

МЕТОДИКА НАВЧАННЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ В СЕРЕДНІЙ ШКОЛІ ТА УНІВЕРСИТЕТІ

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A COURSE IN THEORY OF ENGLISH: BLENDING L2 CONTENT KNOWLEDGE WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING METHODOLOGY

The article addresses the issue of equipping pre-service teachers majoring in Ukrainian and foreign languages and literature, with English as a minor, with 'knowledge about language' through a course in Theory of English. In Ukrainian higher education, such courses integrate foundational theory in the history of the language, phonetics and phonology, lexicology, theoretical grammar, and stylistics, although the content and organization may vary across universities. At the same time, little is known about students' perceptions of the usefulness and applicability of the course in their actual classroom. To bridge this gap, the current research poses two research questions: 1. How meaningful is a theoretical course of English for prospective teachers? 2. What is the perceived impact of studying the theory of English on teaching? The participants in the study were 17 bachelor's-level students, all native speakers of Ukrainian, who completed a questionnaire comprising eight selected items and two open-ended questions. Responses to Questions 1-8 indicated that pre-service teachers held a generally positive perception of the course, specifying the usefulness of the aspects within each theme for effective language teaching. Extended personal responses to Questions 9-10 provided self-reported data about the impact of the course on their development as linguists, teachers, and personalities. These questions confirmed the high evaluation of the course and its impact on students' profiles and prospects of professional activities. The article concludes with implications for course designers and instructors.

Keywords: *theoretical course of English, pre-service teachers, self-reported perceptions of course effectiveness.*

FL is both the object of teaching and the means through which instruction is implemented (Borg, 2006). Apart from a high level of proficiency in FL, Ukrainian FL education emphasises the necessity for a FL teacher to be knowledgeable in linguistics, possess advanced erudition, and be able to apply this knowledge in teaching. To this end, majors are offered courses in separate linguistic disciplines that ensure a well-rounded command of theoretical foundations. For learners of a second FL, programmes envisage a complex discipline, "Theory of a FL," that integrates the most essential knowledge about the target language.

The course "Theory of English as a second FL" is compulsory and/or optional in the majority of Ukrainian universities that provides training for prospective linguists and FL teachers (Soloviova & Snikhovska, 2015; Kmit, 2016; Prosiannikova, 2018).

The departments develop syllabi and publish them, as well as instructional materials such as lectures, seminar tasks, and self-study, and questions for module tests and examinations. The content of courses is mostly very similar since preparing them, instructors use the same available sources. The difference in structuring the courses is more obvious: some course designers begin with lectures on general linguistics; some instructors begin with theoretical grammar, whereas others prefer to open with theoretical phonetics; one such course is entirely focused on translation. Given universities' autonomy in adopting their own instructional strategies, commonalities and differences in course design are considered appropriate (Soloviova & Snikhovska, 2015; Kmit, 2016; Prosiannikova, 2018).

However, we know little about students' perceptions of the course, their evaluations of its content, organization, and impact on their development. To bridge this gap, this study purports to explore the students' self-reported vision of the course usefulness for their professional development. The article will first address the analysis of related literary sources and present the research questions, then contain a description of methodology, findings, and discussion, as well as implications for teaching the course in similar contexts and beyond.

Literature review. Given that literature published in Ukraine provides little or no account of the impact of linguistic content on FL teaching practice, the overview of the literature will begin with considerations from English-language sources.

The concerns of educators about the relationship between teachers' knowledge of language and teachers' knowledge about language were raised following Shulman's (1987) seminal works on teacher professionalism published in the mid-1980s. Shulman (1987) was particularly interested in the relationship between knowledge of content and knowledge of pedagogy, which led him to introducing the concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). According to Shulman (1987), PCK "represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction" (p. 8).

Later, Andrews (2001) specified teacher language awareness (TLA) as a sub-component of the L2 teacher's pedagogical content knowledge, with the term TLA replacing 'knowledge about language' (KAL). He built on the definition of TLA as '...the knowledge that teachers have of the underlying systems of language that enables them to teach effectively' (Thornbury 1997, p. X)" and supplemented it with the component 'teacher beliefs'. So, Andrews' (2001) TLA integrated two dimensions: the declarative dimension,

which encompassed the breadth and depth of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and awareness of language systems, and the procedural dimension, which examined how teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and awareness shape their pedagogical practice.

