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## MAPPING PRACTICES OF WRITING FINAL THESES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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*The aim of this paper is to encourage students to write their undergraduate and graduate theses in a foreign language. Students of Tourism Management at the Polytechnic of Šibenik have already shown interest in that direction. In such a way, higher education institutions in general become more visible to a wider audience, and students improve their proficiency. In Croatia, undergraduate and graduate theses are stored in the Croatian Digital Theses Repository, which enhances visibility and transparency in education. Although transparency prevents unethical behavior, there is a risk of intentional or unintentional plagiarism generated by the use of foreign languages in undergraduate or graduate theses. Students and mentors aiming at an advancement of undergraduate and graduate theses in foreign languages are also confronted with house made legal barriers, which this paper intends to resolve by calling for action. At the Polytechnic of Šibenik, a clear strategy for the elimination of obstacles to foreign language thesis in the field of Tourism Management must be developed.*

**Keywords:** *foreign language, final thesis, visibility, transparency, plagiarism.*

### 1. Introduction

Students at the Polytechnic of Šibenik recognize the importance of foreign languages but rarely write their bachelor or master's theses in foreign languages. As part of their studies, students of Tourism Management submit and relate economic terms in Croatian and foreign languages to more nuanced written and oral communication. They look at relevant literature independently but cautiously to draw up responses and ideas in Croatian and foreign languages.

As foreign language knowledge is a generic skill, students need to learn and train continuously, which is not always the case in higher education institutions. The Common European Framework for Languages precisely describes language levels. A tight lesson plan restricts learning hours, therefore improving language levels remains a challenging task for foreign language learners. Students' higher language levels are a precondition for a student to choose a mentor among foreign language teachers.

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Another challenging obstacle is choosing a theme for an undergraduate or graduate thesis. LSP teachers are experts in language while their students are future experts in management, economy or marketing. Language teachers are expected to contribute to philology, while students are trained in themes about economy, marketing or management. An interdisciplinary approach to the theme of a thesis may be reached by choosing a co-mentor from a field or course the student is interested in. Introducing a co-mentor enables the student to get mentored appropriately, but the changed workflow has to be considered, as an efficient communication between student, mentor and co-mentor has to be established. Such collaboration involves a more direct working between language teachers and subject teachers (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 44).

Writing an undergraduate or graduate thesis in a foreign language adds complexity to the process of graduation and remains therefore a rare phenomenon. At the Polytechnic of Šibenik, co-mentoring is seen as one of the possibilities to increase the number of final theses in the field of management and tourism in a foreign language. On the other hand, co-mentoring is not properly valued in the DECISION ON CONDITIONS FOR EVALUATION OF TEACHING AND PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY IN THE ELECTION PROCEDURE FOR TEACHING TITLES<sup>2</sup> by the Polytechnic of Šibenik (2011), as it is not mentioned as one of the conditions for promotion in the document. Whether co-mentoring is treated equally as mentoring in the mentioned document or not, it can be considered a legal ambiguity.

A university's or other higher education institution's Ordinance on Final Theses [Pravilnik o završnom radu] must have an Article stating that a student is even allowed to write his undergraduate or master's thesis in a foreign language. In Croatia, the Ordinance on Final Theses regulates exactly how the undergraduate or master's theses must be written. By default, the Ordinance on Final Theses<sup>2</sup> of the Polytechnic of Šibenik (2014) regulates that the undergraduate or master's theses must be written in standard Croatian language.

The main goal of this paper is to illustrate that there is a need in tourism management recognized by students as well as teachers to enable and encourage undergraduate and graduate theses in foreign languages. This paper gives a timeline of foreign language theses in tourism management, intending to show how rarely theses are written in foreign languages in the scientific field of economy in Croatia. The second part of this paper shows the connection between legal preconditions for foreign language theses and the intention of ensuring visibility and transparency of final theses. The third part of this paper gives positive and negative aspects of visibility and transparency. Intentional and unintentional plagiarism are described in the fourth part of this paper as both types of plagiarism represent a severe threat for academic writing and anti-plagiarism software is only a helpful tool against plagiarism and not a perfect solution. The paper concludes with a three step strategy to increase the number of foreign language theses at the Polytechnic of Šibenik.

