

# The Analysis of Foreign Language Competences of the Agricultural Graduates in the Teaching System of UNlcert®II (B2)

## Analýza cudzojazyčných kompetencií poľnohospodárskych absolventov v systéme jazykovej výučby UNlcert®II (B2)

Ľubomíra MORAVCOVÁ and Ľudmila MAĎAROVÁ

Department of Languages, Faculty of Management and Economics, Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, Tr. A. Hlinku 2, 949 76 Nitra, Slovakia. Tel.: +421376414547,

e-mail: [lubomira.moravcova@uniag.sk](mailto:lubomira.moravcova@uniag.sk)

e-mail: [ludmila.madarova@uniag.sk](mailto:ludmila.madarova@uniag.sk)

### Abstract

In this paper, we have focussed our attention on the necessity of foreign language competences of the graduates of the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra in the education system of UNlcert® II (B2), which we have tried to evaluate under the current conditions. The ability to communicate in a foreign language opens doors for agricultural graduates to work and study in foreign countries, getting to know new cultures and new people. Of course, the simplest way to acquire a foreign language competence is to live abroad. Because this possibility is not available to everyone, the foreign language competence remains fully under the competence of our schools.

**Keywords:** agricultural graduates, certificate system UNlcert® II (B2), education system, foreign language competences

### Abstrakt

V tomto príspevku sústreďujeme našu pozornosť na nevyhnutnosť cudzojazyčných kompetencií absolventov Poľnohospodárskej univerzity v Nitre v procese vzdelávania UNlcert® II (B2), ktorú sme sa snažili vyhodnotiť v súčasných podmienkach. Schopnosť komunikácie v cudzom jazyku otvára dvere poľnohospodárskym absolventom nájsť lepšie možnosti práce a štúdia v zahraničí, spoznávať nové kultúry a nadväzovať nové kontakty. Samozrejme, najjednoduchší spôsob nadobudnutia cudzojazyčných kompetencií je pobyt v cudzom prostredí. Keďže táto príležitosť nie je umožnená každému, zostáva výučba cudzích jazykov plne v kompetencii škôl.

**Kľúčové slová:** poľnohospodársky absolvent, certifikačný systém UNlcert® II (B2), vzdelávací systém, cudzojazyčné kompetencie

## Podrobný abstrakt

Novela školského zákona zaviedla na slovenských školách angličtinu ako povinný cudzí jazyk od 1. septembra 2011 tak, aby každý absolvent strednej školy vedel plynule rozprávať po anglicky. Okrem toho by mal ovládať aspoň jeden ďalší cudzí jazyk. Podľa Ministerstva školstva dá toto opatrenie absolventom lepšie predpoklady na uplatnenie sa na trhu práce (Jurzyca, 2010).

Jeden jazyk, obzvlášť materinský, nestačí. Vzhľadom na nepopierateľný rozmach vo všetkých oblastiach vedy a techniky, trhového hospodárstva, poľnohospodárstva a s tým súvisiacu politickú a ekonomickú moc vplyvných štátov je mimoriadne dôležité a prínosné učiť sa cudzí jazyk. Dvojazyčnosť má kladný vplyv na vývin jednotlivca. Výskumy a skúsenosti ukazujú, že deti s dvojazyčnosťou na vysokej úrovni nadobúdajú lepšie výsledky ako jednoazyčné deti. Tie dvojazyčné majú väčší všeobecný prehľad, divergentné myslenie, ich samostatná orientácia v probléme je výraznejšia, jazykový cit obozretnejší (Mandelíková, 2008, s. 42).

Jazyková kompetencia je nevyhnutnosťou aj u poľnohospodárskych absolventov, o čom svedčí neustále rastúci záujem o štúdium cudzích jazykov na Katedre jazykov Slovenskej poľnohospodárskej univerzity v Nitre. V rámci integračného procesu v Európskej únii a snahe prispôbiť sa požiadavkám študentov ponúka Slovenská poľnohospodárska univerzita možnosť štúdia v zahraničí, napríklad v programe ERASMUS, kde študenti dvoch fakúlt majú možnosť študovať na zahraničných univerzitách a naopak, zahraniční študenti prichádzajú študovať do Nitry. Vzhľadom na rôznorodosť študijných programov na Slovenskej poľnohospodárskej univerzite v Nitre kladie Katedra jazykov veľký dôraz na cielenú výučbu odborného jazyka v súlade s jednotlivými študijnými odbormi. Šedivý (Poľnohospodár, 2013, s. 4) odkazuje študentom poľnohospodárskej univerzity: „Svoje vedomosti treba vedieť predávať v cudzom jazyku. Znalosť cudzieho jazyka vnímam ako jedinou možnosť, ako sa dnes môžu mladí ľudia etablovať v medzinárodne pôsobiacich spoločenstvách“.