In the mixed-method study, Andrews and McNeil (2005) established the characteristics of the teacher language awareness of 'good language teachers': "willingness and ability to engage with language-related issues; self-awareness (with particular reference to awareness of the extent of their own subject-matter knowledge) accompanied by a desire for continuing self-improvement of their teacher language awareness; willingness and ability to reflect on language-related issues; awareness of their own key role in mediating input for learning; awareness of learners' potential difficulties; and a love of language" (p. 174). The authors conclude that TLA is linked to teacher thinking and teacher reflectivity, which should be encouraged, since the reflective practitioner's attention is focused on improving their content knowledge and increasing their repertoire of teaching skills and activities, thereby creating a positive impact on student learning (Andrews & McNeil, 2005).

In her small-scale study, Schvarcz (2017) examined the connection between teacher language awareness and their professional identity, in particular, the impact of KAL on classroom practices. The researcher considers KAL a key component of teacher professional development, a claim confirmed by her survey of 28 Israeli EFL teachers. The respondents indicated that they benefited greatly from linguistic training; moreover, they demonstrated a high degree of awareness of the applicability of linguistic knowledge in the classroom and of the fusion of linguistics and methodology.

However, by linguistic knowledge, the author understands primarily the knowledge of grammar and the teacher's ability to explain it more clearly and precisely, which she exemplifies at length in her article. In prioritizing grammar (like

many other researchers), she overlooks other fundamental components of KAL, which she quotes in her paper, such as knowledge of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, knowledge of language acquisition theories, and knowledge of socio-linguistic & cultural aspects of language (Denham & Lobeck, 2010, 1). This inconsistency between the declared views and the exemplified practice is compensated for by the following author's conclusion: "teachers, who are knowledgeable in the foundations of linguistics, are better able to understand learners' conceptual difficulties in acquiring a new language and to analyze the causes of their problems" (Denham & Lobeck, 2010, p. 3).

Clearly, the place of linguistic knowledge within the language teacher profile has been debated in English language literature for decades. However, it is still impossible to discover in what way L2 linguistics is offered to students who major not in L2 but in the mother tongue, or any other humanities, etc., as separate courses, e.g., in phonology, lexicology, etc., or a coherent course integrating the essentials in each area. In this respect, we also observe a gap in the description of the course content and its organization. Which areas of linguistics are presented to a student teacher? Which of them are perceived as useful and applicable? To reveal these data, the current research study poses the following questions:

RQ 1. How meaningful is for prospective L1 teachers a theoretical course of English?

Which areas of this integrated course do they perceive as useful and applicable in teaching?

RQ 2. What is the perceived impact of studying the theory of English on teaching? Does contrasting languages affect learning and teaching?

Methodology

Participants in the study

The current study is situated within a pre-service teacher preparation programme (Year 4) provided in Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. The participants

were 17 pre-service teachers training to obtain a qualification as teachers of Ukrainian language and literature, with teaching English being their additional specialisation. All students were female, aged 20-21, and all were native speakers of Ukrainian. By the time they took the course Theory of English, they had acquired knowledge of general linguistics, Ukrainian lexicology, and theoretical grammar, and were also taking a course in Ukrainian stylistics at the same time as Theory of English. The students had three practicums in secondary school in years 2, 3, and 4. All students expressed informed consent to participate in the study.

Methods

To conduct this mixed-method study, we employed a questionnaire comprising eight selected-response items and two open-ended questions.

Question 1 asked to express the degree of agreement with three statements, marking them as "fully disagree" (1 point) to "fully agree" (5 points). Question 2 asked to rank the listed aspects of teacher competency in order of importance from one to five. Questions 3-8 required to mark the appropriate statements from the list as true.

Question 9 invited respondents to write at least 50 words explaining the impact of the course on their development. Question 10 invited respondents to name the languages they could use, indicate the level of each skill, and answer the question about the impact of their plurilingualism on learning and teaching English.

The data obtained from responses to questions 1-8 were analysed using descriptive statistics, i.e., quantitatively. The responses to questions 9-10 were analysed qualitatively, i.e., through content analysis.

Findings

The first two questions, which asked whether the course is necessary for philology majors and teachers, were answered affirmatively by all respondents, of whom 5 expressed agreement and 12 fully agreed with the statements. The same

positive support was expressed as for the statement claiming that knowledge of theoretical foundations is a prerequisite of quality teaching, an informed explanation of language usage, and a key to fair assessment.

Answering Q 4, the respondents were asked to *rank teachers' competencies in order of significance*. The most valued was the ability to contrast linguistic phenomena in native and foreign languages to ensure students' awareness of them (8 responses). Support for knowledge of theory, teaching skills, and the ability to apply theory in teaching practice was equal (3 responses each), whereas proficiency in the target language was found to be the most important by only one student.

