

OVERVIEW OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION OF LINGUISTICS STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITIES OF GREAT BRITAIN

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The article deals with the problem of professional education of linguistics students at universities of Great Britain. The authors analyse the role of linguistics as an academic discipline in Great Britain, outline recent trends in university admission campaigns of 2008-2016 which indicate a gradual but stable increase in the number of applicants wishing to pursue a career in linguistics. They focus on the analysis of degree programmes as defined by Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of the UK Degree-Awarding Bodies in the context of linguistics professional education, as also define features of curricula of professional education of linguistics students at British universities with consideration of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics and look at career prospects of future linguistics specialists in Great Britain.

Keywords: linguistics; linguist; professional education; linguistics students; Great Britain; university; bachelor's degree, master's degree.

Introduction

The modern stage of global development is characterised by dynamic intensification of globalisation and integration processes, as well as the strengthening of international relations. Linguistics is traditionally associated with a variety of aspects of human communication. Mastering the latest technologies during the processing of linguistic information requires knowledge of theoretical and practical developments in linguistics (as a complex system of linguistic areas and disciplines); psychology (the study of mechanisms and strategies of communication); computer sciences (computer linguodidactics, computer lexicography). Thus, there appears a problem of professional training of linguistics specialists who can effectively apply linguistic theories and methods to solving standard tasks in the course of professional activity, particularly, to develop scientific, technical and special terminology, linguistic software, to carry out scientific researches in linguodidactics, psycholinguistics, forensic linguistics, sociolinguistics etc.

Great Britain is fairly considered to be a country with a progressive system of higher education, whose priority areas are orientation towards the needs of the world labour market, improvement of teaching and learning processes, sustainable research development, strategic partnership with industrial enterprises, higher education sector and the public. According to the Quacquarelli Symonds Agency (QS), twenty-three British universities were ranked among 200 world's top universities, which offered professional education to linguistics students in 2016 (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2016). British approaches to the professional education of linguistics students take into account the latest technological advancements, globalisation and internationalisation of sociopolitical and socioeconomic processes, the need for multilingualism and interculturalism of citizens, global linguistic challenges.

The aim of this paper is to provide general overview of linguistics students' professional education at universities of Great Britain, since positive ideas of British experience can be effectively used in professional training of relevant specialists in higher education systems worldwide.

Theoretical framework and methodology

While researching we have taken into account various scientific resources. First of all, we have analysed the findings by such scholars as Anderson (2011), Borsley and Ingham (2002), Mallinson, Hudley, Strickling and Figa (2011), Mansell (2011). Of great significance is Hudson's paper "Why education needs linguistics" (2004), since the author is a British leading scientist who has provided profound insights into the issue of the role of linguistics as an academic discipline. Furthermore, we have considered the developments of Quality Assurance Agency, namely, UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2014), Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics (2007; 2015). In addition, we have used the data provided by UNISTATS and Postgraduate Search to define the country-based allocation of British higher educational institutions offering curricula in Linguistics.

So, we processed the accumulated data via the methods of analysis and synthesis, hermeneutic interpretation and searching, deduction and induction, individualisation, generalisation and systematisation and presented our findings within the scope of this paper.

The role of linguistics as an academic discipline

It is rather relevant to indicate that in Great Britain there is a clear distinction between theoretical linguistics and applied linguistics. Moreover, representatives of the two fields are striving to prove predominance of each. Based on the views of Borsley and Ingham (2002), applied linguistics has little contact with mainstream theoretical linguistics. Applied linguists assume that “theoretical linguistics is irrelevant to applied concerns”, whereas theoretical linguists dispute this view (p. 1).

In his study, a prominent British linguist Hudson (2004) emphasises that language plays a fundamental role in the development of any subject. Each subject has its own terminology and presentation styles which are characterised by specific features that only theoretical linguists can analyse and explain to students much more effectively than specialists without relevant training. Yet he believes that the education process should not be complicated with dogmas and research concepts of theoretical linguistics, since three “products” of linguistics are important, namely, general characteristics of language concepts, theoretical models of their organisation and their relations with other disciplines (Hudson, 2004).