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<sup>2</sup> The authors of this paper provided a verbatim translation of the document.

## 2. A timeline of foreign language theses in tourism management

Tourism management is a social science in the scientific field of economy. For the years 2014 to 2020, the Croatian Digital Theses Repository (National and University Library in Zagreb, 2015) stores within the scientific field of economy 23012 theses in Croatian, 343 theses in English, 9 theses in German, 2 theses in Italian and 1 thesis in French. The first thesis within the scientific field of economy written in English language in Croatia is from the year 2014. In the scientific field of economy only about 1.54% of theses are written in a foreign language. English, being a global language, is the first choice for writing a thesis in a foreign language in Croatia. The authors of this paper deduce from the analyzed data that only 1.51% of theses were written in English in the field of economy for the period between 2014 and 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020. Or to put it differently, for the same period, only 0,05% of theses were written in German, Italian or French.

The presented numbers of theses published in a foreign language on the Croatian Digital Thesis Repository are not accurate. The authors of this paper noticed that three of their own students' theses written in a foreign language at the Polytechnic of Šibenik in the year 2020 are incorrectly stored as theses in Croatian language. Being aware that any data set may have errors due to human input of data, the authors analyzed the repository of the Rochester Institute of Technology in Dubrovnik (Croatian Digital Theses Repository, n.d.). While the RIT Repository lists 11 of 61 undergraduate theses between the year 2015 and 2020 to be written in Croatian language, none of the mentioned theses is written in Croatian language. All the mentioned theses are openly accessible, and it is evident that all the theses at RIT Croatia are written in English. The collected data suggests that the overall number of foreign language theses must be higher than is visible from the statistics given by the Croatian Digital Thesis Repository. In the case of the repository of RIT Croatia, the number of theses written in English is higher by approximately 18% than listed.

## 3. Legal preconditions for foreign language theses ensuring visibility and transparency

Final theses have to be written in accordance with ordinances. At the Polytechnic of Šibenik, Article 54, paragraph 3 of the Regulations on Studying (Polytechnic of Šibenik, 2017, p. 5) states that: "All work related to the final thesis shall be described and implemented in accordance with the Regulations on the Final Thesis of the Polytechnic."

Within Article 14 of the Regulations on the Final Thesis<sup>3</sup> (Polytechnic of Šibenik, 2014) it is clearly stated:

[The student prepares the final thesis in written form, in Croatian language and Latin script in accordance with the Instructions for the preparation of the final thesis of the undergraduate professional study (Appendix 5) Instructions for the preparation of the final thesis of the specialist graduate professional study (Appendix 6). ...]<sup>3</sup>

The previous article clearly prescribes the use of the Croatian language and the Latin script, however on the first page of the mentioned instructions for the preparation of final

<sup>3</sup> This text is a verbatim translation by the authors of this paper.

theses the following permission is given: [... "With special approval by the Dean, the final thesis may be written in a foreign language." ...]<sup>3</sup> The legal framework for writing theses in foreign languages is given at the Polytechnic of Šibenik with the mentioned approval, but it is frequently overlooked by lecturers and students alike due to its position within the text.

Most higher education institutions and universities in the Republic of Croatia do not provide for the writing of student undergraduate and graduate theses in a foreign language in official documents. In general, the possibility of writing a paper in a foreign language is stated briefly in one sentence, with the indication that it usually requires the permission of the Vice-dean, Dean or Rector.

In the Instructions for the preparation and writing of the final thesis<sup>3</sup> of Virovitica College (2018) there is only a note:

[Abstract and keywords in English are not a mandatory part of the structure of the final thesis. In the event that the abstract and key words are stated in English in the final thesis, it is necessary to follow the rules of the English language.]<sup>3</sup>

Neither instructions nor the REGULATIONS ON THE FINAL THESIS<sup>3</sup> (Virovitica College, 2016) state the possibility of writing a final thesis in any foreign language.

