills.

It is important to develop the previously mentioned language skills and teaching activities aimed at practising the specific philosophy terminology by means of synonyms, antonyms and translation (a variety of activities is

commendable). But, it is also important to include the so-called authentic ESP activities. When it comes to teaching philosophy students, this means to encourage students to comprehend and interpret the philosophical attitudes and thoughts they find in original texts in English, as well as to enable them to express their personal opinions after they have read and interpreted these texts. These activities should be in line with the activities which are used in the process of acquiring the subject matter in their mother tongue, i.e. activities commonly done in teaching philosophy as an academic discipline, such as making inferences through reading, summarising the text after it has been read, analysing and interpreting, and oral and/or written summary presentation.

Although all these activities are important, the first one – making inferences through reading, is especially important to philosophy texts, since the understanding of these texts implies the ability to make relevant conclusions based on several parts of the text and their logical combination. This activity commonly relies on both the previous knowledge of language and of the subject matter. It is a well-known fact that making inferences is by itself a highly demanding and complex mental activity which requires an appropriate level of cognitive and intellectual maturity.

Bringing authentic materials into the ESP classroom can be highly motivating for students, as it enriches their learning experience, but only if this material is directly relevant to the students' academic discipline. Authentic material is important to philosophy students because it motivates them to study by exposing them to the 'real' language, which is, in this case, the language of philosophers themselves. However, if the use of these texts is not accompanied by appropriate authentic tasks, its overall learning effect is a poor one. The choice of texts that 'enter' the classroom is another question. As mentioned earlier, the cooperation between the ESP teacher and subject matter teachers is significant, but the cooperation between the ESP teacher and his/her students is equally important (Hyland, 2007: 91). Experience has shown that philosophy students, especially graduate ones, can offer their ESP teachers some useful information about the philosophical topics which are interesting to interpret and discuss. The right selection of philosophy texts can significantly raise students' motivation and their enthusiasm to face complex philosophy texts. The best way to increase students' motivation is to make them aware of the fact that authentic texts in the classroom will give them the opportunity to learn philosophical discourse and vocabulary and the opportunity to learn about the thoughts, beliefs and attitudes of a certain philosopher in a direct way, i.e. in the author's mother tongue, not indirectly, through translations done by the professionals.⁴

It is a well-known fact that students are truly motivated to study only if teaching material constantly addresses their needs. This in fact means that studying complex philosophy texts in English gradually becomes easier if students

⁴ Unfortunately, the translations of philosophy texts into Serbian are often clumsy and of poor quality, thus not very stimulating for students to read.

understand the purpose of their studying as well as of the teaching material, if they recognise as the same the topics taught in the language course and the ones that are taught in other academic courses. The mastering of the texts in the coursebook may become an important incentive for students' further work outside the classroom, after they have graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy. Extensive reading of longer philosophy texts in English which students choose according to their own interests may indisputably improve their knowledge of the subject matter, but at the same time may enrich their knowledge of English as well.

6. CONCLUSION

An important component of teaching ESP is the introduction of authentic teaching material to the classroom. In teaching ESP, the use of authentic material implies reading, comprehension and interpretation of the texts which are written by native speakers for non-pedagogical purposes. Since original texts may be highly complex and intellectually demanding, as is the case with philosophy texts, in this paper an attempt has been made to show that this kind of texts can be successfully used in teaching English to philosophy students. In order to achieve this, an adequate and purposeful selection of philosophy texts should be based on both students' previous knowledge of language and discipline and students' current and future professional needs. The selection of texts and their application in teaching ESP are based on the assumptions that students have reached an appropriate level of both linguistic and communicative competence, so that these texts may activate their already acquired competences and relate them to the newly-acquired knowledge and language experience which are relevant to their future profession. The next question that the paper addresses is the design of an adequate coursebook for philosophy students. This coursebook should facilitate the understanding of complex texts and help further development of language skills by performing the language tasks which correspond to authentic language activities. In turn, these activities should lead to a better understanding of original texts. The entire coursebook should encourage language activities which will help the development of reading comprehension skills, translation skill (translation from English to the mother tongue and vice versa), and oral and written text summarising skills. The right selection of authentic philosophy texts in a coursebook can significantly increase students' motivation and raise their awareness that these texts offer an opportunity to learn the discourse and vocabulary directly relevant to them, and that these texts, at the same time, address their professional needs. This may give incentive to students to work outside the classroom, to do extensive reading of longer philosophy texts in English which may improve both the knowledge of the subject matter and the language they study.

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SAVKA BLAGOJEVIĆ is Full Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, where she teaches ESP and academic writing at the departments of philosophy, pedagogy and sociology. Her main research interests are cross-cultural differences in academic writing (with an emphasis on metadiscourse) and ELT methodology. She has published more than fifty academic papers and three monographs: *Metadiskurs u akademskom diskursu* [Metadiscourse in academic discourse] (2008), *O engleskom i srpskom akademskom diskursu* [On English and Serbian academic discourse] (2012), and *Strani jezik na tercijarnom stepenu obrazovanja* [Foreign languages in tertiary education]. Also, she has published one ESP coursebook, *English for students of philosophy* (2008). At present, she is the head of the Centre for Foreign Languages, which is responsible for organising ESP courses at the Faculty.