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# Languages for Specific Purposes in the Business Services Sector in Poland 2021. Origins, Background, Results and Perspectives of the Language Barometer of Lódź

#### **Abstract**

The article contributes to current discourses on the opportunities, challenges and limits for foreign and specialised language didactics in the context of the closer cooperations between Universities and the wider economic and social environment. It presents and discusses the background, origins, results and perspectives of the research project "The Language Barometer of Lodz 2021. Employees of the modern business services sector". The research questions of the survey are primarily directed at the required foreign language skills of the target group, areas of application of foreign languages, the knowledge and specialist areas to be mastered, language training in the company, as well as the aspect of multilingualism in the context of professional communication. The paper will present and discuss the global results of the survey, and also provide a full package of anonymous raw data collected during the survey for possible further analysis and study. The data obtained in the survey can be used for projects and research initiatives on various aspects of specialised communication in an intercultural work environment, but may also find application in, among other things, the development or modification of curricula at different levels of learning, the creation of specialisation modules, language courses, workshops or educational materials.

**Keywords:** Languages for Specific Purposes, LSP, Business Services, Professional Communication, German, Multilingualism

## 1. Introduction

As early as the turn of the century, an immense complexity was observed when dealing with the research area of languages for special purposes, so that it was possible to speak of specialized communication in a more comprehensive way: from the primarily lexical-semantic via syntactic and functional-stylistic conceptions, pragmatic and communicative factors to socio-cultural, semiotic, intercultural or discourse-related aspects (Kalverkämper 1997: 48, Baumann 2000: 150f.). With a language-use-oriented conception of professional communication (Mikołajczyk 2004: 28), for example, when considering the management of concrete communicative situations in the professional environment, one can speak even more broadly of professional communication in this context (*Fachsprache* vs. *Berufssprache*, Roelcke 2017). This also opens up new perspectives for specialised language didactics. Learners can be enabled to "develop a dynamic, subject-specific or training-specific communicative ability" (Baumann 2000: 154). In this sense, the primary goal of specialised language didactics is to optimise "practical learning and teaching activities in the interest of communicative mastery of specialised situations" (Baumann 2000: 154).

The globalised, innovative and competitive knowledge-based economic world of the 21st century also sets the challenge for foreign and specialised language didactics of closer cooperation with the economic and social environment as well as a strong orientation towards current requirements and prerequisites of the labour market in terms of competences and skills that are usually in demand. In order to cope with the out-of-school professional reality, such cooperation of teaching institutions with representatives of the labour market can entail "original, innovative and/or contemporary tailor-made didactic solutions in the form of teaching programmes, methods, resources or techniques" (Sowa, Mocarz-Kleindienst, Czyżewska 2015: 9–10, transl. J.M., see on all this Makowski 2018c: 66–72).

The analysis of the dynamics of the labour market in general and of the market for modern business services in particular points to an immense pace of growth in the economic sector of modern business services, as well as a continuous increase in the demand for personnel in this economic sector in the future<sup>1</sup>. This fact means new perspectives and challenges for the didactics of foreign and specialised languages on academic level, which is oriented towards specialised communicative competences.

The core of this article, as the latest edition of the long-term study "The Language Barometer of Lodz ( $\pm$ ódź)" and a contribution to the current discourse on the opportunities, challenges and limits in the aforementioned subject area, is the presentation and discussion of the background, origins, results and perspectives of the research project "The Language Barometer of Lodz 2021. Employees of the modern business services sector". The target group of the study consists of employees of companies from the field of modern business services² and at the same time graduates of philology studies at the Philology Faculty of the University of Lodz with a German language orientation. The primary research question of the survey is primarily directed at the required foreign language skills of the target group, the areas of

<sup>1</sup> At the end of Q2 2022, more than 1,714 business services centres representing 1,068 companies were operating in Poland, comprising BPO, SSC/GBS, IT, and R&D entities. They employed 400,300 people (11.6% more than in 2021). Forty-six centres were established in 2021, and three were founded in Q1 2022 (ABSL 2022: 22). The number of jobs in the sector at the end of Q1 2023 forecasted by ABSL (baseline scenario) is 432,000 (ABSL 2022: 23).

Like the ABSL-report, this paper adopts a broad definition of the sector of modern business services to include the activities of business processes outsourcing (BPO), shared services (SSC), global business services (GBS), IT, and research & development (R&D) centres (ABSL 2022: 18).

application of foreign languages, the knowledge and specialist areas to be mastered, as well as the aspect of multilingualism in their workplace. The secondary research questions address language training in the company and the issue of the types of language training for employees in the company and the preparation of employees for their current position after completing the indicated study programme.