When asked to *rank the themes of the course according to their usefulness in teachers' work*, we received surprising results: the respondents found history of English most important (9) and phonetics/phonology least important (1), lexicology and theoretical grammar were supported as most important by three students each, and stylistics was found the most important by two respondents. Questions – were aimed at specifying the...

The answers to the next question, which asked for a ranking of aspects of the history of English according to their significance for teaching, clarify history of English's top position in that ranking. Seven respondents found the knowledge about the emergence of English as a language of international communication the most meaningful, six valued parallels between the development of English and native language, and only four students were interested in the historic and linguistic processes which led to the dominance of English in the world.

The next question, "*How can theoretical knowledge of English phonetics/phonology be effectively applied in teaching?*" received the responses which contradicted a previously voiced opinion of the least usefulness of phonetics/phonology in teaching. Seven respondents supported the

necessity to explain the crucial role of correct pronunciation of sounds, phrases, and sentences in producing and understanding English speech, four respondents found it essential to explain correct articulation of English sounds, and also four emphasized the usefulness of comparing/contrasting the quality and articulation of English and native sounds, rhythm and intonation to achieve better effect in teaching. Only two students found the rules of syllable formation and intoning sentences worth the teacher's attention, though.

In terms of the usefulness of theoretical knowledge of English vocabulary, the majority of respondents (6 in each case) named the composition of the English lexicon (homonyms, synonyms, etc.) and word-building. Three respondents mentioned the importance of stylistic differentiation of vocabulary, and one mentioned the importance of knowledge of the connotative meaning of words. Only two respondents mentioned the necessity to compare/contrast English and native vocabulary, which stands out in this survey.

When it comes to evaluating usefulness of *knowledge of theoretical grammar of English*, six respondents put emphasis on the morphological composition of English words, four chose grammatical categories of English parts of speech, also four found it helpful to expose learners to numerous examples of paradigms to ensure in-depth understanding, whereas aspects of syntax were found useful by two and syntactical and analytical forms in English by only one.

Regarding *the stylistics of English*, the respondents considered most meaningful for teaching the differentiation of functional styles in English (11), lexico-semantic stylistic devices (hyperbole, euphemism, metaphor, etc.) (5), whereas tropes and syntactic stylistic devices were mentioned only by one respondent in each case. No one found it essential to compare the use of stylistic devices in English and the native language and explain them based on prior knowledge.

A special attention was drawn in the last question to the application of knowledge of *contrastive typology of English and Ukrainian* in teaching, the top position was given to the typology of grammatical systems of the two languages (8), the second important was typology of phonetics/phonology (4), one respondent mentioned the importance of contrasting lexical systems and no one mentioned contrastive stylistics. Additionally, four respondents expressed a positive opinion of using Ukrainian while explaining the English language phenomena.

In answers to the final questions "How has studying the course impacted you as a linguist, a teacher, and a personality?" and "How can mastery of several languages impact teaching English?", the respondents provided quite comprehensive answers that confirmed the essential role of the course in their professional development.

Discussion

(1) The results of the survey testify to the respondents' awareness of the necessity for a linguist and a teacher to have foundational theoretical knowledge of the target language. This knowledge shows their erudition, the ability to give informed and detailed explanation of language phenomena structure, functions and usage thus enhancing learners' and other stakeholders' trust and respect towards the linguist/teacher.

The respondents supported contrasting language phenomena of the target and native languages, revealing a strong belief in its meaningfulness for learners. This primarily concerns explaining the differences in the quality and articulation of English sounds and intonation. The technique of contrasting phonetic features is well known in methods of teaching foreign languages and is considered more effective than explaining sounds and intonation based solely on theory. The respondents also found it very useful to compare the grammatical systems of both languages, which is also considered reasonable and even indispensable by applied linguists. Surprisingly, contrasting

vocabulary and stylistic devices in both languages did not receive as much support from the respondents.

Overall, the quantitative data provided evidence of the respondents' familiarity with school-teaching practices and their thoughtful attitude towards expressing views on the dependence of effective teaching on theoretical knowledge of the target language.

(2) More comprehensive and personalized was the information elicited through the respondents' writings, i.e., employing a qualitative research tool. Regrettably, seven responses were shorter than the required count of 50 words. Those express overall satisfaction with the course content in a straightforward manner, e.g., "*I've enjoyed this course a lot, especially the phonetics part*", "*I've deepened my knowledge of English grammar, phonetics, and vocabulary*" or "*I learnt how to contrast systems of English and Ukrainian and think about how to apply this skill in teaching*".

