

APPLIED LINGUISTICS – A FAST LANE TO PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE IN ELT

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Abstract: *This paper provides a brief overview of a course in Applied Linguistics (AL) that was designed to extend and consolidate the current professional competence of MA students at the Department of British and American Studies, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, and to build a sound foundation for their further development. The course was based on the observation that professional competence in Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) draws on multiple sources of information, both theoretical and empirical, and keeps developing through research and teaching practice. Consequently, effective English Language Teaching (ELT) presupposes an extensive body of linguistic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge on the part of teaching professionals, as well as relevant research skills and teaching competencies. To achieve this goal, the course focused on the application of theoretical knowledge in solving a wide range of practical problems. Within the framework constructed, the course members were able to develop their personal philosophy and teaching styles, demonstrating a growing confidence in planning, implementing and evaluating new teaching practices.*

Key words: *professional development, research skills, teaching competences*

The dynamic character of present-day realities, marked by rapid technological development, human resources mobility, innovative ideas and multilingualism, has brought about changes in all sectors of public life, including education. We are witnessing the emergence of new socio-economic needs, such as adequate vocational training, continuing professional development and efficient use of English. To respond to

these challenges we have to re-evaluate certain theoretical stands and teaching practices and to promote new mindsets and skills.

Now that the need for life-long learning has attracted the attention of many educators, a parallel upsurge of interest – that in *continuing professional development* (CPD) – seems to be gathering momentum, particularly in higher education. Aspiring to maintain quality teaching and research, many universities provide opportunities for developing the expertise of their academic staff. The goal is to facilitate their further development as independent analysts, decision-makers and instructors through the formation of a solid knowledge base and profession-specific skills.

The purpose of this paper is to present a brief overview of a course in AL that was designed to extend and consolidate the professional competence of master's degree students at the Department of British and American Studies, University of Sofia “St. Kliment Ohridski”. The course was based on the observation that effective FLT presupposes an extensive body of linguistic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge, as well as relevant research skills and teaching competencies. To achieve this goal, the course focused on the application of theoretical knowledge in solving a wide range of practical problems.

Before discussing the role of AL in achieving this goal, I would like to note that the term “applied linguistics” is often misinterpreted or narrowed down to its pedagogical aspect. The term is often used in reference to teacher training programs that are focused on promoting microteaching techniques, without any theoretical underpinning.

The actual field of AL can be outlined in terms of its main goal, as formulated in Grabe's definition:

The focus of applied linguistics is on trying to resolve language-based problems that people encounter in the real world, whether they be learners, teachers, supervisors, academics, lawyers, service providers, those who need social services, test takers, policy developers, dictionary makers, translators, or a whole range of business clients. (Grabe 2002, 9)

Unfortunately, the potential of AL to help transform theoretical knowledge into practical skills is often underestimated or totally neglected.

It is common practice for philology departments to teach theoretical disciplines apart from any practical application. In consequence, students fail to realize that “language, language learning and language use are a seamless whole and all of the various elements interact with each other in complex ways” (Schmitt and Celce-Murcia 2010, 11).

To remedy this situation, the course in AL was designed to foster continuing development through research and practical tasks. As an integral part of the master’s program, it was planned to provide a framework for professional development in four aspects:

- language-related knowledge
- learner-related knowledge
- profession-specific research skills
- teaching competences.

The syllabus was negotiated with the students as part of a needs analysis that elicited data about their expectations and priorities. The topics were sequenced accordingly and grouped in five modules. Starting with activation of the students’ prior knowledge, each module provided further content-specific input, moving from theory to practice and introducing new ideas.

The first key issue addressed in **Module One** was the complex character of verbal communication – an activity *social* by function and *individual* by nature. Based on a language code belonging to the whole community and employed by individual speakers, this complex phenomenon has linguistic, psychological and social dimensions.

Fig. 1 illustrates the complex relationships inside the overlapping zones – *psycholinguistics*, *sociolinguistics*, and particularly the hub, where the language system, language learning, and language use meet within a broad multidisciplinary framework.