The paper will present and discuss the global results of the survey with reference to the main research questions, as well as provide a full package of anonymous raw data collected during the survey for possible further analysis and study. The data obtained in the survey can be used for projects and research initiatives on various aspects of specialised communication in an intercultural work environment, but also find application in the development or modification of curricula at different levels of learning, the creation of specialisation modules, language courses, workshops or educational materials.

# 2. Origins, background, research methodology

In addition to the traditional tasks set for universities, such as research and education, there has been a discussion for many years about the third mission, that is, relations with the social and economic environment. In the existing dialogue between the aforementioned partners, the necessity to create standards and dimensions of universities' orientation towards the needs of the labour market is very frequently mentioned. More and more often initiatives in this field include activities such as the creation of new fields of study, education and study programs or workshops in consultation with the surrounding business environment.

The Philology Department of the University of Lodz has been running "The Language Barometer of Lodz" since 2014; it is a long-term study, which is a response to the challenges of the third mission of universities as well as the immense growth in the economic sector of modern business services. The global objective of the study is to collect, analyse, compare and exchange data concerning foreign and specialist languages on three levels. The first involves the labour market and related assessment of current employment needs and future demand from employers for candidates with foreign language skills; furthermore it focuses on desired knowledge of foreign and specialist languages in the workplace, areas of application and most often required language skills and soft competence requirements. The second level is made up of higher education institutions: the evaluation of the state of research on foreign and specialist languages in academic teaching, the offer of universities in the fields of neophilological studies created for needs and/or in cooperation with the labour market. The third area of research concerns students and candidates for higher education, in particular the identification of linguistic resources among secondary school students and students in the context of the local labour market demand and external factors shaping foreign language skills of candidates for higher education (Makowski 2014, 2018a–c)<sup>3</sup>.

Over the years, the research methods of the Language Barometer of Lodz have been modified from quantitative to qualitative methods. In the initial editions (Tab. 1) aimed at companies (1/2014, 2/2015, 4/2017), questionnaires were addressed to HR department employees, who provided answers concerning the questions posed on behalf of all company employees. Depending on the HR department in question, this allowed to obtain more or less detailed data on all employees of the company. For example, in edition 2/2015, in the case of two respondents (Ceri International, Infosys BPO Poland),

<sup>3 [</sup>At:] https://jezykowybarometr.wixsite.com/lodz [date of access: 08.09.2022].

in addition to a general declaration on the language skills of the employees, detailed quantitative data were specified, including the language competence levels. Ceri International declared a total of 201 employees, including 120 with English, 79 with German and 2 with Spanish. Infosys BPO Poland had a total of 2103 employees, of which all employees had to speak English at a minimum level of B2. As a second foreign language, the respondent declared the knowledge of the following languages: French (225), German (97), Spanish (73), Russian (40), Dutch (40), Italian (37), Romanian (20), Arabic (19), Hungarian (18), Portuguese (16), Swedish (17), Turkish (15), Czech (15), Greek (12), Finnish (10), Norwegian (7), Danish (6), Estonian (5), Hindi (4), Slovak (4), Slovenian (3), Bulgarian, Hebrew, Lithuanian and Latvian (1 each) (January 2015, Makowski 2015).

Such an approach allowed, on the one hand, to obtain in some cases very detailed data relating to a very large number of employees. On the other hand, it proved to be very problematic to obtain answers to other questions, e.g. regarding areas of foreign language use or areas of knowledge and supported processes, because depending on each department, employees performed very different activities and used foreign languages for differentiated tasks. Hence, after the two pilot editions of the barometer (7/2020 and 8/2020), it was decided that in the next edition dedicated to the issue of specialist communication in modern business services companies, the target group should be the employees themselves directly. This approach, as the authors will show in the next section, made a much more precise and qualitative determination of the answers to the research questions. Based on the raw material collected in the survey, the data can also be analysed taking into account the correlations between various factors, such as education, level of language competence and work experience.

Tab 1. Editions of the Language Barometer of Lodz 2014–2022 (developed by the authors).

