

МИНИСТЕРСТВО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ И НАУКИ
РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ
ТОМСКИЙ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ

ЯЗЫК И КУЛЬТУРА

**Сборник статей
XXIV Международной научной конференции,
посвященной 135-летию
Томского государственного университета
(7–9 октября 2013 г.)**

Ответственный редактор профессор С.К. Гураль

Томск
Издательский Дом Томского государственного университета
2014

P.J. Mitchell, L.A. Mitchell

Tomsk State University, Tomsk, Russia

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN RUSSIA

The Bologna Process and its ramifications herald perhaps the most far-reaching reforms in European higher education in this century. It is not without reason that many of us are divided as to whether the Bologna Process will enhance or wreck our system of language education. Yet this division of minds need not develop into an educational ‘civil war’; despite its inherent positives and negatives, the Bologna Process invites us to reinvent and reinvigorate language education with an emphasis on inclusivity, internationally high standards and inter-university collaboration.

It was in April 2006 when one of the authors of this paper addressed an academic conference in the faraway town of Pyt’-Yakh, where he hypothesized on the Bologna Process’s effects on language teaching in Russian universities. That report ended with the words: “The Bologna Process is a long path, but the destination is in sight. All that is necessary is to continue forward” [1. P. 193]. Since then, the Bologna principles as implemented in practice have turned out to differ from those set out on paper.

Most newly-matriculating students at Tomsk State University’s Faculty of Foreign Languages no longer study for the specialist’s diploma, but for a bachelor’s degree in ‘linguistics’. In accordance with the Bologna-envisaged structure of wide-ranging all-encompassing bachelor’s degrees, the linguistics curriculum is common for all language students instead of the previous division between future teachers and translators. This enables a student at Bachelor level to study a wide selection of courses within his academic sphere while not committing to a certain career until, if he so wishes, proceeding to studies at Master level.

From September 2014, a master’s degree will also be offered. Most importantly of all, the State Educational Standards provide both for student choice in the selection of particular courses and for a degree of university autonomy in curriculum development. Given the long history of the State writing a mandatory curriculum for every degree course this should be her-

alded as a significant improvement for both students' and universities' rights. It could be argued, however, that the reforms envisaged by Bologna are not being implemented to the greatest extent possible; despite the creation of a supranational European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Bologna reforms do call for much-increased university autonomy and the inclusion of students in decision-making processes. The issue of local autonomy is one that must be reviewed in the near future as the Bologna reforms take hold.

Although the Bachelor level more or less corresponds with the Bologna vision, the programme at Master level is rather lacking and – one might argue – does not meet the expectations of modern master's degrees. It is common in Western countries for master's degrees to be much more specialized than at the Bachelor level. It is not merely a case of the level or depth of knowledge being higher than that required to graduate with a bachelor's degree, but also of the very specialization of knowledge, i.e. a Western example could be that a graduate of a bachelor's programme in general history might then pursue a master's degree in, say, American constitutional history before narrowing down to a very specialized topic for doctoral research, e.g. the expansion of the powers of the executive during the presidency of G.W. Bush.

The 'abandonment' of specialization, certainly at Master level, was definitely not a Bologna-envisaged reform. The extent to which this – unintended by Bologna, but pursued by Russia – reform is threatening the education of decent specialists can be highlighted with an example from TSU's Faculty of Economics, which traditionally has prepared students for the specialist's diploma in seven economic majors: Economic Theory; Finances and Credit; Accounting, Analysis and Audit; World Economy; National Economy; Management; Taxes and Taxation. This Faculty now offers one bachelor's and one master's programme... both simply called 'Economics'. It is as yet unclear whether optional courses will be available for students wanting to specialize in one of the previously available areas.

