

**VALENTINA TSYBANEVA****THE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN IN-SERVICE SYSTEM****Introduction**

This article focuses on language development of teachers, specifically those whose teaching experience of English in the secondary (state) schools is more than 15 years. As it is stated by P. M. Lightbown and N. Spada, “older learners can attain high, if not “native”, level of proficiency in their second language” (Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 67). Surely, language teachers should have the necessary knowledge and skills to guide students towards the goals of learning English in secondary schools. According to the requirements of the language teachers’ qualification, they are supposed to demonstrate a high level of written and oral proficiency in English. Having an excellent command of the target language is one of the most important characteristics of teachers. However, the language teachers clearly understand that “without appropriate practice” their level of English can be hardly close to proficient. Especially, it is so due to the fact that they work in a non-speaking English environment.

Working for the chair of the foreign language and methodology in Volgograd State Academy of Advanced Training and Retraining of Education Workers for about 4 years, I have noticed that, on the one hand, teachers of English have the sense of fear to speak English in front of their colleagues (peers) and unwilling to have any lessons for development of their linguistic competence. On the other hand, they are isolated while back at school and have no time, no possibility to work on it. Despite the increase in number of courses aimed at the professional development of the teachers of English (which is according to the currently highly-discussed law of education in Russian Federation), there is a lack of availability of the ones designed for teachers’ language development. Not only the administration of the state schools feel that their employees will benefit more from the courses which goal is language development, but, as I see it, teachers themselves realise the advantages of such courses.

So, the main idea of this article is to focus on the specially-designed course in In-Service Teacher-Training Academy that helps language teachers to advance their proficiency in English.

**Characteristics**

The language teachers who are the target students of this course attend the course for the professional development in the Academy. The majority of teachers have a qualification of language teacher and the working experience in teaching language specialized state schools – gymnasiums or lyceums – for more than 15 years. They are representatives of the middle-class, monolingual females who often come from small towns or suburbs with very limited intercultural experiences. The number of male teachers is the lowest. In this group there is the only one out of 25. Many of these teachers are working under stressful conditions, made more dreadful in recent years by constant pressure to raise student scores on annual standardized

tests – unified state exam (USE). They are non-native English teachers and usually feel unsafe using the language they have to teach.

They attend courses every day during 2 weeks in October and for a week in November and the course was specially designed for this particular group in accord with their needs and expectations. They have 2 lessons focused on language development practically every day within 3 weeks from Monday till Saturday for 60 minutes.

### **Language Development of Teachers Theory**

Some of the principles of adult learning identified by Brundage and MacKeracher are discussed by Nunan in the frames of a learner-centered approach. They are:

- “Adults value their own experience and learn best when they are involved in developing learning objectives for themselves.
- Adults have already developed organised ways of focusing on, taking in and processing information.
- Adults learn best when the content is personally relevant to past experience or present concerns and the learning process is relevant to life experiences.
- Adults learn best when novel information is presented through a variety of sensory modes and experiences, with sufficient repetitions and variations on themes to allow distinctions in patterns to emerge” (adapted from Nunan, 1988, pp. 22-23).

Generally, adult learners are influenced by “past learning experience, present concerns and future prospects” (Nunan, 1988, p. 24). Also, these principles are referred to cognitive style of learning.

Additionally, within the bounds of communicative and competence approaches, language teachers are to have C1 level of the language according to Common European Frame Reference (CEFR). In this case as Richards mentions “a proficiency-oriented language curriculum ... is organised around the particular kinds of communicative tasks the learners need to master and the skills and behaviours needed to accomplish them. The goal of a proficiency-based curriculum is ... to enable learners to develop the skills needed to use language for specific purposes” (adapted from Nunan, 1988, p. 33).

All mentioned above is particularly relevant to teaching language teachers. The teacher (who works with teachers) should be able to consistently work with language teachers, adapting the lessons according to the participants’ needs. However, it also has implications for syllabus design – the teacher will need to pace the course in accordance with the language development of teachers, so the syllabus will have to be flexible to teachers’ needs.

### **Implications for Course Design**

G. Yule says that for most people, the experience with the second language (L2) is fundamentally different from their first language (L1) experience and it is “hardly conducive to acquisition” (Yule, 2006, p. 163). They usually encounter the L2 during their teenage or adult years, in a few hours each week of school time. The main approaches to the teaching English were the grammar-translation and

audiolingual ones. The first offered vocabulary lists and sets of grammar rules to define the target language and memorize as much as possible. Obviously, “written language was more emphasized than spoken” (Yule, 1987, p. 165). The main difference of the audiolingual approach was that the emphasis was on the spoken language and practice which involved hours spent in a language laboratory drilling aspects of the language (Stern, 2003). Consequently, background language experience has to be analyzed in order to define the teachers’ learning style.