In the introductory section of the Instructions for preparation and defense of the final and master's thesis<sup>3</sup> of the Polytechnic of Velika Gorica (2013) it is stated: ["The paper should be written in Croatian language and spelling (except in the case of special approvals for writing in another language, with a translation into Croatian)."]<sup>4</sup>

In their REGULATIONS ON FINAL / DIPLOMA THESIS of The Polytechnic in Požega (2020), Article 26, paragraph 3, states:

["The thesis should be written in Croatian language and Latin script..." and the paragraph 4 of the same article: "If the final thesis is written in a foreign language, the student is obliged to enclose one copy of the translation of the text of the final thesis in Croatian."]<sup>4</sup>

Nowhere is it stated that special permission from the Dean or Vice Dean is required to write a dissertation in a foreign language.

In the REGULATIONS ON FINAL THESIS<sup>4</sup> of the Libertas International University (2019), Article 7, paragraph 1, it is clearly stated that: ["The final thesis is written and defended before the Commission in the Croatian literary language."] However, within Article 2 in the REGULATIONS ON SPECIALIST GRADUATE THESIS AND GRADUATE THESIS<sup>4</sup> (Libertas International University, 2019) it is stated that: "Graduation and specialist diploma theses are written and defended in the Croatian standardized language. Exceptionally, with the approval of the Rector, the paper may be written and / or defended in English."<sup>4</sup> Classes at Libertas International University are held in Zagreb, Dubrovnik and Kutina, with classes in Dubrovnik being conducted in English, and at other locations in Croatian.

Instructions for students<sup>4</sup> at the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Opatija, University of Rijeka (n.d.) state:

[The paper is written and defended in Croatian. The title of the paper is written in Croatian and English. Exceptionally, the paper may be written and defended in a

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<sup>4</sup> This text is a verbatim translation by the authors of this paper.

foreign language with the obligatory preparation of a summary of the paper in Croatian language. A student wishing to write a paper in a foreign language, with the prior approval of the mentor, submits a written request to the Vice Dean for Teaching.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. Visibility and transparency

Higher education institutions offering visibility of theses written in a foreign language is seen as a possible advantage on the labor market. Students who had written a bachelor thesis in a foreign language shared the opinion that within the sector of tourism, a thesis written in a foreign language represents an advantage in a job interview. Students realize the importance of foreign languages while working in internships in tourism. Final theses in a foreign language can also be a valuable source of information in areas relevant at the local or regional level, and can be of interest to experts from other countries.

Visibility is very important in higher education. Institutions with a good reputation are mentioned in the media. Colleges and universities are classified according to lists. These factories of progress offer their students a social status in addition to education. The intellectual output is the yardstick that academic society enjoys because it knows it has the honor to advance humanity. Unfortunately, every now and then it appears that the academic degree is misused.

Transparency prevents the disguise of dishonorable behavior. One of the worst offenses in academic society is to adorn oneself with borrowed plumes. If the intellectual output is available, the possibilities of its misuse might be diminished. Plagiarizing someone else's work is not only the theft of intellectual property but also an ethically unacceptable act.

In July 2013, the Croatian President promulgated the *Act on Amendments to the Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education*<sup>5</sup> (Zakon, NN 94/2013-2132 [Act, OG 94/2013-2132]). *Article 40, paragraph 11* of the mentioned Act provides that:

[Universities and faculties are obliged to permanently publish the final thesis of their studies on the public internet database of the university library within the university and to copy them into the public internet database of final theses of the National and University Library. Polytechnics and colleges are obliged to copy the completed papers into the public internet database of final theses of the National and University Library.]<sup>6</sup>

The enactment of such a law can be seen as an important prerequisite for the visibility of theses. The Croatian Digital Theses Repository created within the Digital Academic Archives and Repositories (DABAR) system enables scientific institutions and institutions of higher education to permanently store their undergraduate and graduate theses as well as other digital material (All documents | Croatian Digital Theses Repository, 2015).