As for language students, instead of an increasing specialization through the first two tiers of higher education, linguists do not only have a typical bachelor's programme, the contents of which to be mostly mandated by the federal government, but also a common general master's programme – the 'Master of Linguistics' – with no obvious specialization in a particular field. As with the Bachelor level, there are opportunities at the

Master level for university autonomy and students' rights in devising a portion of the curriculum, but it remains to be seen to what extent it will be possible for Master level students to specialize in a particular area, e.g. teaching or translating, as was previously the case with the specialist's diploma. It is of course possible that language faculties, using the powers of autonomy conferred upon them, will develop separate 'tracks' in their Master of Linguistics degree taking into account the desires of their students, but this is something that not all faculties have yet considered, despite the imminence of reform.

A problem of particular concern to be faced by language students is that of progression from Bachelor to Master level. We have in Russia a common yet misplaced perception that a bachelor's degree does not constitute a 'full higher education' and that it is not up to the standard of a specialist's diploma. In terms of calendar years spent studying it must be conceded that the bachelor's degree is shorter than the specialist's diploma, which gives ammunition to its critics. It can equally be argued, however, that in terms of academic content the bachelor's degree is no inferior to the diploma; indeed students at Bachelor level in Britain are required to spend a much greater proportion of their time on individual study and conducting research, often culminating in a final-year dissertation of no less academic rigour than the *diplomnaya rabota*.

The practical concern is that unless perceptions are changed, employers will have a rather poor opinion of those graduates who did not continue their education at Master level. This will inevitably lead to the vast majority of graduates demanding access to master's programmes, thereby tempting universities to offer almost as many places on Master level programmes as at Bachelor level. No doubt this will be in part motivated by a desire to increase their income, in an age of underfunding. The upside may be that Russia will become the country with the largest proportion its population educated to Master level in the World, taking into account that, according to UNESCO's OECD (2005) report, even now over half (53,9%) of Russia's adult population has attained a university education, compared to the OECD mean of 24% [2. P. 172]. The consequence, however, will be the devaluation of Russian bachelor's degrees and – it logically follows – the devaluation of Russian master's degrees too, for it goes against the ideal of the Master level being 'elite'.

The Russian academic, V. Gryzlov, draws our attention to the importance of progression to Master level not being automatic and that it should “practically exclude the graduation of Masters with [less than good] diplomas” [3. P. 26]. We see that this fundamental principle of the Master level – implicitly understood in the vast majority of signatory countries, yet not enshrined in any Bologna document – is in danger of being lost owing to our universities’ financial concerns and also negative perceptions of the Bachelor level both within and without Russian academe. It is therefore of the utmost importance that progression to master’s degrees is limited only to those language students of strong academic ability, lest holders of bachelor’s degrees find it difficult to embark on careers within their specialization and graduates of Master level programmes continually be subject to perceptions that a master’s degree is the minimum acceptable level of university education rather than a demonstration of postgraduate proficiency in one’s subject area. At the time of writing there are no plans to distinguish between research-based or professionally-orientated Master level programmes; the Russian master’s degree – irrespective of academic subject or plans post-graduation – will combine both taught courses and individual research work, the former taking up the first year, the latter most of the second year.

The Bologna Process happily does not yet affect the fit-for-purpose third stage of higher education, the *aspirantura*, though there exists the possibility of a name change in order to make it sound similar to the western ‘doctor’. As for the process of researching, submitting and defending one’s dissertation, and indeed being accepted as a research student, the Bologna reforms respect national traditions and variances in procedure. Access to the *aspirantura* for language students, originally available to graduates with a specialist’s diploma, will probably be restricted to those who graduated under the traditional system and graduates of master’s programmes. It is noted in Russia’s national report 2004-5 on implementations of the Bologna reforms that, “Officially, bachelor’s degree holders are eligible, provided they pass the entrance exams” [4]. In practice, however, our universities will almost certainly prove to be reluctant in admitting those with bachelor’s degrees only, for it would raise questions about the quality of their *aspirantura* and about the preparedness of the applicant, not to mention depriving the university of two years’ income from master’s degree fees. It should be noted, too, that in most other countries of the

EHEA such leapfrogging is frowned upon; indeed Great Britain is one of very few countries in which allowances are occasionally made for exceptional candidates, enabling holders of bachelor's degrees to begin doctoral studies without first gaining a master's degree.

