

## **CEFR in the Slavic Educational Context: A Classroom of Students from China and Ukraine Taught English by Polish Teachers**

### **CEFR w dydaktyce w kontekście słowiańskim. Grupy zajęciowe chińskie i ukraińskie nauczone angielskiego przez polskich wykładowców**

**Summary:** The aim of the article is to present and confront the obstacles faced during the preparation and organisation of a foreign language preparatory course for the Chinese and the management of the first year studies in English for the Ukrainians in the Slavic higher education context of emigration. The course was prepared for a group of Chinese students whose task was to obtain B2 level of English. In this respect, the article relates to Anna Mikulska's essay *A Chinese Child at Polish School: A Case Study of M.* (2016) and to the volume *Teaching English to Students from China* (2003). As regards Ukrainian students, they did not attend the specific foundation course and were enrolled on the regular BA programme without former language preparation. Both groups faced dilemmas of emigration; yet if the members of the former represent non-Slavic origins, the representatives of the latter do.

**Key words:** Slavic context, foreign students, emigration, Chinese, Ukrainians, CEFR

**Streszczenie:** Celem artykułu jest ukazanie i zestawienie problemów związanych z funkcjonowaniem uczestników kursu języka angielskiego organizowanego dla Chińczyków oraz organizacji pierwszego roku z uwzględnieniem potrzeb studentów z Ukrainy w kontekście słowiańskiego otoczenia kulturowego i warunków emigracji. Założeniem kursu jest doprowadzenie studentów z Chin, kandydatów na studia w języku angielskim, do poziomu B2 zgodnie z Europejskim Systemem Opisu Kształcenia Językowego. W aspekcie potrzeb Chińczyków, artykuł stanowi omówienie problemów podobnych do tych, które opisano w eseju Anny Mikulskiej *Dziecko chińskie w polskiej szkole: studium przypadku M.* (2016) oraz w pracy zbiorowej *Teaching English to Students from China* (2003). W kontekście problemów napotykanym przez obie grupy, pojawia się kwestia emigracji w słowiańskim otoczeniu kulturowym. Jednak jeśli pierwsza grupa wywodzi się z tradycji niesłowiańskiej, to druga grupa obejmuje przedstawicieli tejże kultury.

**Słowa kluczowe:** słowiański kontekst kulturowy, emigracja, obcokrajowcy, Chińczycy, Ukraińcy, CEFR

The essay addresses the possibility of obtaining specific CEFR language skills in the Slavic educational context with the inclusion of non-Slavic and Slavic groups of students experiencing common problems of emigration. Namely, it seeks to discuss selected CEFR-related challenges and solutions pertaining to the foundation course in Practical English (B2 level) for Chinese students organised in the scenario of the Slavic university and campus, as well as confronting it with the management of enrolment and first-year courses attended by

students from Ukraine who did not have to take any preparatory classes and were admitted on an individual basis – the B2-level requirement had to be met, and frequently was by the Ukrainians, prior to admission and the beginning of first-cycle studies.<sup>1</sup>

As Katarzyna Florencka notices, Polish universities have been considerably involved in the process of admitting Ukrainian students onto their programmes and she points to the growing numbers in this respect: in the academic year 2012/2013 there were almost ten thousand Ukrainians studying in Poland and in 2016/2017 the number reached as many as 35.584 Ukrainian students (Florencka 2018). She relates to the surveys carried out by the Institute of Public Affairs and stresses the lack of common programmes and intake procedures targeting candidates and students from Ukraine (Florencka 2018). This lack of common regulations might have been responsible for the fact that Ukrainians did not take the preparatory course to be described below, created as the foundation programme for non-Polish candidates seeking to pursue their BA studies in English offered in Poland and ultimately involving only participants from China. In addition, the entrance documents presented by Ukrainians candidates seeking to study at NCU and proving language competences varied and had to be examined on an individual basis.