While the creation of a digital repository is a noble idea, the obligation of universities, faculties, polytechnics or colleges can become legally problematic in case a student should not be willing to permit the storage of their thesis in the Croatian Academic Thesis Repository.

<sup>5</sup> The authors translated the title of this act from the Croatian act: *Zakon o izmjenama i dopunama Zakona o znanstvenoj djelatnosti i visokom obrazovanju*, which is published online in the *Official Gazette* (Croatian: *Narodne novine*).

<sup>6</sup> This is a verbatim translation by the authors.

Students of tourism management at the Polytechnic of Šibenik are occasionally allowed to use confidential data from companies for their theses, which is a justified reason for restricted access within the digital repository. In such a case the final paper is stored with restricted access. Restricted visibility of a thesis is seen as a precondition when students analyze financial information of a company operating in the field of tourism.

Language teachers at the Polytechnic of Šibenik confidently state that foreign languages enhance the visibility of their institution. They also claim that an adequate use of foreign languages at their institution could lead to academic exchange and cooperation with other higher education institutions.

## 5. Intentional and unintentional plagiarism

Theses written in a foreign language widen the audience of any higher education institution in Croatia. A thesis written in a foreign language could possibly achieve a greater impact on the scientific and academic society. Unfortunately, a misuse of ethical principles could also damage the reputation of any higher education institution. Plagiarism, as the severest type of academic misconduct must be discussed and prevented.

At the Polytechnic of Šibenik the problem of plagiarism is discussed on a regular basis. Mentors and students are concerned that open access may contribute to plagiarism even more than to transparency and visibility. Students often advocate the idea of storing their thesis under free access but are concerned about whether intentional plagiarism could occur. According to Majstorović (2016), a large number of university students confessed to have repeatedly copied sentences or paragraphs without citing the source, while a smaller number confessed to have copied a few pages without citing the source, or to have paid someone to write a paper for them.

When the Croatian Digital Theses Repository (2015) is searched for theses containing the word *plagiarism*, it offers 19 results comprised of 10 undergraduate and 9 master's theses. Among the granters of the theses are 7 universities or higher education institutions:

- the University of Zagreb stores 12 theses (8 theses in the field of technical sciences and 4 theses in the field of social sciences),
- the University of Zadar stores 1 master's thesis in the field of social sciences,
- the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek stores 1 undergraduate thesis in the field of humanistic sciences,
- the University of Rijeka stores 1 master's thesis in the field of social sciences,
- the University of Pula stores 1 undergraduate thesis in the field of social sciences),
- the Algebra University College stores 2 undergraduate thesis in the field of technical sciences,
- and the University of Applied Health Sciences stores 1 master's thesis in the field of social sciences).

It is evident that, within the Croatian Digital Theses Repository, plagiarism is mentioned in undergraduate and master's theses in the fields of technical sciences, social sciences and humanistic sciences. The oldest master's thesis, mentioning plagiarism, stored within the

Croatian Digital Theses Repository, is from the year 2014. The author of the mentioned master's thesis analyses and compares tools for the detection of plagiarism (Cvitković, 2014). Theses in the field of technical sciences describe also algorithms for the detection of plagiarized source codes.

A master's thesis from the Department of Psychology of the University of Pula describes an experiment of cryptomnesia, an unintentional form of plagiarism (Frančula, 2016).

Other theses in the field of social sciences describe plagiarism in journalism, tools for detection of plagiarism, or student attitudes towards plagiarism. In a master's thesis from the University of Zadar, the respondents of a survey on plagiarism agree with a large majority, that all compulsory courses at the University of Zadar should introduce an extra course in order to educate students about the proper writing of student papers (Majhen, 2018). Ireland & English (2011) indicate that "...some students need to experience plagiarism in order to appreciate what it constitutes" (p. 165). Many of their students did not share the institution's understanding of plagiarism prior to entering university, but the same had also subsequently changed their understanding of plagiarism.