We fully agree with the statement that one must build “collaborative partnerships between educators and linguists that integrate cultural and linguistic knowledge” (Mallinson, Hudley, Strickling, & Figa, 2011). Based on the analysed features of degree programmes in linguistics at leading British universities, it is clear that programme developers have taken into account extralingual and intralingual factors, challenges of linguistic globalisation, strategic guidelines of the information space, problems of linguistic ecology and language policy, rapid development of communication technologies in all sectors of society (Lancaster University, 2016; Manchester Metropolitan University, 2017; Newcastle University, 2017).

Thus, professional education of linguistics students at universities of Great Britain is aimed at fundamentalisation and professionalisation of linguistic knowledge, universalisation of practical skills, development of linguistic culture and linguistic thinking, which allows enhancing modern trends in development of linguistics.

Increase in enrollment as indicator of growing need in linguistics specialists

The rapid development of technologies, globalisation and internationalisation of sociopolitical and socioeconomic processes, the increasing role of science, education and innovations, the need for multilingualism and interculturalism of citizens have led to an increase in the number of applicants for degree programmes in linguistics. This can be evidenced by the UCAS report, where they have presented the number of undergraduate students enrolled in degree programmes (including those in linguistics) at British higher education institutions during 2008–2016 (UCAS, n. d.). We have used this information to analyse the increase in the number of applicants wishing to study linguistics, the relevant percentage increase and the allocation of the number of applicants according to certain specialisation areas, namely, linguistics, classics and related subjects. The results of this analysis are presented in Figures 1, 2 and 3 below.

So, during the 2016 admission campaign, 12,585 applicants were enrolled, that is 1,755 persons (1.62%) more than in 2008. There was a slight but continuous increase in the number of applicants which increased from 12,440 to 12,500 during 2014 – 2015. It should be noted that in 2010 the highest figure for the indicated period was recorded – 12,860 persons, which was 2,030 persons (1.8%) more than in 2008 and 275 persons (0.18 %) more than in 2016 (Figures 1, 2).

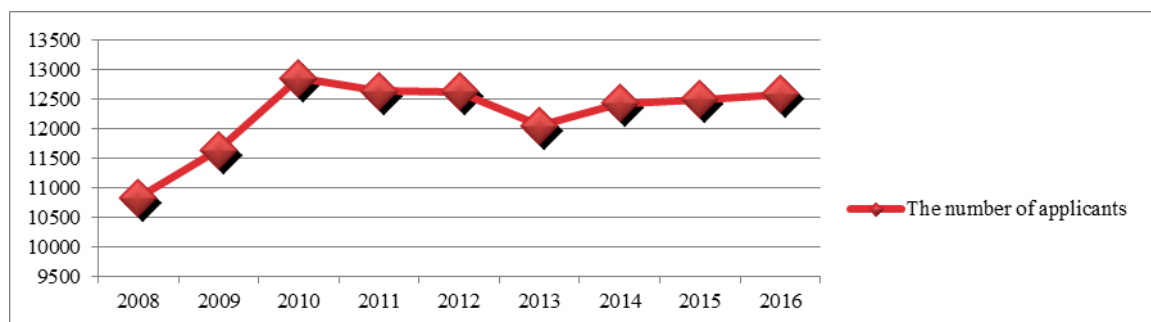


Figure 1. The number of applicants enrolled in degree programmes in linguistics, classics and related subjects during 2008–2016 at British universities
(Systematised by the authors based on Undergraduate releases by UCAS)

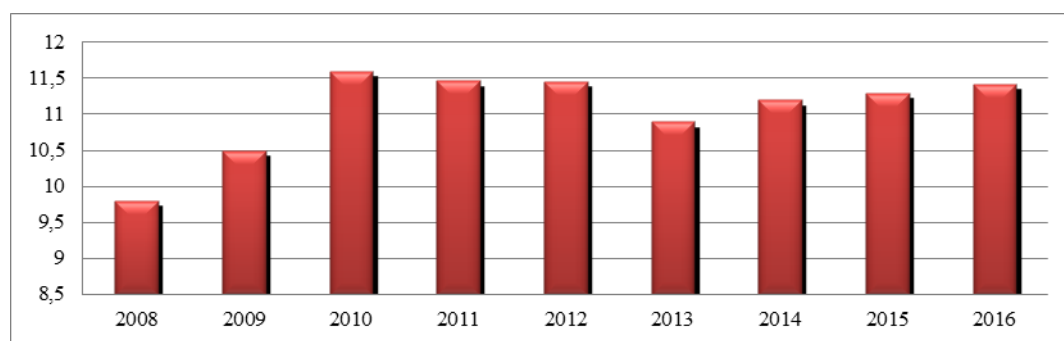


Figure 2. The percentage increase in the number of applicants enrolled in degree programmes in linguistics, classics and related subjects during 2008–2016 at British universities
(Systematised by the authors based on Undergraduate releases by UCAS)