Cieľom práce bolo zosumarizovať výsledky skúšky UNlcert® II (B2) a vyhodnotiť cudzojazyčné kompetencie študentov Slovenskej poľnohospodárskej univerzity v Nitre z jazyka anglického a nemeckého v rozpätí rokov 2006 – 2010. Ďalším cieľom bolo porovnať výsledky z písomnej a ústnej časti skúšky v jazyku anglickom a nemeckom spolu ako aj jednotlivo a posúdiť, ktorá časť skúšky je z hľadiska svojej obťažnosti problematická, prípadne v ktorej časti skúšky dosahujú frekventanti najslabšie výsledky. Na základe získaných informácií navrhnúť riešenie na zlepšenie úrovne jazykových kompetencií z problémovej oblasti.

Zo stanoveného cieľa vyplynuli hypotézy týkajúce sa očakávania minimálnych rozdielov v klasifikácii medzi anglickým a nemeckým jazykom, očakávania zistenia rozdielov medzi jednotlivými jazykovými kompetenciami a výsledkami, ako aj očakávania zlepšovania vedomostnej úrovne frekventantov v jednotlivých rokoch.

## Introduction

Foreign language competence requires the same skills as the competence of the native language. It is based on the skills, thoughts, feelings, and the realities of the verbal and written character (such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in an adequate amount in the social context – education, work, home, and spare time – in such a way that a learner is able to express and interpret his / her wishes or needs.

“Effective communication motivates the people and makes them more active” (Maďarová, 2003). The degree of language mastery is based on the needs and interests of learners, in our case, of the agricultural learners. It also depends on the amount of vocabulary, knowledge of grammar, as well as the correct ways of the verbal language interaction. It is also important to have knowledge in the field of social communication, culture, and language variations. From the point of the ordinary necessities of life, listening comprehension skills and understanding the spoken language are among the most important skills. It means to be able to start communication, to maintain and to conclude it, to be able to read texts and understand them. It is also recommended to learn a language informally in the context of the life-long education.

Familiarizing oneself with cultural differences, cultural manifoldness, as well as curiosity and interest in foreign languages and intercultural communication plays a very positive role (Schlüsselkompetenzen für lebenslanges Lernen. Ein europäischer Referenzrahmen. Online 28.8.2011).

Students completing their foreign language education at universities and colleges will have to prove the quality of their command of a particular foreign language in their future employment. Universities and colleges of non-philological orientation are not competent to perform State language examinations. However, they are trying to acquire accreditation to grant UNIcert® certificates. The European Union accepted the rule, “which equalizes all of the languages of today’s and future United Europe. On behalf of the EU resident life harmonization and preservation of the nation and language identities, some European states established the ECL Consortium in London, whose task was to elaborate the system of internationally comparable language examinations. It came out of the Document of the Mutual European Reference Language Frame: to learn, to teach, to judge, (Council for Cultural Co-operation Education Committee, Modern Language Division, Strasbourg). The certificates obtained in the ECL system are considered equal within the EU and do not need any further official verification or nostrification procedures” (Zelenická, 2011). “If we want to be considered actual, we cannot get by only with textbooks and cassettes. We have to realize that the language is alive and is developing itself. The problem indicates that languages are mutually interconnected. As the people from various countries meet in one place, the languages do the same” (Ludwiczak, J.M., 2011).

The Department of Languages of the Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra applied in writing the Institute of Accreditation of the Language Tuition at Universities of the Central and Eastern Europe (UNIcert®LUCE) to grant it permission for accreditation of the language tuition programme. In 2006, after examining the proposal and all the relevant documents, such as the list of teaching staff, the examination committee, and the test procedure, it was granted accreditation for UNIcert® II (B2) level for the English, German, and Russian languages. In the period from 2006 to 2010, 1,935 participants took part in the English, German, and Russian UNIcert® II (B2) examinations. Out of these, there were 1,553 participants in the first term, 357 participants in the second, and 25 participants in the 3rd term.

## Material and Methods

The condition for granting the UNIcert® II (B2) level certificate at the Slovak University in Nitra is completion of a four-semester language tuition of A, B, C, and D

levels aimed at the field of economic sciences and at a successful examination pass. In the year 2011, we started the task of summarizing the results of all the UNlcert® II (B2) exams and to evaluate the foreign language competence of the students of the Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra in the English and German languages.

The core of this task was the 5-year monitoring of 1,935 examined applicants of the first three academic years of the six faculties at the above mentioned university, who took the language examination UNlcert® II (B2) in the years 2006 – 2010.

The assessment of students' achievement and progress in UNlcert® II (B2) test was divided into the following parts:

- Listening comprehension test
- Reading comprehension test
- Essay writing test
- Oral communication test

The assessment usually takes more forms, such as personal - response and performance - based ones considering assessment as an integral part of the teaching process.

