

# TOWARDS A SYSTEMATISED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING FOR BORDER GUARDS

**Marina Žukova**

State Border Guard College, Latvia, e-mail: [marina.zukova@rs.gov.lv](mailto:marina.zukova@rs.gov.lv)

**Abstract.** *Ability to communicate in English is one of the prior competences border guards are required to have in order to ensure qualitative border control and border checks on the state border. Being aware of the importance of knowledge of English for border guards in fulfilment service duties on regular basis the State Border Guard of Latvia tried and tries to find optimal solutions for organising English language training for its staff. The present paper is a summary of the results of research carried out with the aim to work out suggestions on the measures to be taken in order to provide the SBG officials with the possibility to acquire and maintain English language knowledge and skills required for qualitative fulfilment of service duties. In the course of the research the assessment of border guards' level of knowledge of English and analysis of English language courses provided by the SBG to border guards was carried out.*

**Key words:** *border guards, professional terminology in English, standardisation, improvement, requirements.*

## Introduction

Latvia's membership in the European Union (the EU) since 2004 and Schengen area since 2007 set a number of new tasks to the officials of the State Border Guard (SBG) – ensuring border control on the EU external border, participation in international joint operations, trainings, experience exchange events, meetings and informative events, which resulted in broadening the range of professional skills and competences SBG officials are required to have in order to fulfil the set tasks successfully. More and more often Latvian border guards are faced with situations when they have to be able to communicate with foreign travellers and colleagues. English as an international language gradually became the main medium of communication for border guards who have to fulfil their service duties in international environment. Thus the importance of the knowledge of English and professional terminology in English in particular increased considerably during the last years.

The conclusion - “although the overall improvement border guards' level of English knowledge and availability of online English language training materials were observed not all border guards were able to communicate effectively in English” - made by the Schengen evaluation commission on the results of the evaluation of the quality of the sea and air border control carried out in Latvia in 2013 (State Border Guard, 2013), made it obvious that the SBG had to find solutions for improvement of

border guards' level of English knowledge, providing border guards with the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for successful communication with foreign travellers and colleagues.

The present paper summarizes the results of the research carried out from 2013-2015 with the aim to work out suggestions on the measures to be taken in order to provide the SBG officials with the possibility to acquire and maintain English language knowledge and skills required for qualitative fulfilment of service duties.

Since border guards are taught to use the English language knowledge and skills in a specific environment, that is for communication with persons who cross the border and colleagues from foreign countries, the research was based on the findings in the field of teaching English known as English for specific purposes, summarized namely in works of Paltridge and Starfield, Dudley-Evans and St.John, and Borszéli.

### **English language training for the SBG officials: the present situation**

In order to achieve the aim of the research - to work out suggestions on the measures to be taken in order to provide the SBG officials with the possibility to acquire and maintain English language knowledge and skills required for qualitative fulfilment of service duties – the following activities were carried out in the course of the research:

1. Assessment of border guards' level of knowledge of English (November- December 2013);
2. Analysis of English language courses provided by the SBG to border guards (2014-2015).

Following the Schengen evaluation commission's recommendation regarding the level of border guards' English knowledge the SBG delegated the State Border Guard College (SBGC) with the task to assess the English language knowledge of the SBG officials involved in border control, immigration control and criminal investigation activities.

*Assessment of border guards' level of knowledge of English* was carried out by means of a test. The test was prepared with assumption that the English language competence in its context was comprised of knowledge and ability to apply general English vocabulary, grammar structures and reading skill and the knowledge of basic border guards' professional terminology.

The test consisted of two parts: check of general English knowledge – Oxford Quick Placement Test and check of knowledge of border guards' professional terminology – task to translate 100 most commonly used border guard work related terms from Latvian into English.

Border guards' levels of general English knowledge were defined based on the results interpretation scale suggested by Oxford Quick Placement Test, which in its turn is based on ALTE (Association of Language testers of Europe) levels scale. The knowledge of border guards' specific terminology was assessed based on a 10-point grading system adopted in Latvia. The SBGC English language teachers were involved in the preparation and implementation of testing, the SBG territorial boards were responsible for defining and selecting border guards to be tested.

As a result, 1152 SBG officials from different SBG structural units participated in the test. One part of the officials who were tested often used English as a media of communication with travellers - these were border guards who served at border crossing points in Riga international airport or seaports, the other part of the tested SBG officials were border guards who served at border surveillance units and border crossing points on the EU external border with the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus and the use of English was not so important for them in carrying out service duties because the number of English speakers is relatively low on that part of the state border.