The *doktorantura* is likewise unaffected by the Bologna Process. Those who claim that the Bologna reforms require its abolition are either mistaken or lying, and it must be said that such scaremongering ought have no place in academia. Although the Bologna Process requires the creation of a three-tier system of higher education (bachelor-master-doctor) it must be reiterated that the Bologna reforms respect national traditions and variances, and that this includes national provision for higher doctorates, including the German *habilitation* and the Russian *doktorantura*. It has been suggested that the name should be changed, but such superficial alterations need not be a source of great worry for language educationalists.

Of perhaps greatest interest to the language student – and indeed to the language teacher – are the increased possibilities for academic mobility brought about by the implementation of the Bologna Process. The Berlin Communiqué stated the necessity of “ensuring a substantial period of study abroad in joint degree programmes as well as proper provision for linguistic diversity and language learning” [5. P. 6]. This would unarguably be of great benefit to a student of any subject, but for language education it will prove invaluable. Too many of our language students are unable, mainly for financial reasons, to study abroad. It is to be hoped that by obliging universities to send students abroad for a minimum of one semester, it will be possible to negotiate mutually beneficial arrangements with partner institutions, thus eliminating or at least greatly reducing the circumstances of financial iniquity in which our students often find themselves.

Increasing the possibilities for staff mobility, too, is a stated priority in the London Communiqué, which recognizes the difficulties involved: “...issues related to immigration, recognition, insufficient financial incentives and inflexible pension arrangements...” [6. P. 2]. We as educators understand the problems encountered in learning a language outside the country in which it is spoken and we, better than many, appreciate how much being in that country facilitates language acquisition. Knowledge exchange and discussion of best practice will be mutually beneficial for both sides. With more mobility our teachers will know their languages better and this will undoubtedly aid their teaching of them, not only due to improved language knowledge, but also

through enhanced access to authentic language materials, more opportunities for cross-cultural discourse on teaching methods, etc. Our students in Russia will therefore benefit from better teaching by us, not to mention the anticipated opportunities for studying in universities abroad.

It is also important to note that academic mobility is not a one-way street: foreign educators and students will travel here too. An increase in the number of native speakers – including students, but particularly lecturers – can only help the situation in Russian universities, where we either have too few native-speaker teachers to go around or are forced to use uneducated – and often grossly underqualified – globetrotters. An influx of foreign academics, especially non-language specialists, would also offer great possibilities for Russian students in non-language faculties to study with, and learn from, specialists in their own field who happen to speak a foreign language fluently. This would certainly facilitate professional discourse in that language at a technical level much higher even than that of which a language teacher – native or non-native – would be capable. An influx of language teachers would, at the very least, mean having enough native speakers to go around, perhaps even in non-language departments; regular practice – at least weekly – through a student's university education would become the norm rather than a dream. As stated above, the London Communiqué does mention that much more has to be done on increasing staff and student mobility, but even if these aims will be just partially realized in the future the particular advantages for language education in Russia cannot be overstated.

Recognition of degrees and academic mobility go hand in hand. It is through the introduction of the European credit transfer system (ECTS) and the three-cycle higher education system that recognition and mobility are facilitated. Our students' tertiary qualifications will now be recognized uniformly throughout the EHEA; a giant leap forward from the times when it was seldom understood whether a specialist's diploma should count as either a bachelor's degree or a Master level qualification. Taking the example of Tomsk State University's Faculty of Foreign Languages, of those of our graduates with specialist's diplomas who continued their education in Europe or America, the vast majority were accepted onto master's programmes. Thanks to the Bologna Process our masters will now be entitled to undertake doctoral studies, and students even at Bachelor level will hopefully be provided with opportunities to study abroad for a semester or academic year. The prospect of offering joint programmes with foreign

partner universities is now also open to us. All the better for language education in Russia.