"The most common mistake rarely leading to misunderstanding is violating the relatively fixed English word order. Every learner goes through a stage when the word order of affirmative and negative sentences is presented and learns to apply the inversion for questions" (Maciag, 2011). Of course, there are many more problem areas, the nature of which has its roots in the native language.

We have set the following methodical procedure in compliance with our target setting:

- To summarize all participants taking UNlcert® II (B2) level certificate in the monitored period.
- To perform a classification analysis based on the graphs and tables.
- To compare an evaluation of the achieved results.
- To determine, out of the available results, the most problematic language skills causing participants the most serious problems.
- To find out the major causes and propose some optimal conditions in order to improve knowledge in the given area.

## Results and Discussion

Based on the quantitative evaluation of the entire UNlcert® II (B2) classification of the English and German languages for the observed period, we can state (table 1, figure 1) that there were 1,553 examinees in total sitting for the examination in the first examination term. Out of this amount, 103 applicants achieved the best result (Grade A-1), which represents 6.63%. Grade B-1.5 was achieved by 219 examinees, which was 14.10%, 296 examinees achieved the grade C-2, which was 19.06 % and grade D-2.5 was achieved by 264 examinees (17%). 154 examinees were graded with E, which represents 9.91% out of the total amount. It results from the mentioned classification that almost one-third (517) examinees were not successful and approximately one half of those who participated (50.16%) were graded from B-1.5 to D-2.5. This trend points to a considerable unpreparedness of the examinees in the first examination term. Experience shows that many of the examinees, knowing they have one more examination term, often underestimate the examination and do not pay enough attention in preparation or come with the intention that "I might be OK."

357 examinees took part in the examination in the second examination term, out of which, 75.07% passed, in comparison to the 1st examination term, where only 66.71% passed. This is an indication of a more responsible attitude and better preparedness of all the examinees. This fact has not been accurately reflected in the final grading because most students were graded from C-2 to E-3. Twenty-five examinees arrived at the 3rd term, 9 of them (84%) passed with grades D-2.5 to E-3 and 2 examinees (8%) failed (Moravcova, 2012).

Table 1: Total Classification of UNlcert® II (B2) for the Years 2006 – 2010, English and German Languages Together

	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	4
1st Term	103	219	296	264	154	517
2nd Term	3	22	64	105	74	89
3rd Term	0	0	2	9	12	2

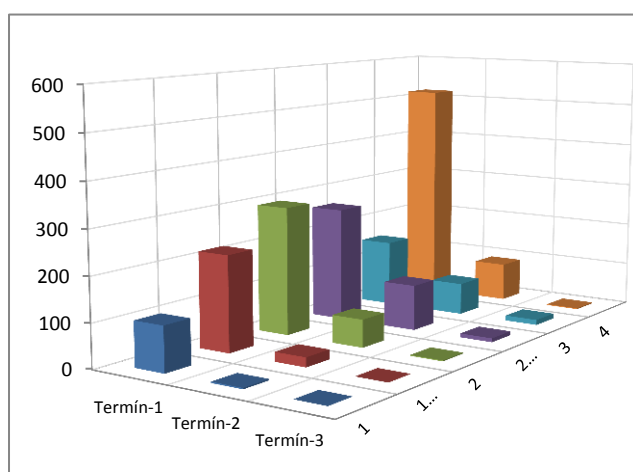


Figure 1: Total Classification of UNlcert® II (B2) for the Years 2006 – 2010, English and German Languages Together

We recorded a statistically provable difference in the classification between the years 2007 a 2010 (table 2, figure 2). The best results were achieved by examinees in the year 2006 and the worst ones in the years 2007 and 2009.

Table 2: Total Classification of UNlcert® II (B2) for the Years 2006 – 2010, English and German Languages Together

Contrast	Pr > Diff	Significant
2007 vs. 2006	0.138	No
2007 vs. 2010	0.039	Yes
2007 vs. 2008	0.291	No
2007 vs. 2009	0.689	No
2009 vs. 2006	0.198	No
2009 vs. 2010	0.083	No

2009 vs. 2008	0.543	No
2008 vs. 2006	0.282	No
2008 vs. 2010	0.191	No
2010 vs. 2006	0.637	No

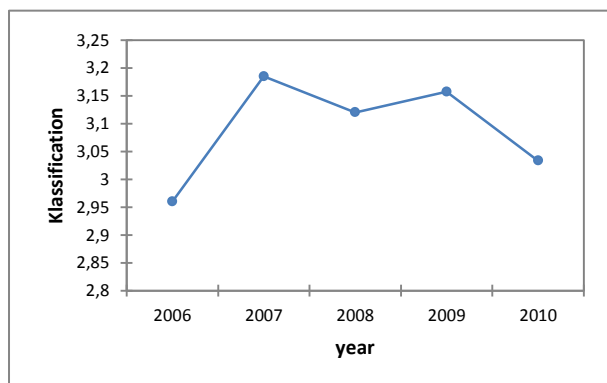


Figure 2: Total Classification of UNlcert® II (B2) for the Years 2006 – 2010, English and German Languages Together

A statistically high provable difference of UNlcert® II (B2) in classification of the English and German languages for the years 2006 – 2010 was also confirmed. The results from the German language were better (table 3, figure 3), but we cannot say that the difference was significant.

