



Combining Content and Languages in Professional Foreign Language Courses at EASS

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Abstract

As an academy dedicated to training professionals who require some level of knowledge in a foreign language for their respective roles, the language teaching model at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS) employs diverse foreign language instruction approaches such as English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), and Integrated Content and Language in Higher Education (ICLHE). Language teaching at EASS is mostly coordinated and implemented by the EASS Language Centre, but some colleges also have a fixed language instructor position.

In our presentation, we share the best practices from our extensive experience and demonstrate how our language instruction system works. We provide examples from our integrated content and language lessons e.g. cases concerning breach of the peace, traffic stops, customs control, phone calls to emergency response centre.

Feedback from internship experience shows that students perceive ICLHE classes as highly beneficial and see their efficiency and potential in actual work situations. As students cannot be easily assessed by instructors during single ICLHE classes, their progress becoming rather intrinsically evident during their internship period is the most valuable feedback for such courses. In reality, it is the whole LSP agenda, and not only the ICLHE lessons that support students' ability to be involved in professional discourse in a professional way (Lasagabaster 2023).

The language learning model at the EASS is enhanced by these diverse language instruction methods, and also by content instructors and language professionals working in close collaboration. Such collaboration may initially pose challenges either because of differences in knowledge areas (Kletzebauer et al 2022), or poor communication. Feedback and experience from working with the different colleges (Police and Border Guard College, Rescue College, and Financial College) reveals that, similarly to students, professionals, in general, support ICLHE ideas and principles. There are misunderstandings and doubts, as have been expressed elsewhere were CLIL (content and language integrated lessons) systems have been used (Arno-Maciá, Elisabet and Guzman Mancho-Barés 2015) but overcoming them eventually improves the whole language learning system.

Keywords: CLIL, LSP, ICLHE, EMI, feedback

1. Foreign Language Instruction for Public Safety and Internal Security Students at EASS

EASS is unique in providing education for professionals of different areas of public safety under one roof. We teach police officers, rescue service, prison service, tax and customs, and also have an MA programme for security studies. The foreign language system is designed, first of all, to meet the requirements of our partners and the students' future employers: Police and Border Guard Board, Tax and Customs Board, Rescue Board, Estonian Prison and Probation Service. Their needs differ slightly, as do their requirements, for example, some EASS colleges do not have courses in Russian and some need Russian so much that they have their own language instructors. Otherwise, most of our foreign language instruction is coordinated by the EASS Language Centre.

Our foreign language learning model has been revised over the years and now includes general language courses, specialised language courses, tandem learning, integrated content and language lessons, and English as the medium of instruction.