Florencka also touches upon the emigration issues pertaining to the situation of Ukrainian students in Poland: again, quoting the Institute of Public Affairs data, she mentions what draws Ukrainians to pursuing their studies in Poland and enumerates “lower costs of living as compared to other countries, [...] the possibility of paying a reduced tuition fee, [...] ease of access and admittance, [...] the prospects of finding employment in the study-related area [...], and the quality of teaching offered by a given faculty or university” (Florencka 2018). As regards the situation of the Ukrainians doing the BA programme in English Studies offered by the Faculty of Languages, they still formed a visible minority (5/72) of the intake when compared to the representativity of the Chinese. Yet, in the 2016/2017 academic year there were more Ukrainians studying English than in the previous cycles. The Ukrainian students followed the regular class timetable and attended classes with other, predominantly Polish, students. Yet a noticeable difference was observed in the case of holiday breaks: because of the religious calendar discrepancy the Ukrainians frequently applied for the extension of the Christmas break.

In terms of the Chinese group of foundation students, referring the experience of organising the pre-BA-level programme in English at Nicolaus Copernicus University, NCU, to the observations presented in Anna Mikulska’s article *A Chinese Child at Polish School: A Case Study of M.* and to the ideas examined in the volume *Teaching English to Students from China* (2003), the article will deal with contextual differences and juxtapositions, as well as describing the process of preparing and conducting the foreign-language programme for EFL young adult and adult learners. The issues to be explored concern the possibility, or lack of it, in matching the requirements of CEFR descriptors, the students’ non-Slavic educational background, and the pre-determined conditions and factors in which the course

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<sup>1</sup>The author has been coordinating the foundation course since 2016 and was responsible for teaching matters at the Department of English, Faculty of Languages, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. The observations recounted are predominantly based on the aforementioned experience. All passages from Polish texts are the author's translations.

organisers had to plan and conduct the course programme. In terms of the group from Ukraine, B2 level of English was a prerequisite needed in order to be admitted and the students did not have to take preparatory language training. What is more, they did not form a separate cultural group collectively facing problems of emigration and subject to any university cooperation project- or institutional agreement-based principles of enrolment. They were included in class groups with Polish students and had to integrate on an individual basis, joined by some of the Chinese students from the foundation course. The students' performance data show that although the Ukrainians did not attend the foundation course, most of them passed their courses – in contrast to the Chinese students, for whom, the participation in the foundation course did not bring the required linguistic progress, specifically in relation to the cultural aspects of the Anglophone world, grammar, writing and speaking (on the basis of grade records analysed).

In *A Chinese Child in the Polish School. A Case Study of M (Dziecko chińskie w polskiej szkole: studium przypadku M., 2016)* Mikulska discusses the problem of children in the context of the Polish educational system. Although she singles out the learner's experience of a nine-year-old Chinese girl, whose parents, wealthy businesspeople, decided to bring her to Poland to see whether she can adapt to a completely different cultural, linguistic and educational environment. The author also describes the main phases in the development of the child's skills in Polish, learning strategies and the obstacles encountered at the beginning and later phases of the teaching process. Mikulska's text “demonstrates that the problem of appropriate preparation of the school for the intake of young immigrants does not only concern educational institutions in large cities. The points presented in the article are a summary of the teacher's one year's experience of teaching the girl [...]” (Mikulska 2016: 163). Similarly, this essay is based on an experience of more or less the same length, but the target group of Chinese students was different and it consisted of eleven post-secondary-school learners who completed their education in China and sought to do their BA degree in courses conducted in English and offered by Polish and other Slavic universities. Yet, the Slavic-language context in which the girl described by Mikulska functioned was a positive factor, as she was supposed to learn Polish. And in the case of the Chinese students, the Slavic context had a detrimental effect: unable to understand Polish, they were forced to use Chinese as the primary form of communication, making it impossible for them to enter linguistic interactions in English with non-Chinese students.