Edition 1/2014	The Language Barometer of Lodz 2014
Research method:	Questionnaire-based survey, quantitative approach
Source of data acquisition	Companies, Human Recourse Department
Scope of research	4 participants (companies) – 33% of the market of modern business services in Lodz (3568/10800: total number of employees of the 4 participating companies as respondents of the survey in relation to the total number of employment in the sector of modern business services according to the ABSL report for the given data collection period).
Period of data collection	April 2014
First publication of research results	Makowski 2014

Edition 2/2015	Evaluation of company needs in the field of candidates with foreign language skills. Survey results			
Research method:	Questionnaire-based survey, quantitative approach			
Source of data acquisition	Companies, Human Recourse Department			
Scope of research	5 participants (companies) – 28% of the modern business services market for Lodz (3704/13100: total number of employees of the 5 participating companies as respondents of the survey in relation to the total number of employment in the sector of modern business services according to the ABSL report for the given data collection period).			

Edition 2/2015	Evaluation of company needs in the field of candidates with foreign language skills. Survey results
Period of data collection	January-April 2015
First publication of research results	Makowski 2015
Edition 3/2015	Focus test results: Students in the "Linguistics for Business (BA)"
Research method:	Focused group interview, qualitative approach
Source of data acquisition	First and second year students in the "Linguistics for Business (BA)" at the Philology Department of the University of Lodz
Scope of research	75 participants
Period of data collection	May 2015
First publication of research results	University of Lodz, Faculty of Philology – confidential, internal use only
Edition 4/2017	Foreign and specialist languages in professional communication. The Language Barometer of Lodz 2017
Research method:	Questionnaire-based survey, quantitative
Source of data acquisition	Companies, Human Recourse Department
Scope of research	4 participants (companies) – 30% of the market of modern business services in Lodz (5506/18100: total number of employees of the 4 participating companies as respondents of the survey in relation to the total number of employment in the sector of modern business services according to the ABSI report for the given data collection period).
Period of data collection	August-October 2017
First publication of research results	Makowski 2018b
Edition 5/2018	Foreign and special languages in professional communication. Students questionnaire. The Language Barometer of Lodz 2018
Research method:	Questionnaire-based survey, qualitative
Source of data acquisition	Third year students in the "Linguistics for Business (BA)", German Language section
Scope of research	25 participants
Period of data collection	May 2018
First publication of research results	University of Lodz, Faculty of Philology – internal use only
Edition 6/2019	Foreign and special languages in professional communication. Students questionnaire. The Language Barometer of Lodz 2019
Research method:	Questionnaire-based survey, qualitative
Research method:	
Source of data acquisition	Third year students in the "Linguistics for Business (BA)", German Language section

Edition 6/2019	Foreign and special languages in professional communication. Students questionnaire. The Language Barometer of Lodz 2019
Period of data collection	May 2019
First publication of research results	University of Lodz, Faculty of Philology – internal use only
Edition 7/2020	Foreign and special languages in professional communication. The Language Barometer of Lodz 2020 [pilot project, companies]
Research method:	Questionnaire-based survey, quantitative
Source of data acquisition	Company, Human Recourse Department
Scope of research	2 participants (companies) – 3% of the market of modern business services in Lodz (850/25900: total number of employees of the 4 participating companies as respondents of the survey in relation to the total number of employment in the sector of modern business services according to the ABSL report for the given data collection period).
Period of data collection	December 2020
First publication of research results	University of Lodz, Faculty of Philology – internal use only
Edition 8/2020	Foreign and special languages in professional communication. The Language Barometer of Lodz 2020 [pilot project, employees]
Research method:	Questionnaire-based survey, qualitative
Source of data acquisition	Employees
Scope of research	2 participants (employees)
Period of data collection	October 2020
First publication of research results	University of Lodz, Faculty of Philology – internal use only
<b>Edition 9/2021</b>	The Language Barometer of Lodz 2021. Employees of the modern business services sector
Research method:	
	Questionnaire-based survey, qualitative
Source of data acquisition	Employees
Scope of research	39 participants (employees)
Period of data collection	July-October 2021
First publication of research results	Grzeszczakowska-Pawlikowska, Makowski, Stawikowska-Marcinkowska 2022a; Grzeszczakowska-Pawlikowska, Makowski, Stawikowska-Marcinkowska 2022b in this AJMP special issue; Grzeszczakowska-Pawlikowska 2022 in this AJMP special issue; Makowski 2022 in this AJMP special issue; Stawikowska-Marcinkowska in this AJMP special issue