During the eight years, the number of applicants who chose Linguistics from Linguistics, Classics and related subjects also increased (Figure 3). Thus, during the 2016 admission campaign, 585 applicants were enrolled, which was 210 persons more than in 2008. It is worth noting that the number of applicants grew gradually, that is approximately 30–40 persons annually (except in 2011). In 2014, the highest figure for the whole period was recorded – 665 applicants, which was 290 persons more than in 2008 and correspondingly 80 persons more than in 2016. As one can see from Figure 3, the combination of linguistics or classical philology with other subjects (foreign languages, anthropology, history, etc.) is extremely popular among applicants. The lowest rates are characteristic of subjects which are indirectly related to linguistics and classical philology (others in linguistics, classic and related subjects).

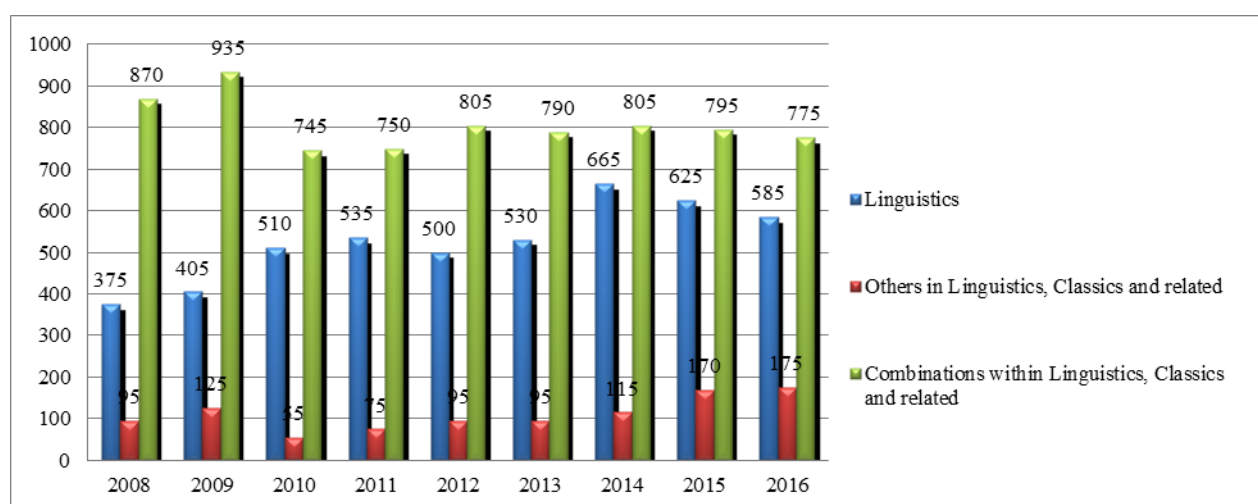


Figure 3. The allocation of the number of applicants enrolled in degree programmes in linguistics, classics and related subjects during 2008–2016 at British universities
(Systematised by the authors based on Undergraduate releases by UCAS)

Degree programmes as defined by Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of the UK Degree-Awarding Bodies

In order to provide general overview of the organisation of linguists' professional training at British universities, we consider it appropriate to define the concept of bachelor's degree, master's degree and doctoral degree according to the descriptors of the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of the UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Quality Assurance Agency, 2014).

Bachelor's degree is a course of academic study of the first cycle of qualifications of three or four full-time academic years that provides obtaining theoretical knowledge, practical skills and abilities that are sufficient for effective performance of professional duties in the chosen area. It is located at level 6 in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, at level 6 in the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales and at levels 9–10 in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (9 for ordinary bachelor's degrees, 10 for bachelor's degrees with honours).

It must be noted that in Scotland, most undergraduate degree programmes are called “masters” and cover four years. This is unlike elsewhere in the UK, where the lowest degree is generally called the bachelor’s degrees and is not equivalent to the postgraduate master’s degree (The University of Edinburgh, 2018). For instance, the University of Edinburgh awards the following (MA (Hons)) degrees in linguistics: Linguistics (MA), Linguistics and English Language (MA), Linguistics and Social Anthropology (MA), etc. (The University of Edinburgh, 2018).

