

CHAPTER 4

Polish for Health Personnel

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1 Introduction

In Chicago, Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) courses are necessary in Polish, and, eventually, for other Slavic languages such as Ukrainian and Russian, given their large immigrant populations in the city. Polish is the third most commonly spoken language in Illinois, following Spanish and English. Because of this, students and local hospitals have mentioned repeatedly that a Polish LSP course for Health Personnel is needed. It is beneficial and important in our particular community but also a useful resource for health personnel working with Polish native speakers across the United States. Much of our student body at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) is preparing for, or is enrolled in, medical school on our West Campus and have time and again expressed their interest in Polish as a professional need. Being able to create and offer courses such as Polish for Health Personnel will allow us to draw from a large medical community that finds such offerings relevant.

1.1 Institutional Background

The potential learners for this course are quite diverse, including both students at UIC and professionals in the field. Even within these two groups, there is still a wide degree of diversity in terms of medical focus. In surveying class demographics at UIC, students who have enrolled in Polish language courses and who are also enrolled in a medically related field tend to include students from the dentistry program, pre-med students, undergraduate biology, or other science majors.

Students enrolled in UIC's medical or science programs that have had direct client interactions or otherwise have felt the need for Polish for their future career goals, have several time constraints to consider when taking language courses. Science and medical programs for students are typically very demanding in their course loads and do not allow for many elective credits. Beyond that, students can take six courses maximum (i.e., 18 credit hours) per semester without having to pay additional tuition fees. Some students, eager to learn some Polish, have requested to unofficially audit or sit in on language courses for this reason. The result tends to be that a seventh course, at three or four credits (i.e., a three to four hour commitment per week), regardless of how valuable it may seem to them, is too much for them to manage. and those students typically miss a large amount of class meetings, often ceasing to come at all towards the middle and end of the semester.

Another consideration is that many students at UIC also have additional obligations beyond coursework, such as internships, work-study, or other employment. All of these factors make it challenging for medical or science majors to be able to continue Polish language study

for any length of time. However, it is important to note that most undergraduates are required to complete two years of language study at UIC. It is not uncommon, thus, for students to take one year of one language and the second of another. Spanish is the most popular language elective at UIC, and for good reason, since it is also useful for students planning on gaining employment in the Chicago area. It is also the most commonly studied language in high school and the most familiar and approachable for students, especially those who are from the Chicago metro area due to their frequent interaction with the language and its native speakers. It is also common for students at UIC to avoid the two-year language requirement by electing to take a placement test in a language that they have studied in high school or in one that is native to their family in lieu of language classes. As the coordinator for the Slavic Basic Language Program at UIC, the placement test reports reflect that many students who place out of the first two years of language study (i.e., placing into POL 201) do not enroll in the language level they place into, but rather petition for credit to be awarded for meeting their language requirement.

For professional learners, the need for Polish language skills within their profession has already been established by their interaction with clients. These professionals are varied, including medical technicians, nurses, and hospital administrative staff. For these learners, the need is immediate and their time commitments are also limited. They already work either part or full time in their field and have difficulties in regularly attending the language courses we offer at UIC. At UIC, most language courses are offered from the morning through the early afternoon and there are no offerings in the late afternoon or evenings. Working professionals are therefore limited in the amount of time they can contribute to language study (e.g., many only attempt a

one semester course and are not able to continue in a full-year sequence). Finally, they are also unable to devote time outside of the classroom for study or homework.

2 Needs Analysis

The needs analysis (NA) for this proposal will survey a population within the health and affiliated community at UIC and UIC hospitals, for whom the proposed course would be targeting and to whose daily professional life it would be beneficial. The NA will help establish the language needs of health personnel for basic Polish language skills in their daily patient interactions. The NA will also help establish the necessary skills and competencies that the course would aim to deliver to students, as well as to serve as a regular assessment before each such course offering to ensure that course objectives are aligned with learner needs.

The population receiving NA questionnaires would include: (a) current medical students (e.g., pre-med, medical, dentistry); and (b) health personnel (e.g., nurses, technicians, doctors, interns and staff). It will also sample native Polish speakers (i.e., potential clients) because they, too, will contribute valuable information with regards to their needs in hospital-client interactions. Polish language faculty will also be asked to contribute their reflections on the content questions for the questionnaires. It would also be reasonable to contact faculty who teach similar courses in other departments (e.g., Spanish), in order to gain from their experience. The Spanish department has already identified similar learner needs. In fact, they have two courses available, albeit for advanced language learners, with the title “Spanish for Health Personnel I and II.” There is also potential feedback that can be gained from informal conversations with colleagues in the medical field in the Chicago area, who can speak to their professional

experience with Polish speakers and to the value that knowing some Polish adds to their profession. Last, if possible, being able to shadow a nurse or other hospital staff members who regularly interact with native Polish speakers for a few hours would likely be an important factor in being able to accurately reflect on the needs of potential learners. Another potential result of the NA is that language use is necessary not only in instances of client interactions but also in interactions with other hospital staff members who are also native Polish speakers, such as custodians and other support staff.

