TRANSLATING LINGUISTIC THEORIES INTO PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR ESP MATERIALS DESIGN: FROM DISCOURSE ANALYSIS TO TEACHING POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract. Linguistics plays a key role in foreign language education both in relation to the teaching/learning process and to materials development. As a point of departure the article examines the implications of linguistic paradigms for foreign language teaching methods and follows the evolution of the concept *discourse competence*. Together with Discourse Analysis it is identified as central to updating contemporary teaching methods and instructional materials. The major objective is to show how research within linguistics informs and gives new impetus to FLT which is illustrated by a model of ESP instructional material designed for teaching political discourse to university students. The main conclusion is that such a form of mediation between theory and practice can broaden the focus on authenticity to encompass not only exposure to real language but also to genuinely analytical and critical thinking experiences typical for the academia.
Keywords: ESP materials design; discourse analysis; political discourse

Introduction

Languages have been taught and learned for centuries. Over the years, circumstances have differed, resulting in some approaches and principles being more influential than others. Contemporary foreign language teaching can be described as being based on several overarching principles of foreign language learning. As maintained by H. D. Brown (2014), these principles combine the cognitive, emotional and linguistic dimension of learning. When foreign language teaching is based on these principles, it is determined first and foremost by the contemporary developments within linguistics and its pragmatic and functional turn in particular (Shopov 2002). This consideration suggests that knowledge about language can be developed into solutions to language-based problems experienced by real language learners and instructors. The mediation between linguistics and FLT, in our view, has three interrelated aspects which will be approached in terms of (1) the way general theories of language are applied in certain teaching methods;

(2) the belief what constitutes to know a language for real communication; (3) the potential to develop instructional materials on the basis of current research within linguistics.

Theories of language and FLT methods

The general theories of language that inform the different approaches to language teaching and learning attempt at defining the nature of language. There are various conceptualizations of language but two of them stand out: (1) language as a rule-governed combinatory system and (2) language as social fact (Larsen-Freeman 2011, p. 157). These dichotomous views correspond to the two main paradigms in linguistics.

The first paradigm relates to the formal or structural view of the language system. This structuralist theory of language is associated with the work of Saussure, where the focus was on the synchronic system of language, in particular the abstract system of the shared code, referred to as *langue*, as opposed to the individual utterances of speech, named *parole*. Language was seen as a system comprised of discrete segments: phonemes, lexemes, morphemes which combine to make words, phrases, clauses, and sentences that comply with the established word order rules. This understanding of language has been adopted by traditional, structural, descriptive, and generative linguistics.

The second paradigm presents a view of language that contrasts with the structural perspective. The description of language 'as a social fact' is associated with the idea that language use, or *parole*, was also worthy of study and had its own, situationally defined though, conventions and patterns. Dell Hymes (1972, cited in Brown 2014, p. 218), the main proponent of this view, insisted that "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless". The knowledge of when and how to say what to whom, referred to as *communicative competence*, was seen as more important than linguistic competence. The new focus on language use meant greater interest in language functions and meanings than language forms. A functional view of language includes how texts are organized to realize the meaning potential of language, the distinctive patterns and choices people make when using language, how different registers and genres are patterned, how various conversational moves are structured, how these are performed differently in different speech communities/cultures, and how the use of language differs across professional and academic contexts (Larsen-Freeman 2011, p. 157).

Except for the two main linguistic paradigms, i.e. formal/structural and communicative/functional, there is another contemporary view that language serves the purpose of empowerment developed within post-structuralist theories of language. It became influential in the late twentieth century and is associated with the work of Bourdieu (1991), Foucault (1972) and others. While structuralists describe signs as having idealized meanings and linguistic communities as being

relatively homogeneous, post-structuralists consider the signifying practices of a society as sites of struggle, and linguistic communities as heterogeneous arenas characterized by conflicting claims to truth and power. Thus language is not viewed as a neutral medium of communication, but as conveying social meanings.

