

# The Media – a New Patch in the Quilt of English Studies

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At the opening of a new specialisation in communications at a Canadian University, the dean of the Faculty famously claimed that Media Studies was an interloper in academia in direct competition with his own discipline of English. Osler (2000) maintains that the order of occurrence of the two at Canadian Universities was the reverse – communications studies came before English. Elsewhere, Media Studies are reported to have replaced English on the assumption that more often than not people read newspapers and not literary texts (Haig 2005). On a more commercial footing, many departments prefer to offer training in communications than in languages because of the greater interest from applicants. In Bulgaria students can only do English Studies while Media Studies is not on offer as an academic subject. The result of this situation is that the graduates can mainly take up jobs as teachers or translators, and remain banned from the broad spectrum of qualifications offered in the field of communications.

Apart from job prospects – which are not unimportant at all, the issue also exists about the curriculum. Most universities in Bulgaria recruit based on a high language proficiency in English – at least B2, or C1 by the Framework of Reference for languages developed by the Council of Europe. At the same time, the curricula in many specialised language schools include even teaching at C2 level, thus leaving a limited space for furthering language skills at University. Isolated attempts to admit to English Studies programmes students who do not have a high level of language competence failed – probably due to the fact that students in Bulgaria generally graduate high school with their English at level B2, probably because obtaining proficiency in a language does not benefit the award of a bachelor degree, or because the graduates face competition from the majority of students who started their studies with a high level of language proficiency already. Whereby the question arises if students do not need language teaching, what is it that curricula should offer.

In both USA and UK debates raged starting as early as the fifties of the twentieth century, calling English Studies a discipline in a state of crisis. The reasons for that varied slightly on the two continents. Academics in America raised the alarm about an imbalance between reading and writing in the syllabi. According to Bousquet (2004) most departments strive to teach writing skills, which inevitably come together with a subject matter such as literature, economics, journalism etc. Thus, the part of English is a mere instrumentality serving an academic discipline often far away from the range of the traditional Arts. In the UK, the argument is that an academic discipline should teach a subject matter plus the research methodology deployed to collect and

organise it (Guy and Small 1993), whereas for English Studies even the selection of what to teach is more political than academic thus rendering research methodology redundant and hard to present on academic courses. Therefore, the crisis of the Arts is establishing a subject matter that would not tease out ideological controversy and basing it on firm research principles.

For countries where English is a foreign language, such as Bulgaria, English is often an instrument for carrying out professional skills – e.g. the hospitality industries, diplomacy etc.; or the lingua franca for academic study carried out jointly with universities in other countries; or the language to be taught as a prospective career in itself. The latter is the case of English Studies in Bulgaria, which explains why language mastery is required at admission. At present, English Studies presents a syllabus which collates linguistics, cultural studies and literature, supplemented with courses towards obtaining teaching qualifications.

Theoretically, communication is a verbal activity where the main medium is language. Its split from language and research through means which have nothing to do with linguistic terms run counter to the essence of the process itself. In view of the uses of language in non-English speaking countries outlined above, English can be seen as the medium in which many journalists work, the vehicle for co-ordinating curricula with international universities; and developing professional skills of writing and reading. Why is it then that English is divorced from communication and journalism?

One reason is institutional. Linguistics belongs traditionally to the domain of Arts and Humanities, designated as Domain 2 by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, while Communications is lodged within the Social Sciences, Domain 3, respectively (table 1.). The issue is non-negotiable and universities can train towards 2 or 3, but never both. The broadly advertised joint degrees at the New Bulgarian University, where students can select subjects of their choice to make an academic programme tailored to their taste also have to focus on ONE field, because the Ministry only approves diplomas in one specific specialisation.

