EFL TEACHING IN THE WORKPLACE: ESSENTIAL PARAMETERS OF GENERAL ENGLISH COURSES FOR UNIVERSITY LECTURERS AT THE TODOR KABLESHKOV UNIVERSITY OF TRANSPORT

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Abstract: The current paper treats EFL adult education issues as well as matters related to EFL teaching in the workplace within the framework of general English courses, conducted at two levels, for university lecturers at the Todor Kableskov University of Transport. Examined topics are relevant due to the impact of enhanced lecturers' communicative competence in English, on education process, through improved students' / university teachers' communication parameters, greatly contributing to students' motivation in university subjects learning. In addition, widened EFL language and linguistic knowledge facilitates lecturers in using English, mainly for general communication purposes, and, to some extent, for specific ones in specialized literature reading, understanding and commenting on.

Considered issues, essential in applied linguistics, are related to adult learning peculiar features. Thus, for example, adult learners, especially course participants with university teaching and scientific careers, are more independent learners than university students, possessing better awareness of general studying techniques, course objectives and current level of knowledge. Hence, learning strategies university colleagues implement may be more easily built upon to suit EFL as well as FL learning requirements by means of adequate language learning strategies training, this training contributing to learners' language awareness enhancement as well as to much better learner autonomy parameters achievement. Examined issues are supported by means of both general English courses exemplification material.

1. Introduction

EFL adult education and EFL teaching in the workplace issues have been topical for the last thirty or forty years, this applied linguistics branch accompanying, to some extent, ESP teaching development. On the one hand, workplace English language training is essential with respect to employees' language, linguistic, and, hence, professional development, and, on the other, with relation to an institution success, largely bound up with workers' competences and skills. Needless to say, in the case of university lecturers, EFL trainees,

workplace learning has a significant impact not only on university teachers' communicative competence enhancement, contributing to general and specialized English language knowledge, and, this way, facilitating general communication as well as specialized literature use, but also on lecturer/student relationship, allowing lecturers to refer students to English language study materials, translating relevant passages and/or important terminology, and, corroborating, as a result, student learning motivation in taught university subjects.

The current paper, which sets the objective of presenting essential parameters of workplace general English courses for university lecturers, conducted at two levels by the author, at the Todor Kableshkov University of Transport, will be developed in the following layout. First, adult education and EFL training in the workplace will be treated, both courses complying with adult and workplace teaching requirements. Learner autonomy (LrA) and learner awareness (LA) will be next concisely examined, both concepts being crucial in EFL knowledge formation, and, also developed in a specific way for adult learners. Then, language learning strategies (LLS) implementation, relevant in LA and in LrA enhancement, will be briefly commented on. Finally, conclusions will be made with respect to the approaches used usefulness in terms of teaching outcomes.

2. Adult education characteristics

Teaching EFL to adult learners in the workplace is characterized by typical requirements, which significantly differentiate it from working with university students. Adult learners have usually acquired, along with specific education, relevant work experience, and, in the case of lecturers, they also possess consciously gained expertise, related to teaching and research. Thus, promoting LA and LrA parameters, while teaching adults and, especially, university lecturers, is not supposed to start from a low level, as it is usually the case with university students, but rather to be built upon and be purposefully oriented, by means of characteristically applied LLS (rf. [1]).

Having built professional awareness, adult students want to know what material exactly they are going to study, why precisely they need it and how they are going to use the knowledge of it. Adults are strongly motivated if they realize characteristic features of taught items, the understanding of which is greatly predetermined by the approaches implemented in teaching / learning. In addition, the ability of independently, to some extent, applying taught material in individually created learning tasks, in asking questions and discovering their answers based on consciously learned knowledge, in performing self-evaluation and setting feasible objectives, of purposefully seeking support and explanation from lecturer in case of understood learning problems, greatly enhances adult learners' self-esteem, motivation and contributes to much better LA.

Thus, for example, in Dirani's view [2] there are five crucial adult learning principles, "autonomy, motivation, meaningfulness, support and mastery", compatible with Knowles' ([3] in [4]) principles, and namely: "Learners need to know; Self-concept of the learner; Prior experience of the learner; Readiness to learn; Orientation to learning; and Motivation to learn". These postulates will be only briefly commented on, and, in a way, revealing their connectedness. All principles are interconnected due to their relatedness to already accumulated professional awareness (prerequisite to rather high LA, with some adult learners) as well as to appropriately taught LLS by EFL lecturers in the objective of achieving desired learning outcomes.