The NA questionnaires (see Appendix A) will be distributed via email and in-person. A select amount of individual interviews will also be conducted. There will also be an on-site visit to gain first-hand experience of necessary learning outcomes.

3 Student Learning Outcomes

After receiving responses to the NA, the necessary course content will become more clear, although the preliminary course description and features can be mapped out prior to this. One of the most important considerations is the time commitment that interested health personnel can actually contribute to Polish language study. For this reason, the course will be offered once per week, in the late afternoon or evening. This will allow working professionals and students with full schedules to attend. The course will be available for credit (e.g., 1-2 hours), in consideration of those students who cannot enroll for a full three or four credit language course, but would still like to receive some credit as well as having the course reflected on their transcripts or resumes. Alternatively, perhaps a certificate program could be created in the future. The NA questionnaire will better reflect the scheduling needs of health personnel but

it is possible, considering UIC's half and full semester scheduling options, that it can be offered in 8- or 16-week sequences. The course learning outcomes will understandably be limited in scope but will be tailored to the specific language needs expressed in the NA. Predicting the NA results, based on previous feedback and experience, the course will focus on pronunciation, expressions as related to filling out medical charts with client information, and phrases and expressions that serve to solicit client response as well as those that provide instructions to the clients.

This course will be more akin to a survival language course, teaching its students the bare minimum that would be required of them in their professional interaction with Polish native speakers. Considering the limited time that the students are able to commit to during a semester, as well as the limited, if any, time they can spend on study outside of class meetings, the course will be taught in a way that focuses on their specific, communicative language needs. Pronunciation will be the main focus of attention but units such as mock client-health personnel interactions will certainly be included. This course aims at facilitating communication at a basic level between native speakers of Polish and health personnel, minimizing immediate need for interpreters on a daily basis.

The specific learning outcomes for this course are predicted as being a combination of outcomes directly stated in the NA but also will have the overall program goals in mind. For an LSP course such as this, it is expected that it will be quite limited in scope and the amount that learners will be capable of mastering in an eight or 16 week sequence. As such, the learning goals that are outlined for the course should reflect targeted and realistic outcomes that the

students can expect and that the instructor and, by extension, the department, can be held accountable for and can reasonably assess.

In determining the set of learning outcomes that can be reasonably provided, there are a number of considerations that should be addressed. First, keeping in focus that this is a LSP course, the language skills taught must be as closely correlated to those that are most pertinent for the use purposes of the students. In short, this means that, although governed by a complicated case system, a language such as Polish in this type of course cannot be reasonably approached from a grammar-centered perspective. Students do not have the time—inside or outside the classroom—to master the grammatical rules and inventory of exceptions of a Slavic language, nor should they hold any expectation of learning the grammar system through this, essentially, introductory course. The language skills that an LSP course can offer thus need to be focused on phonology and set expressions that the students are likely to encounter or need in their professions. Second, the NA questionnaires need to be administered at the start of each LSP course so that the instructor may gauge and accommodate the various, learner-specific needs each time this course is offered. The umbrella title of *Polish for Health Personnel* is intended to neither discourage nor delimit the possible student population of the course, but it comes with the added expectation that the course builder keep in focus the variety of students for whom this course may be professionally beneficial to. Third, in keeping the learning outcomes modest and realistic, learners will gain confidence in their ability to function within the language, hopefully, propelling them into further language study (e.g., during the regular term, hopefully translating into higher enrollments) or, at least, into further language contact with Polish speaking clients, co-workers, staff, or community members. One additional, and crucial, comment is that

instructors need to know what college advisors are communicating to their students, especially those in medical or science-related fields. As it turns out, at UIC, biology and chemistry students are advised against foreign language study in their first three to four semesters of study, which is most certainly a detriment to the eventual skills that those students can be expected to master. On the contrary, should students have the opportunity to engage in foreign language courses that are not significantly adding stress to their schedules, but are indeed providing useful, albeit basic, language skills, they would surely benefit. Sharing these and other benefits of an LSP course with advisors may also be a step in the right direction, when it comes to getting a new course proposal, such as this one, approved.

