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Postgraduate Student, **OLGA KOMOCHKOVA**
Khmelnitskyi National University, Ukraine
Address: 11 Instytutska St., Khmelnytskyi, 29016, Ukraine
E-mail: olga1807komochkova@gmail.com

LINGUISTICS UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE COURSES: EXPERIENCE OF LANCASTER UNIVERSITY (UK)

ABSTRACT

The article deals with peculiarities of undergraduate and postgraduate linguistic courses at Lancaster University. It has been stated that the latter is considered to be one of the best higher education institutions both in the UK and worldwide. Being a relatively new higher education institution (founded in 1964), it can already boast its academic reputation. According to data of British surveys it has been found out that Lancaster University is extremely popular among students. Speaking about linguistic achievements it should be mentioned that Lancaster University's linguistic centre, spanning four generations of researchers, has been recently awarded The Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education. It has been revealed that degree programmes at Lancaster University are flexible and provide students with the opportunity to master a wide range of subject areas to complement their main specialism as well as numerous optional modules selected to satisfy various education needs and inclinations of students. Teaching approach at the University is research-driven and research stimulated, that is why much curriculum time is dedicated to carrying out research projects. Students are significantly motivated towards self-study as most of study time (81–89 %) is dedicated to independent learning. Lectures, seminars and similar are given only 11–19 %. Positive aspects of British experience in professional training of future linguists have been outlined.

Key words: linguist, linguistics, undergraduate courses, postgraduate courses, professional training, British experience, higher education, Lancaster University, Great Britain.

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Ukraine places a high priority on education reform “to ensure that the education system corresponds to the needs of a modern economy and promotes Ukraine's integration into international scientific activities. The goals of this reform are quality education and equal opportunity” (British Council Ukraine, 2015). To achieve these goals it is essential “to cooperate with European universities, study their experience of higher education standards development and implement relevant practices” (Курбанов, 2016).

British higher education is rightly considered to be “standard” with internationally known universities that orient towards needs of world labour market, teaching and learning advancement, stable research development, strategic partnership with international organizations, enterprises, higher education representatives and public. Speaking about linguistic courses at British universities it should be mentioned that they have been devised subject to high standards of academic education, teaching, welfare support and facilities to produce specialists able to generate new knowledge, adapt to fast-changing conditions and, thus, be the most in-demand.



In the view of rapid technogenic development it is of great importance to train native linguists according to modern linguistic challenges in the context of globalization and integration processes relying on the achievements in foreign experience, British one, in particular.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

So, we believe it extremely useful to analyze peculiarities of undergraduate and postgraduate linguistics courses at Lancaster University and outline positive aspects of such experience.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

Theoretical framework of the article has, primarily, comprised the data from official website of Lancaster University, namely, the Department of Linguistics and English Language. Strategic Plan of Lancaster University for 2020 has been considered. Data from UNISTATS and PROSPECTS, official websites presenting information on British higher education institutions, have been taken into account.

Such methods as theoretical synthesis, theoretical analysis, generalization and systematization have been used during the study.

RESULTS

Lancaster University, being a relatively new higher education institution (founded in 1964), can already boast its academic reputation. According to the Guardian and the Complete University Guide it was ranked in the *UK TOP 10*. Students at Lancaster University are more satisfied with their course than the average UK student according to the latest National Student Survey (91 % on the overall student satisfaction score) (Lancaster University, 2016).

As for achievements in linguistics Lancaster University's linguistic centre, spanning four generations of researchers, has been recently awarded *The Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education*. Researchers at the centre have been providing valuable insights into the understanding of language for the past 45 years. Their work has resulted in a range of important applications, namely, vastly improved dictionaries and has also affected policy towards topical social issues such as online aggression, hate speech etc. (Lancaster University, 2016).

Department of Linguistics and English Language at Lancaster University has been ranked 13th in the 2015 International QS rankings, 4th in the UK in The Times Good University Guide Subject Ranking and 5th in the UK in the 2016 Complete University Guide (Lancaster University, 2016). The department offers quite a range of linguistics courses that lead to Bachelor of Arts (BA Hons) and Master of Arts (MA). Undergraduate courses (BA Hons) are *Linguistics*; *Linguistics and Philosophy*; *Linguistics and Psychology*; *Linguistics combined with language studies* (Chinese, French, German, Spanish); *English Language and Linguistics*; *English Language*; *English Language combined with other language studies* (French, German, Spanish), etc. Postgraduate courses (MA) are *Applied Linguistics and TESOL*; *Language and Linguistics*; *English Language*, etc. Within this paper we will focus on the courses Linguistics (BA Hons) and Language and Linguistics (MA).