The Arts and Humanities	The Social Sciences
2.1. Philology	3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Culture Studies
2.2. History and Archaeology	3.2. Psychology
2.3. Philosophy	3.3. Political Science
2.4. Religion and Theology	3.4. Social Work
	3.5. Mass Communications and Information Science
	3.6. Law
	3.7. Administration and Governance
	3.8. Economics
	3.9. Tourism

Table 1. Classification of Academic Fields in Bulgaria

On a practical level, the range of Humanities, according to the classification of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, does not really translate into genuine professions, i.e. these are fundamental studies that would need a second step to lead to a professional qualification. The Social Sciences, for their part, can immediately be construed as professional qualifications, such

as a sociologist, a political scientist, a journalist, a social worker etc. Professionally, the graduates of the Arts and Humanities Departments can only hope to qualify as teachers – a low-paid job, of a low social status in many countries. Extensive literature exists on the issue of pragmatism in Arts and Humanities in modern time. Mulcahy (2010:306) – to quote from one of the recent articles on the topic – doubts the place of these disciplines at a time when such a high premium is placed on costs and the more immediate appeal of practical knowledge. He argues for including practical skills, which he sees as little or not represented in the field of Arts and Humanities.

Technically, Media or Communication Studies do not exist as university or high school subjects in Bulgaria. The split between the qualifications – Humanitarian or Social Studies – does not allow universities to train towards or award blended degrees. The student needs to choose one or the other, thus closing the path of philologists to the spheres of Social Sciences, and specifically – that of Journalism. The marginal connection between languages and Journalism, especially when it comes to foreign languages and cultures, does not reflect positively on the quality of journalism in Bulgaria. Numerous incidents reveal low levels of language skills in journalists, meagre knowledge of other countries and a lack of intercultural skills. The number of language errors in advertisements and publicity material is ever-increasing, while being genuinely embarrassing for communication specialists. At the same time, the vast number of advertised journalistic vacancies pose the requirement of mastery of one or two foreign languages. In effect, very few graduates meet this condition by virtue of their training at the departments of journalism in Bulgaria. And the fault is in the system of education that divorces communication and journalism from language.

At the same time, the Social Sciences in Bulgaria are seen to be developing in isolation from world trends, in a paradigm that is parochial and in need to catch up with European disciplines (Gornev 2012:181). The very vehicle of innovation and new ideas remains encapsulated in the past and refuses to suggest ways of integrating into a fast progressing world. Thus, the lack of a lingua franca to facilitate co-ordinating international syllabi with Bulgarian counterparts is visibly missing.

In this article a review is given of the degrees of integration between social sciences and humanities, with an emphasis on Media Studies and their connections to both Languages and Social Sciences. Towards this goal the scope of Media Studies as an academic subject is explored via research of the websites of leading UK and world universities. Secondly, we look at specific syllabi announced for the university courses in Media and Communication Studies. As a third objective, we try to answer the question of which departments teach Media Studies, with an eye on the role given to languages in this process.

#### MEDIA STUDIES AS AN ACADEMIC SUBJECT AT UNIVERSITY

The renowned founder of Communication/Media Studies in America Wilbur Schramm admits that schools of journalism provided teachers trained in the study of communication who were ‘social-science trained’ (1997: 19). Thus communication was conceived as best investigated through empirical social research. Later, studies of audience reception were included in the subject matter, as well as strategies of presentation, social parameters of readerships, and the sociology of media production, dissemination and reception. The emphasis was clearly on the sociological factor, but specific psychological parameters were also incorporated, inasmuch as Schramm was

a student of the experimental psychologist Osgood. These research beginnings were supplemented with technical perspectives, presenting communication as a flowchart of transmission and reception with the respective participants and noise as intermediary (Shannon and Weaver 1949: 98). The object of investigation spread out to reach the reception of media by children, or the representation of various ethnic groups in society. A specific brand of research led to the term 'agenda-setting', which explores how public learning is influenced by mass media coverage (Cohen 1963).