<b>Edition 10/2022</b>	Students in the Linguistics for Business (BA). The Language Barometer of Lodz 2022			
Research method:	Questionnaire-based survey, qualitative			
Source of data acquisition	Third year students in the "Linguistics for Business (BA)", German Language section			
Scope of research	14 participants			
Period of data collection	June 2022			
First publication of research results	University of Lodz, Faculty of Philology – internal use only			

<b>Edition 11/2022</b>	Students in the German Philology (BA). The Language Barometer of Lodz 2022			
Research method:	Questionnaire-based survey, qualitative			
Source of data acquisition	Third year students in the "German Philology (BA)", German Language section			
Scope of research	14 participants			
Period of data collection	June 2022			
First publication of research results	University of Lodz, Faculty of Philology – internal use only			

#### 3. Results

The survey "The Language Barometer of Lodz 2021. Employees of the modern business services sector" is the 9th edition of the project. The target group of the study consists of 39 employees of companies from the field of modern business services and at the same time graduates of philology studies with a German language orientation. The identity of the participants of the survey was anonymous, the participants were numbered with digits from [2] to [40]. The period of data collection was 19.07. – 31.10.2021. Tables 2 and 3 characterise the survey participants in detail regarding their education and experience in the modern business services industry. In terms of educational background, graduates of German Philology (Master) (19 participants) and Linguistics for Business (Bachelor) predominate (Tab. 2). In terms of experience, the proportions are spread more or less evenly between a group of very experienced employees (more than 8 years of experience, 13 participants), moderately experienced employees (4 – 8 years, 14 participants) and employees with the least experience (less than 4 years, 12 participants) (Tab. 3).

German Philology UŁ (MA)

Linguistics for Business UŁ (BA)

German Philology UŁ (BA)

Other\*

\* Linguistics in Special Communication (MA),
Germanistics with IT, unrelated, German Philology
UŁ (MA) + Physics UŁ (spec. theoretical, MA),
Finance and Accounting, German Philology UJ (MA)

Tab. 2. Education of the participants of the survey (developed by the authors).

Tab. 3. Experience in the field of modern business services of the participants of the survey (developed by the authors).

over 10 years	7
8 – 10 years	6
6 – 8 years	3
4 – 6 years	11
2 – 4 years	7
under 2 years	5

Regarding the required foreign language skills (Tab. 4) of the target group and the aspect of multilingualism (Tab 5), the predominant languages among the participants of the survey are German (39/39 participants, 100%) and English (38/39 participants, 97%), followed by Spanish (4), Dutch (4), Italian (4), Russian (3), Norwegian (2), Swedish (2), French (1) and Portuguese (1).

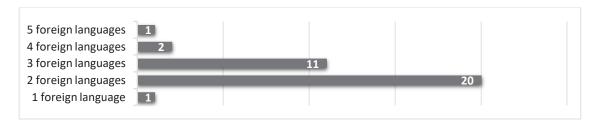
Tab. 4. Foreign language skills of the target group of the participants of the survey in total (developed by the authors).

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	Total
German		1	4	2	16	11	39
English			1	11	21	2	38
Spanish			1	2	1		4
Dutch		1	3				4
Italian	2	1	1				4
Swedish		1	1				2
Norwegian	1	1					2
Russian		1		1			2
French				1			1
Portuguese		1					1

Among the survey participants, employees with knowledge of two foreign languages are the dominant group (51%, 20 employees). Employees with knowledge of three foreign languages represent 28% (11 employees) of the target group. With German as the leading foreign language, 92% of survey

participants (36/39 employees) declared English as a necessary requirement for their current job position. In two cases English is seen as an additional asset by the employer; in the case of one employee English is not required. At the same time, for 23 employees (58%), knowledge of another foreign language is additionally rewarded by the employer.

Tab. 5. Multilingualism in the target group (developed by the authors).



In addition to general information on language skills and multilingualism in the study group, the results of the survey allow to analyse the individual detailed language profile of each individual employee (Tab. 6).

Tab. 6. Foreign language skills of the participants of the survey in detail (developed by the authors).