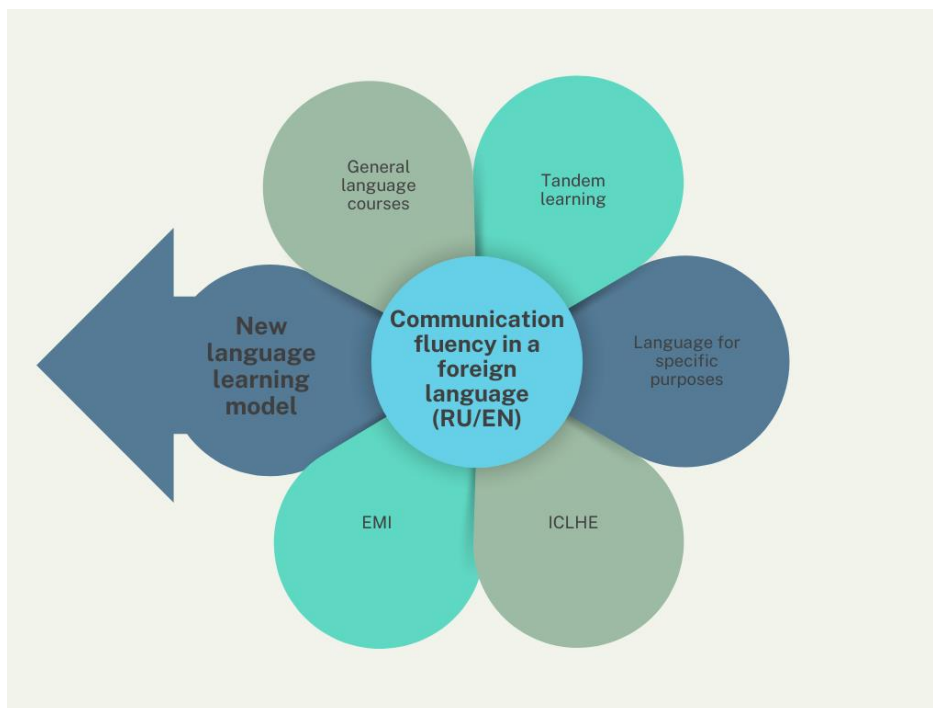


Fig. 1. Foreign Language Model at the EASS

In Russian, general language courses start from beginner level; in English, from lower intermediate. As many students start their Russian studies from beginner level, the structure of the learning path differs in Russian and English. Also, the usage of these languages differs – Russian is mostly used with people (on the streets, in customer service), English is, in addition to customer communication, the language of international co-operation and research.

In all languages and all specializations, language instruction concludes with professional language use. This is implemented through an LSP (language for specific purposes) course, content and language integrated lessons (ICLHE), and content courses in English (EMI). Integrated lessons are included in most language courses and several speciality courses.

As you can see later, of all the components of our language learning model, the benefits of ICLHE are the most obvious and apparent to students. The ICLHE lessons are content course lessons in a foreign language. Police officers do their specific proceedings, tax and customs officers conduct customs checks on the border, and so on. These are realistic work situations with customers who do not speak Estonian. LSP lessons are also strictly professional content based and often include role plays but do not have an officer in the classroom together with the language teacher.

This language model is the basis for foreign language studies in all our specialities. As our focus in this paper is on police officer training, we will discuss it in more detail below.

1.2 English and Russian for Police Officers

EASS provides police officer education in two levels – professional higher education (3 years; Fig. 2) and vocational training (1.5 years). Both have full-time and distance learning options.

The learning path for English and Russian takes different routes due to the language proficiency levels of the students and the distinct contexts in which each language is used. Differences occur also in professional higher education and vocational training courses. The figure below shows the learning path for higher education. Vocational training cadets have both English and Russian only on lower intermediate level.

Although not an uncontroversial issue, the present policy requires police officers to have some level of fluency in three languages – Estonian, Russian, and English. The level of English among cadets is generally higher than that of Russian, as no foreign language certificate is required in the entrance process. This shows also in our current language model. The main challenge with Russian is that cadets fully comprehend its necessity only during their internship, as the feedback analysis showed.



FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

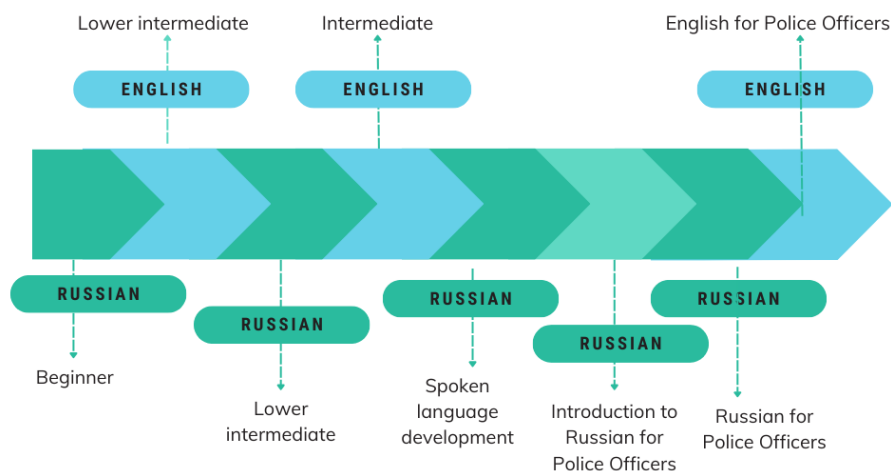


Fig. 2. Foreign languages at the EASS Police and Border Guard College

Thus, Russian instruction starts from beginner level and continues through lower intermediate, spoken language development, introduction to LSP to LSP over the cadet's 1st and 2nd year. The compulsory English course – English for Police Officers – is on the 5th semester, 3rd year, which means that they have already had their work placement and their ICLHE in misdemeanour procedure. Although we cannot change the schedule for the courses, our new foreign language model will take the current poor timing into account, so that we could include some English lessons in the 2nd year.