In Canada, Osler (2000) testifies that the beginnings of Communication research were marked by a desire to split from history as such and instead research and present the past through narrative theory. The roots of the discipline spread as far back as ancient Greece to include classical rhetoric into the curricula, with the understanding that what media practitioners need is to persuade and convince. Approaches to this process were sought in the work of philosophers such as Plato. Modern offshoots propose research on the communicator as a lover (Darnell & Brockreide, 1976), developing further an idea suggested by Plato. Other theoretical inroads into communication were sought in Sociology and Political Science. Marshall McLuhan (1964), the famous Canadian philosopher, had a big impact with his interest in the medium, rather than the message.

In the UK, Media studies began with recognising journalistic texts as admissible in the classroom – since they were deemed popular culture, of lower quality and unfit for the lofty standards of education. The Newsom Report (1963) on education talked of the need for schools to provide a 'counterbalancing assistance' to popular culture. With time, however, researching media shifted focus to critical reading, establishing political agendas, and to the essence of the new media. As early as 1960 the first chair in Film Studies was established at a British University. Culturalist roots transpire in the first course in Media and Society taught at the Open University, where issues of identity, art and literacy formed the basis of the curriculum. Golay's *Introduction to the Language of Image and Sound* (1973), a seminal work on visual literacy, added valuable ideas to the emerging field of Media Studies. Critical distance and analytical skills are to this day a key feature of Media studies courses in the UK. The Glasgow University Media Group's famous studies, *Bad News* (1976), created a storm of controversy through its exposure of bias in mainstream media's reporting of industrial news. In 2012 the group celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their *Bad News* series, critically evaluating media coverage of topical issues. Some claim that Media Studies are popular because they purportedly lead to more jobs, others attribute their popularity to the easier subject matter – Media Studies courses are famously called 'Mickey Mouse Studies' in the prestigious *Times Educational Supplement* to reflect a general condescension to courses that deal with cartoons rather than with classical literature.

In a review of Media Studies in the UK Haig (2005:2) writes:

At the undergraduate level alone, the register of courses compiled by the University and College Admissions Service lists 115 different institutions offering a total of 1000 bachelor degrees in media studies. One reason for the popularity of these courses is that, according to statistics from the Graduate Careers Advisory Service, media studies graduates are more likely to find jobs than those with social science or humanities degrees: nearly three-quarters of them obtain employment within six months of graduating,

compared to the overall figure for UK graduates of two-thirds. This is in turn partly because the media industries in Britain are booming as a result of de-regulation, but also because media studies graduates are regarded favourably by employers who see them as being well-trained, flexible and equipped with useful transferable skills.

Three types of courses are established. Some are based in social science faculties, with the consequence that they tend to focus on the theory and criticism of media and may include no practical work at all. Other courses are based in arts faculties and are focused on creative and artistic work, including everything from ceramics and fashion design to film-making and drama. The third type of course is based in vocationally-oriented technical faculties, usually at less academically prestigious institutions, where the focus is on the practical training of media professionals (recording engineers, lighting and cameramen, website designers, journalists, advertising executives etc.).

The Scandinavian countries followed suit, introducing Media Studies at their tertiary level of education (Nordenstreng 2007), borrowing richly from existing traditions. South African universities pride themselves on varied curricula of Media Studies (Fourie 2001). If there ever was a revolutionary movement in education to include new subjects in the 60s and 70s last century, it was Media Studies. Unfortunately, this trend never reached Bulgaria, which in those times was busy extolling the virtues of communism and turning a blind eye to everything that came from the West.

## MEDIA STUDIES SYLLABI

Should a student in the UK desire to prepare for the job of a journalist, they would probably check options in an on-line guide published by the *Times Educational Supplement*, called the *Good University Guide*. It is one of the sources that provide information for prospective students. Inasmuch as it appears in a prestigious newspaper such as the *Times*, it would be considered very influential.

The first frustration is that it does not contain the rubric of Journalism. With reference to September 2016, top of the rank list for Linguistics is Oxford University, for Media and Communication – New Castle University, for English – St Andrews University in Scotland, and for Education – Cambridge University. The ranking is based on questionnaires with students and staff, on academic output and on job realisation. It is conducted year by year, so these data are relevant only for the date specified with the respective classification. Alternative assessors also have different rankings, depending on their specific methodologies.

