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ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНОГО ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ (ВЛАДЕНИЕ ЯЗЫКОМ СТУДЕНТАМИ)

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LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF EMI (STUDENTS' LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY)

Аннотация. В работе анализируются вопросы разработки требований к уровню владения английским языком и отбора студентов для обучения на англоязычном отделении, а также способов оценки их языковой компетентности. Описаны способы дальнейшего совершенствования языковой подготовки студентов в процессе обучения в университете.

Ключевые слова: англоязычное преподавание, студенты англоязычного отделения, уровень владения английским языком, оценка языковой подготовки студентов, совершенствование языковой подготовки студентов.

Abstract. The issues of developing the requirements to the English language proficiency and selection of students for English medium instruction, the ways to assess their English language proficiency are analyzed. The methods to further improve the language proficiency of the EMI students in the process of university training are described.

Keywords: English medium instruction, EMI students, English language proficiency, assessment of the students' English language proficiency, improvement of the students' English language proficiency.

Internationalization and globalization of all aspects of the life in the contemporary world, increased mobility, as well as strengthening of the international status of the English language and its use as a lingua franca are reflected in the development of the higher education system: the recent decades have been marked by the emergence and dynamic development of English medium instruction, which,

depending on the country, can be intended for both international and national students and include teaching individual disciplines as well as the entire academic program.

The term “English medium instruction” (“EMI”) does not refer to the long-established higher education systems such as those in the United Kingdom, the United States and other countries where English is the native language of the country's population. This is a completely new form of education, born of contemporary conditions. This term is defined as “The use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” [1, p. 2].

Despite the popularity and high rates of spread of this form of education everywhere, its clear advantages both for the students and universities, on the one hand, and for the development of education and science in the world, on the other hand, many of the problems outlined earlier [2, p. 38], have not been investigated in detail. Since, as can be seen from the above definition of J. Dearden, the concept of English medium instruction refers to the countries where English is the second or foreign language, the most difficult questions are related, one way or the other, to the level of the English language proficiency of all parties of this teaching and learning process.

The recent publications on EMI cover in detail the issues of requirements (including language) for the teachers who apply to teach in English, but less attention is paid to the issues of English language proficiency of the students.

In this paper, we will focus on the analysis of the issues of determining the level of the English language proficiency when selecting the students for EMI, as well as improving the level of their English proficiency by the example of the experience of training future doctors and dentists at Kharkiv National Medical University (Ukraine).

The first step in selection of the future EMI students is to formulate the requirements for their language proficiency. We do not exclude that such requirements may be specific, that is, depend on the majoring field of the future students, and will be determined by the forms and methods used to teach students of a particular profession, therefore our experience may differ from the experience of the universities teaching the students of other majors. Thus, training the students of medicine and dentistry involves doing certain groups of disciplines: humanities, natural sciences (also known as preclinical training), clinical sciences (clinical training). The forms of teaching are lectures, seminars, and practical classes. The prerequisite of preclinical training is doing the courses of natural sciences and humanities in the scope of secondary school curriculum. Therefore, the requirements for the language proficiency of the students should provide for the ability to understand oral lectures, large written texts of the textbooks (namely, texts on abstract and specific topics, including texts on preclinical training subjects), set down educational information orally and in writing, accessible and understandable for the interlocutor, to understand the language that concerns the learning process organization, living in a foreign country, etc. The rate of spontaneous oral speech of the future student should be quite high. His speaking skills should allow him to clearly and in detail convey the necessary information to the interlocutor without any

difficulty for the both. He must also understand lengthy, clear oral communications in literary English. Such requirements correspond to CEFR B level (independent user) [3]. This vision of the language proficiency of the applicants for EMI at Kharkiv National Medical University (KhNMU) was enshrined in the relevant university documents. The language items of these requirements include, in addition to the respective knowledge of general English, the knowledge of the particular characteristics of academic genres (e.g., lecture, textbook, abstract, oral presentation), the knowledge of the technical vocabulary of disciplines such as chemistry, biology, physics, anatomy at the secondary school level, as well as knowledge of the procedural vocabulary of these disciplines.

The respondents of the study described by J. Dearden [1] also expressed the opinion that the students need to be proficient in English at least at the B1 level. In the report on the results of the British Council study conducted in Ukraine, it was suggested that in this case, the use of English in the classroom, the use of compensation techniques, correction strategies, structuring, as well as textual and visual support will contribute to both the understanding of the educational material by students and increasing the level of their English proficiency [4, p. 43-44].