Master’s degree is a higher education qualification of the second cycle of qualifications, typically lasting at least one year, that provides obtaining profound theoretical and / or practical knowledge, skills and abilities in the chosen area, general principles of methodology of scientific and / or professional activity and other competencies sufficient for effective performance of professional innovative tasks. It is located at level 7 in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, at level 7 in the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales and at level 11 in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

Doctoral degree is a higher education qualification of the third cycle of qualifications, typically lasting at least three years, that provides obtaining theoretical knowledge, abilities, skills and other competencies sufficient for generating new ideas, solving complex problems in the field of professional and / or research and innovation activity, mastering methodology of scientific and pedagogical activities, as well as conducting one’s own scientific researches, the results of which should be scientifically relevant and have theoretical and practical significance. It is located at level 8 in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and at level 12 in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (Quality Assurance Agency, 2014).

According to UNISTATS (2017) and Postgraduate Search (2017), British official websites that provide detailed information on undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral curricula, 43 universities provide 417 undergraduate programmes in linguistics. At the same time, 59 universities offer 187 postgraduate and doctoral (taught and research) programmes in linguistics.

Consequently, we can conclude that such a great number of higher education institutions offering curricula in linguistics for all cycles of higher education prove 1) significant interest of potential students in linguistics as a science and their choice to build a career in this field; 2) the need for modern specialists capable of expanding the potential of linguistics and using its assets in various fields for development of a global society.

The majority of universities are located in England. However, there also Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish universities that provide professional training in linguistics (Figure 4).

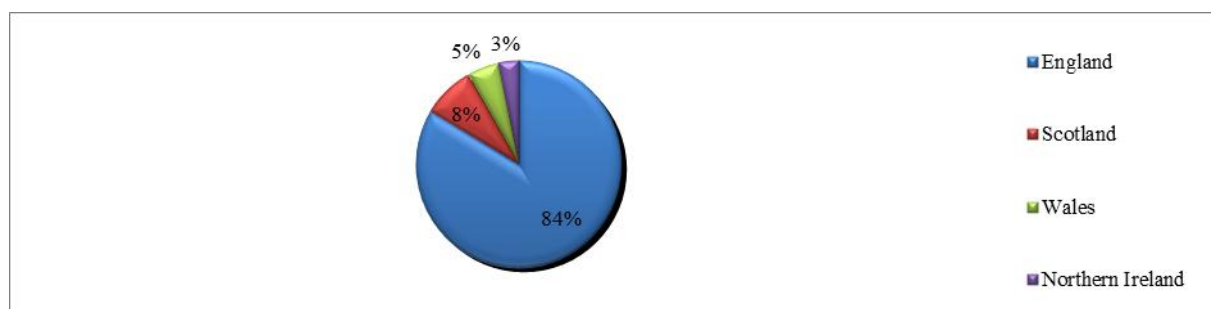


Figure 4. The country-based allocation of British higher education institutions offering degree programmes in Linguistics
(Systematised by the authors)

Features of curricula of linguistics students’ professional education at British universities

As evidenced by the studies performed, professional training of linguists at British universities is mainly oriented toward humanities (Anderson, 2011; Mansell, 2011).

Thus, at the first cycle of higher education, Bachelor of Arts curricula prevail. Some universities, such as University College London, University of Reading, University of Ulster, University of Edinburgh, University of Sunderland, simultaneously offer Bachelor of Science curricula, which are mostly based on mathematical and natural sciences.

Postgraduate education in Linguistics offers a wide range of qualifications. Most universities offer Master of Arts curricula. However, there are a number of universities that also provide:

- Master of Science curricula (University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Aston University, University College London (University of London));
- Master of Philosophy curricula (University of Cambridge, Swansea University, Sussex University, Canterbury Christ Church University;
- Master of Letters (University of Stirling);
- Doctor of Philosophy (Birkbeck (University of London), University of Greenwich, Queen Mary University of London and others).

Linguistics curricula for the first (Bachelor) cycle of higher education, as a rule, are designed for three years (full-time mode of study). In some cases, curricula are designed for four years and include one year of study abroad and / or foreign language studies (The University of York, Lancaster University). Part-time studies can last four (University of Brighton, Birkbeck (University of London)), five (University of Westminster) or six (University of Wolverhampton, University of the West of England Bristol) years.