The following learning outcomes are a proposed sample for such a course, with students being able to:

- Correctly pronounce the letters of the Polish alphabet and write down Polish names or words, when speakers spell them out or repeat them
- Be able to read from the *Medical Point2 Polish* book
- Pronounce body parts to the patients in the TL
- Instruct patients with basic commands
- Inquire as to the ailing condition of the patient
- Identify patient concerns and report them to the doctor, in translation
- Through the use of supplementary aides, complete patient charts and solicit key healthcare information
- Schedule a follow-up visit for the patient

4 Materials and Curriculum

The course will meet once per week, in the late afternoon or evening, for two hours. It will be a two credit hour course over the 16-week term or a one credit hour course for the 8 week half-term. The syllabus will be blended using functional, situational, and topical approaches, in consideration of responses from the NA as well as the general nature of such a survival-level course, which indicates as its goal the ability for learners to function in specific situations and be able to handle specific topics. Students of this course will need to be able to function in situations that they are most likely to encounter and sequenced as such in the order for the interactions to transfer into their real-life professions. Functional language use is the most realistic outcome of this course, considering its limited scope and realistic timespan.

There is a shortage of readily available materials for such a course, or for medical personnel in general. There is one such digital text available and it will be required for the course: *Medical Point2Polish* (Interlingua Publishing, 2009b), available as an eBook. The strength of this text is that it offers medical vocabulary (e.g., related to body parts and ailments) as well as a side-by-side English and Polish set of questionnaire-type phrases and expressions that may be useful to a variety of health personnel. Most certainly, a course packet will need to be created and made available to students at the campus bookstore, or in iBook format, potentially to be created by the instructor, after the initial NA and, ideally, modified for specific learners' needs each semester. A list of supplementary resources and Internet links will be provided on a course management website such as Blackboard as well as in the course packet (e.g., super55.com, dimensionsofculuture.com, and other relevant websites that already have

created bilingual materials for medical purposes). Finally, as for any language course, a Polish-English Dictionary, for reference (e.g., a digital App), will be recommended to students.

Each course will have repeating units (i.e., phonology, vocabulary and expressions), ensuring that certain linguistic aspects are constantly being practiced, with more emphasis given to profession related content as the course progresses and learners become more proficient in their language use. Below is a proposed 8-week sequence, which could easily be extended to a 16 week sequence:

- Week 1-2: Phonology, Alphabet, Dictation, Basic Expressions
- Week 3-4: Basic Syntax, More Expressions, Numbers 0-10, Months and Days, Body Parts
- Week 5-6: Asking Questions, Giving Basic Instructions
- Week 7-8: Forms and Documents, Basic Translations, Cognates, Cultural Information, as appropriate.

5 Assessment and Evaluation

There is no planned formal diagnostic language assessment for this course. The NA will speak to the needs that the student population has for language skills in their health professions, and students of this proposed course should be true beginners. Achievement assessments throughout the course sequence will be offered for immediate correctness checking but will not receive a quality grade. It is planned that these assessments will be administered at the beginning of each class meeting, so that students can test what they have retained and the instructor can gain a sense of how well the students are mastering the material. Assessments such as these will

correlate to the learning objectives and will be as authentic as possible. For example, if the objective is for students to be able to correctly write down Polish names, there will be audio recordings of native speakers stating their names and spelling them. With certain tasks, such as in-class role-play situations, there will be some artificiality, since these may be scripted, but they will be based on expected situations that are relevant for healthcare personnel.

Reflection in an LSP course will be an integral part of the program for the learners to be able to express if and how their new language skills are applicable to their careers as well as for the instructor to gain constant feedback with regards to content, relevance, and application of the materials. Therefore, journaling on a discussion blog will be encouraged to report on their daily patient interactions (e.g., outside of the classroom) and if what they are learning in class is useful, or if there are gaps that they feel need to be addressed by the course. In-class discussions of the same topics will also be a part of the course. A final, or end-of-term, assessment will include each student interacting with a native speaker, in a mock-clinical situation, where the learning outcomes will be checked (e.g., if a student can correctly solicit and record information, if the student can, at a basic level, report to the doctor what is ailing the patient, and help complete a questionnaire with the patient's medical history). Potential consequences could be that the assessment does not match-up with the actual situations that the students encounter (e.g., they may need more vocabulary, as it pertains to more advanced medical conditions) and the course content will have to be modified in the future. Immediate feedback will be provided during class on all assessments. There will also be opportunity for final feedback at the end of the course. Finally, the course grades will most likely be based on a Pass/Fail, or Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory, basis.

The instructor should also solicit reviews of course materials periodically throughout the term, as to the progress of the course, from the students. Mid-term and end-of-term course evaluations will also be provided, circling back to all stakeholders surveyed during the course planning stages and checking whether the students who took the course previously were able to apply the skills they learned in the course in a way that is relevant to their work environments. Resulting changes and improvements to the course will be applied to modified learning outcomes as well as class assessments and activities during future terms. This will be an on-going process, as there will be a post-course evaluation and pre-course NA required before the start of each subsequent term that the course is offered.