To begin with, many degree programmes at Lancaster University are flexible and provide students with the opportunity to master a wide range of subject areas to complement their main specialism (Lancaster University, 2016). Linguistics (BA Hons) is full time and divided into two sections: Part 1 (Year 1) and Part 2 (Year 2, 3). Modules are *core* and *optional*. It should be mentioned core modules are sometimes called "compulsory or obligatory" and optional – "option".



In Year 1 students are to study core module “Linguistics”. This module introduces students to key areas of linguistics: phonetics, phonology, morphology and syntax including semantics and pragmatics. Students will also have the opportunity to comprehend the essence of major theoretical debates and acquire analytical skills based on the data of English and other languages as well. In addition, the module will cover sub-fields of linguistics, namely, sociolinguistics, language acquisition, historical linguistics, linguistic typology. Indicative discussions on forensic linguistics, educational linguistics, language testing will be held. Year 1 offers English Language as an optional module. Studying this module students will discover not only traditional linguistics areas of English (lexis, grammar, phonetics), but the areas being often overlooked (letters, spellings), conversational analysis. Moreover, students will learn about the role of practices and contexts in shaping English (creation of new TV genres, functions of the English language). Students obtain knowledge in teaching English as a foreign language as well.

Modules of Year 2 are based, predominantly, on the knowledge obtained in Year 1. Sounds of the World’s Languages and Structures of the World’s Languages are core. Sounds of the World’s Languages presupposes the study of the physiology of how sounds are produced and acoustic characteristics of particular sounds. Students are to learn how to transcribe, describe and produce all the sounds in the world’s languages. Structures of the World’s Languages covers important concepts of case making, alignment, agreement, word order, animacy, definiteness. Thus, students are taught how to analyze new data on the world’s languages. Also, students get to know how to provide explanations for why languages are structured the way they are.

Year 2 offers Researching Language as core, too. In our opinion, it is extremely reasonable taking into account that students are to write a dissertation in Year 3. In such a way they obtain all necessary knowledge, skills and abilities that will come in handy while carrying out research. At Ukrainian universities students obtain information on research basics, too. However, curriculum time dedicated to the area is not enough for its profound mastering that results in students’ unreadiness to conduct independent researches and lack of motivation.

We find it rather interesting that the module being core is not assessed and is not counted towards students’ second year credits. Nevertheless, it is a key part of students’ dissertation preparation and students have to attend these sessions. Term 1 is focused on academic writing, so students are supported in the shift from coursework requirements of Part 1 and 2 and are prepared for dissertation demands. In Term 2 students are introduced to various approaches to researching language during workshops led by staff members engaged in different areas of linguistics research. A list of possible research topics is provided. However, students tend to discuss their own research projects to be supervised by a particular member of teaching staff during Term 2 of Year 2 (Lancaster University, 2016).

Concerning optional modules in Year 2 students are provided with a range of modules focused on areas related to linguistics (*Corporate Communication; Discourse Analysis; English Grammar and Phonetics; Language and Pedagogic Structure; Stylistics; Understanding Media*, etc.). Among these we have come across *Independent Study*. This module enables students to pursue their own study interests which were not covered by established modules. Although, it is subject to the availability of qualified staff. The module presupposes producing of an extended piece of coursework (Lancaster University, 2016).

Year 3 (final) covers such core modules as *Cognitive Linguistics, Topics in Phonetics and Phonological Theory* and *Dissertation*. Cognitive Linguistics is aimed at developing



critical awareness of theoretical constructs and teaching students how to evaluate the appropriateness of specific analysis for individual languages. By the end of the course students have a good command of principles, notions and structures of the science. Topics in Phonetics and Phonological Theory are based on the knowledge obtained while mastering Sounds of the World's Languages and Structures of the World's Languages. With knowledge of general characteristics and peculiarities of language sounds in mind students learn how to discuss and evaluate different frameworks for modelling phonetics and phonology. As for dissertation it was mentioned above that students are to choose a research project individually or from a list provided. The necessary amount of words can vary, namely, 10000–12000. A supervisory team is appointed for every research student.

Optional modules of Year 3 cover a wide range of linguistic subfields, namely, *Forensic Linguistics*; *Psycholinguistics*; *Language and Identities: Gender, Ethnicity and Class*; *Corpus-based English Language Studies*, etc. Students are also offered to study *Language in the Workplace: Topics in Professional Communication*. This module introduces some key areas in which language study and social science studies of interaction can help to understand practices in a range of workplace. In addition, *School Volunteering module* is available. It is designed for those willing to try working as classroom volunteers in primary or secondary schools over the course of one term (Lancaster University, 2016).

