

THE ROLE OF ENGLISH AS A *LINGUA FRANCA* IN 21ST CENTURY DENTISTRY

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‘Language plays a significant role in most professions but perhaps nowhere more so than in medicine, where effective communication is widely recognized as important to clinical outcomes’ [1, p. 243]. Therefore, it is essential for 21st century dental professionals to be aware of the significance of language use and communication in healthcare, which also pertains to their interaction with foreign patients.

Owing to a number of reasons, the English language has assumed the role of the 21st century lingua franca of many disciplines and spheres of life, including healthcare and healthcare education. First, globalization has augmented the need for a *common language*, i.e., a *lingua franca* that would be used by speakers who do not share the same native language and has also paved the way for the process of internationalization of higher education, science, and healthcare. As a result, universities around the world have recognized the need to become part of the global academic and scientific community. For instance, in 2014, the University of Belgrade adopted *the Strategy for the Internationalization of the University of Belgrade* which clearly emphasized the need to incorporate more study programs in English and other foreign languages [2, 3.2.2] and to support and develop foreign language programs as part of the process of internationalization [2, 3.2.6]. *The Action Plan for the Internationalization of the University of Belgrade* was adopted in 2015 [3]. Also, the process of internationalization of higher education and the role of the English language became quite recognized in 2003 in Japan, when the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) introduced national guidelines, whose purpose was to improve the quality of English education in Japan [4–6]. Consequently, many of the 83 medical and 29 dental schools in Japan started offering Medical English and Dental English courses [4].

This is in accordance with the fact that the impact of the English language on the careers of dental professionals is multifold. Firstly, English has a prominent role in dentist-patient interaction and dental team interaction since there have been influxes of foreign patients, many of whom seek dental treatment, as well as an increase in the mobility of healthcare providers who often find themselves speaking English while working in a foreign country, sometimes in bilingual or even multilingual environments. Doctor/dentist-patient interaction represents a form of institutional talk which can be either *clinician-centered* or, more preferably, *patient-centered* [7] since patient-centeredness has been recognized as critical for providing quality healthcare [8]. Thus, language should be perceived as an essential part of the patient-centered approach with dentists and other members of the dental team paying attention to how they use language when addressing patients in order to provide clear instructions, explain the procedures, alleviate their anxiety, etc. Even though the *Calgary-Cambridge* model has been traditionally used to teach effective clinical communication as it offers step-by-step guidelines, new technology-enhanced teaching methods such as *Video Interaction Guidance (VIG)* have started to emerge [7,9]. These can also be used to enhance English speaking skills of (prospective) dentists by rehearsing dentist-patient interaction.

Furthermore, English can facilitate the process of pursuing (postgraduate) education and conducting medical research in an international academic and scientific environment. The findings of a study conducted in Japan indicate that competency and confidence in the English language could represent one of the major obstacles for students to study abroad [10]. It is the internationalization of higher education that has led to English serving as a medium of medical education in countries such as China and Russia [1]. As an illustration, Sechenov University in Moscow, the oldest medical university in Russia, organizes the *International English Language Olympiad for Medical and*

Pharmaceutical students allowing students to assess their Medical English, but also to compete and cooperate with their peers from all over the world. Moreover, an indicator of the prevalence of English in research is the percentage of journals published in English – 95% of natural science journals indexed within the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) are partly or completely published in English [11,12].

The English language also enables dental professionals to attend programs of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in order to adopt innovative methodologies and treatment modalities. Finally, it is worth noticing that English as a lingua franca can assist dental professionals in their efforts to transcend the barriers in terms of networking and exchanging ideas and *know-how* with their foreign colleagues but also in terms of accessing and using new technologies.

Under the paradigm of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Dental Purposes (EDP), also called Dental English or English for Dentistry, is devoted to equipping (prospective) dentists with morphosyntactic, discorsal, and pragmatic competencies by focusing on subject-specific terminology, communication, and genre-specific features of the English language, i.e., the lingua franca of 21st century dentistry.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca, English for Dental Purposes, health communication, interdisciplinarity, internationalization

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