Mikulska's article is significant in terms of the observation of the whole teaching process: its preparation, organisation and development inside and outside the classroom. The girl subject to research was sent to a Polish family and could only spend her time with the parents at the weekends; thus, she was exposed to the Polish-language environment most of the time (Mikulska 2016: 166) and linguistic “immersion” in the target culture (Mikulska 2016: 173). Mikulska states that at the early stage of the teaching process the girl “experienced stress and culture-shock related fits of crying” (2016: 167), and only single cases of such behaviour were noticed in the group of Chinese students in Toruń – the ones whose skills in English were not sufficient to effectively participate in class discussions and exercises and the ones who were unable to cooperate and socialise with other students. One solution mentioned in the article was based on the application of ludic elements in lessons (Mikulska 2016: 168), and the teachers at NCU had to use similar resources to involve the

group of students unwilling to take part in communicative scenarios but happy to perform drills and write written assignments (cf. Mikulska 2016: 169). However, if Mikulska describes the girl as “sitting at the desk in the straight position and waiting for her teacher to come to the classroom, [...] which stems from the mentality of the Chinese society” (Mikulska 2016: 170), the Chinese students who pursued their B2 course did not form a unanimous group and disciplinary problems, that is skipping classes or being late for them, were not a rare occurrence.

As regards the linguistic competence problems, the Chinese girl could not “master the correct spelling of words. As a result of negative transfer, she frequently spelt words without appropriate spacing between them, as it happens in the Chinese graphic principles or notation” (Mikulska 2016: 172). Spelling was one of the major problems experienced by the Chinese students in Toruń, too, followed by speaking and listening comprehension deficiency. Lack of common language of instruction was both a problem and a challenge at the beginning. English was the only linguistic tool for communication and its classroom level had to be adapted and appropriated for the students’ needs. Because of the more advanced level of English demonstrated by some of them, the practice of mediation via interpreting and explanation in Chinese by selected students had to be applied. An essential teaching tool was also an online dictionary which gave definitions of words in English, followed equivalents in Simplified Chinese. The dictionary also provided categorisation of lexical items within the CEFR indicators, thus making learning progress visible to both students and teachers. In general terms, access to the Internet resources, and to Google images in particular, was an indispensable aspect of the teaching process inside the classroom. Another indicator of CEFR level was the specification provided by classroom materials. In this respect, after the first round of enrolment, the teachers decided to use an academic-domain series of course books which progressed from A1 to B2 in order to provide the students with course-external versions of interpretation of B2 level and its descriptors, and to give them a more critical assessment. However, at the final stage of the process, it was decided to change the upper-intermediate level of one course book and replace it with the “inter-plus” level of another one. The original selection turned out to be too challenging for the Chinese learners.

The requirement described above did not concern the Ukrainians students enrolled on the first year, BA. Their language skills were post-B2 level, which made it possible to apply teaching with the assumption that the primary, and the only, language of instruction was English. The awareness of the specificity of the Anglophone culture, literature, politics and geography was sufficient and enabled the Ukrainians to become involved in interpretative and critical discussions – in contrast to the Chinese who decided to pursue English studies having successfully completed the foundation course. Even if some of them demonstrated language skills at the required level, the cultural specificity of the English-speaking world could not be fully comprehended – this element was not included in the materials used during the course, which in general targeted European non-speakers of English.

The aim of the NCU foundation project, in which the European language-competence assessment benchmarks are supposed to have been applied to the experiences of non-European students, was to prepare foreign upper secondary-school and junior-college graduates for their effective participation in the BA courses read in English and offered by NCU in Toruń. The questions to be addressed primarily concern the possibility or lack of it,

in matching the requirements of CEFR descriptors, students' non-Slavic higher educational background, and the pre-determined conditions and factors in which the course organisers had to plan and conduct the course programme. Still, another question concerns the possibility of extending the course onto the second year to cover selected aspects of the cultures shared by the English-speaking world. This extension, not required in the case of candidates from Ukraine who had already been provided with background knowledge of Anglophone reality, perhaps would not be feasible due to financial, motivational and organisational reasons – the Chinese students sought to complete the foundation course as soon as possible and to start “proper” studies afterwards.