As for the methods of assessing the English language proficiency of the future students, there exist a number of approaches to it: in some countries it is required to pass one of the existing tests, for example TOEFL or TOEIC [5]. These ones and a number of other exams (e.g., IELTS, PTE Academic, Cambridge English FCE and CAE) are independent internationally recognized exams, they assess all types of speech activity using the CEFR criteria, thus providing an objective and clear understanding of the language proficiency of future students. However, their use is limited by not always satisfactory accessibility of testing centers, rare examination sessions, time limits of the certificate validity, the need to prepare in the format of the exam, preferably at the language schools specializing in training for the exams, which is frequently difficult for the school leavers, who in the last year of school spare a lot of time preparing for the national school-leaving exams. Our university encourages the EMI applicants to pass the international tests in English, but those who do not have such certificates have the opportunity to pass the entrance exam according to the program developed at the university [6]. The results of the entrance exams are analyzed annually, their format and content are revised. Long-term experience of our university has shown that such an exam reliably copes with the task of assessing the English language proficiency level of the EMI applicants at our university.

In the context of English medium instruction, concern for the quality of the English language of future specialists should not be limited to the admission procedures assessing the level of language proficiency, since the language of the field is acquired along with its conceptual component. Thus, EMI teachers of disciplines, without even realizing it, teach their students the language of their field (technical words, communicative genres, language use). Therefore, at a university that has an EMI program, the responsibility for mastering these aspects of the English language falls on the shoulders of the teachers of disciplines. The questions of English proficiency of an EMI teacher have been featured in detail in the literature. It is believed that in addition to the knowledge of general English, the teacher must know

the language for academic purposes, the language of his field, the language for organizing the classroom activities, as well as understand the language problems of his/her EMI students [7].

At KhNMU, the required level of the English language proficiency (general and professional) of the teachers is provided by the system of control of the English language skills of the teachers who apply for work with the EMI students, which was created in the early days of introduction of English medium instruction at the university, as well as English language classes for the teachers who are preparing to work with the EMI students, which have been conducted by the Department of Foreign Languages for almost 20 years. However, closely related to the linguistic competence, linguopragmatic, linguocultural, linguodidactic, pedagogical competences of the teachers require detailed investigation, which can provide new information necessary for EMI teachers training and selection.

The specific feature of the EMI students at KhNMU is that the students for whom English is their native language make up a small number of them (less than 1 per cent), for the majority of our international students English is a foreign language, which results in a number of linguistic problems of our students: levels B1-B2 are not the levels of a complete command of English. Insufficient knowledge of technical words within the framework of the secondary school curriculum as well as of the vocabulary in general, poor procedural vocabulary, insufficient productive skills, lack of learning skills in English, pronunciation of teachers are some of the problems they face from the first days of the university. All this slows down their adaptation to the new conditions, their entry into new learning conditions, and leads, in turn, to a decrease in the academic performance and loss of motivation. The course of English for the first-year students of medicine and dentistry, developed by the Department of Foreign Languages of KhNMU, helps to overcome such difficulties. Its peculiarity is that, unlike traditional courses in general English or ESP, it integrates the two above and a course of medical terminology (similar to that taught in medical colleges in the United States with the aim to acquaint the students with the rules of term building and analysis in the field of medicine). Thus, it is designed both for those for whom English is their first or second language, as well as those for whom it is a foreign language. This versatility is ensured by the novelty of the subject - English terminology - for all students, regardless of their language status. The course consists of three sections (general information about medical terminology, terminology by systems, clinical and pharmacological terminology) and is built on a systemic basis. Each unit contains certain terminological material necessary for assimilation, training exercises, tasks for independent work under the guidance of a teacher and out-of-class independent work. In addition, each unit includes the tasks performed both independently and under the guidance of a teacher, in order to improve the level of language proficiency, master the vocabulary of natural science disciplines in the scope of the school curriculum, and activate communication skills [8]. In addition, it can be supplemented with the tasks to improve grammar and language use, which are done by the students independently. In such a way, students' language skills are improved in the context of their future profession.

This course was highly appreciated by the students, who noted such positive aspects as the possibility to adapt to the language of medicine, understand medical terms, form a conscious approach to medical terminology and at the same time improve their knowledge of the English language. The students were also attracted by the fact that the classes are taught by the language teachers [9].

In conclusion, it should be noted that the question of the level of the students' English language proficiency necessary for successful completion of English medium instruction is still open [10]. In the literature on the EMI problems it is stated that in addition to the language skills, the knowledge of the field, skills and strategies of learning in the English language [11], the student's motivation [12] are also important for successful learning in English. It is emphasized that assessment the syllabus by the students and students' needs analysis should be practiced within English medium instruction [13]. The above demonstrates that the issues of English proficiency of the EMI applicants should be considered in the context of their motivation, the knowledge of the field and related sciences, their learning strategies, readiness to participate in formation and assessment of the programs and courses. Attention should also be paid to improving the student's English language proficiency both in the English language classroom and within the setting of preclinical subjects.

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