Despite a great deal of training and teaching experience, “non-native speaker teachers may be viewed as insufficient language teachers because they often lack native speaker’ linguistic competence in the target language and culture” (Shin, 2008). However, from my own professional experience and observation, I agree that non-native speaker teachers possess some crucial “advantages over native speakers including a deeper understanding of learners’ first languages and an ability to explain second language features in ways that students can understand” (ibid). So, it is essential for non-native teachers to constantly strive to reach high levels of written and oral proficiencies in English.

The fact mentioned by S. Wallace should be taken into consideration as teachers may be at “different stages of development or improvement and have different needs and aspirations, of which a common programme of competences might meet only the most basic” (Wallace, 2007, p. 77).

Additionally, teachers of languages need special assistance with the challenging task of developing and administering proficiency tests (for example, USE which their students take while leaving the school) that teachers as well as administration of the educational department can effectively measure students’ progress. It is critical for language teachers to be aware of the USE and have practice of preparation for the exam.

### **Diagnostic Testing**

My experience in working with language teachers for 4 years indicates that the majority of the teachers are eager to check their level of proficiency in English with the help of the test which is similar to the USE (which their students of 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> forms are to take every year). The diagnosing test consists of reading tasks to read for gist, details and specific information; grammar and vocabulary gap-filling tasks (one of them is word formation) and writing a personal letter and an essay. The main rationale behind the test which covers different teachers’ abilities in aspects and system of English was to see and check their abilities to cope with the test under stressful condition. Most of them do have fear of further discussion of their results with their colleagues. Moreover, in the lessons the teachers participated in speaking activities to prove their level of English as well as the level of their professional development as the topic for discussion connected with the system of education and its problem in Russia.

### **Needs Analysis**

I have analyzed different areas of difficulty in the language. To find out them I organized discussion to see what the teachers themselves underline as the main difficulties for them as the language learners. First, I gave them the questionnaire to

complete and I asked them questions connected with the specific area of the language they wanted to work within the course. Though, some of the difficulties were predictable as they were practically the same as students of the 11<sup>th</sup> form usually mentioned. Here is the list of difficulties:

- 1) Vocabulary: many words have different meanings according to the context, idioms, synonyms, etc. Moreover, the most “mysterious” is word formation (it is also tested in the USE is extremely difficult for their students).
- 2) Fluency: Oral fluency requires many qualities, such as readiness to speak, speech rate, etc, in which non-native English teachers are in a disadvantage. Sometimes they are ashamed to speak English as it takes time to find the right structures at the right time and try not to translate the word from Russian. They want teaching “through dialogue and discussion” (Skinner, 2010, p. 46).
- 3) Pronunciation: it is marked by a slight Russian accent that can a little interfere with other people’s understanding.
- 4) Grammar: Unsurprisingly, grammar is the favorite field for these language teachers. They strongly believe that “it is to be more learnable than vocabulary”.
- 5) Listening and reading: though the teachers have ideas of how to teach perceptive skills, they do have no practice themselves and want to know how to cope with different listening and reading activities under exam condition.

Another important dimension which was obvious after analysis of the teachers’ portfolios, which can also “be used instead of a test to assess how well a learner doing” (Lindsay & Knight, 2006, p. 130), is that the teachers of this group are supposed to be experts. They have highly-developed abilities (which influence their learning style) in the following:

- “a richer and more elaborate knowledge base;
- ability to integrate and use different kinds of knowledge;
- ability to make reasonable judgments based on background experience;
- better understanding and use of language learning strategies;
- greater awareness of the learning context” (adapted from Richards & Farrell, 2005, pp. 7-8).

However, they have underlined that these specific areas of the language and professional competences suffered in the teaching practice as they have lack of practice of English at the appropriate level. Gaining this information about the language teachers is of the great use in designing the course to match their learning preferences and expectations.

## Results

Diagnostic Testing – teachers’ proficiency in English is high enough. The teachers are very good at receptive skills which are aimed at getting the main idea, however, they might have some problems with getting specific information. They managed to meet the criteria for writing a personal letter, though they had some difficulties with essay, especially they highlighted the lack of knowledge of connectors and conjunctions.

Needs Analysis – the teachers were provided with the information of Kolb's learning styles and work in groups of 3-4 to define their own style. Mostly, they refer to converging or accommodating learning styles. Being non-native English-speaking teachers, they also pointed out the fact that they knew less social language than their students who were growing up using different Internet resources. Since their own schooling took place in Russia, the teachers lack cultural backgrounds to interpret and participate appropriately in the discussion of the socio-cultural information.

### **Priorities for the course design**

- The course should have enough listening and reading material (which has socio-cultural information) and activities for development of these skills and further discussion to raise language teachers' awareness and supply them with different kinds of interaction in the lesson.
- The course should include some information and activities aimed at linking devices and difficult grammar areas to help teachers with the writing assignments and speaking.
- The course is to have the activities and tasks which can help to cope with USE (course books used in schools do not have enough of them).

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Valentina Tsybaneva  
Volgograd State Academy of Advanced Training  
and Retraining of Education Workers  
Volgograd, Russia  
walenday14@yahoo.com