	= 1.1 (2.)	(25)	2 (7)	- 1 (-1)	
[2]	English (C1)	German (C2)	Spanish (B1)	Dutch (B1)	
[3]	English (C1)	German (C2)	Italian (B1)		
[4]	English (C1)	German (C2)	Russian (B2)		
[5]	English (C1)	German (B2)	Norwegian (A1)	Swedish (A2)	
[6]	English (C1)	German (B1)			
[7]	English (C1)	German (B1)			
[8]	English (C1)	German (C1)			
[9]	English (B1)	German (C1+)	Russian (A2)		
[10]	English (B2/C1)	German (B1+)			
[11]	English (C1)	German (B2+)	Spanish (C1)		
[12]	English (C1)	German (C2)			
[13]	English (B2/C1)	German (C1)			
[14]	English (C2)	German (C1)			
[15]	English (C1)	German (B2/C1)	Dutch (C1)		
[16]	English (B2)	German (C1)	Italian (A2)		
[17]	English (B2)	German (C2)	Dutch (A2)		
[18]	English (B2)	German (C1)			
[19]	English (C1)	German (C2)			
[20]	English (B2)	German (C1)			
[21]	English (C1)	German (C1)			
[22]	English (B2)	German (C1)	Italian (A1)		
[23]	English (C1)	German (C1)			

[24]	English (C1)	[German (B2/ C1)]*			
[25]	English (B2)	German (C2)			
[26]	English (B2+)	German (B1)			
[27]	English (C1)	German (C1)			
[28]	English (C1)	German (A2)	Spanish (B2)		
[29]	English (C1)	German (C1)			
[30]		German (C2)			
[31]	English (B2)	German (C1)	Dutch (B1)		
[32]	English (B2)	German (C1)	Norwegian (A2)		
[33]	English (C1)	German (B2/C1)			
[34]	English (B1/B2)	German (B2/C1/ C2)			
[35]	English (B2)	German (C2)			
[36]	English (C1)	German (C2)	French (B2)	Spanish (B2)	Swedish (B1)
[37]	English (B2)	German (C1)	Portuguese (A2)		
[38]	English (B2)	German (C1)			
[39]	English (C1)	German (C1)	Russian (A2)		
[40]	English (C2)	German (C1)	Italian (A1)		

<sup>\*</sup> only the answer «English (C1)» was given. With the indicated educational qualification in «German Philology (BA)», the assumed minimum level of German should be B2/C1

One of the most relevant research questions was the aspect of the areas of application of foreign languages. In the receptive skills of listening and reading, the most often areas of language use are participation in telephone conversations or platform based conversations, understanding of e-mails as well as understanding of both spoken and written instructions, explanations and descriptions. In the productive skills, in the case of speaking and interacting competence, the dominant area is that of active participations in discussions and negotiations, telephone and platform based conversations, and in the case of writing instructions, explanations, descriptions and e-mails on professional topics. When it comes to translation, written translations are done with a very different intensity, interpretation is rather or definitely not important.

Tab. 7. Evaluation of the importance of the LISTENING skills in German in the current job position of the survey participants (developed by the authors).

	definitely important	rather important	rather not important	definitely not important
participation in face-to-face conversations on professional topics	18	7	6	8
participation in telephone conversations about professional topics	27	3	2	7
participation in conversations on platforms like MS Teams / Zoom / Skype or other about professional topics	27	3	2	7

	definitely	rather	rather	definitely
	important	important	not important	not important
understanding of discussions / negotiations on professional matters	23	6	2	8
understanding of verbal instructions / explanations / descriptions on professional topics	27	3	2	7
understanding of presentations on professional topics	19	10	3	7

Tab. 8. Evaluation of the importance of the READING skills in German in the current job position of the survey participants (developed by the authors).

	definitely important	rather important	rather not important	definitely not important
understanding of articles in professional press	10	10	9	10
understanding of e-mails on professional topics	30	3	1	5
understanding of written instructions / explanations / descriptions on professional topics	30	3	1	5
understanding of texts on professional topics	19	9	6	5
understanding of traditional correspondence on professional topics	21	7	3	8

Tab. 9. Evaluation of the importance of the SPEEKING and INTERACTION skills in German in the current job position of the survey participants (developed by the authors).

	definitely important	rather important	rather not important	definitely not important
active participations in discussions / negotiations on professional topics	20	10	3	6
active participation in face-to-face conversations on professional topics	17	9	6	7
active participation in telephone conversations about professional topics	24	6	3	6
active participation in conversations on platforms like MS Teams / Zoom / Skype or other about professional topics	24	5	3	7
giving verbal instructions / explanations / descriptions on professional topics	20	9	3	7
conducting presentations on professional topics	16	11	5	7