Finally, the Bologna Process and in particular, the creation in Russia of the Master level fills a gap between first – taught – degrees and the research cycle of higher education. By bringing teaching in higher education and high-level academic research closer together we gain language education that is informed by research breakthroughs and language research that is informed by realities in teaching. This blurring of the line between professional researchers and language teachers allows not only for more complete inter-university collaboration, but also intra-university collaboration, creating a new class of ‘researching professionals’, furthering the cause of language education in our higher educational establishments.

In conclusion, we see that the Bologna Process creates new conditions for language education in Russia. A common bachelor’s programme for new language students – most of whom are unready to commit to a particular career – is a wholly positive step. A common master’s programme, however, goes against the Bologna principles and is to the disadvantage of future language professionals – irrespective of sphere – in general. It is strongly advisable to introduce several specialized master’s programmes appropriate for language professionals, e.g. in teaching, translating, linguistics research, etc. Currently the only possible saving grace would be to create different tracks in the Master of Linguistics degree so as to allow specialization in a particular area. The Bologna ideal of institutional autonomy and the opportunities for students to have a say in the curriculum is to be welcomed, but could have been granted to a greater extent. Uninformed perceptions of bachelor’s and master’s programmes remain to be challenged, among both employers and students; only when graduates of bachelor’s programmes are accepted as ‘university graduates’ in the fullest sense of the term, will our language education system stand up to international and domestic scrutiny. The *aspirantura* and *doktorantura* will see no upheavals and the Master level with its mix of taught courses and individual research should provide a worthy preparation for future third-cycle studies. Academic mobility and exchange of knowledge are greatly served by the Bologna reforms and offer wonderful theoretical possibilities for language education in Russia. The theory will, however, become practice only with immense effort and will on the part of politicians, university administrators and educators. Not least among concerns for Russian universities is the issue of financial disparity with European institutions; the future might well lie in joint

degree programmes and close partnerships whereby both universities benefit. The bringing together of teaching and research fits in well with Russia's own educational policy and no doubt bodes well for the future of language education in Russia. There are, as with the majority of reforms, advantages and disadvantages. It seems that to avoid the negatives and enjoy the positives, it is best to keep as close to the Bologna ideals as possible. For it is not that there is one long path, but many. And there is not one destination in sight, but several. And it is not merely necessary to continue forward, but first to choose by which path.

References

1. Mitchell, P The Bologna Process and its Effects on Language Teaching in Russian Universities. *Development Priorities of liberal education in the XXI century*. Tyumen Univ TSU, 2006. pp. 190-193.
2. UNESCO, Educational Trends in Perspective Analysis of the World Education Indicators 2005 Edition. URL: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/TEMPLATE/pdf/wei/WEI2005.pdf> (retrieved: 01.12.13).
3. Gryzlov, V Quality education: the dialectic of positions and levels. *Higher Education in Russia*. 2005. No. 5. pp. 25-26.
4. Kassevitch, V, Rozina, N, Lukichev, G, Gevorkyan, E, Minayev, A, Talonov, A, Chistokhvalov, V Russian National Report on the Bologna Process 2004-5. URL: http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/national_impl/00_Nat-rep-05/National_Reports-Russia_050117.pdf (retrieved: 01.12.13).
5. Berlin Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education 01.12.03. URL: http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/030919_Berlin_Communique.PDF (retrieved: 01.12.13).
6. London Communiqué – Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalised world. URL: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/londonbologna/uploads/documents/LondonCommuniquedefinalwithLondonlogo.pdf> (retrieved: 01.12.13).

Key words: Bologna Process; higher education reform; language education.

Abstract. The article examines the implementation of the Bologna Process in Russia and implications for language education. The introduction of a multi-tiered educational system is examined in terms of opportunities for specialization at various levels. Attention is drawn to issues of progression from one stage to the next and perceptions of the qualifications issues of opportunities for student and academic mobility in both directions are considered, as is recognition of qualifications in different jurisdictions. Conclusions are made on the difficulties of implementing the theoretical Bologna ideals in practice, taking into account the likely adaptations of the Bologna reforms to Russian higher education realities.