On the website for prospective university applicants UCAS, courses for future journalists also tend to be entitled ‘Media’ or ‘Communication’. The term Journalism, non-existent in the *Good University Guide*, appears for courses offered regionally in Wales and Scotland. Also, it is used with modifying phrases naming specialised areas: Music Journalism, Fashion Journalism,

Sports Journalism etc. With a view of the specific medium, Journalism is also modified by Multimedia Journalism, Broadcast Journalism, and so on.

UCAS also contains information concerning opportunities to combine subjects. For the subjects entitled 'English', 49 courses are solely dedicated to English, while 52 are joint courses. Combinations are offered with Teaching, Business, Sociology, and Translation. No link is forged with Media, Culture or Communication. Media Studies, for their part, tend to be taught as single subjects (123 courses, as opposed to 88 for joint courses). Full time is the predominant mode, a fraction are advertised as 'sandwich', i.e. including a work placement.

The range of subjects taught on the Media courses is enormous. Below is a brief selection, chosen to illustrate the variety:

Film & Television Studies	Media Communications
Music Industry Practice - Business & Innovation	Advertising and Marketing Communications
Digital Media	Interactive Digital Technologies
Criminology	Digital Production and Filmmaking
Contemporary Media Cultures	Sports Studies and Development
Fashion Media Practice and Criticism	Computer Visualisation and Animation
Fine Art	Law

The list shows that practical considerations have suggested various aspects of Media Studies that require university training. Apart from the specifics of media, such as Film and Digital Media, we see spheres of life that journalists may need to be familiar with, in case they choose to cover. They range from fine art to criminology. A very special connection is forged with law as an object of coverage, but also as codes of practice.

The joint subject areas for the BA courses may be a mystery and invite speculation why these rather than others have been chosen:

Drama & Theatre Studies/History  
Film & Television Studies/English Literature  
Film & Television Studies/Fine Art  
French/Film & Television Studies  
Chinese /Creative Studies  
German /Media Studies  
Journalism/Media Studies

Creative Computing/Media Communications

Journalism /Public Relations

Language and/or with Film/Media (French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish)

Fashion Branding/Communication

English/Communication at Work

Environment/Media Studies

American Studies/Media and Communications

Computing/Film, Radio & Television

Digital Media/Early Childhood Studies

Digital Media/English Literature

Digital Media/Events Planning

These combinations immediately answer a question posed with this research – what is the relevance of foreign languages to journalism and media? The answer favours a close association between the two, as the courses are offered in tandem, obviously recognising that knowledge of television as a medium is enhanced by mastery of a foreign language and familiarity with media broadcast in this language.

The combinations Major – Minor also include foreign language courses with media:

English Language with Media Studies

French with Media Studies

Law with Media Studies

Media and Public Relations

Communication (EFL) and Media Studies

English Studies with Journalism

International Relations with Journalism

History with Journalism

Public Relations with Politics

At this stage, a distinction needs to be made between programmes where English is taught as a mother tongue, or as a foreign language. English as a mother tongue leads to careers in writing, publishing, and obviously – in communications. Naturally, the language proficiency of the students is high and other skills can be included in the curricula. English as a foreign language, for its part, relates to functioning in international settings, or teaching language or literature.

## DEPARTMENTS ENGAGED WITH MEDIA STUDIES

The UCAS tables for 2013 (figure 1.) – selected here for the clarity of presentation – reveal in percentage the gains and losses in the number of applicants for each subject group. The UK universities were used for the study.