Accepting applications from candidates from Ukraine is not surprising bearing in mind the common European and Slavic backgrounds shared by Poland and its neighbour. However, the former, as a Slavic state, has also recently become involved in the process of taking in Chinese candidates on BA and MA programmes available in English, and thus has reflected, or contributed to, a more general and universal tendency of educational globalisation. NCU in Toruń is one of research and teaching institutions belonging to a group of Polish universities offering foundation courses in English for foreigners. Successful preparation, organisation and completion of such a teaching process definitely require prior research in the language learning and acquisition patterns shared by the target group of students who are supposed to function in the Slavic higher education context in which English is not spoken as the native or first language.

And there is still a niche for such case- and context-based studies in Poland. Even the article by Mikulska does not address the problem of English as a foreign language but the process of learning Polish, the language used by the society in which the Chinese child is supposed to function and not only in the school environment. If, in the case of the girl described by Mikulska the Polish context plays a crucial positive way in the process of language acquisition, the situation of the Chinese on the foundation course does not add any beneficial factor in learning English. Still, what stands on the same footing is that the members of the foundation group were subject to dislocation in a totally different setting in terms of language, culture and society, similar to the situation portrayed by Mikulska and experienced by the Chinese learners of Polish. They could not use English freely outside the classroom and the campus administrative staff, for example the halls of residence employees, were not used to speaking English to the students whose level of the language made it impossible to break the linguistic barrier. The classes were conducted in English as the instructors were not given preparation in Chinese – the only bridge, as already mentioned, between English and Chinese was the online dictionary used in classes and containing translations in simplified Chinese. Many of the students felt isolated and they could only resort to using Chinese in their own group environment. Only some of them were willing to interact with Polish students representing the Slavic culture; yet, the language level on both sides caused frequent misunderstandings.

The situation described above, as a matter of fact, did not concern the Ukrainians who successfully integrated within the group of students on the BA programme in English studies. No problems were reported in the case of the communicative situations involving the Ukrainians and the administrative staff. The class organisation and management required no extra measures – even the University Study-Oriented System was handled by students from

Ukraine individually, with a few exceptions, and they were able to organise their registration and enrolment on their own or with the help of their Polish classmates. No problems were noticed in terms of selecting the required number of elective courses or choosing all the compulsory courses. As in the case of Polish students, some Ukrainians sought to schedule their classes in a way enabling them to combine their courses in a fewer days – perhaps they wanted to have more time for extracurricular activities or for part-time work. What is more, the students learned the principles how to solve those problems and had no difficulty in terms of functioning in the Polish university environment. No issues related to cultural differences were reported.

In contrast, the Slavic cultural and linguistic context in which the Chinese students functioned was quite unique and new. In some respects it was even different from the one described by Mikulska; yet, the general backgrounds and requirements of teaching English to Chinese students have been quite widely described on the basis of TEFL experiences in other countries and cultures. The institutional context-dependent research outcomes can be found in the collection of case studies titled *Teaching English to Students from China*, published as early as in 2003. The data and analyses presented in the book are worth noting because of the temporal frameworks determining the English courses described there. The preparatory programme for EFL Chinese students was initiated in 1992 and in Europe, just one year before the first intake of students in Singapore, the Intergovernmental Symposium was held in Switzerland, in November 1991. Its theme was *Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe: Objectives, Evaluation, Certification* and, pursuing former attempts taken by the Council of Europe to standardise levels of linguistic competences, it gave rise to the following assumption: “A further intensification of language learning and teaching in member countries is necessary in the interests of greater mobility, more effective international communication combined with respect for identity and cultural diversity, better access to information, more intensive personal interaction, improved working relations and a deeper mutual understanding” (2001: 5). The quotation comes from the 2001 edition of *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, which also contains its exploration:

The Common European Framework provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively (2001: 5).

However, it becomes clear that the “common basis” moves beyond the borders of Europe, and in *Teaching English to Students from China* a different observation can be found: “Among the one billion foreign language learners of English, a majority come from the People’s Republic of China” (qtd. Yi 2003: xiii), the information is dated 1982. The consequences presented in the book are self-imposing and self-evident, thus expressed in the original words: “The huge learner population of Chinese has made the task of successful English teaching in and outside of China all the more important and challenging” (Yi 2003: xiii).