The next step was to see how language works in real-life situations, with reference to three basic oppositions: a) the language **system** vs. its **realization**; b) language as **product** vs. language as **process**, c) knowledge **of** a language vs. knowledge **about** language.

Fig. 2 represents a communicative act that includes an utterance, shared by two interlocutors, using the same code with reference to the same situational event.

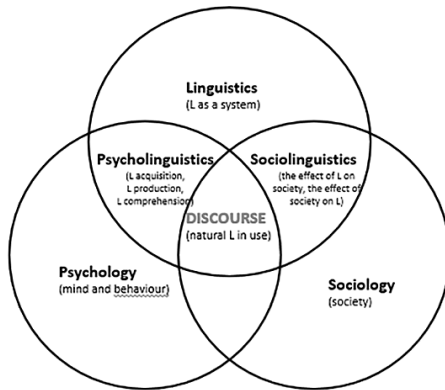


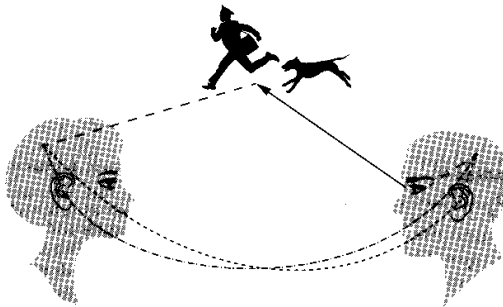
Fig. 1 The outer circles (Grozdanova 2015, 16).

(1) **situational event**

real world situation

(material)

3D entities co-exist



(4) **listener**

Information

(ideal – mental model)

(2) **speaker**

information

(ideal – mental model)

A stray dog is chasing the postman.

(3) **message**

Verbal product

(material)

linear

Fig. 2 (Grozdanova 2015, 13)

What a foreign language teacher needs to know is that the target of teaching, respectively learning, is NOT to make learners memorize an inventory of utterances in the foreign language but to construct a mental *system* in a patterned way, by integrating new knowledge into the existing network in the mind. Second, “pedagogic activities have to be psychologically authentic, with alignment between the conditions of learning and of subsequent use” (Chapelle and Brindley 2010, 28). In other words, FLT needs to link linguistic forms and structures to the way they are encoded and decoded, without isolating *product* from *use*.

The third issue addressed was the difference between knowledge *of* a language and knowledge *about* a language. The purpose was to see whether teaching English by providing metalinguistic information about forms and rules runs parallel or crosswise to the authentic learning processes.

Considering language from the inner perspective uncovered another significant challenge – *compartmentalization*. As generally known, “no single person [is] able to master the whole field” (Lynch and Mendelssohn 2010, 11). “To get around our cognitive limitation as human beings” (ibid.), we divide it into manageable parts. Six subfields are generally identified – phonetics and phonology, morphology and syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Traditionally, they are included in the academic curriculum as independent disciplines. The problem is that “this is not the way language works in the real world” (ibid.). It works as a whole of interrelated units and the piecemeal approach fails to utilize its full potential in FLT. The holistic approach, by contrast, enables one to uncover relations across sub-fields and to diversify one’s means of expression. For instance:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Room 324 is <i>vacant</i> . | – lexical |
| Room 32 4 is <i>unoccupied</i> | – morphological |
| Room 324 is <i>not occupied</i> . | – syntactic |

Lumping together system-based functional equivalents is a powerful teaching technique, which enhances learners’ fluency by providing different tools to do the same job.

With the focus of interest shifted from units to learners and domains, a comprehensive model of *Communicative Competence* was proposed (Hymes 1972, 269–293; Canale and Swain 1980, 1–43; Bachman 1990, 87, among others) to represent our ability “to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meaning interpersonally within specific contexts” (Brown 1994, 237). The unified approach helped construct an all-embracing model of language proficiency. It also solved the problem of compartmentalization in FLT by making it possible for single components and sub-systems to be foregrounded without obliterating the big picture.