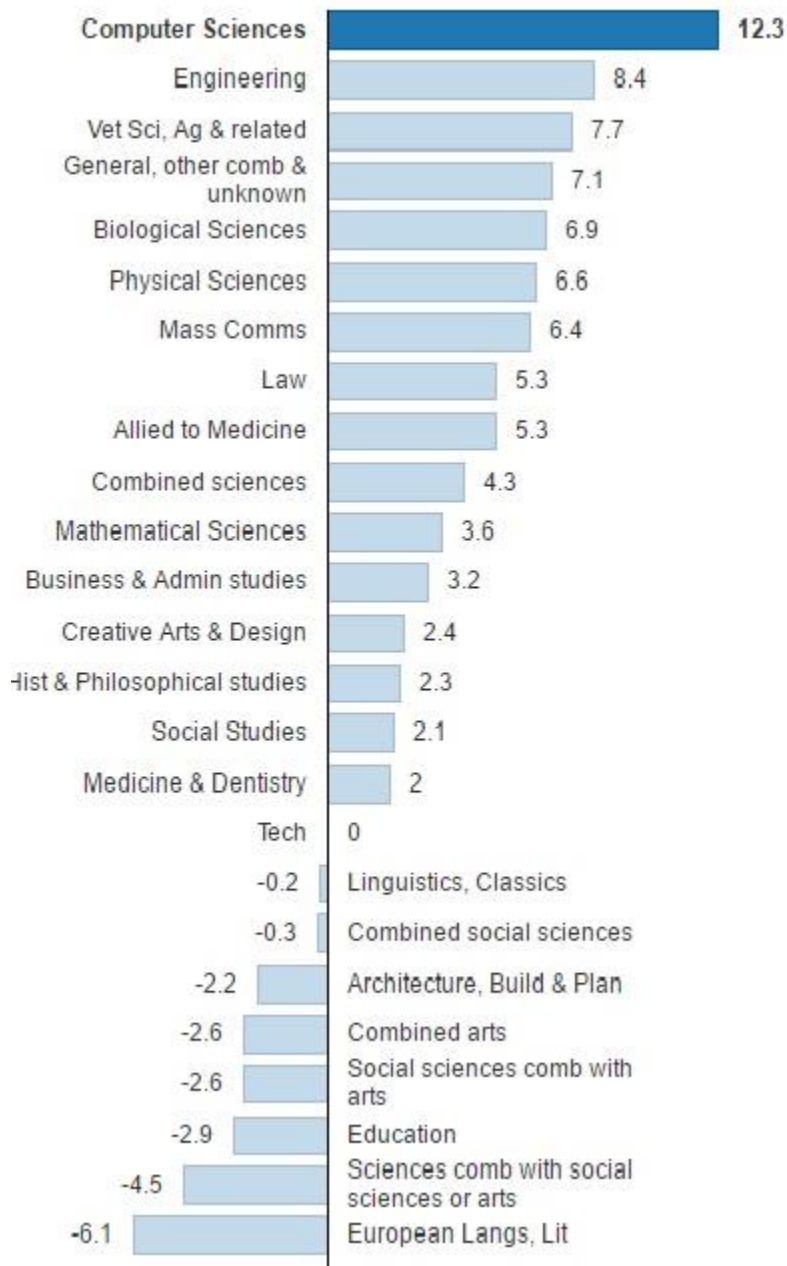


Figure 1. Growth numbers by subject areas (in percentage)



The greatest loser of applicants are European Languages and Literature. Linguistics lost less, but its collaboration with Social Sciences lost considerably more than linguistics. At the same time, Mass communications was a significant winner with an increase of more than 6%, nearly the same amount that Literature lost. If Humanities departments were looking to enhance their appeal by teaming up with Social Sciences, they were wrong. The applicants called their bluff.

The American Academy of Arts & Sciences also produced data that English language and literature, history, languages and literatures other than English, linguistics, classical studies, and philosophy declined by 8.7 percent between 2012 and 2014, falling to the smallest number of degrees conferred since 2003 – 106,869 (Jaschik 2016). Thus, the conclusion that the interest in academic studies of Languages and Linguistics is a worldwide trend gets a powerful validation.

The situation calls for serious measures on the part of academic in the field of languages and linguistics. Rather than team up with more desirable subjects, the successful departments developed new specialities, borrowing from the subject matter of other areas.