The challenges relate to the features of the Chinese learners as learners of foreign languages. Various problems were signalled in the introduction to *Teaching English to Students from China* (Yi 2003: xiv-xv) in the context of the intensive English programme implemented by the Centre for English Language Communication affiliated with the National University of Singapore. Most of them are described in particular chapters. By way of illustration, Laina Ho “sets out to identify the specific pronunciation problems, vowels as well as consonants, of Chinese learners from certain regions of China” (2003: 139). The author notices pronunciation problems observed by teachers: minimal pairs, dental fricative sounds (2003: 144); nasal ending of verbs, and many more (Ho 2003: 145–145).

The purpose of this essay is not to analyse common linguistic problems encountered in a classroom of Chinese ESL learners, but to put them in the Slavic higher education context of CEFR and the foundation course organised and conducted at NCU in Toruń, which as a matter of fact resembles the one in Singapore, and two compare further immigrant student experiences. In other words, the purpose is to juxtapose the situation experienced by the Chinese with that faced by the Ukrainian admitted onto the first-cycle programme on a completely different basis. The course described in *Teaching English to Students from China* was a typical intensive programme lasting 6 months created to provide [...] intensive English training [...] to a homogenous learner group from the People’s Republic of China” (Yi 2003: xiv–xv). The course conducted at NCU was created for similar purposes – that is to prepare a group of Chinese students, who had already completed their secondary-school education in the People’s Republic of China, for their higher studies in English offered by NCU. The aim of the course was not equated with the development of the students’ skills in general English, but was conceived of as the university-tailored programme, predominantly in the area of academic lexis and communicative use. However, its target objective was the B2 level of English assumption in the Slavic university context, missing from *Teaching English to Students from China*. This assumption is crucial in the case of the Chinese students – as the course was supposed to enable them to continue proper studies on the first-cycle programme. The Ukrainians did not have to attend such a course – their B2 level was proved in the entrance documentation and in the successful completion of first-year courses, which required the linguistic competence on that level as a prerequisite.

Thus, with reference to the former group, the question arises as to the connection between the problems described in *Teaching English to Students from China*, their presence or absence in the group of students who came to study in Toruń, and their influence upon the achievement of B2 level. The two-semester programme consists of 600 hours, which, according to the *Common European Framework Guided Learning Hours*, makes it possible for the student to progress from A1 to B2 level (<https://support.cambridgeenglish.org/hc/en-gb/articles/202838506-Guided-learning-hours>). The courses in Singapore and Toruń were structured similarly in terms of week class arrangement (cf. Young and Fong Yoke Sim 2003: 23).

Almost three decades passed between the project in Singapore and the one recently organised by NCU, in which there was one tutorial group of students of eleven, more or less the same number of males and females (cf. Young and Sim 2003: 23). The week organisation of teaching load was 20 hours of classwork and there was always one working day off for extracurricular activities. In terms of the background of the students participating in the

course conducted by the Centre for English Language Communication in Singapore, the learners

C[a]me from different parts of China. They [had] learned English for about six years in an EFL setting in their home country before coming to Singapore, where English is one of the four official languages and is the language of administration and education. Their English proficiency upon arrival [was] low intermediate (Yi 2003: xv).

The students who came to Toruń represented different regions of China, too. Their English proficiency was not on the same level, notwithstanding the assumptions and expectations relating to their secondary education background. The results of the grammar diagnostic test conducted by one of the teachers showed that the individual linguistic competence ranged from A1 to A2+ or even B1 (course materials), which caused the course teachers and administrators to adapt the A1 course book in English for academic purposes.

As mentioned, there is a point of divergence in the assumptions of the two courses and it concerns the requirements of CEFR. These, nevertheless, were adapted to account for the potential problems faced by Chinese learners of English, because of the interpretative possibilities pertaining to the Framework, which assumes “An action-oriented approach”:

Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of competences, both general and in particular communicative language competences. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various conditions and under various constraints to engage in language activities involving language processes to produce and/or receive texts in relation to themes in specific domains, activating those strategies which seem most appropriate for carrying out the tasks to be accomplished (2001: 9).