Now let us proceed to Language and Linguistics (MA) and reveal its peculiarities. It should be mentioned that postgraduate courses in linguistics are designed for those with a degree wishing to pursue more search-oriented topic prior to a research degree or those having no (little) previous training in linguistics. Language and Linguistics (MA), being the most flexible taught programme at Lancaster University, can be full-time (12 months) and part-time (24 months). Students are allowed to take one core module and a dissertation.

Core modules are *Research Methods in Linguistics* and *English Language and Postgraduate Academic Study Skills*. The first module prepares students for the research involved in their course work assignments and dissertation and is taken by all students. It deals with theoretical, ethical and methodological issues in language and language teaching and is aimed at providing postgraduate students with assistance in carrying out research projects. An extended dissertation option is available, too.

Postgraduate Academic Study Skills consists of lectures and small group work so that students can develop their skills of academic writing, etc.

This postgraduate course offers a great amount of optional modules (21), thus meeting students' different education needs and study interests. They are *Corpus Linguistics*; *Introduction to Discourse Studies*; *Language, Literacies and Digital Communication*; *Principles of Language Teaching*; *Second Language Acquisition*; *Sociolinguistics*; *Bilingualism*; *Forensic Linguistics*; *Stylistics*; *Pragmatics*; *Cognitive Linguistics*, etc. It should be noted that the range of modules can be changed if necessary (results of students' feedback, staff changes or new research) (Lancaster University, 2016).

Speaking about studying Lancaster University's "approach to teaching is research-driven and research stimulated" with "an atmosphere and culture of exploration and enquiry amongst students that brings leading edge discovery and insight into all teaching and learning environments" (Lancaster University, 2016). According to UNISTATS data curriculum time of Linguistics (BA Hons) at Lancaster University is dedicated, primarily, to independent study (see Figure 1) (UNISTATS, 2016).

All undergraduates are also provided with a minimum number of contact hours per week and timely feedback on their work and a maximum number of 15 students per



seminar group. Speaking about postgraduate study students focus, primarily, on their research and are assessed by coursework and dissertation.

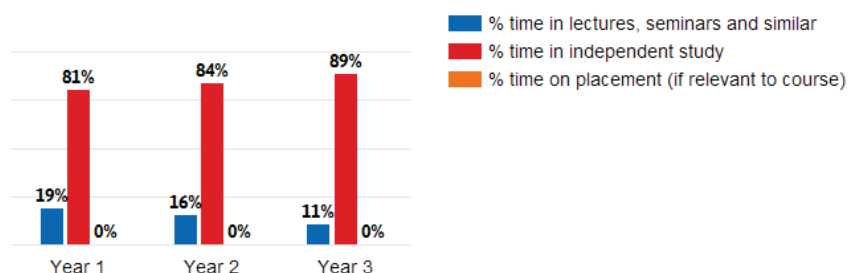


Fig. 1. Time in Lectures, Seminars and Similar at Lancaster University

So, linguistics degrees at Lancaster University cultivate skills in data analysis and presentation, critical thinking and the use of statistics and IT. This expertise is valuable for careers in education, language teaching, speech therapy and translation as well as information technology, management, the mass media, creative arts, social work and counselling (Lancaster University, 2016).

It should be mentioned that the University is frequently singled out for its high levels of graduate employment; an above-average proportion of students get graduate-level jobs (78 %) and Lancaster's unemployment rate is low (Lancaster University, 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

Having studied peculiarities of undergraduate and postgraduate linguistics courses at Lancaster University we can conclude that the latter is a powerful representative of British higher education system. First of all, its degree programmes are aimed at satisfying students' education needs and inclinations. Courses are flexible and developed to cover all core fields and subfields of linguistics. At the same time students are offered a wide range of optional modules. Since teaching approach at the University is research-driven and research stimulated, much curriculum time is dedicated to carrying out research projects that will result in educating modern, active, creative and mobile specialists being in-demand in world labour market. Students are significantly motivated towards self-study as most of study time (81–89 %) is dedicated to independent learning. Lectures, seminars and similar are given only 11–19 %.

In the view of above we can state with confidence that professional training of future linguists at Lancaster University is accorded to European standards of higher education and results in the formation of specialists ready to face globalisation and integration challenges.

Positive aspects of such experience can be implemented into higher education system of Ukraine, in particular, professional training of future linguists at native universities.

The study and analysis of peculiarities in professional training of future linguists at leading British universities are rather perspective for further researches.

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