The results of the testing demonstrated that 55% of the officials who did the test had insufficient level of the knowledge of professional terminology in English (their performance in border guards' specific terminology check was evaluated as unsatisfactory) and 81% of the tested officials had a relatively low level of the knowledge of general English (beginner or elementary or A1-A2 according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages of the Council of Europe in consideration of specific needs).

The results of the testing proved the observations made by the Schengen evaluation commission and conclusion that there was a need to find solutions for improvement of border guards' level of English knowledge.

*Analysis of English language courses provided by the SBG to border guards* was carried out with the aim to determine their benefits and weaknesses and identify the problem areas to be improved.

Being aware of the importance of English language knowledge in carrying out border control and border checks, the SBG as far as it was possible tried and still tries to organise English language courses for its staff. During the last decade border guards had an opportunity to attend a number of courses financed and implemented both by the SBG and within the frames of the EU financial support programmes.

The courses organised within the EU financial support programmes were implemented by private language schools and firms specialising on the organisation of language courses, unfortunately the information

regarding the content of the training programmes, training resources, teachers' professional background, duration of courses, etc. was not accessible during the research. Therefore only the English courses financed by the SBG itself and implemented by the SBGC, the only educational institution in Latvia providing vocational education and qualification improvement courses to the SBG officials, were analysed.

Being the 1<sup>st</sup> level higher professional education institution SBGC provides the SBG officials with the opportunity to improve their English language knowledge within border guards' professional English terminology subjects implemented in the frames of formal education programmes and two qualification improvement courses in border guards' professional English terminology.

The content of the English professional terminology subjects has been developed on the basis of the description of border guards' competence and recommendations regarding the content of English language training programmes included in Common Core Curriculum for EU Border Guard Basic Training (CCC) developed by the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex). The CCC describes border guard's English competence and attitude towards the foreign language as follows: "A border guard is able to produce, understand and speak steadily and clearly, work-related phrases and dialogues in English concerning border checks and border surveillance situations. Border guard is aware that English language is important for daily tasks relating to border checks or border surveillance at air, land or sea borders. Border guard is prepared and ready to further improve their English skills. Border guard is able to use, in English, politely phrased greetings together with clearly and politely stated phrases related to basic border control. Border guard accepts the use of English in their daily work, when required" "(Common Core Curriculum, 2012).

It is also recommended that "border guards' English language proficiency is aimed level B1 level according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages of the Council of Europe in consideration of specific needs" (Frontex Agency, 2012).

Thus all border guards who undergo border guards' basic preparation training have the opportunity to get basic knowledge of border guards' specific terminology.

The present research focused mainly on border guards' possibilities to further maintain the knowledge acquired within formal education programmes thus a deeper analysis of English language courses implemented as qualification improvement courses was carried out.

As it has been already mentioned the SBGC offers two qualification improvement courses in border guards' professional English terminology – intensive English professional terminology course “Carrying out border checks at seaport border crossing point” and “Professional English terminology e-learning”. The following aspects – topics covered within the courses, training materials, teachers' professional background, duration of courses, regularity and number of implemented courses, as well as the number of border guards who have been trained – were analysed. The information on the content of the courses, training and teachers' resources, duration and regularity of courses, as well as number of border guards trained is summarised in table 1.

**Table 1. English professional terminology courses implemented by the State Border Guard College**  
(Source: compiled by the author)

	<i>Course “Carrying out border checks at seaport border crossing point”</i>	<i>Course “Professional English terminology e-learning”</i>
<i>Topics covered</i>	1. Giving information about the service place. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Service tasks, duties</li> <li>- Service ranks</li> <li>- Infrastructure of a service place</li> <li>- Equipment</li> </ul> 2. Interviewing persons who cross the border <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information in travel documents</li> <li>- Vessels documents</li> </ul> 3. Border checks on vessels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kinds of vessels, parts of vessels</li> <li>- Border check procedure</li> </ul> 4. Non-standard and problem situations at border crossing point <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Giving instructions</li> <li>- Problems with documents</li> <li>- Refusal of entry</li> <li>- Imposing fines</li> </ul>	1. Giving information about the service place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Service tasks, duties</li> <li>- Service ranks</li> <li>- Infrastructure of a service place</li> <li>- Equipment</li> </ul> 2. Communication with persons who cross the border <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information in travels documents</li> <li>- Interviewing persons</li> <li>- Giving instructions, explanations</li> <li>- Imposing fines</li> <li>- Refusal of entry</li> <li>- Issuing visas</li> </ul> 3. Professional terminology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Terminology in the EU and Schengen normative acts, terminology related to participation in joint operations</li> </ul>
<i>Preliminary requirements</i>	Preliminary knowledge of English	A1 level
<i>Training materials</i>	Authentic materials (specimens of documents examined during	Training materials developed by the teachers of the State Border