Again, in contrast to the claim of the least practical knowledge of English phonetics and phonology, elicited in answer to Question 4, several responses in this part of the survey expressed pleasure at being equipped with some practical information about teaching pronunciation, e.g., "*now I know how to explain the articulation of certain English sounds correctly and clearly*", "*I have enhanced my knowledge of English phonetics and practiced it with my pupils*". Other respondents were happy to enrich their vocabulary, recapitulate grammar, and obtain a systematized picture of the English language and interrelation of its components, e.g., "*through this course, students have an opportunity to revise what they have learnt earlier and grasp the theory on which this practice is based. Practice which is not underpinned by theory is not accomplished, and this course allows us to acquire an in-depth understanding of why English functions in the way it does and what reasons shaped it in the way it is today*".

Some respondents gave an overall evaluation of the course, mentioning that "studying the course encouraged me to develop my outlook further and study the topics that interested me," which is very positive and rewarding to the course instructor. Others expressed their evaluation from three perspectives – of a linguist, a teacher, and a personality, which indicates thoughtful consideration of the course impact as well as the respondents' ability to reflect and analyse. As linguists, the respondents emphasised "enhanced understanding of language structure, its evolution and interrelations with other languages and cultures".

As teachers, they claimed that "knowledge of theory helped [me] create more effective lesson plans", "enabled informed and clear explanation of language use", "prompted adaptation of teaching techniques to the acquired understanding of language phenomena".

Studying the course had a notable impact on respondents' personalities. They reported that the course "broadened [my] horizons and enhanced [my] understanding of the world around", 'enhanced [my] sensitivity to linguistic and cultural features of different languages', 'opened [my] mind to new knowledge, developed critical thinking' and 'enriched [my] cultural baggage and encouraged journeys across linguistics and cultures'.

Additionally, the respondents made insightful comments related to the course organization. One respondent underscored 'the opportunity to collaborate with group mates during the practical sessions.' Two of them mentioned that 'the course was too short to cover its interesting content' and 'too short to allow students more time to get to grips with quite demanding theory.' Another respondent suggested that '*such an informative course would be more useful if it were scheduled earlier in the programme*'. Three students found it very advantageous that the study of English stylistics coincided with the study of Ukrainian stylistics. On the negative note, it is also worth quoting the opinion mentioning 'overload of the course

with theory', however, it cannot be taken seriously with respect to a course on the Theory of the English language.

Answering the final question about the number of languages spoken by the respondents, the majority of them indicated Ukrainian and English, although three students wrote they could use one, two, and even four additional languages at various levels of proficiency. The respondents' opinions about the impact of teacher plurilingualism on the effectiveness of their work were identical. They all were confident that a plurilingual teacher could better explain language phenomena and their usage, comparing and contrasting them, thus enhancing learners' grasp and enabling informed use.

In fact, the respondents subconsciously advocated a multilingual pedagogy, in which teachers help learners reflect on and become aware of their pre-existing language knowledge and develop their plurilingual learning strategies (Council of Europe, 2020). For example, lexical-similarity-based strategies have been shown to be effective in teaching languages from different language families, such as Slavic and Germanic (Otwinowska, 2017). Overall, as Otwinowska (2017) and Haukås (2015) emphasise, similarity-based strategies may be crucial for learners' success. Looking ahead, it is crucial that today's pre-service teachers become familiar with multilingual pedagogy, which is quite incompatible with the traditional framework of language teachers' awareness.

Conclusion

Summing up the self-reported perceptions of the course, it is clear that the respondents were overwhelmingly positive about its content, impact on the pre-service teacher's classroom effectiveness, and overall experience. Through the questionnaire, we identified the areas/themes of the course that are particularly relevant to the respondents' actual teaching practice. At the same time, the data allow us to critically review the course content and consider applying teaching techniques to demonstrate that the themes

initially found irrelevant to the respondents are, in fact, useful and feasible. The responses to the questionnaire, therefore, provide evidence of successful resolutions of Research Question 1 of this study.

The findings obtained through respondents' writing elicited convincing though subjective, evidence of overwhelmingly positive impact of *Theory of a Foreign Language* (a) on the pre-service teachers' profile integrating features of a linguist, a FL teacher and a personality; (b) on the enhanced awareness of links between teacher knowledge about language and teaching methodology; (c) on the understanding of plurilingualism and/or contrasting language phenomena to ensure effective language learning. These findings testify to the resolution of Research Question 2 posed in this study, too.