In language education, the three paradigms are implemented by underpinning certain teaching methods. As a single set of procedures to be followed in foreign language education for accomplishing linguistic objectives, language teaching methods refer to certain theoretical positions and beliefs. These include among others the nature of language, the nature of second language learning, and the role of instructional materials (Brown & Lee 2015, pp. 15 – 17; Shopov 2002, p. 17; Thornbury 2011, pp. 191 – 192). Thus each method construes language either as a structural system, characterized by formal rules, or as a potential to express various functions or meanings by making semantic choices. The belief in the nature of language, which takes the form of a theory of language, is the most important aspect of each teaching method that influences all other aspects.

Structural linguistics, being part of the first linguistic paradigms discussed, provides a systematic description of sentence structures or patterns. As such it is responsible for grammatical syllabi, in which linguistic structures are sequenced and graded according to increasing linguistic complexity. Formal views on language have also inspired the use of inductive or deductive grammar exercises in which a grammar rule is discovered and practiced, respectively. Formalism and generative grammar in combination with behavioral psychology, which advocated conditioning and habit-formation models of learning, were underlying the teaching method known as *audiolingualism* (Harmer 2015, pp. 79 – 80; Shopov 2002, pp. 20 – 22). However, the focus on sentence patterns, not on connected text, and on imitation, not on creativity, were seen as serious obstacles to second language fluency and led to the ultimate failure to teach long-term communicative proficiency (Larsen-Freeman 2011; Thornbury 2011).

The functional and anthropological tradition in linguistics with its emphasis on context, meaning and use differed markedly from structuralism. The use of situations to contextualize the structural patterns became a typical feature of classroom materials in Britain in mid-twentieth century. The use of situations to contextualize grammar items removed the need for explanation and translation. Thus the functional view of language underpinned the teaching method known as *situational language teaching*. It was characterized by situational presentations in which new patterns were first presented, then practiced at degrees of decreasing control, before free production was allowed (Thornbury 2011, p. 188).

The functional view of language also stood at the core of the *Notional-Functional Syllabus*, more commonly known as the *Functional Syllabus*. The distinguishing characteristics of the functional syllabus were its attention to functions as the organizing elements of English language curriculum, and its contrast with a

structural syllabus in which sequenced grammatical structures served as the organizers. Reacting to methods that focused too strongly on grammatical form, the *Notional-Functional Syllabus* emphasized the pragmatic purposes of language. The functional part of the *Notional-Functional Syllabus* corresponded to language functions. Syllabi were organized around such functions as identifying, reporting, denying, accepting, declining, asking permission, and apologizing (Brown & Lee 2015, pp. 28 – 29; Larsen-Freeman 2011, p. 157).

The functionalist paradigm, developed in Britain and Europe, was further strengthened by the speech act theory, sociolinguistics, Halliday's functional grammar, the notion of communicative competence and others. These developments in language description culminated in the *communicative approach*. As pointed out by Thornbury "there was a marked shift away from a concern for what language is to a concern for what language does" (Thornbury 2011, p. 189). Today the *communicative approach* with CLIL as its 'strong' version and Communicative Language Teaching as its 'weak' form, is recognized globally as an approach to language teaching that provides a set of principles and an underlying basis of contemporary FLT. It represents a major shift from earlier methods and approaches in the suggestion that (1) grammatical structures might better be included under various pragmatic categories; (2) authentic language use is emphasized as learners attempt to build fluency but not at the expense of a accuracy (Brown & Lee 2015, pp. 31 – 33).

The post-structuralist view that language is not a neutral medium of communication but reflects and/or construes power relations has also been made manifest in language education. It underpins the problem-posing approach, based on the work of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire (1970, cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2011). In a problem-posing approach, students are encouraged to perceive critically the world in which they exist. The goal of such an approach is to help students to understand the social, historical, and cultural forces that shaped their context and then to empower them to make decisions to gain control in in that context (Larsen-Freeman 2011, p. 158).

