

THE MASTER “DEUTSCH FÜR DIE KOMMUNIKATION IM BEREICH DER WIRTSCHAFT”

Federica Missaglia

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore
Milano/Italy
federica.missaglia@unicatt.it

Abstract

This paper presents the Master “Deutsch für die Kommunikation im Bereich der Wirtschaft”, a professional degree aimed at developing specific competence in linguistic mediation. It prepares highly-skilled professionals specialized in German business communication. The courses focus on acquiring the necessary terminological, interdisciplinary and intercultural skills to make business agreements in German. Furthermore they aim to prepare professionals familiar with business communication in an intercultural perspective, able to incorporate the acquired skills into their job in order to develop new and competitive projects for their companies and to apply highly developed expertise to the solution of a wide range of communication problems. This Master is one of the first degrees in the country to focus on business communication in a foreign language that is not English; it has developed a unique programme of learning experiences which helps students to identify their interests and to achieve their career goals from an innovative starting point. The Master’s programme was developed together with the Austrian, German and Swiss Consulates and is characterized by a pluricentric approach to the German language. The Master prepares its graduates for a wide variety of careers providing a sound basis upon which to build a career in business communication: It allows students to acquire the necessary skills to make an immediate, effective contribution upon employment in the area of business communication. Students with the Master’s degree have already incorporated the acquired skills into their current jobs or have used this programme as a stepping stone to a new job; all graduates of past editions are already employed in a wide range of business and financial fields in Italy or abroad.

1. Introduction

The Catholic University of Milan is characterized by a long tradition in high quality research and academic teaching, but following the recent university system reform it is also characterized by a strong orientation towards a sound practical professional training of its students. In line with this three-fold orientation towards research, teaching and practical experience, since 2005 the Faculty of Linguistic Sciences and Foreign Literatures has been offering the Master “Deutsch für die Kommunikation im Bereich der Wirtschaft” (German for Business Communication) a professional degree aimed at developing specific professional competence in linguistic mediation. The Master is intended to meet the demand for qualified business communication professionals by companies, insurance companies, banks and other institutions of German-speaking countries in Italy or abroad.

2. The project: Aim and addressees

The objective of the Master “Deutsch für die Kommunikation im Bereich der Wirtschaft” is to prepare highly-skilled professionals specialized in German Business Communication. Its courses aim to develop high oral and written competence in German; they focus on acquiring the necessary terminological, interdisciplinary and intercultural skills to manage business communication in German. Furthermore students gain a comprehensive understanding of Politics, Economics and Law of the German-speaking countries. The courses aim to prepare professionals familiar with Business Communication in an intercultural perspective, able to incorporate the acquired skills into their job in order to develop new and competitive projects for their companies and to apply highly developed expertise to the solution of a wide range of business communication problems.

For this reason the Master’s courses are interdisciplinary, drawing from the fields of Linguistics & Communication Sciences (Intercultural Communication, Communication Management), Politics, Economics & Finance (Economics for Business, Corporate Finance, Business Organization, History of Economics) and Law (Business Law).

The Master’s course is addressed to max. 18 Italian and foreign graduates in Foreign Languages or Economics (Diploma di Laurea before D.M. 509/1999, Diploma di Laurea Triennale or Diploma di Laurea Specialistica) who have an advanced knowledge of German and good overall competence in

disciplines related to economics and business studies. The linguistic competence is assessed by a language test (level B2/C1 of the European Framework) and an interview in German.

3. The courses

The degree provides a balanced curriculum that explores business communication in theory and practice. To complete the Master's programme students are expected to acquire 60 credits (for a total of 1500 hours over two academic terms).

The certificate includes the following parts:

1) courses and lessons in the classroom, tutorials and seminars with experts and professionals (130 hours), language labs (200 hours), individual independent and instructed study (670 hours). Lessons, seminars and labs include: German Language and Culture (Oral and Written Communication, Political and Economic Institutions of the German-speaking Countries), International & Intercultural Communication; Public Relations (covering issues such as Human Relations, Media Relations, Public Affairs, Financial/Investor Relations, Community Relations, Product Publicity/Product Public Relations, Ecology Relations, Issues Management, Crisis Management, Corporate Identity); Business Law; Economics for Business; Corporate Finance; Business Organization; History of Economics (40 credits).

The Master in German Business Communication is characterized by a high level of teaching and an international orientation: the whole course is delivered in German through a series of tutorials, labs and lessons with the academic staff of the Catholic University as well as with linguists, economists and legal experts of other Italian and foreign universities and with representatives of the Austrian, German and Swiss Consulates in Milan. The seminars, including case studies, are held by Italian and foreign professionals experienced in Business Communication (especially, "Unternehmenskommunikation" [1], Corporate Communication) either in an Italian company, insurance company or bank in a German-speaking country or in an Austrian, German or Swiss company in Italy.

2) After the period of classroom study students are expected to undertake a practical experience in Italy or abroad (400 hours, 16 credits) in order to develop and put into practice the skills acquired during classroom study. Practical experience is generally gained during an internship in a company or institution where, under the supervision of a personal tutor, students autonomously deal with issues related to German Business Communication and Communication Management. They are directly involved in the management of communication between the organization where they are doing their internship and its publics (internal and external stakeholders, public opinion) and practically experience different communication techniques and strategies which are used for an organization's internal and external representation as well as for mass communication through different media. The definition of the practical experience is carried out *ad personam*, depending on individual education profiles and on the specific projects offered by stakeholders and partner companies.

3) Finally, students are expected to prepare the final exam (100 hours, 4 credits). They write a thesis on their practical experience consisting in a case study focused on German Business Communication. Assessment is through the project work and an oral presentation in German.

4. Results

The Master "Deutsch für die Kommunikation im Bereich der Wirtschaft" is one of the first degrees in the country to focus on Business Communication in a foreign language that is not English; it has developed a unique programme of learning experiences which helps students to identify their interests and achieve their career goals from an innovative starting point. The Master prepares its graduates for a wide variety of careers in German business communication. It provides a sound basis upon which to build a career in business communication and allows students to acquire necessary skills to make an immediate, effective contribution upon employment in the area of business communication.

The Master's programme was developed together with the Austrian, German and Swiss Consulates and is characterized by a pluricentric approach to the German language [2]. In its past editions it successfully met the demand for highly-skilled communication professionals by Austrian, German and Swiss companies, banks and insurance companies operating in Milan and Lombardy or abroad.

The most positive effect of past editions was that students with the Master's degree have incorporated the acquired skills into their current jobs or have used this programme as a stepping stone to a new job; all graduates of past editions have already found employment. Some of them are working for the company where they did their internship, others in a wide range of business and financial fields in Italy or abroad, including UniCredit, Commerzbank, Deutsch-Italienische Handelskammer etc. The companies which took part in the programme as stakeholders in past editions offering internship (Commerzbank, Deutsch-Italienische Handelskammer, Deutsche Bank, Leica Microsystems, Messe Frankfurt, Messe Hannover, Douglas, Obi, Lidl, Mercedes Benz, Metro, Penny Market, Rehaus, Autogerma), have already renewed their offer for new places with good opportunities for the Master's graduates.

Due to the balanced three-fold – theoretical, practical and empirical – orientation towards German Business Communication in 2006 the Master "Deutsch für die Kommunikation im Bereich der Wirtschaft" was awarded the European Label for innovative language teaching projects by the Italian Ministry of Employment [3].

References

- [1] Mast, Claudia, *Unternehmenskommunikation: Ein Leitfaden*. Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius (2002).
- [2] Clyne, Michael, *The German Language in a Changing Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1984).
- [3] http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/awareness/label_en.html