Practice and theory have proved that "the more autonomy employees have, the more successful they are in learning and solving problems in trainings" [2]. A lecturer may also act, to various extents, in LrA context, as a facilitator who behaves as "a "catalyst", and provides leadership without "taking the reins" [5]. *Meaningfulness*, in current paper, relates to knowledge and awareness building as well as to establishing links with already acquired

professional, EFL and language competences. Otherwise, with respect to [6], it must be stated that "It is important to let the learner know how the new information or task fits with their existing knowledge so that they understand why the new skill or concept is being discussed." This type of understanding, though, cannot be satisfactorily obtained in EFL adult teaching unless both concept acceptations are considered as equally relevant and complementary, the deeper consciousness learners receive about language functioning / profession relationship, the more complete comprehension of EFL learning significance they are supposed to obtain. *Motivation* greatly depends on LA development (rf. [7]) as well as on "appropriateness and relevance" principle [6] implementation in teaching / learning process, or, on the opportunity learners are given to "find solutions" to "real life problems" [2]. *Motivation* can be treated as related to the above *Learners need to know* principle as *motivation* stems from the need or desire to acquire skills based on new knowledge (rf. [4]). According to Munro ([8] in [4]) motives for learning can be subdivided into three types (*surface*, *deep* and *achieving*). While surface motives involve satisfying "minimal criteria", deep motives implicate concepts understanding and achieving motives - "achieving excellence". Surface motives learning actions naturally include "reproduction of ideas", whereas deep and achieving motives require respectively "actions that help understanding" and "linking ideas with existing knowledge" ([8]). Thus, *learners' need to know* is evidently related to the *Prior experience of the learner* principle, as well as to the fundamentals of *Readiness to learn*, *Orientation to learning* and *striving for mastery*, all of them corollary to motivation. *Support* can be defined as creating "a supportive environment" allowing learners to "feel free to ask questions, make comments and take risks" [6]. *Mastery*, referring to high quality of skills and knowledge, can in current paper author's view be built through *motivation*, LA improvement (rf. [7] as to LA and motivation interconnection), though, always based on LrA principles as workplace learners are "self-directed and want to be actively involved in the learning process" [1]. Needless to say, EFL (and FL in general) proficiency also stems from a "greater degree of responsibility" of the lecturer, revealing education practical benefits and stimulating interest [9], regularly providing feedback, which is "critical … to accurately assess what, if anything, the learners are taking away and to correct any misdirected learning that is occurring" [1]. The *Self-concept of the learner* principle matches adult learners' studying independence, ability to establish connections with *prior experience* and *knowledge*, *proficiency aspiration* and *support*. This adult education pillar does also relate to adult learners' self-evaluation, greatly depending on, and also, stimulating their LrA and LA. To corroborate *learners' self-concept*, lecturers need to also recognize "the job that the learner does, the important role they play and their prior experience they are bringing to this learning experience." [4]

3. Learner autonomy fundamentals

LrA according to Holec [10] is "the ability to take charge of one's learning … to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning" (in [11]). Based on [11] autonomous learners must have attained (to various extents, according to research in this field) the ability of goal-setting, of determining learning content, progression speed, appropriate LLS and of, also, evaluating acquired knowledge quality. Autonomous learners are likewise interested in studied language form / semantics connection, hypothesizing with respect to language functioning, exploring assumptions and taking risks in using language (partial rf. to [12]). It is crucial to take into account that individual learners or groups possess their own specific LrA degree, stemming from individual characteristics, among which, age, prior experience, overall, language and EFL competences, LLS taught and LA attained. As Sinclair [13] (rf. to in [11]) reckons there are different autonomy degrees[1] and

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[1] There is leakage between LrA levels, which may partially overlap, with respect to spheres of language being taught, individual learning styles, experiences and the teaching circumstances.