2. Implementing ICLHE at EASS

The ICLHE lessons are part of both – language courses and speciality courses, such as misdemeanour procedure or international co-operation.

In English, Police and Border Guard College's higher education students have approximately 20 ICLHE lessons and 54 ESP (English for Specific Purposes) lessons during 3 years of study. In Russian, the numbers for ICLHE in Russian and RSP (Russian for specific purposes) are much higher, with 48 ICLHE lessons and 90 RSP lessons (36 lessons of introduction to RSP and 54 lessons of RSP).

Vocational training students can finish their studies with no English courses because English is taught on a lower intermediate level only and if their language level is higher, they do not need to select an English course. The students would then have only about 4 ICLHE lessons in English. They do learn Russian (20 lessons) and have 18 ICLHE lessons in Russian.

2.1 Misdemeanour proceedings and the commencing of criminal proceedings

Instructors/teachers involved: Russian language, English language, offence proceedings, security tactics.

Before the activity: students take the speciality courses, Russian for specific purposes, and acquire related knowledge and skills. Since the ESP course starts only on their 3rd year, the cadets are provided with a vocabulary list compiled by the language and speciality lecturers together.

Setting: dormitory.

Duration of the activity: approximately 45 minutes per group.

Speciality lecturers divide students into groups – a) offenders b) neighbour who has called the police c) patrol pair d) observers.



Scenario: It is 3.30 am and the police patrol pair receives a call to a scene of night time disturbance. The neighbour who called said loud music had been playing since midnight and they had heard loud female voices. The neighbour, who is also a member of the defence league and has a gun at home, offers help for the police.

The pair arrives at the scene and starts carrying out the activities they normally do at a scene. They do not know the offenders do not speak Estonian. It all comes as a surprise. While conducting their duties, students must follow the official procedure, eliminate the disturbance, and make sure everything is done safely. Usually, lecturers observe but they may also be given a role. During the activity, lecturers are at the students' disposal and help students when needed, but usually each lecturer observes their 'line of work'. The activity stops when the students say they feel they have completed the task. After the activity, everybody is walked through the case again and feedback is provided by language teachers, speciality teachers, participating students and observers. If necessary, corrections are made, and advice is provided.

2.2 Traffic-Related Misdemeanour Proceedings and the Commencing of Criminal Proceedings

Instructors/teachers involved: Russian/English language, offence proceedings, public order/security tactics

Before the activity: students take the speciality courses, and also RSP, and acquire related knowledge and skills. Since they have not taken the ESP course yet, they are provided with a vocabulary list compiled by the language and speciality lecturers together.

Setting: campus streets / indoor garage

Duration of the activity: approximately 20 minutes per group.

Speciality lecturers divide students into groups – a) traffic offender b) patrol pair c) observers.

The patrol pair is provided with information about the offender (unfastened seatbelt, speeding, drink driving etc.). They stop the car and need to carry out the activities as they would normally do in such a case. Attention is paid both on conducting the activities correctly and using polite and clear language. Here students are also expected to fill in a report and explain its content to the offender. Although the report papers state offenders' rights and obligations also in English and Russian, the language used falls into the category of legalese (especially when it comes to English) and tourists whose language level is sufficient for travelling may not be fluent enough for understanding that. Therefore, the patrol pair is expected to explain the whole report (incl. offenders' rights and obligations) in simple yet clear and polite language.

2.3 Victim Interview

Instructors/teachers involved: Russian/English language, offence proceedings

Before the activity: A few days before the lesson, the language teacher sends some materials to read/review and learn (words, phrases).

Setting: classroom, equipped with an audio system and screen, broadcasting images and sound from the interrogation room to the classroom.

Duration: 45 min per group.