6 Conclusion

There is an expressed need for health professionals in Chicago to speak at least a basic level of Polish due to the large immigrant population. Health professionals and medical students do not have time in their schedules to enroll in a full language class that meets four days per week, thus a once per week course would be a suitable option for them. Success in delivering learning outcomes could prompt health professionals and medical students to pursue further language study, thus boosting program enrollments.

An important quality to LSP courses is that they are adaptable to the specific learners' needs. A NA should be performed before each such course offering. It is possible that, during a given year or semester, the learner demographics, and thus the learning needs and outcomes, will be vastly different for students or professionals interested in such a language course. The best

possible outcome of an LSP course, in addition to facilitating professional interaction for learners, is that it would likely encourage further study in the language. Similarly, offering a LSP course may encourage students who are yet uncertain of their majors to experiment with a course like this one, fuelling their desire to enter a field where such practical knowledge will help them succeed in their professional goals.

This could be a viable course at higher levels of instruction as well. Working with established advanced language courses (such as those within the Spanish Department at UIC), should enough interest arise from LSP courses for advanced language speakers, this would also be a possibility. At the advanced levels, the material would certainly need to be developed with the counsel of a working professional within the field and with those health personnel who require advanced language skills such that they can communicate in the TL with other professionals. A course at this level would be best suited for health personnel readying to travel abroad for work, or those who spend an extensive amount of time in collaboration with personnel from Poland. For instance, in the local Polonia community, there are medical offices that function in the Polish language the majority of the time, not just during client interaction but amongst the staff as well.

Learning Slavic languages is already difficult for many and attempting to do so with true beginners will be a real challenge. The 16 contact hours will have to be managed with a reasonable expectation of content and learner progress. Medical students and staff are already faced with time restraints on additional study and are not able to enroll in a standard language course that meets three to four days per week. Reducing the credit hour to one or two per week

and adjusting the course meeting schedule to off-peak hours will be a necessity. Low availability of teaching and reference resources for this LSP course is another limitation. Most of the materials for this course will have to be created anew, thus requiring extensive preparatory work for the instructor. Finally, there are currently no available funding support sources for such a project proposal, thus the work done in preparation for this course will be additional work for the instructor who chooses to take it on.

It is important to take the process of course proposal one-step at a time and to delimit the scope of LSP courses. On the one hand, a course should not be so restricted in content that it turns away students, but on the other it cannot possibly be designed to be inclusive of all possible student learning needs. Ideally, a successful NA will show the content and skill needs around which a course of this kind could be build. The NA should also speak to the feasibility of the course and whether there is enough interest in the UIC medical community for such a specialized course, that would be designed for their professional purposes, which is why it should be administered each time before the course is offered because the student population is likely to change from year to year.

Appendix A

Sample Needs Analysis Questionnaire

Date:

Please select all applicable answers.

Health Profession (current or planned):

- Medical (Doctor, Nurse, Staff, Student)
- Dentistry (Doctor, Nurse, Staff, Student)
- Student (undergraduate degree-seeking, science major, or other)
- Professional (Administrative Staff, Medical Technician, Other Staff)
- Other (please explain):

Frequency of interaction with Polish speakers:

- Daily
- A few times per week
- Once or two per week
- Rarely
- Other (please explain):

Type of interaction with Polish speakers:

- Client check-in/out (name, personal information, etc.)
- Chart data (reason for visit, ailment identification, etc.)
- Pre/Post-Visit Instructions (giving directions, explaining procedures, medication dosages, etc.)
- Financial/Insurance (soliciting information, explaining benefits, explaining billing/payments, collecting payments or establishing a payment schedule, etc.)
- General Instructions (giving directions or locations, asking or answering questions, etc.)
- Other (please explain):

Appendix A (Continued)

Knowing some Polish would be beneficial to your career:

- Yes
- Maybe/Not sure
- No

What language skills would be helpful to your profession:

How do you communicate with Polish speakers, not knowing the language yourself?

- Regularly use a Polish speaker as an interpreter
- Try to find someone who speaks Polish (other staff or client family member)
- Some set phrases in Polish but mostly in English
- Only in English
- Other (please explain):

Would knowing some Polish help in these client interactions?

- Yes
- Maybe/Not sure
- No

How many hours per week would you be able to contribute to language learning? Please circle the maximum amount of hours.

In-class:	0	1	2	3	4	5
Out-of-class:	0	1	2	3	4	5

What time of day/day of week would most suit your work schedule? Please circle the days.

- Nights (after 7pm) M T W R F
- Late afternoons (after 4pm) M T W R F
- Afternoons (after 12pm) M T W R F
- Mornings (before 12pm) M T W R F
- Weekends Only (please specify time):

Appendix A (Continued)

Would you be interested in a once per week, for credit, Polish language course for health personnel?

- Yes
- Maybe/Not sure
- No

Would you be interested in a once per week, for credit, Polish language course for health personnel that also offers a related language certificate program?

- Yes
- Maybe/Not sure
- No