The latest enhancement in the prevention of plagiarism is the use of the anti-plagiarism software *Turnitin*. The use of the mentioned plagiarism checker is seen as a major improvement, as it enables students and mentors to prevent unintentional plagiarism. A plagiarism checker is a helpful tool when used correctly. When a writer writes down his own ideas, he may unintentionally plagiarize ideas previously published by other writers or even by himself. A plagiarism checker will identify the text sources and help the author with citations. There are authors who cannot escape the temptation to translate a text that has already been published into a foreign language. To detect such plagiarism, a plagiarism checker would have to compare translations of the submitted texts. Variations in writing style indicate different source texts. A student who honestly writes his text can explain each paragraph. Frequent communication between mentor and student prevents intentional as well as unintentional plagiarism.

If students have to do a questionnaire or interviews for his paper, they will write about their findings with enthusiasm and not be tempted to plagiarize.

## 6. Conclusion

Students of tourism management rarely choose to write their bachelor or graduate in a foreign language. The authors analyzed the statistical data for the years 2014 to 2020, and noticed that the Croatian Digital Theses Repository (National and University Library in Zagreb, 2015) stores in the field of economy only about 1,51% of theses in English language. Also, only 0,05% of students, studying in the field of economy in Croatia, wrote a thesis in German, Italian or French.

As a way of improving students' proficiency in foreign languages and their potential distinctiveness on the labor market, the authors of this article believe that higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia should encourage final theses in foreign languages. Moreover, these institutions should provide legal preconditions and a framework for easier and more inclusive encouragement for their students in opting for writing final theses in foreign languages. This will contribute greatly to increasing visibility of higher education



institutions on international level which is something that our educational system should strive to achieve. Another aspect that should also be considered is the emergence and enactment of the rule on the inclusion of final theses in the public Croatian databases which inevitably raises the question of plagiarism and how to avoid it.

While LSP teachers are specialized in the field of language and communication, students of tourism management often want to prove their expertise in the field of economy and management. Therefore LSP teachers at the Polytechnic of Šibenik suggest the use of a co-mentor from the student's field of interest. Collaboration between language teachers and expert teachers is one of the aims of successful LSP teaching.

From all mentioned facts, foreign language teachers at the Polytechnic of Šibenik suggest the following three measures, as a first step in a strategy to encourage foreign languages in Tourism Management:

1. Co-mentorship should be validated for the promotion of teaching titles. In that way, students would be enabled to write theses in foreign languages in their field of interest. Mentors would be motivated, as they would be validated for their linguistic expertise. The Polytechnic of Šibenik could gain better visibility and cooperation with other higher education institutions.
2. As unintentional and intentional plagiarism represents a threat to the reputation of any higher education institution, language teachers at the Polytechnic of Šibenik suggest the introduction of a course that teaches students academic writing from the first semester. Academic writing should be taught from the first semester.
3. Further ideas on measures for the use of foreign languages in undergraduate and graduate theses must be carried out.

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#### Sažetak

#### **PRIKAZIVANJE PRAKSE PISANJA ZAVRŠNIH RADOVA NA STRANIM JEZICIMA ZA POSEBNE SVRHE**

*Cilj ovog rada je istaknuti potrebu za poticanjem studenata na pisanje završnih radova na stranom jeziku. Studenti Turističkog menadžmenta na Veleučilištu u Šibeniku su pokazali zanimanje u tom pravcu. Na taj način, visokoobrazovne ustanove postaju vidljivije široj publici, a studenti usavršavaju svoje vještine. U Hrvatskoj se završni i diplomski radovi pohranjuju u Nacionalni repozitorij završnih i diplomskih radova ZIR, što poboljšava vidljivost i transparentnost u obrazovanju. Iako transparentnost sprječava neetičko ponašanje, uvijek postoji rizik namjernog ili nenamjernog plagiranja prilikom uporabe stranih jezika u preddiplomskim i diplomskim završnim radovima. Studenti i mentori usredotočeni na unapređenje preddiplomskih i diplomskih završnih radova na stranom jeziku, suočeni su s pravnim preprekama vlastite institucije, koje ovaj rad želi razrješiti pozivom na djelovanje.*

**Ključne riječi:** strani jezik, završni rad, vidljivost, transparentnost, plagijat.