Discourse and communicative competence

The contemporary trends in language research are applied in a construct that stands at the core of the *communicative approach.* As pointed out by Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000, p. 16) "the major goal of taking a language course is to enable students to develop communicative competence". *Communicative competence* is a notion which draws on the functional and post-structuralist understanding of language as interactive communication among individuals, each with a cultural identity. This means that the contemporary research interest in discourse, interaction and pragmatics underpins treating language learning and teaching as a potential for meaningful, authentic exchanges among users of a language. Thus the social

constructivist perspective of linguistics has impacted FLT so much can be traced in the evolution of the notion of *communicative competence*.

There are various models of communicative competence in language teaching. Brown (2014, pp. 219 – 223) discusses two classifications from the 1970s and early 1980s. In the first one a distinction was made between linguistic and communicative competence while in the second one cognitive/academic language proficiency or context-reduced communication was distinguished from the basic interpersonal communicative skills or context-embedded communication. Another model from the 1980s, that of Canale and Swain (1980, cited in Brown 2014, p. 218), is the most influential work on communicative competence in relation to foreign/second language teaching because the authors proposed a pedagogical framework based explicitly on the notion of communicative competence. It consists of four different components: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. The first two components reflect the use of the linguistic system whereas the last two define the functional aspects of communication. In the 1990s the model of communicative competence underwent some modifications reflecting the developments within textlinguistics and pragmatics. Bachman's complex model (1990, cited in Brown 2014, p. 221) focuses on the communicative language ability in communicative language use. In this model there is a clear division between strategic and language competence where the former is responsible for all productive and receptive means for negotiating meaning.

In the 2000s a more simplified model of communicative competence, suggested in the Common European framework of reference for languages (2001), provided guidelines for effective foreign language education on the basis of description of language use and the user/learner's ability to use language. In order to carry out the activities and processes involved in the production and reception of texts and the construction of discourse, i.e. the communicative situations they are involved in, learners are expected to activate general and communicative competences. The important detail in this model is the understanding that all human competences contribute in one way or another to the language user's ability to communicate and may be regarded as aspects of communicative competence. In this model communicative competence consists of two groups of competences: (1) general, i.e. less closely related to language such as declarative knowledge, skills and know-how, existential competence, ability to learn; (2) communicative language competences. The communicative language competences include three components: linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competences. The functional linguistic paradigm can be traced as underpinning the formulation of the pragmatic competences component which covers: (a) discourse competence; (b) functional competence; (c) design competence.

As can be observed from the overview made the place of discourse competence component, which refers to the knowledge and skills in combining linguistic

elements to achieve a unified textual whole, has been problematic with all the models presented so far. It seems that grammatical/linguistic, sociolinguistic and strategic competence are all component parts of overall discourse competence. In Celce-Murcia and Olshtain's opinion it is the most important component as it encompasses all the other components of communicative competence. This can be traced in the following:

the core or central competency in the Canal and Swain framework is discourse competence since this is where everything else comes together: It is in discourse and through discourse that all the other components are realized. And it is in discourse and through discourse that the manifestation of the other competencies can best be observed, researched, and assessed (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain 2000, p. 16).

With this belief, a more complex model of communicative competence was suggested, which emphasized the central role of discourse competence as shown in Fig. 1.
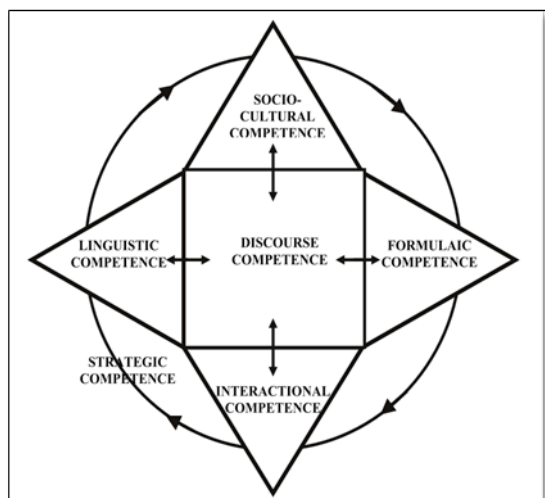

Figure 1. Schematic representation of Celce-Murcia's model of communicative competence (ibid.)