Implications for teaching

These are related to the informed selection of teaching linguistic content in line with teachers' professional needs. It is essential that pre-service teachers fully understand how the knowledge they acquire is relevant and applicable to teaching L2 in secondary school. Whenever possible, course instructors should focus on these aspects and demonstrate the applicability of the material either by themselves or with the help of a video.

Further implications concern course organization. Traditional lectures should be turned into interactive ones with elements of a flipped classroom whenever it is reasonable. Traditional seminar questions should be replaced by problem-solving questions, conducted either individually or in teams. Projects are beneficial when pre-service teachers make presentations illustrating the contrast of language phenomena. These are specimens of creativity and even gamification, enhancing rapport and emotional engagement of the class. During seminars conducted this way, both students and the course instructor feel inspired and see themselves as part of a small professional community.

Summative assessment of the knowledge and skills developed through the

course can also be diversified. An example from the author's practice demonstrates how knowledge of theory can be elicited through a practical assignment: excerpts from two or three texts of different types (academic, business, official, oratory, fiction, or newspaper) can be offered to examinees for written analysis. First, they are to identify the functional style of the text and justify their answer, then identify classes and categories of the underlined words (mostly nouns and verbs), and identify the word-building patterns of some indicated words. Other words are to be recognized as homonyms/homographs and synonyms/antonyms. Some sentences are to be identified as simple, complex, and compound. Examinees are on their own to locate stylistic devices used in the text. As long as the text excerpts represent different genres and types and are characterized by specific vocabulary and syntax, its analysis can demonstrate the actual level of a students' knowledge about language in the manner divorced from rote learning.

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КУРС З ТЕОРІЇ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ: ПОЄДНАННЯ ЗНАЬ ПРО ДРУГУ ІНОЗЕМНУ МОВУ З ЇХ ЗАСТОСУВАННЯМ У МЕТОДИЦІ НАВЧАННЯ

Постановка проблеми. Знання теоретичних аспектів мови, що яку опановують студенти, вважається в Україні важливою передумовою якісної підготовки фахівця з іноземних мов. Студенти, які оволодівають англійською мовою, слухають курси теоретичної фонетики та граматики, лексикології та стилістики, які часто тривають протягом семестру. Студентам інших спеціальностей, які вивчають англійську як додаткову спеціалізацію, пропонується курс "Теорія іноземної мови", де лінгвістичні дисципліни викладаються інтегровано: кожній дисципліні присвячується один модуль. Ця практика є традиційною в українській мовній освіті. Проте досі не вивчено ставлення студентів до такого курсу, бракує інформації про його цінність для майбутнього професійного життя студентів та про труднощі, з якими вони стикаються. Для з'ясування цих питань було проведено дослідження, представлено у статті.

Методологія. Учасниками у дослідженні стали 17 студенток четвертого курсу, що навчаються у Київському Національному Університеті імені Тараса Шевченка та здобувають кваліфікації вчителя української мови та літератури, англійської мови у середній школі. Для отримання даних студентам було запропоновано опитувальник, який містить вісім запитань з вибірковою відповіддю та два запитання, що вимагали розгорнутої відповіді (не менше 50 слів). Таким чином, до методів дослідження увійшли кількісний та якісний інструменти.

Результати та обговорення. Аналіз виявив цілком позитивне ставлення студенток до змісту курсу, який вони вважали дуже важливим для узагальнення та систематизації теоретичних знань з англійської мови напередодні закінчення бакалаврату. Опитувальник також допоміг з'ясувати, які саме аспекти англійської мови респондентки вважають ключовими для роботи вчителя і як їх можна застосувати на практиці. Розгорнуті відповіді висвітлили вплив теоретичного курсу англійської мови на розвиток студенток як лінгвістів, вчителів та освічених особистостей. Курс дав їм змогу поглибити вже здобуті знання та отримати нові, які спонукали до читання додаткової літератури та пошуку відповідей на питання, що виникли. Студентки збагатили власний словниковий запас, глибше зрозуміли взаємозв'язки між структурними рівнями мови тощо. Усі ці знання, на їхню думку, здатні вплинути на їхню вправність у методиці викладання мови, уміння рефлексувати та впевнено почуватися під час пояснення складних мовних явищ.

Висновки. Результати надають цінні висновки для розробників курсу "Теорія англійської мови", оновлення його змісту та вдосконалення викладання. Наголошено на необхідності адаптації курсу до вимог, що ставляться до освіченого вчителя-мовника у наш час.

Ключові слова: теоретичний курс англійської мови, майбутні вчителі, самооцінені уявлення про ефективність курсу.

BIO

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