Nunan ([14] rf. to in [11]) discriminates between five LrA degrees, namely, *Awareness*, *Involvement*, *Intervention*, *Creation* and *Transcendence*. At *Awareness*, the lowest stage, learners obtain consciousness of fruitful to them *learning strategies*, at *Involvement* they develop the ability of choosing their own *goals*, at *Intervention* learners adjust tasks to their *objectives*, at *Creation* they start generating their *individual tasks*, whereas at *Transcendence*, the highest level, students grow into *educators and explorers*. Achieving LrA, even at the highest stage, does not make EFL lecturers useless; though students learn to analyze language phenomena, to connect them to individual experience and acquire abilities to teach each other and themselves easier issues, they will always need specialized direction into complicated and fascinating domains of EFL (FL) learning.

How can LrA be successfully built? LrA construction stems from LA formation parameters due to already established connections between both constructs; autonomy integrates aspects of metacognitive awareness (evident through the above LrA charasteristics), dependent on cognitive awareness, these both types of consciousness being fundamental LA components. LA / LrA connectedness can be likewise testified to through Nunan's [15] recommended nine steps towards LrA development, in line with the above mentioned five LrA stages: "*Make instruction goals clear to learners*"; "*Allow learners to create their own goals*"; "*Encourage learners to use their second language outside the classroom*"; "*Raise awareness of learning processes*"; "*Help learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies*"; "*Encourage learner choice*"; "*Allow learners to generate their own tasks*"; "*Encourage learners to become teachers*" and "*Encourage learners to become researchers*".

4. Language awareness essential features with respect to learner autonomy

Based on definitions, LA[2] can be treated, according to the author, as "*conscious awareness, explicit knowledge about language in general and in particular, nature of language, reflection on language and languages*" [17]. Theory and practice have proved that "*consciousness* and *explicitness*, up to learners' level, profile and background, must be present in all spheres of linguistic activity, in *teaching, learning and use*" to promote "students' *linguistic thinking development* and interest in the *nature*, *role* and *functioning of language,s at all language levels*", this way preconditioning "linguistic *observation, analysis, induction, conclusion, generalization, hypothesis formulation and verification* in general and in particular" [17]. Quite obviously, based on the above lines, LA teaching in EFL adult training greatly stimulates LrA in terms of setting appropriate and feasible objectives, self-evaluation, hardships understanding, adequate questions asking, learning content determining and adequate LLS adoption, among others, EFL (FL, NL) learning parameters understanding being impossible, even at the lowest level, without LA building. LA training is also in compliance with already referred to adult learning fundamentals ([2], [3] in [4]), these principles functioning being impossible without taught / learnt EFL material understanding.

5. Language learning strategies implementation within both general English courses

As already revealed, LA construction cannot be achieved without appropriate LLS training, all of them complementary and interconnected; the most essential LLS are *cognitive* and *metacognitive ones*, preconditioning the others (related to memorizing, deriving meaning from context, reducing anxiety and communicating in task fulfilling) (rf. [17]). Here below will be only briefly presented some cognitive and metacognitive LLS, subsumed under the term of cognitive approaches (rf. [17]), basically applied on both courses with university

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[2] As to LA description provided by researchers in this field and the author rf. to [16] and [17].

lecturers in compliance with learners' groups specificity. All referred to approaches provide learners with information as to the whys and wherefores of taught items and their learning.

- *Schemes, diagrams use*

This procedure implementation focuses on schematically illustrating taught phenomena essence to achieve better clarity. Thus, for example, values of *past simple / past progressive* categories (a), *diatheses* (b), *comparatives and superlatives* (c), *locative prepositions* (d) were presented by means of: schemes revealing a finished process bounds in contrast with background progressive unbounded past process (a); diagrams referring to active and passive correlations, active ↔ passive transformations and active / passive formulae derivation (rf. [16], [17]) (b); diagrams of various height buildings, the learners having been shown that comparing refers to measuring quantities of a quality (e.g., height) (c); schemes referring to relationships between objects in terms of location (d).

- *Contrastive teaching use*

Contrastive teaching (CT)[3] was almost universally implemented on both courses, NL (and occasionally FL (French)) contrasts having proved on many occasions a really powerful consciousness raising tool, based on convergences / divergences illustrations between English and NL (FL) categories. This approach was successfully applied in teaching, among others, *the English perfect* (a), *diatheses* (b), *countables / uncountables* (c) through: contrasts with Bulgarian equivalents (aorist, perfect, present) examined in terms of form / semantics) (a); translating active / passive voice examples into Bulgarian, exemplifying both languages similarities with respect to diatheses formation and values (b); referring to similarities and discrepancies between English and Bulgarian countability / uncountability of nouns (e.g. *apple*, *wine*, *air* (convergence); *bread*, *money*, *homework* (divergence)) emphasizing on both languages semantization variety determining variety in nouns functioning (c).