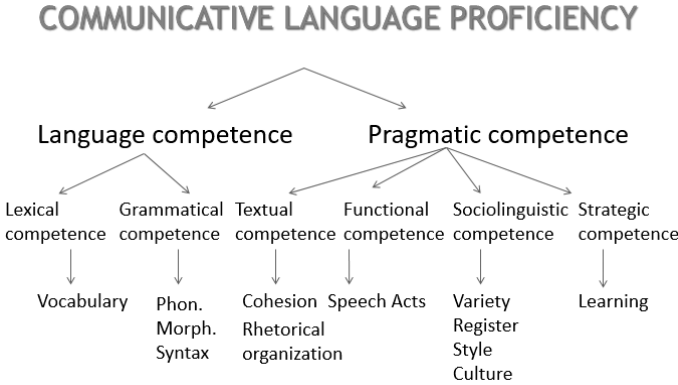


Fig. 3 Communicative proficiency (a nuclear model)

The broader the conceptual framework constructed, the easier the transition from fundamental questions about language, language learning and use to pedagogical questions about learners, teachers and effective teaching. To answer these questions the MA students needed to know more about how people process information, what factors influence learning, and what strategies facilitate it. This was the next step taken in the overall development under way.

Module Two derived from the awareness that teaching goes beyond providing students with pedagogical descriptions of vocabulary and grammar in class. It aims to construct a coherent language system

in the learner's mind. In-depth understanding of how this happens involves learning about: a) the *universal* nature of information processing (i.e. perception, selection, storing, and retrieval) and b) *individual* learning styles and strategies.

A historical overview of research on human learning, in general, and language learning, in particular, introduced the students to major approaches in the field, their main proponents and the ideas they promote. Special attention was devoted to the Schema Theory, the Meaningful Learning Theory, and the Information Processing Theory.

The Schema Theory follows Piaget's view that knowledge comes from action (see Slavin 1991, chap. 2). Four key concepts explain the process of learning:

- *schema* – a mental pattern constructed in dealing with objects or events
- *assimilation* – incorporating new objects into the scheme
- *accommodation* – modifying existing schemes to fit new situations
- *equilibrium* – the state of balance restored between present understanding and new experiences.

Imbalance between what learners know and what they encounter in class tends to cause disequilibrium. It is the teacher's job to reduce the anxiety caused and take advantage of the learners' curiosity to look for ways to restore the balance.

The Theories of Meaningful Learning were used to promote the idea of relatability in the acquisition of new knowledge – its retention, organization and incorporation in the existing mental system. To address the issue we followed Anderson and Ausubel (1965) and (Brown 1994, 79–84) in contrasting:

rote learning – acquisition and storage of items as arbitrary entities, interfered by contiguous items, and eventually lost

with *meaningful learning* – acquisition and storage of items through incorporation in larger cognitive structures.

When a piece of new information enters the processing mechanism in the mind, its retention is effective only if it interacts with and gets subsumed by a larger and stable conceptual construction. Teachers can facilitate students' acquisition of new items by advance activation of relevant background knowledge (schemata).

The Theory of Information Processing and Memory was presented to unfold a more comprehensive picture of how people perceive, understand, incorporate and recall the information that enters the mind through the senses. Fig. 4 shows the sequence of components plus the respective operations.