The description of such an approach enables language-course organisers to shape, to some extent, such factors involving teaching as “domains,” “strategies,” and “tasks,” and bearing in mind a learner’s “competences” and “constraints.” The pronunciation issue previously mentioned can be considered one of such hindrances.

In the volume *Teaching English to Students from China* some features of the Chinese teaching aspects are given, and the consequences of such an educational background and experience were observed in the case of the students who came to Toruń. Yuan Yi gives examples of EFL teaching history in China: “a majority of language teaching practitioners in China have adopted a teacher-centred intensive reading model wherein a written text is dissected and analysed word by word and sentence by sentence to help students understand word meanings and grammatical structures” (Yi 2003: xv-xvi). As regards other student-oriented approaches, the author continues with the statement that “Although a few people have experimented with a communicative approach in China, this is only a minority and the degree of success seems minimal. As a result, the speaking and listening skills of these PRC



learners of English remain rather low” (Yi 2003: xvi). The same observation concerning the learning experience of teaching approaches can be made on the basis of the Chinese course participants who studied English in Toruń. They found it very difficult to become involved in speaking activities and listening comprehension was a major hindrance on the path to the successful completion of the course. Such a difficulty, at least partly, stems from the reading and grammar oriented foreign language teaching methodology applied in China, which is beginning to change, as argued by Feng Anwei (2003: 1).

Similar problems were not noticed in the case of Ukrainians students on the first-cycle programme. The speaking and listening skills had already been developed prior to the admission and communicative issues did not pose difficulties on the level of the cultural background of students. The pronunciation aspects reflected the specificity of sound discrete sound differences and not the serious deficiency resulting in lack of communication, distortion of meaning or confusion. Perhaps, the minor problems observed concerned errors in grammar and lack of complex vocabulary, and these were improved within the first year of BA studies – as the Ukrainians could become actively involved in literary, linguistic and cultural theoretical modules offered in the second- and third-year curricula.

However, on the basis of the teaching experience in the classroom of Chinese students on the foundation course, it can be argued that the re-assessment of the methodology has not affected ELT practices on the secondary-school level and traditional teaching practice frequently takes the form of College English. This argument appears later in Anwei’s essay published over two decades ago: “Empirical research findings and observations in recent literature strongly suggest that except for a gradual change in the medium of instruction, major features of the traditional grammar-translation or intensive-reading model are still predominant in the majority of College English classrooms. Classroom teaching is teacher-centred and transmission of knowledge remains the standard practice as well as an educational aim” (Anwei 2003: 9). The author consecutively contends that “The communicative language teaching approach [...] is not adopted” (Anwei 2003: 9). In the case of the NCU foundation course, elements of the communicative approach were employed, especially in the Speaking part of the weekly timetable, about eight 45-minute classes out of twenty. However, the teachers found it difficult to make students speak upon guidelines, instructions or other prompts, both verbal and visual. Yet, with the progression of similarly structured activities, the students gradually became involved in pair and group speaking exercises. More communicative output came from the students with more advanced skills in English but not all of them showed their willingness to contribute. Although the course was supposed to accept applications from candidates across the world, including Ukraine, the participants did not represent any other cultural background. Having a multi- or bi-national group students, assumingly involving Ukrainians who would have been to later join the first-year BA students, would have made the management of the course content, materials and activities even more challenging, specifically taking into account the language-level and cultural-awareness discrepancy among the course participants.

The B2 level proved to be a challenge for the Chinese students. Most of them completed the course, but once admitted on the BA programme in English studies, they could not succeed in class involvement and obtaining passing grades specifically on Practical English modules was too difficult. In this respect their situation should be juxtaposed with

those experienced by students from Ukraine. As already signalled, they were not involved in any special language training organised prior to the onset of BA studies; yet, the foundation course was also on offer for them. Their intake was managed by the University Office of Foreign Students and they were admitted on the basis of the assessment of the documents submitted – results on the secondary-school level, grades in English, results on classes conducted in English and extra certificates confirming their language level (e.g. IELTS score) and academic orientation.