	the border check on crews and vessels), teacher's developed materials	Guard College and Frontex experts with the focus on border guards' specific needs
<i>Duration</i>	2 weeks, 76 hours	13 weeks, 18 contact hours
<i>Form of training</i>	Traditional, face-to face in class training	E-learning combined with progress and final assessment in a form of traditional face-to face in class training
<i>Teachers' background</i>	Teachers with Border Guard background, border guards on service with more than 10 years of teaching experience	Teachers with Border Guard background, border guards on service with more than 10 years of teaching experience
<i>Regularity/ number of courses</i>	3 courses were organised in 2014 and 2015	5 courses have been organised in 2011-2015
<i>Number of border guards trained</i>	24	130

In the result of the analysis it was concluded that the English language courses offered by the SBGC are characterised as English for specific purposes courses (ESP). ESP according to Jeremy Day and Mark Krzanowski “involves teaching and learning the specific skills and language needed by particular learners for a particular purpose. The purpose in ESP is always a professional purpose – a set of skills that learners currently need in their work or will need in their professional careers”. (Day and Krzanowski, 2011, p.5). The topics covered during the courses are purely border guards specific, with a very small emphasis on general English.

The following benefits and weaknesses of the analysed courses were pointed out:

- Benefits:
  - SBG provides its staff with the opportunity to improve the knowledge of border guards' professional terminology in English;
  - experienced tutors with border guard background are involved in the development and implementation of the courses;
  - the content of courses and training materials being developed based on the border guards' specific needs, a wide range of authentic materials – specimens of documents, audio/video materials relevant to the topics are used;
  - the course “Professional English terminology e-learning” is implemented as an e-learning course combined with traditional classroom learning, which allows to the SBG to

save certain financial resources, which is required for the organisation of traditional face-to-face courses;

- Weaknesses:
  - the number and range of courses is very limited (only two);
  - the courses are not implemented on a regular basis;
  - due to limited financial resources, as well as training and accommodation facilities at the SBGC it is not possible to provide regular training to a big number of border guards, as a rule, when planning qualification improvement courses for a year priority is given to organisation of specific courses, e.g. document examination or use of border guard specific information data bases, etc.;
  - the existing courses do not provide the border guards with the possibility to continue their training and learning in the future. There is no any system of interrelated courses with succession from a lower level to a higher one, which is one of the preconditions for formation of consistent knowledge and skills, as one of the external factors, which affect the success of second language learning according to Krashen is “the time and the frequency available for the exposure to the target language” (Straková);
  - only one of the two courses – the course “Carrying out border checks at seaport border crossing point”- was developed with the focus on a specific sphere of border guards’ work, the e-learning course focuses on border guards’ professional terminology in general. As a result the needs of border guards working at land and airport border crossing points and in the Immigration service were not fully satisfied;
  - it was observed that occasionally border guards who did not meet the preliminary requirements for participation in a particular course were sent to the training;
  - not always border guards were motivated to participate in the course, especially in situations when their chiefs nominated them to the course or they did not use English in their everyday work.

### **Conclusions and suggestions**

To summarise the results of the research it was concluded that:

1. The average level of border guards’ English knowledge is comparatively low;

2. The SBG as an institution is aware of the importance to invest financial resources into professional improvement of its staff, as far as it is possible English language courses are organised both by the SBGC and in the frames of the EU financial support programmes;
3. The courses organised by the SBGC were developed based on the border guards' work specifics, the knowledge and skills focused within the courses generally meet border guards' needs;
4. The courses organised by the SBGC do not provide border guards with the possibility to continue language learning and constantly improve and maintain the acquired knowledge and skills, which could be one of the reasons why a big number of border guards demonstrated quite a low level of knowledge of general English and professional terminology during the testing done in 2013;
5. There is no strict system for the selection and nomination of participants for the courses, occasionally a part of border guards sent to the training did not need to use English in everyday work at all, e.g. officials working in border surveillance units. As a result the knowledge and skills they acquired during the courses faded over time and the finance for their training was spent inefficiently;
6. There is no any system of requirements regarding the level of foreign language knowledge obligatory for successful fulfilment of the service duties on the state border. It is important for an employee to be aware of the employer's requirements in relation to professional knowledge, skills and competence needed for taking a definite position. Knowing and being aware of the state of play regarding English language competence can be one of the reasons for higher motivation to improve the foreign language knowledge and competence. The importance of learner's motivation in foreign language learning has been stressed in numerous researches on the foreign language learning and acquisition. Gardner and MacIntyre define motivation "as the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to learn the language and the satisfaction experienced in this activity" (Ushida, 2005);
7. It is necessary to determine categories of border guards for whom it is obligatory to know English, which will allow to use available financial and training resources more rationally;
8. There is no data available on the impact of the training provided by the SBGC on the improvement of border guards' English competence and fulfilment of service duties.