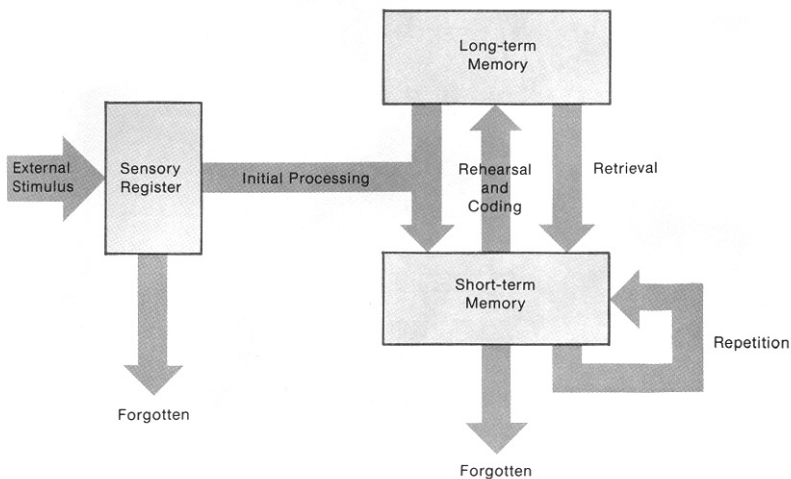


Fig. 4. The sequence of Information Processing (Slavin 1991, 131)

A detailed description traced the route of the incoming information from the *sensory register*, through the *short-term memory*, to the *long-term memory*, addressing such important issues as the role of attention and repetition, generalization and transfer of information, inductive and deductive reasoning, and the *Gestalt principles* of wholeness, figure and ground.

The discussion on the common traits of human learning was followed by that of identifying variations across individuals and tasks.

By the end of this session the students demonstrated understanding of some basic **dimensions of varying learning styles**, namely:

- field in/dependence
- left and right-brain dominance
- ambiguity tolerance
- reflectivity and impulsivity
- visual and auditory dominance

They were able to identify the cognitive factors which affect the ease of learning, contributing examples from their own experience. Further to the idea of personalized teaching, we discussed the *affective aspects* of human behaviour and their impact on FLL, namely:

- internal, or personality factors;
- external, or socio-cultural factors.

The significance of *personality factors*, such as *motivation, self-esteem, inhibition, anxiety, risk-taking, extroversion*, and *empathy*, was analyzed relative to learner performance, special attention being given to sources of errors and error correction. Recommendations for useful learning strategies and good teaching practices were also discussed and short-listed.

The second part of this session dealt with the *socio-cultural factors* that influence foreign language learning. If culture is assumed to be the collective identity of a community, then it serves as a mental filter through which the incoming information is perceived and interpreted. The wide coverage of various cultures on TV, the Internet and the press had contributed to the general discussion on *stereotyping, culture shock, acculturation* and other related issues. Cultures were compared and cross-cultural observations provided. The development of multi-cultural competence was related to the ideas of *empathy, tolerance* and *open-mindedness*.

Module Three

To many people, learning a foreign language is identified with memorizing lists of words and sets of rules. The idea that vocabulary and grammar work jointly in getting meaning across (see Widdowson 1990) sounds to them rather vague. To go deeper into the matter, the MA students needed sufficient evidence to reflect upon. So, instead of providing explicit information about the ways vocabulary and grammar work, I decided to let them take the language learners' role and experience the processes involved.

The general assumption in this module was that learning L2 vocabulary involves learning individual items as much as integrating them into a coherent mental lexicon. My purpose was to demonstrate how learners can be guided towards developing *lexical competence* by experiencing a sequence of related activities. The first objective was their experiencing the *cognitive aspect* of vocabulary learning. E.g.:

Experiential Sequence

Step 1: General domain activation

It was triggered by means of a pre-reading task that introduced two different stories.

Activator 1: *This is a story about an American teenager, called Tony, and his friends,...*

Activator 2: *This is a story about doctor Kemp and how he met the Invisible Man for the first time.*

Having read the introductions, the students were asked to read another passage and say whether it belongs to text 1 or text 2.

Follow up: *I was hoping it would snow. My friend got a toboggan for his birthday and he said the next time it snows we can try it out together.*

The unanimous conclusion was that Activator 1 had created a plausible context for further reference – that of TEENAGE WORLD – within which they had processed the relevant new information.

Step 2: Focused Schemata-based Lexical Predictions

By activating certain parts of the learner's background knowledge, the instructor can narrow down the range of relevant choices. For example: WEATHER.