A next step in the present study is to show which departments take part in training journalists and where Media Studies have found their home.

Arts Centre

Music Academy

The Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (Criminology)

Faculty of Arts, Law & Social Sciences

Department of English and Media

School of Media and Communication

School of Creative Industries

School of Humanities and Cultural Industries

Department of Film, Media and Cultural Studies

It is apparent that topic-related journalism is developed in departments specialised in the respective subject, e.g. Arts, Music etc. However, some Arts departments have changed their names to include Media, Film etc. Particularly coherent is the title bridging Media and Cultural Studies. Smaller universities seem unable to afford independent departments of Linguistics and go for a blend with the more desirable partner, Media and Communication. A major trend is merging Arts and Social Sciences – a step unthinkable under the Bulgarian System of Academic fields.

APPLICABILITY OF THE QUALIFICATIONS

A specialised advisory website (*Learn*) for university applicants explains what jobs graduates from Media Studies courses can expect:

A media studies major is one way to break into the television and film business as a writer, director or producer. Writers who work directly for television and film are called screenwriters or scriptwriters and can be hired as employees or independent contractors.

Another website, *Prospects*, specialising in the UK job market, summarises the jobs and agencies in table 2.

Typical employers	jobs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communications agencies;</li> <li>• the Civil Service;</li> <li>• further and higher education institutions, such as colleges and universities;</li> <li>• local government;</li> <li>• marketing organisations;</li> <li>• media companies;</li> <li>• the newspaper industry;</li> <li>• PR consultancies;</li> <li>• publishing companies;</li> <li>• TV and radio companies</li> </ul>	Advertising account executive Broadcast journalist Editorial assistant Event organiser Information officer Magazine journalist Market researcher Writer	Media planner Multimedia specialist Programme researcher, broadcasting/film/video Public relations officer Runner, broadcasting/film/video Television/film/video producer

Table 2. Employers and Jobs for Media Studies Graduates

Some of the jobs promised to Media Studies graduates do not exist on the Bulgarian job market. Should universities campaign for improving the media by introducing new jobs, then their students will be facing very bright prospects to find working positions.

The top-ranking university for Media studies, Newcastle University, promises this type of realisation to its students:

You will study the generation, circulation and promotion of information, and explore the role the media plays in shaping culture, identity and interpersonal communications.

The professional qualifications offered with the educational degree are for the following fields:

- journalism
- public relations
- film-making
- marketing

The course would seem to combine a broad field and subjects that might appear incompatible, such as advertising and journalism. However, the department invested in more opportunities for the

applicants rather than a narrow specialisation and consistency. This choice has seen the endorsement of candidates.

The entire make-up of the department puts together Humanities and Social Sciences:

- Architecture, Planning and Landscape
- Arts and Cultures
- Business School
- Combined Honours Centre
- Education, Communication and Language Sciences
- English Literature, Language and Linguistics
- Geography, Politics and Sociology
- History, Classics and Archaeology
- Law School
- Modern Languages

The curriculum for the study includes compulsory subjects which do not affiliate to one discipline, but hark to the newly established field:

- Introduction to Media Studies
- Introduction to Research Methods
- Introduction to Social and Cultural Studies
- Introduction to Multimedia Technologies for Media Studies

Interestingly, Cultural studies – a typical Humanities subject – is bundled together with a Social Science. In Bulgaria, it is a long tradition to present cultural studies in tandem with literature and art, rather than with social trends. Probably this is down to the restrictions imposed on sociology under the authoritarian regime until 1989. Despite the apparent academic reason for matching culture and society, the inkling towards literature still lingers in Bulgarian academia.