The conclusions mentioned above are indicative of certain inefficiency of the existing approach of the SBG to the organisation and implementation of English language training for its personnel. One of the denouements for raising the border guards' English knowledge quality in author's opinion is the systematisation of the English language training process for border guards. Thus the following suggestions were put forward:

1. To systemise English language training within the SBG;
2. To determine the following categories of border guards for whom the knowledge of English and professional terminology in English is obligatory:
  - SBG officials involved in border control;
  - SBG officials involved in immigration control;
  - SBG officials who participate in international events (joint operations, training, working groups, etc.) organised by Frontex and other international institutions;
3. To define three levels of knowledge of professional terminology in English as follows:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> level of knowledge of professional terminology in English for the SBG junior inspectors and inspectors, corresponding to the level of knowledge acquired within the further professional education programme "Border guarding";
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> level of knowledge of professional terminology in English for the SBG junior officers, corresponding to the level of knowledge acquired within the 1<sup>st</sup> level higher professional education programme "Border guarding";
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> level of knowledge of professional terminology in English for the SBG senior officers and officials who participate in international events (joint operations, training, working groups, etc.) organised by Frontex and other international institutions, corresponding to the level of knowledge acquired within the 2<sup>nd</sup> level higher professional education bachelor programme "Border guarding";
4. To work out descriptors for each of the three levels of knowledge of professional terminology in English;
5. To establish a common register (data base) of SBG officials who are required to have the knowledge of professional terminology in English of a certain level, with the up to date information regarding type of training and examinations passed in order to make it possible to follow their progress in foreign language, to make the selecting and nominating candidates to language courses easier and more accurate. The personnel management system "Horizon" can be used for this purpose;

6. To determine that SBG provides training in professional terminology in English to border guards for whom knowledge of English and professional terminology in English is obligatory;
7. To determine the procedure for regular controls to be carried out with the purpose to verify if border guards for whom the knowledge of English and professional terminology in English is obligatory have the appropriate knowledge level;
8. To develop a system of courses of different levels and specialisation in border guards' professional terminology to open up the opportunities for border guards to receive continuous training and improve their knowledge of specific English;
9. To carry out a deeper research on the quality of training courses in professional terminology in English offered by the SBGC and their impact on border guards' level of knowledge and skills (analysis of course results, questionnaires for the participants of the courses, border guards' retesting in professional terminology in English).

### References

1. BORSZÉKI J. (2013). The principles of modern language teaching represented in an EU training tool for border guards I, *Military Science Review / Hadtudományi Szemle*, Vol. 6 Issue 3. p109.
2. FRONTEX Agency. (2012). *Common Core Curriculum. EU Border Guard Basic Training*. Publishing Office. p 269.
3. DAY,J., KRZANOWSKI,M. (2011). *Teaching English for Specific Purposes: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press. p 31.
4. DUDLEY-EVANS T., ST.JOHN M. (2012). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach*. Cambridge University Press. 303 p.
5. Quick Placement test. (2001), UCLES. p 20.
6. PALTRIDGE B., STARFIELD S. (2012). *The handbook of English for specific purposes*, Wiley-Blackwell. p 592.
7. STRAKOVÁ,Z. Second language acquisition and the role of input in the classroom, Retrieved 23 March 2015, from [http://www.pulib.sk/elpub2/FHPV/Kesselova1/pdf\\_doc/16b.pdf](http://www.pulib.sk/elpub2/FHPV/Kesselova1/pdf_doc/16b.pdf)
8. USHIDA, E. (2005). The Role of Students' Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning in Online Language Courses, *CALICO Journal*, Vol. 23, No.1. Retrieved March 30, 2015, from [https://calico.org/html/article\\_131.pdf](https://calico.org/html/article_131.pdf), 2005
9. [STATE BORDER GUARD \(2013\). Order No. 830 "On prevention of drawbacks and implementation of recommendations done in the course of Schengen evaluation on sea and air borders"](#).