Within this model of communicative competence discourse competence component plays a central and controlling role. It refers to the selection, sequencing and arrangement of words, structures, and utterances to achieve a unified spoken message. This is where the other elements in the model come together; where the lexical and linguistic levels, the formulaic patterns and the sociocultural and interactional knowledge are united in the creation of a coherent text. Discourse competence is thus a level above the other sub-competences in the model, a level which both includes and controls all the other elements.

In terms of the mediation between linguistic theories and FLT Celce-Murcia's model of communicative competence incorporates the various usages of the term *discourse* – language in its context of use and language above the sentence level. Thus what underlies the model is the view of language as functioning within a certain context and at the level above the sentence. The implications of this view for language education is the belief that competence in a language is concerned

with more than just knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. It also includes how to participate in a conversation, how to structure a written text. To be able to do this, it is necessary to take into account the context, or situation, in which a particular use of language occurs and how the units of language combine together and structure the overall discourse.

Discourse approach to language teaching

Focusing on discourse involves changes in the way language is taught. Traditional language teaching methodology, which includes presentation, practice, and production, needs to be supplemented with activities which develop greater awareness of the nature of discourse and the differences between the modes of discourse. Instead of the traditional present-practice-produce sequence McCarthy and Carter (1994) suggested illustration, interaction, and induction. Illustration means using real data presented in terms of choices that depend on context and use. Interaction means discourse-sensitive activities that focus on uses of language and negotiation of meanings in order to raise learners' awareness of critical features through observation and discussion. Induction means getting learners to draw conclusions about the function of different lexico-grammatical options.

More recent publications agree with these ideas by pointing out that the theoretical standpoint of discourse analysis underpins the process of foreign language teaching and assists the thorough comprehension of texts in a foreign language and language learning in general when learners are involved in conducting authentic tasks (Mangacheva 2013). Research findings in discourse processing are particularly relevant in settings where the foreign language is taught for academic purposes. Peryanova (2013) maintains that discourse analysis is of great importance when developing intercultural competence because it helps university students not only to realize the ideological aspect of the covert cultural meanings interwoven in the messages, but it contributes to successful interaction in the target culture. The author is convinced that the process of foreign language teaching should focus on the discursive features and involve analysis of the categories and practices of communication which will enable university language learners to develop communicative competence. For example, the analysis of the social, cultural and communicative features of food and eating as discourse is important because it provides the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes which is the ultimate aim of FLT.

Research findings of studies conducted within Discourse Analysis have implications not only for language pedagogy but for materials development as well. We argue in favour of Celce-Murcia and Olshtain's opinion that instructional materials created within discourse and context-based approach "offer choices to teachers and learners to be flexible, allow for adaptation to specific learner needs and contexts, and facilitate the personal growth of both teachers and learners"

(2000, p. 231). Such an approach is confirmed by more recent insights into the research aspects of contemporary lingua-didactics. Vesselinov insists that "the transformation of research pathos into an individual initiative for self-improvement in the conditions of real practice is a prime factor in guaranteeing the future of spirituality associated with language use" (2019, p. 8)[1]. In our perspective too, the mediation between linguistic theory and research on the one hand and ESP materials development on the other can be viewed as upgrading the fundamentals of teaching practice by elevating it beyond routine activities and tasks and the traditional skills-based approach.

An example of the potential of FLT to be dynamic, open to adapting its methods and practice by following the most recent developments within contemporary linguistics is the model instructional material based on discourse analytical research of political discourse. It has been devised for BA students of International Relations who are enrolled in an ESP course devoted to the language used in the professional field of politics. The main aim of the course is to develop learners' communicative competence at level B2/C1 according to CEFR. The central focus of the materials is developing understanding of political discourse as language in use within its broad social and narrower cultural-political context of American politics and the typical verbal strategies and rhetorical means used by the speakers in order to achieve their goals in communication. The instructional material is based on the findings of an extensive study of political discourse as exemplified in political speeches of American politicians and conducted through Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (see Kostova 2018; Kostova 2020).