The electives reveal an orientation either to popular culture, the sensationalist and high-circulation media in list B, or to the broadsheets appealing to more educated tastes:

List B	List A
Sex, Sexuality and Desire Visual Culture	Introduction to Public Relations Journalism Practice

Celebrity Culture Broadcast Journalism 1 (Radio) Advertising and Consumption Television Studies Marketing Strategy: Concepts and Applications Human Resource Management	Media, Democracy and the Public Sphere Gender, Media, Society Case Studies in Practical Management Practical Management Business Game Career Development for Second Year Students Career Management Module Developing Enterprise, Entrepreneurship and Employability
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Table 3. Elective courses for Media Studies

Some of the options beg the question: why career management is combined with Media and Democracy, while celebrity culture with Human Resources. Yet, the orientation is clear.

WORLDWIDE

On the world stage, the website for university rankings Top Universities lists Media Studies as a Social Studies subject. Linguistics and Languages are classified with the humanities. According to their criteria, the rank list is as shown in Table 4.

Rank	University	Country
1	University of Southern California	USA
2	University of California, Berkely	USA
3	London School of Economics and Political Science	UK
4	University of Wisconsin-Madison	USA
5	University of Texas at Austin	USA
6	University of Amsterdam	Holland
7	Stanford University	USA
8	University of Pennsylvania	USA
9	Michigan State University	USA
10	University of California, Los Angeles	USA

Table 4. Top Universities for Media Studies worldwide.

Clearly this evaluations system praises a school of business education as the best provider of Media Studies in the UK. This indicates that Media and Communication studies are construed away from the scope of arts and humanities.

The top university from this rank list, the University of Southern California, offers two strands:

- Communication (media and culture);
- Journalism (PR and journalism).

The purported aim is: “to encourage students to think critically, write effectively and master the new and emerging technologies”. Despite the fact that writing and thinking cut across all disciplines and they are innate to language studies, no such courses are offered to the students. In effect, communication is linked to every other domain of social studies but languages in the range of subjects:

- Communication and Social Science
- Communication and Mass Media
- Public Speaking
- Communication Practicum
- Communication and Culture
- Communication and Media Economics
- Entertainment, Communication and Society
- Empirical Research in Communication
- Persuasion
- Learning from Case Studies in Communication
- Interpersonal Communication
- Understanding Social Science Research
- Innovation, Entertainment, and the Arts

From these Public Speaking, Persuasion and Interpersonal Communication have always been vested in the field of English Studies (Guy and Small 1993). Following from the argument for providing subject matter and method, found missing from the academic subject in the UK quoted above, we can clearly see that Media secures both. In addition, it also connects with Cultural Studies in its sociologically oriented perspective, also known as Area Studies – an indisputable necessity for foreign correspondents or international journalists.

## CONCLUSION

Our exploratory study sought to establish whether integration exists between the social sciences and the humanities, with an emphasis on Media Studies and their connections to both Language and Social Sciences. The theoretical discourses about Media/Communication Studies and their beginnings appear to link Media to Languages and Social Sciences. Eventually, the subject matter dissolved the borderlines between the disciplines. The brief history of the subjects – presented in the limited space of this article - would suggest that Communications and Media came to upgrade the studies of language and culture, to enrich purely linguistic studies with social

parameters, alongside the inevitable connection to the evolving and omnipresent knowledge of technology.

The curricula of Media programmes do include a number of innately linguistic subjects, such as Rhetoric, Interpersonal Communication, Persuasion, Writing, Critical Skills etc. But the impact of non-linguistic subjects is also quite considerable. The review also showed that Communication and Media Studies have evolved as a stand-alone subject with its own introductions to an obviously consolidated theoretical field. The establishment of a new subject with its interdisciplinary make up is also reinforced by the fact that overtly blended courses between social studies and humanities do not appeal to students.

In effect, Media Studies is a cross-disciplinary field with its own subject matter borrowed from both Languages and Social Sciences, but evolved in a specific subject. Its preferred denomination is with the latter – social sciences, but this is a matter of established practice in Bulgaria, not of the pragmatics that Social Science is more useful to journalism. If Linguistics were to evolve into its own media strand, it would be no less valuable. With the purported isolation of Social Sciences in Bulgaria from world trends, Linguistics may be better able of acting as the bridge with Media and turn into a promising academic discipline.

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