Activator: *It was March. What was the weather like?*

Response: *wet, raining, cold, snowing, cloudy, sunny, cold but sunny, constantly changing, warm and pleasant, windy and shiny, *unconstant...*

I got as many answers as members of the group. The students' individual predictions varied along two dimensions – cognitive and linguistic. Diverse as they were, they covered cumulatively the same lexical field – *weather in March/spring*.

Step 3: Text-based Lexical Predictions

The next objective was to see whether lexical meaning identification depends on the learner's ability to find clues in the text. Ten presumably new words had been highlighted for the students to interpret, as shown in the example. They were instructed to write down the Bulgarian translation counterparts and the respective clues.

Activator: *After school me and Joel, Martin and Scott started **hanging out** at The Sweet Shop. We always sit at the same table ...*

Response: = BG: *мотая се, шляя се, вися;* clues: *after school, at The Sweet Shop, at the same table,...*

Judging from the data, the predictions were based on a combination of textual and discourse factors (see Grozdanova 2003, chap. 1).

Step 4: Organising/storing lexical items

The students had seen how the activation of different topic domains triggers the choice of certain lexical items and patterns. They realized that the development of lexical competence involves construction of a patterned system which is to incorporate the new items. Here are three system-building techniques:

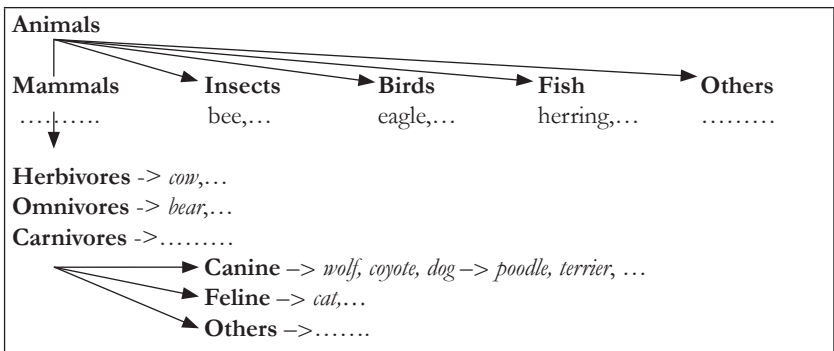
a. Lexical sets, chains, patterns

Students had to complete a table with suitable lexical items, as shown in the example. They collaborated in compiling six lexical sets (vertically) and four lexical chains (horizontally).

Season	weather	clothes	leisure activities	eating place	food	drink
Winter	<i>cold</i>	<i>jacket</i>	<i>skiing</i>	<i>snack-bar</i>	<i>sandwich</i>	<i>tea</i>
Spring

b. Hierarchical structures

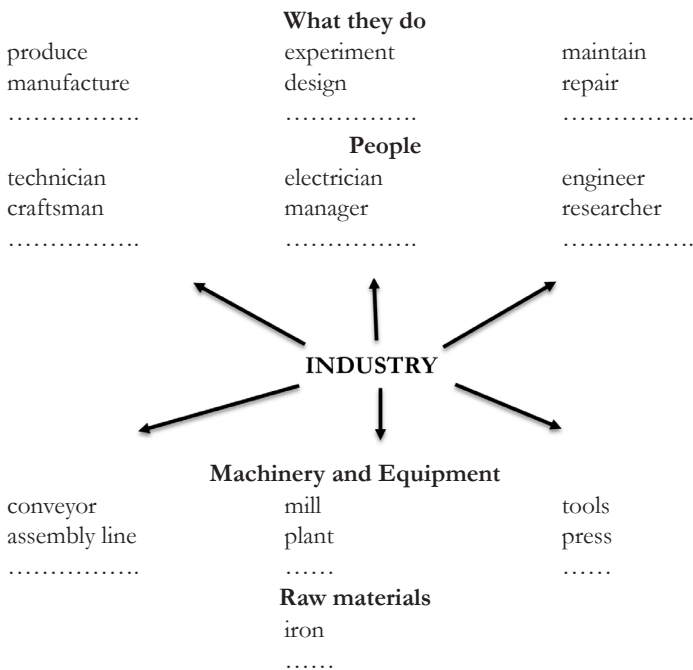
Students were instructed to complete the basic structure of the hierarchy and then to link the items through coordination and subordination, as suggested in Step 5.b. below.