The instructional material covers two broad areas: (1) main issues in politics, and (2) specific features of political language. These two areas are approached as tasks that involve the practice of reading, listening, writing and speaking skills, which makes the instructional material a truly language learning tool. The instructional material is developed into four clearly defined parts. In the first part, which includes reading and speaking activities, the broad socio-political context of the topic is outlined by a matching activity in which general knowledge of history and political leaders should direct students in guessing the authors of catch phrases about the nature of politics. The following task of sharing perceptions gradually extends into writing a summary of the main points of the catch phrases and reaching at a working definition of the main focus of the lesson.

Example 1

Task 1: Arriving at a definition.

Politics is ...Match the following six definitions of politics with the six speakers listed below them. Who were these speakers? Which of them were politicians? Which of the definitions do you agree with most?

In the second part, a link between politics and language is drawn. The second reading comprehension exercise offers citations from three distinguished authors – a

philosopher, a linguist, and a journalist – who identify the essential role of language in the process transforming the political will into social action. The textual aspect of political discourse is further emphasized in the discussion the text types as well as the contextual and textual features of five political genres.

Example 2

Task 2: Politics and language

Politics is conducted through language. Language is vital to the process of transforming political will into social action. Read two definitions and an aphorism. Do you agree with them?

Genres of political communication: political speeches, newspaper editorials, press conferences, cabinet meetings, Acts of Parliament

How many more political actions or events involving the use of language can you think of?

Which genres involve spoken language, which involve written language and which involve both?

Can you think of any political actions or events which do NOT involve using language at some stage?

From which sources (news websites, TV news, newspapers, social media, conversations with friends, etc.) do you obtain your information about politics?

The third part of the instructional material presents political language in action. This is introduced in the form of a listening comprehension exercise in which a video of an authentic political speech should be watched in order to identify the main themes and the political language used by the speaker to persuade the addressees. A script of the speech divided into sentences is additionally provided for follow-up work. The identification of the features of the speaker's evaluative language is based on the overview of five functions of political discourse and the linguistic means for their expression which are introduced in the Language Focus section of the instructional material. The discussion of the ideational and persuasive aspect of the speech is intended to be conducted around different types of evaluative language, rhetorical effects, positioning or the identity from which the politician chooses to present himself, the non-literal meaning created by metaphors, the issues of arguments introduced in terms of personality, logic, and emotion, which are referred to as appeals to ethos, logos and pathos respectively. The third part concludes with measuring the extent to which the content of the speech and the conducted discourse analysis contributed to learners' development of intercultural competence and knowledge in the field of politics as well as discourse competence with a focus on the verbal strategies.

Example 3

Task 3: Political language in action. Watch Donald Trump's victory speech, 'Binding the wounds of division' (available at: https://tinyurl.com/PiP-Trump). What are the main themes?

Task 4: Study the Language Focus section. Then answer the questions.

1. Who does the speaker praise? What evaluative language does he use?

2. Trump is famous for his liberal use of hyperbolic language including intensifiers (totally, incredibly) and highly charged evaluative items (magnificent, huge, carnage). Can you find any examples? Are they mostly positive or negative in evaluation?

3. Look at his use of the pronouns, I, you, we, us, etc. How is each pronoun used? What overall effect does the speaker intend to achieve?

4. What sort of personality and qualities (ethos) does the speaker attempt to project? What logical or pseudo-logical arguments (logos) does he employ? And what appeals to emotion (pathos) does he use?

5. What examples of creative repetition and contrast can you identify?

6. Does Trump use any metaphors?

Task 5: Discussion. How much did you learn from the speech about American politics and the incumbent American President?

The final part of the instructional material leads the learners towards self-reflection on the knowledge, skills and competences developed during the session. Learners are expected to review the activities and issues that have been discussed and finally to put down what they find as the main ideas into writing. These activities are expected to facilitate learners' internalization of the language presented and practiced during the lesson in order to be able to access and transform it for use in a later occasion.