- *Comparative teaching use*

Comparative teaching (CpT) (rf. [16], [17]) has always contributed to reducing intralingual interference, preconditioning interlingual negative transfer. Thus, for example, *–ing/-ed adjectives* elucidation was based on revealing lexical convergence, accompanied by grammatical divergence, between taught items through briefly mentioning, for better explicitness, similarities and differences between groups of *–ing words* (adjectives, participles, nouns) and *–ed words* (adjectives, participles) the examined adjectives belong to.

- *Deriving categories logic of functioning*

Thus, for example, *definite article use* in superlatives was logically derived from its use in referring to a unique object within a set of objects. Hence, "the tallest building" refers to a building which is exceptional by its height within a group of buildings.

- *Other cognitive approaches implemented*

Other cognitive approaches implemented within both courses were, for instance, specific underlining, allowing paradigm building and conclusion making as to taught items features; talks aimed at promoting self-evaluation and error overcoming; optional assignments; revision activities sometimes performed partly in class and sent by email accompanied by another file containing activities answers to corroborate self-correction and error study; test materials analysis; group work and mutual learner explanation of easier items; sending learners internet links to study materials; conversations on learning problems, hardships underlying reasons, remedial actions, future study plans and ideas.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, cognitive approaches application on both general English courses taught to university lecturers contributed to learners' communicative competence, due to strategies

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[3] Rf. [16], [17] as to CT essence, use and LA enhancement role.

usefulness in terms of LA as well as of LrA enhancement, prerequisites, as already commented on, to knowledge building. The strategies implemented conformed to the above mentioned adult learning fundamentals and peculiarities. On completion, learners shared the following concisely presented views as to both courses characteristics: the approaches used were considered fruitful in knowledge improvement, cognitive teaching having promoted learners' linguistic analysis abilities and awareness of studied categories functioning logic; contrastive skills were improved when comparing English with Bulgarian categories while reading and listening, error detection and correction skills were ameliorated. Motivation for further learning was also revealed.

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ПРЕПОДАВАНЕ НА АНГЛИЙСКИ ЕЗИК КАТО ЧУЖД НА РАБОТНОТО МЯСТО: ОСНОВНИ ПАРАМЕТРИ НА КУРСОВЕТЕ ПО ОБЩ АНГЛИЙСКИ ЕЗИК ЗА УНИВЕРСИТЕТСКИ ПРЕПОДАВАТЕЛИ ВЪВ ВТУ „ТОДОР КАБЛЕШКОВ"

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Ключови думи: обучение на възрастни, преподаване на английски език като чужд на работното място, автономия на обучаемите, езикова осъзнатост

Резюме: Настоящият доклад третира проблематика, свързана с преподаването на английски език като чужд на възрастни обучаеми, както и с тази на преподаването на английски на работното място, в рамките на курсове на две нива по общ английски за преподаватели във ВТУ „Тодор Каблешков". Разглежданата тематика е значима поради влиянието на повишената комуникативна компетентност по английски език на преподавателите върху учебния процес чрез подобряването на комуникацията между студенти и лектори, съществена за мотивацията на студентите. Същевременно, разширяването на езиковите и лингвистични знания по английски улеснява преподавателите при ползването на езика най-вече за обща комуникация, но, в известна степен, и за специфични цели - четене, разбиране и коментиране на специализирана литература.

Разглежданата проблематика, значима в приложната лингвистика, е свързана със спецификата на учене при възрастните обучаеми. Така например, възрастните, и най-вече, тези с кариера на университетски преподаватели и учени, притежават по-висока степен на независимост в учебния процес от тази на студентите поради по-доброто си разбиране за общите методи на учене, целите на курса и нивото си на познания. Следователно, стратегиите за учене, които колегите преподаватели прилагат, могат да бъдат по-лесно надграждани в съответствие с изискванията за изучаване на английски, както и с тези за чужд език по принцип, чрез преподаването на подходящи стратегии за езиково изучаване, водещи до повишаването на езиковата осъзнатост и до постигането на много по-добри параметри на автономност при учене. Изследваната проблематика е илюстрирана с помощта на примери от двата курса.