(after Slavin 1991, 165)

c. Spidergrams

Students had to complete a conceptual web with words from different grammatical classes – Ns, Vs, etc. So they developed skills to combine and generate higher level products.



Step 5: Systemic knowledge consolidation Patterned knowledge is consolidated by means of controlled or semi-controlled tasks, following the sequence: word ⇔ phrase ⇔ clause ⇔ text. For example:

- Memorization of lexical items in use through rhythmical pyramid-like repetitions aloud: /*toboggan*/
a toboggan
got a toboggan
Joel got a toboggan
Joel got a toboggan for his birthday.

- Developing lexical competence with the help of follow-up tasks like the ones below.

a. Rewrite the teenage story, changing the following elements:

the season is summer, and the month is August;
the boys are Bulgarian and the event takes place in Bulgaria

b. Complete the definitions:

Cats are

Sharks are

c. Write sentences using words from the web.

Electrician – maintain/repair – assembly line

Step 6: Lexical Competence in Use

Using vocabulary freely in communication marks the completion of the experiential circle and demonstrates the learners' proficiency. E.g.:

Report a similar event

Recommend the story to a friend

The basic strength of this method is that it helps reconcile the individual differences of the learners – communicative needs, learning styles, and language capacity – by guiding them through goal-oriented experiential sequences. Instead of following one single path, traced by the teacher and the text, the students collaborated in covering whole semantic fields, benefiting from their own schematic diversity and lexical knowledge. Having experienced the sequences of cognitive-oriented activities, the students were then demonstrated a number of teaching techniques to choose from and try out.

Module Four

Views on teaching grammar have varied considerably – from strict prescriptions at one pole to “no grammar” at the opposite pole. The belief that grammar is not to be viewed apart from vocabulary implies that instead of learning *forms* and *rules* in isolation learners should internalize them as an organizing force in communication. It is the teacher's task to make informed decisions as to which grammatical points should be called attention to, how they should be sequenced and how their acquisition could be facilitated.

The purpose of Module Four was to present arguments in support of the view that effective learning of grammar involves *consciousness raising* and active participation on the part of learners, who, under the teacher's guidance, could discover how language works as a system.

The feeling that L2 grammar is best taught through explicit instruction is misleading, as there is no way to observe or control the

processes taking place in the learners' minds during the instruction. On the other hand, learning through discovery keeps the learners involved in processing the input data and the teacher informed about the output. It is crucial for mental grammar to be distinguished from the formal descriptions in grammar books. Teachers need to know that pedagogical descriptions are *aids* to learning, not *the object* of learning (Corder 1973). For example, compare these two ways of presenting Voice and note the differences:

A. Active and Passive Voice (introduced together)

... In some sentences the Subject does the action. In that case we say the verb is in the Active Voice. In sentences in which the Subject is not the doer of the action but the receiver of it, the verb is in the Passive Voice. The Passive Voice is made by using some part of the verb *to be* and a Past Participle.

B. The Passive Voice – Shift of Focus: (introduced after the Active Voice)

1. Compare the sentences below and answer questions a. and b.:

Bell invented the telephone.

The telephone was invented by Bell.

a. Which sentence is about:

*the agent of the action?

*the thing affected by the action?

b. How can you use each sentence to complete the encyclopedia entries below?

Alexander Bell – *a British inventor who went to live in Canada and then in the USA.*

Telephone – *an apparatus with which people talk to each other over long distances.*

2. Complete the rules.

When we want to talk about the person or thing that performs the action, we use

When we want to focus on the thing or person affected by the action, we use

As shown in B, consciousness raising links new information to prior knowledge, stimulating inductive learning through inferential thinking. It combines implicit and explicit teaching in a balanced way.