Tab. 10. Evaluation of the importance of the WRITING skills in German in the current job position of the survey participants (developed by the authors).

	definitely important	rather important	rather not important	definitely not important
giving written instructions / explanations / descriptions on professional topics	20	11	2	6
writing texts on professional topics	13	10	7	9
taking notes of meetings	8	15	8	8
drafting summaries of texts on professional topics	8	9	13	9
writing articles in the professional press	5	5	14	15
writing articles for internal knowledge bases	10	10	7	12
compilation of glossaries of professional terminology	8	4	11	16
writing traditional correspondence on professional topics	10	9	6	14
writing e-mails on professional topics	29	3	2	5
preparing presentations on professional topics	12	13	5 9	
filling in forms	14	10	6	9

Tab. 11. Evaluation of the importance of the TRANSLATION and INTERPRETING skills in German in the current job position of the survey participants (developed by the authors).

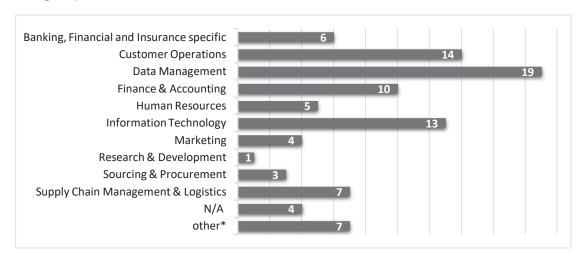
	definitely important	rather important	rather not important	definitely not important
written translation on professional topics	10	11	6	12
whispered interpreting on professional topics	6	4	8	21
consecutive interpreting on professional topics	4	7	8	20
simultaneous interpreting on professional topics	4	3	10	22

The question of the processes supported and the areas of knowledge covered by the specialist communication in the target group was just as important as the proficiencies and areas of language use by the participants of the survey.

Of the services provided by the participants of the survey listed in the questionnaire, the dominant area was the branch of data management, followed by customer operations and information technology. The noticeable trend towards multi-specialisation of employees was very significant in this

case in that only 12 participants of the survey support only one single branch of service. The remaining employees are active in a minimum of two or more diverse specialist areas. For example, one of the participants described his spectrum of supported processes as *Any area requiring IT consultancy* (clients from various sectors including heavy industry, entertainment, education, medical industry, etc.).

Tab. 12. Specialist areas supported by the participants of the survey (German, multiple choice question) (developed by the authors).



<sup>\*</sup>Brand Management / Sales, Any area requiring IT consultancy (clients from various sectors including heavy industry, entertainment, education, medical industry, etc.), Quality and Regulatory, Artificial Inteligence, Contract Admin, Service Desk, Quality of Medical devices.

## 4. Concluding remarks, implications and perspectives

The global analysis of the results of the survey questions regarding the role of foreign and specialised languages in professional communication in the modern business services sector in Poland has made it possible to isolate certain consistent trends, which were also confirmed in earlier editions and which have didactic implications:

- the significant role of multilingualism according to the scheme: English as the language of
  internal communication of the company and/or the language for process support plus a
  minimum of one other foreign language for process support,
- high diversity in the role, requirements and areas of application of foreign languages within
  individual companies or departments, which on the other hand, is often accompanied by
  routine and repetition of the same activities, tasks or performance,
- very high diversity of knowledge areas (supported processes),
- with so many specialist areas supported by the target group, it is obvious that employees are
  exposed to a very wide range of specialised texts in their job-related communication (for more
  details on the text genres pointed out by the participants see: Grzeszczakowska-Pawlikowska,

Makowski, Stawikowska-Marcinkowska 2022a). Independently of the type of process or area of knowledge, there is a trend towards certain universal text genres, such as various types of technical documentation, instruction manuals or technical reports, invoices and other accounting documents, human resources documents or various universal types of business communication texts such as e-mails, official letters, offers and others.

In combination with the awareness of the high internal and external turnover of employees in this sector of the economy, the training of language competences in a narrow way for a specific currently existing demand from the labour market seems to be not beneficial for the learners. From a didactical point of view it seems much more effective to develop skills to be prepared for constantly changing market conditions and turnover, i.e. training in universal competences.

Based on the raw material collected in the survey (Grzeszczakowska-Pawlikowska, Makowski, Stawikowska-Marcinkowska 2022a), the global results presented above can be analysed taking into account the correlation of various factors, such as education, level of linguistic competence, work experience, selected language proficiency, area of language use or specificity of the supported process.

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