Among the most common are bachelor's degree programmes in: Linguistics, Language and Linguistics, Linguistics and Languages, English Language and Linguistics, French Language and Linguistics, German Language and Linguistics, Spanish Language and Linguistics, Linguistics and Philosophy, Linguistics and Psychology, Linguistics and Social Anthropology, TESOL and Linguistics, Modern Languages and Linguistics, History and Linguistics, Economics and Linguistics, Linguistics and Media, Sociology and Linguistics, Russian Studies and Linguistics, Linguistics and Screen Studies, Linguistics and Music, Linguistics, etc. (UNISTATS, 2017).

Master's degree programmes in linguistics at British universities are designed for one year for the full-time mode of study or two years for part-time mode (seldom three years (Faculty of Oriental and African Studies, University of London), or even five years (York St. John University). Doctoral programmes in linguistics usually last from three to six years (University of Birmingham, University of Brighton, University of Essex, University of Leeds, Anglia Ruskin University, etc.).

At the master's level, curricula for future linguists' professional training imply studying general linguistics or choosing a specialisation in one of linguistics subfields. Thus, general linguistics curricula can be called Theoretical Linguistics, General Linguistics, Linguistics, etc. Specialised curricula for linguistics involve Sociolinguistics, Historical Linguistics, Evolutionary Linguistics, Psycholinguistics, Neurolinguistics, Language Acquisition, History of Linguistics, Philosophy of Language, Clinical Linguistics, Computer Linguistics, Forensic Linguistics, Translation Studies, Lexicography etc.

The aim of modern tertiary education in Great Britain is to provide interrelated interdisciplinary professional training. The characteristic features of the organisation of linguists' professional training at British universities are: flexibility in provision of students with ability to choose from a vast range of degree programmes and specialisations; promotion of students' independence in search of their own educational trajectory; development of their academic mobility and maturity; provision of the necessary practical experience for further professional activity; possibility of successive and parallel studying of several degree programmes; training orientation toward research activities; use of traditional and innovative forms in organisation of training, etc.

Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics

Subject Benchmark Statements form part of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), which sets out the Expectations that all providers of UK higher education reviewed by QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) are required to meet. They are a component of Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, which includes the Expectation that higher education providers consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements in order to secure threshold academic standards. Subject Benchmark Statements are written and maintained by subject specialists drawn from and acting on behalf of the subject community. The process is facilitated by QAA. In order to ensure the continuing currency of Subject Benchmark Statements, QAA initiates regular reviews of their content, five years after first publication, and every seven years subsequently. The Quality Code aligns with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Quality Assurance Agency, 2014).

It is vital to mention that Subject Benchmark Statements imply recommendations for the design, delivery and review of curricula. While providing general guidance for defining the learning outcomes associated with the curriculum, they do not represent a national curriculum in a field or articulate the approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. Thus, they ensure flexibility and innovation in curriculum development within a framework agreed by the subject community.

The degree programmes in linguistics at British universities meet academic standards, as evidenced by the subject rankings in the National Student Survey, the Results of the Annual Provider Review Process, Enhancement-Led Institutional Reviews, Teaching Excellence Framework.

It must be noted that graduates with linguistics qualification are in demand in a wide variety of industries, first of all, those directly related to the professional use of linguistics, including speech and language therapy, teaching, information technology, interpreting and translation, publishing, public relations, research, lexicography. In addition, graduates can work in advertising, journalism, forensics etc.

Conclusions

General overview of linguistics students' professional education at universities of Great Britain shows that it is based on the principles of openness and accessibility, continuity and consistency, diversification of degree programmes, qualifications and specialisations, provision of equal opportunities for everyone to determine individual educational trajectory. Linguistics programmes are aimed at fundamentalisation and professionalisation of linguistic knowledge, universalisation of practical skills, development of linguistic culture and linguistic thinking, which contributes to development of the modern linguistic science. The dynamics of its development demonstrates the search for the most optimal ways of development of future linguists' competencies necessary to meet the current and perspective needs of an individual, economy and society as a whole. The areas of linguistics specialists' professional activities are expanding in the context of linguistic globalisation and informatisation of society.

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