In addition to discovery procedures, new techniques for building mental grammar were demonstrated along with some experimentally proven *facilitation devices*. The first technique demonstrated was *Transition from Semantic to Grammatical Organization of the Message*.

Teaching grammar in discourse provides conditions for more complex sentences to be primed by simpler versions, with textual reduction leading to the expression of new information mainly. If we compare the complete and reduced versions of the same answers given below, we can see that A1 involves certain knowledge of grammar, which A2 does not.

Q: How're you?

A1: **I'm** fine. Thank you.

A2: Fine. Thank you.

Q: How's your family?

A1: **We're** fine. Thank you.

A2: Fine. Thank you.

The lack of grammatical markers in A2 is compensated for by the predictability of the speaker's intended meaning. So, the gradual passage from semantic to grammatical organization of the message could enhance the learners' comprehension and fluency at the early stages of interlanguage development and add to their self-esteem.

Another facilitating technique involves the use of the minimal identifiable units of conversation – the *Adjacency Pairs* (e.g. Greeting-Greeting, Request-Response, Command-Acknowledgement, etc.) Combining their conversation-building potential with textual reduction, adjacency pairs can facilitate learning and communication in a natural way through scaffolding. Here is an application of the Question-Answer adjacency pair technique:

A: *Did they have a son?*

Question

B: *Two. Two boys and a girl.*

Answer

A: *Do you know where they live?*

Question

B: *A small town in New Jersey...*

Answer

(after Berman 1986)

Lexical Activation of Grammatical Forms was the third device meant to prepare learners for the complexity of English grammar. It was based on experimental findings (Grozdanova 2003, chapter 2) that the presence of a certain lexical item can prime the later use of a semantically related grammatical item. For example:

busy => progressive forms *I'm busy.* => *I'm busy reading.* => *I'm reading.*
once => past habitual *That man was once coach of the football team.*
 => *That man used to be coach of the football team.*
right => tag questions *You are leaving tomorrow, right?* => *You are*
 leaving tomorrow, aren't you?

Cross-level activation, as demonstrated earlier, showed how teaching language as a network of interdependent sub-systems contributes to the diversity of exponents in speech. E.g.

COMP

<i>Bill beat the champion.</i>	lexical
<i>Bill outran the chamion.</i>	derivational
<i>Bill ran faster than the champion.</i>	morpho-syntactic

Positive L1 transfer can be implemented through *contrastive analysis* and linking L1 language *mediators* to their L2 counterparts. E.g.:

*Това е **една** колежка от университета.*
*This is **a** colleague from the University*

Finally, the use of productive *Lexico-syntactic Patterns* was introduced to prevent learners from re-lexicalising Bulgarian structures in their L2 output and to help them develop native-like competence throughout all stages of L2 acquisition. E.g.:

X is more.../...er than Y
 It's only in X that Y

(Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992, 53)

In conclusion, gaining knowledge and experience from the sessions on vocabulary and grammar, the MA students saw for themselves how

the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach compensated for the limitations of one-sided practices. Their active involvement in the work made them aware of the fact that most of the problems they had dealt with previously required expertise and skills from different areas.

Module Five

Module Five addressed the exploration of learners' acquisition order and interlanguage progress. The *Interlanguage theory* (Selinker 1972) was introduced to account for the learners' systemic approximation to L2. Surprisingly, most students in the MA group were unaware of the fact that learning a foreign language involves constructing a patterned system which is different from both L1 and L2. So any deviations in the learners' speech they considered errors to be punished instead of interlanguage forms to be outgrown. To change their perspective, four stages of language proficiency were defined relative to the developmental stages through which learners pass in their progress to L2:

- Pre-systemic stage – random errors and wild guesses, vague idea of a system
- Emergent stage – initial awareness of a system, internalization of few rules, inability to correct errors
- Systemic stage – more consistency, ability to correct errors
- Stabilization stage – the system has been mastered to the point of fluency, ability to self-correct

(Corder 1994, 211–213)

Within the framework of Bulgarian-English interlanguage, major theoretical models were discussed, along with relevant analytic procedures and teaching applications. Among them were:

- Contrastive Analysis (CA)
- Error Analysis (EA)
- Performance Analysis (PA)
- Discourse Analysis (DA)

Contrastive analysis was introduced to help students uncover certain similarities and differences between L1 and L2. The purpose was to

identify L1 transfer as a source of interlingual errors. The initial version of the CA Hypothesis, which claimed that errors could be predicted on the basis of differences between the two languages, was replaced by a weaker but valid version, which addressed the sources of actual errors.