Example 4

Task 6: Choose the best answer(s). In this lesson, we have looked at:

the ways politicians use language as the 'tool of their trade'

ways to learn about politics and politicians themselves from the language they use

the agenda of world politics

political leaders and their rhetorical style

Task 7: Why we hate politics? Answer the question in writing (80 – 100 words). Summarize all the important issues discussed in the lesson.

In line with discourse analytical tools the *Language Focus* section, which is placed at the end of the instructional material, describes the language of politics in terms of the functions it performs, i.e. evaluation, construal of rhetorical effects, positioning, creating non-literal meanings, constructing appeals to logos, ethos and pathos. It also presents the most salient linguistic means for achieving these functions like comparatives, the transitivity system, ordering of blocks of information, the use of highly positive or negative lexical items, modality, repetition, antithesis, the use of personal pronouns and register, and the use of metaphors. Each of these are illustrated with examples taken from authentic sources, i.e. real political speeches.

Conclusion

The article has attempted to outline the extent of mediation between linguistic theory and teaching practice understood as materials development. Several conclusions can be drawn. First, contemporary linguistics has developed various views on language motivating novel approaches to foreign language teaching. Theories of language have the most important influence on FLT methods, define the standards of teaching and learning and set the main goals of language education. The three main linguistic paradigms that have influenced FLT have been structuralism, functionalism, and post-structuralism. Second, the process of the pragmatization of knowledge, i.e. the application of the research on language, can be observed by following the emergence of different teaching methods and the evolution of the concept of *discourse competence* as part of *communicative competence*. The modifications of the models of FLT reflect the developments within social sciences and linguistics in particular. Third, functionalism, cognitive linguistics, linguistic pragmatics and discourse analysis are the approaches which have ensured the updating of teaching methods and instructional materials. Their main impact has been in terms of authenticity of language teaching material and activities which resemble "real-life" communication, realization of the potential of language to express values and create situated meanings. These have extended the agenda of ESP well beyond the acquisition of typical lexico-grammatical features. Finally, the discussion of the model instructional material for teaching the language of politics has emphasized the importance of combining relevant linguistic research and discourse analytical procedures with FLT methodology. It is our conviction that such an approach creates a focus on authenticity in language learning not only in terms of exposure to real language but also to genuinely analytical and critical thinking experiences.

NOTES

1. The translation of the citation is mine.

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ТРАНСФОРМИРАНЕ НА ЛИНГВИСТИЧНИТЕ ТЕОРИИ В ПРАКТИЧЕСКИ РЕШЕНИЯ ЗА СЪЗДАВАНЕ НА МАТЕРИАЛИ ЗА СПЕЦИАЛИЗИРАНО ЧУЖДОЕЗИКОВО ОБУЧЕНИЕ: ОТ АНАЛИЗ НА ДИСКУРСА ДО ПРЕПОДАВАНЕ НА ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИ ДИСКУРС

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Резюме. Лингвистиката играе ключова роля в чуждоезиковото обучение както по отношение на процеса на преподаване/учене, така и по отношение на разработването на учебни материали. Като отправна точка статията разглежда влиянието на лингвистичните парадигми върху методите на преподаване на чужд език и проследява еволюцията на понятието *дискурсивна компетентност.* Заедно с анализа на дискурса *дискурсивната компетентност* се разглежда като основен фактор за актуализиране на съвременните методи на преподаване и учебните материали. Целта на статията е да разгледа начина, по който съвременните лингвистични изследванията информират и мотивират ЧЕО. Това е илюстрирано с модел на учебен материал по специализиран английски език, предназначен за преподаване на политически дискурс на студенти. Основното заключение е, че ефективната връзка между теорията и практиката може да разшири измеренията на автентичността в чуждоезиковото обучение, като създаде възможности не само за използване на реалния език, но и за характерни за академичната среда дейности като езиковедски анализ и критическо мислене.

Ключови думи: създаване на материали за специализирано чуждоезиково обучение; анализ на дискурса; политически дискурс