After gaining positive reviews of the records, the candidate was admitted on the BA programme in English Studies, and the B2 level of English was a curriculum prerequisite to start such a course. The Ukrainians represented a minority in the course group and no separate class arrangement was necessary to cater for their needs. Still, due to the length of the period in which the administrative procedures were completed, they were put into groups already occupied by other foreign students. Their language preparation in most cases was better, and the students from Ukraine could successfully participate in classes conducted in English – in contrast to the Chinese for whom the level was too difficult in terms of English language comprehension. The patterns of integration were also different: the Chinese still formed a unanimous group willing to cooperate with each other yet distant from students representing other cultures.

In contrast, the Ukrainians integrated with different students and found it easy to work with their Polish and Erasmus+ classmates. The class arrangement did not follow a special path required to cater for the needs of the Ukrainians – the only step involved the introduction of the foreign students coordinator on the level of the organisation of the course programme. In most cases, their attendance in the foundation course was not required – as they did not make language mistakes and did not face the linguistic problems like those faced by the Chinese. The common Slavic background was definitely a most positive factor enabling the Ukrainians to complete their courses of studies. Still, as they did not manage to form a unanimous group because of their singularity, they could not form a closely-knit, separated from others, student community – in contrast to the Chinese group spending extra-curricular time together. It appears that Polish and Ukrainian students shared common methods of foreign language learning perhaps based on the same methodologies and teaching resources. They responded to the specificity of the English-speaking countries in a similar way and showed a general understanding of Anglophone culture, literature and society. This turned out to be too challenging for the Chinese on the foundation course who joined the first-year BA group. Although they confirmed the B2 level of English in their successful completion of the course and their satisfactory results in the final examination, the specificity of the philological study programme was still too difficult for them.

To conclude, the expression B2 is absent from *Teaching English to Students from China*, and the level of English with which the students in Singapore should complete their language course had not been defined by means of the descriptors within CEFR specifications. In contrast, B2 has recently gained a lot of significance in the area of tertiary education in Poland – a Slavic state whose universities offer English courses for foreigners, and are currently held responsible for the way in which teaching and learning outcomes should be described. First-cycle students are supposed to develop their language skills to B2 level by completing a foreign language course. And, in the wake of the development of study

programmes in English, usually in such fields as Management, Economics and Tourism, candidates who want to enrol have to demonstrate B2 level of English. If the focus on B2 level in the organisation of the foundation course at NCU is one point of divergence in relation to the project conducted in Singapore, another one concerns the Slavic language environment outside the classroom. For the students from China, B2 level was a challenge and most of the students did not manage to complete the first year of studies on the BA programme of English. The best students on the course obtained satisfactory results in the BA-level studies in English. The students who came to Toruń were mostly exposed to the English language only in class, after which they could communicate in Chinese with classmates (cf. Mikulska 2016: 163). They shared rooms in the halls of residence and had limited contact in English with Poles or Erasmus+ students. In other situations, they were exposed to the Polish language. However, in their learning experience, they also faced problems both similar to and different from the ones described by Anna Mikulska in reference to a young Chinese girl who came to Poland with her parents and attended Polish school.

The Ukrainians were better prepared in terms of their linguistic competences and the awareness of the B2 level requirements as well as CEFR descriptors. Due to the regulations of admittance employed at NCU, they did not have to undergo any foundation programme in English. In most cases, they became successful students of English who could well integrate with other students and for whom problems related to the experience of emigration did not pose obstacles on the path to the completion of BA studies. The solution to match the levels of the foreign students admitted onto the BA programmes could be the modification of the foundation course and to offer at least three semesters of preparatory classes, from 600 to at least 900 teaching hours. This might be beneficial in the case of adding more Anglophone culture and literature-related subjects to better prepare the participants to become actively involved in the process of acquiring information about and features of the British and American philological courses planned in the first year of BA studies in English. The extra part of the foundation course could also target the Ukrainians who in this way could systematise their knowledge of the Anglophone world, at the same time being first-year students.

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