Error analysis. Making errors is a natural part of the learning process. As indicators of interlanguage development, they should be analyzed carefully and corrected tactfully. To grasp the gist of error analysis, the students were asked first to identify errors in the BE Interlanguage through regular observation, then to describe the type of deviation (omission, addition, substitution, ordering) and to reconstruct the correct version in L2. The final task was to account for the source (L1 interference, overgeneralization, ineffective teaching). The students were also instructed to reflect upon two important questions concerning the strategies of error correction – *when* to correct and *how* to correct. There was a general agreement that errors that affect communication and comprehensibility require immediate attention, as do errors committed during the practice stage of learning. Random mistakes, on the other hand, caused by carelessness or fatigue should be dealt with after the communicative event is over. Also, negative correction and over-correction are to be refrained from, as they unmotivate learners and lead to avoidance strategies in production. And again, to prevent misunderstanding, error correction should be performed at discourse level. Consider the following two equivalents of the Bulgarian *Тръгнаше да си тръгна веднага*. They are both acceptable in isolation.

I had to leave immediately. (and so I did.)

I should have left immediately (but I didn't.)

Awareness of the limitations of sentence-based error analysis led to its incorporation in Performance Analysis.

Performance analysis emerged to broaden the scope of interlanguage studies and to uncover the order of L2 acquisition. Research on B-E interlanguage, inspired by Andrei Danchev (see Danchev 1988), shed some light on the order of acquisition followed by Bulgarians and the strategies employed by them. It also showed that sequencing the teaching units in line with the empirical data helps avoid teaching induced errors

(e.g. introducing *there is* before *have* prevents the generation of **In the room has five students*.) So the need to examine utterances along with the preceding input opened up new areas of investigation such as text analysis and conversation analysis, i.e. discourse analysis.

Discourse Analysis

The session on discourse analysis brought us back full circle to the hub in the multidisciplinary framework represented graphically in Fig. 1 and the role of AL in developing professional competence in ELT. With the big picture in mind, the group discussed the differences between the spoken and the written modes of communication, commenting on new IT-related hybrid forms, such as SMS-s, tweets, posts etc. (spontaneous but written), autocue, etc. (spoken but scripted). The discussion was carried out in three perspectives – linguistic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic. Drawing on their knowledge and experience in the field, the students were now capable of discussing pedagogical issues and proposing ways of developing *discourse competence*.

To sum up, throughout this module the MA group demonstrated ability to identify problem areas, to choose and apply appropriate research procedures and to evaluate their own effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on the knowledge and experience gained from each session, the course members could see for themselves how the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach compensated for the limitations of one-sided practices and contributed to the development of a comprehensive professional competence. Moreover, they demonstrated willingness and ability to express their own views in presentations and group discussions.

Topic discussions were complemented by the application of basic research skills and techniques – e.g. *contrastive analysis*, *error analysis*, *performance analysis*, and *discourse analysis*. Teaching-related procedures, such as: *needs analysis*, *analysis of motivation*, *action research* and so on were also demonstrated in class and experimented with by the course members in their own environment. The results were reported in class, which enabled them to supplement each other's knowledge, raising the level of competence of the whole group.

In conclusion, by the end of the course the participants had demonstrated a growing understanding of the key principles underlying ELT professional development and built the necessary scientific base for further reference. Within the frame constructed, they were able to optimize their own teaching styles and strategies and to devise suitable teaching and assessment instruments. What is more, they had increased their confidence in planning, implementing and evaluating new teaching practices.

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