Table 3: Total Classification of UNlcert® II (B2) for the years 2006 – 2010, Comparison of the English and German Languages

Contrast	Pr > Diff	Significant
EL vs. GL	< 0.0001	Yes

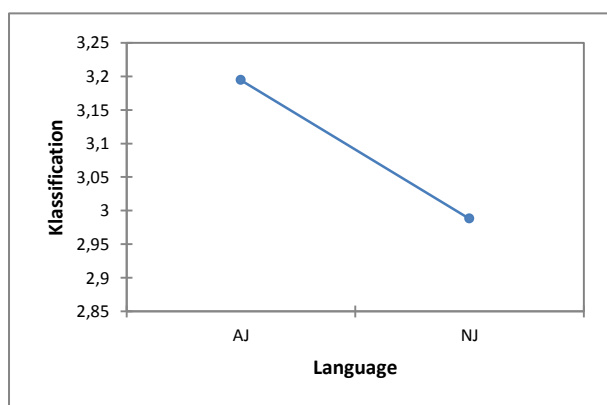


Figure 3: Total Classification of UNlcert® II (B2) for the Years 2006 – 2010, Comparison of the English and German Languages

The aimed motivation remains the basic supposition for mastering a foreign language, which is a positive aspect of the process of study and is usually the first



step in persuading oneself to try to understand and communicate in a foreign language. Ježková (2004, p. 42) claims that „in terms of the language competence, graduates from universities are supposed to be prepared in such a way that they are able to get, by means of their acquired knowledge, a kind of comparative advantage and they should be able to recognise cultural difference in a special text, to interpret it and to be able to use it on the market. The ability to quickly acquire information and use this information source on the market is part of the comparative advantage”.

Hanic (2011) focuses his attention on the cognitive and communicative competences in teaching foreign languages at non-philologically oriented universities. He stresses “the problem of preparing university students in a short period of time in a way that they are able to speak and understand a foreign language”. According to him, it is possible to achieve this goal by using both traditional and innovative methods.

The European Union makes a great effort and invests a lot of finance to enable most Europeans to understand one another and to communicate in a foreign language. It creates the possibility of education in the field of foreign languages not only for the younger generations, but also for elder citizens and perceives the foreign language education as the life-long process. Therefore, it is up to each individual to make most of this challenge.

According to Special Eurobarometer 386 (2012) - „at a national level English is the most widely spoken foreign language in 19 of the 25 Member States where it is not an official language (i.e. excluding the UK and Ireland). The majority of Europeans who speak English, German, Spanish and Russian as a foreign language believe that they have better than basic skills. Ratings of skill level are broadly similar to those seen in the 2005 survey. Just over two fifths (44%) of Europeans say that they are able to understand at least one foreign language well enough to be able to follow the news on radio or television. English is the most widely understood, with a quarter (25%) of Europeans able to follow radio or television news in the language.”

In the last few years, we have often heard the opinion that foreign language education should be under the competence of elementary and secondary schools. Many non-philologically oriented colleges list foreign languages among compulsory electives with a low number of credits. Lack of finance forces some faculties to completely cancel foreign language tuition, which is in contrast with the requirements of the new citizens of Europe. University teachers are recording an increasing interest to study foreign languages from the side of students. Therefore, we think that this effort should also be supported from the side of the competent authorities. This should be the way how to develop linguistic and cultural diversity in order to get better possibilities for placement on the labour market and to help to contribute to universal personality development.

## Conclusion

The ability to communicate in a foreign language opens doors for international work and study stays, higher quality holidays abroad, getting to know new cultures and new people. The simplest way to acquire a foreign language competence is to live abroad, but because this possibility is not available to everyone, the foreign language competence remains fully under the competence of our schools. The Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra has the accreditation to perform examinations in the certificate and education system of UNlcert® II (B2) level. The condition for awarding

the UNlcert® II (B2) level certificate is the completion of a four-semester language tuition A, B, C, D, aimed at economic sciences, and a successful examination pass. In the years 2006 – 2010, 1,935 students took the UNlcert® II (B2) examination from the English and German languages. The interest in studying foreign languages is enormous from the side of students and it is necessary to perceive it as a life-long process.

## Acknowledgement

This paper was created with the support of the VEGA project, No.: 1/ 0493 / 12.

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