The activity is carried out in groups. Each group receives interrogation reports to fill in. The speciality teacher gives the task, i.e. the situation to be acted out. One person plays the role of the victim (foreigner), the other two are investigators on duty. To make the situation as realistic as possible, only basic information is given in the assignment. For example, a man was mugged on the street, he suffered from minor injuries and wants to file a report. The task is to interview the victim following all the necessary procedures (ID check, rights and obligations etc.), to obtain all information to initiate criminal proceedings, and provide information about what is going to happen next. Other groups also fill in the report forms. After the interview is finished the language teacher provides feedback. Then the speciality teacher checks that the report forms are filled in correctly and also gives feedback and feedforward. Students must later submit corrected report forms.

2.4 International co-operation

ICLHE does not necessarily have to be an active session with lots of physical activity. Our students need English also in other contexts, such as international co-operation. Thus, we have combined



language and content in the police officers' international co-operation module where they need to make a presentation and write memos based on a meeting. These two may be combined or may come as two different activities. In the language lesson (the ESP course), we discuss making presentations and writing a memo (based on the content lecturer's needs and instructions). In the specialization lesson, students learn about the content and the purpose of both, the presentation and the memo. The next step is a presentations session and finally, writing memos. The memos may be based on the presentations session, or they may be a separate activity and be written based on a (fictional) meeting. Similar activities have also been conducted in other subjects, e.g. community policing, where students have read about different community policing related programmes abroad and made a poster presentation based on them. Here students have previously been provided with the vocabulary lists they may need when reading and analysing the materials and taught basics about compiling a poster presentation.

3. The Current Language Learning Model and Police Cadets' Feedback from the "Field"

In order to improve and develop the language learning/instruction system, we have conducted several studies involving students, their future employers, and speciality lecturers. Here we introduce some findings from a large-scale feedback survey following Police cadets' internships in 2023 (Police and Border Guard College 2023).

The internships differ between 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year cadets but all of them have some sort of work placement. Thus, 483 cadets from all three cohorts filled in the survey, which included questions about their internship from their specialization point of view but also 8 questions about their experience with foreign languages. The language questions addressed their perception of how they managed with their language and how their language studies so far had supported them. They could also give suggestions for language studies. The study is ongoing, with more responses expected over the next semesters but we can discuss the highlights from the initial analysis based on the 483 responses received.

The most obvious, yet the most important finding, especially from the cadets' perspective, is that they had to use Russian much more than English during their internships, although most had some contact with both languages. 268 cadets said they used English at least once, 331 cadets said they used Russian at least once. On the other hand, they perceived their Russian language level lower than their English level – on a scale from 1-5, as 3 and 4-5, respectively. The cadets' experience with the two languages was different in other aspects too, with many responses in the feedback survey indicating the need for more **general** language practice in Russian, and especially listening practice. They could ask their questions but understanding more complicated or unexpected responses was challenging.

The feedback analysis showed that students consider ICLHE/LSP lessons highly valuable. They emphasized that the classes were an excellent preparation for their internship, where they had to use foreign languages to conduct different work-related duties. Students highly appreciated the presence of both, the speciality and language lecturers, as they had been able to ask for both of their advice. In accordance with Lasagabaster (2023), the cadets were highly motivated to do well both in terms of procedure and the foreign language.

Both the feedback survey and a focus group interview carried out in the framework of an ongoing Nordplus project (Laanemaa 2024) indicate that cadets value highly the clear connection between foreign language and work during ICLHE lessons:

"The best way to learn language is ICLHE lesson. You do not learn the language for the sake of learning a language. You learn how the language could be useful at work."

"Thanks to these lessons, I have practiced basic tasks: dealing with traffic offenders, responding to intimate partner violence (IPV) calls, checking documents at a border checkpoint." (Police and Border Guard College 2023).

The importance of ICLHE is visible in both – English and Russian but for opposite reasons. As the level of English is generally higher, cadets value very specific vocabulary taught together with a speciality lecturer. As Russian is generally more difficult for our cadets, they benefit a lot from repeated training of using professional language, supported by both, the LSP and ICLHE lessons.

As the survey was conducted right after the internship period, the cadets had recent experience using the foreign language, which enhances the credibility of their responses. Even though there were cases where one cadet may express that they would benefit from more general Russian lessons and



everyday topics, and another could say that they find no point in discussing booking a hotel or trying to find a bus station, they may actually be saying the same thing – they need more general conversations, and if some specific vocabulary is required, let it be related to law enforcement.

4. Challenges and the Future

The survey is a huge asset for the ongoing revision of the foreign language model at the EASS. Although this is a longer process, we can implement some changes based on the cadets' experience and consultations with speciality lecturers already. The survey will be repeated next year, offering valuable material for comparison.

One of the challenges we have encountered concerns effective cooperation between language and speciality lecturers. Such collaboration may initially pose challenges either because of differences in knowledge areas (Kletzebauer et al 2022), or poor communication. Although all interest groups evaluate ILCHE lessons highly, the organisation of them at the EASS is still rather chaotic and mostly depends on lecturers' personal contacts. In order to improve cooperation, the language centre of the EASS is currently working on an international project with the aim to develop a model that would clearly show participants' role in the process; there will also be an interactive website providing tips for organising more efficient learning process.

Since both, students and lecturers, see ICLHE lessons as very beneficial, we aim to integrate LSP and speciality subjects even more. Currently, Police College students have approximately 20 ICLHE lessons and 54 ESP lessons over their 3 years of study. In the future, we hope to reverse these numbers so that ESP lessons serve primarily as preparation for ICLHE classes. Such preparation is seen relevant by students, as they feel that prior going to ICLHE classes they need to revise or even learn new vocabulary and practice different language functions (Laanemaa 2024). However, in the case of EASS, this system would probably be applicable only for English since our students' level of English is mostly on B or C level, but lower in Russian, where they therefore need more time for preparation and more support. Although a large proportion of Estonian population speaks Russian as their mother tongue, or as a second language (their first language being something else (e.g. Ukrainian, Armenian)), and the older generation is generally fluent in Russian, the younger generation of Estonians is not. Therefore, our Estonian-speaking students have numerous Russian language courses (including Russian for specific purposes) during their studies at the EASS and also the proportion of ICLHE lessons in Russian is higher, when compared to those in English.

As seen in earlier research and from our experience, the need for ICLHE lessons is seen by all stakeholders, including speciality instructors. One idea of the professional (not only language) studies is to organise training in authentic or simulated environment. This means that a large proportion of e.g. border guard training will be conducted at the border crossing point or border area, police training in situations as seen above, etc.

As said, the biggest challenge in increasing the proportion of ICLHE lessons is co-operation and collaboration – specifically, how to align ideas with actions together with specialty instructors, as the importance of ICLHE often remains a topic of discussion rather than implementation. We have started the process of changing that by first publishing an article about language lecturers' work shadowing experiences in police patrols, police station, and on the border, with the aim of stressing how intertwined foreign language teaching is with field work. This is followed up by a general call to co-operation with the language centre. The last step in this workflow is language centre meetings with lecturers and instructors of different law enforcement areas. This will result in a revised foreign language teaching model where most of the learning happens in work related contexts, without disregard to the importance of general language as seen above from students' feedback.

There is one additional motivator for everyone in enhancing the programmes and making language learning more efficient. The number of police cadets is going to double in the coming years, but due to various reasons the number of lecturers will not.

5. Conclusion

The Language Centre of the EASS has come a long way since its establishment over 30 years ago. Initially, the language instruction model stated that professional language was to be taught strictly separately from speciality courses. Around 10 years ago, with an aim to increase language instruction efficiency, a new model was devised and ICLHE lessons were introduced. As this method was seen as useful and effective by all stakeholders (learners, speciality and language teachers and future



employers) year after year the number of such lessons has increased. In the future, the foreign language instruction model will be even more practice oriented, reducing the number of traditional LSP lessons, which purpose would mainly be a preparation for internship of ICLHE, and increasing ICLHE lessons. However, as seen from student feedback, Russian still needs to be taught in classroom since students lack practice and struggle with it in general communication. This will all be done in the light of doubling the number of students, therefore with the goal of concentrated and specialization focused language studies. We will be on this path by reinforcing collaboration between our language centre and speciality lecturers, and continuously reviewing our teaching.

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