TRAPS OF TEACHING SPECIALISED LANGUAGES

CĂTĂLIN DEHELEAN

Keywords: *traps, teaching, specialised languages*

Introduction

Most academic staff teaching specialised languages are graduates of humanities where they have acquired two basic types of competencies: language competences and literary competencies. (See Figure 1.)

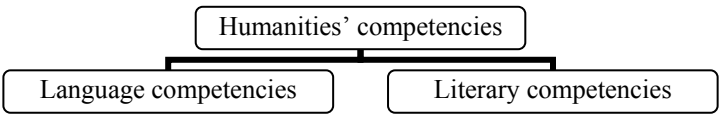


Figure 1: A graphic representation of a basic classification of types of competencies acquired by the graduates of humanities

Their language competencies include: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar language history, language philosophy as well as many others. (See Figure 2.)

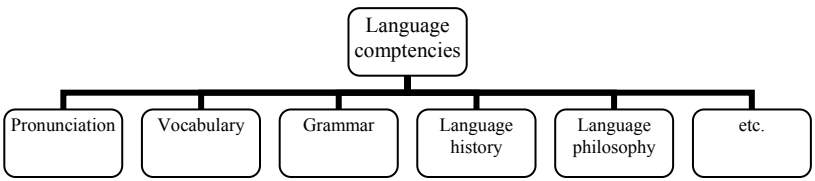


Figure 2: A graphic representation of a basic classification of types of language competencies acquired by the graduates of humanities

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Their literary competencies usually revolve around literary criticism and comparative literature. (See Figure 3.)

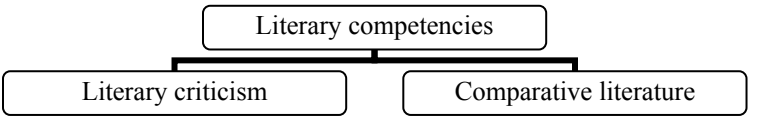


Figure 3: A graphic representation of a basic classification of types of language competencies acquired by the graduates of humanities

The result of this education is, rather unsurprisingly, an art-centred or, conversely, a language-centred perspective of the world, which is, of course, admirable. (See Figure 4.)

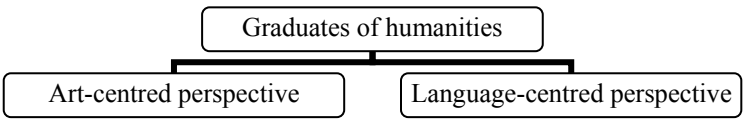


Figure 4: A graphic representation of a basic classification of types of perspectives of the world which graduates of humanities might possess

However, any of these two perspectives, that is either the assessment of the aesthetic value of a text belonging to the belles-lettres, or understanding the rules governing the language may clash with the perspectives of the students, who are, by the very nature of their studies, oriented towards other fields whether they be in sciences or social sciences (See Figure 5.)

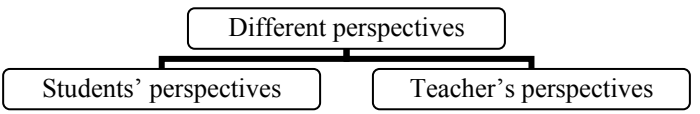


Figure 5: A graphic representation of a basic classification of types of perspectives of the world which the two elements involved in de educational process might possess

The very existence of the two widely different perspectives of the world might lead to a continuous and deep misunderstanding of

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the purpose of specialised languages, which is related to the interests of the students who need enable to be self-sufficient in a lingua franca. (See Figure 6.)

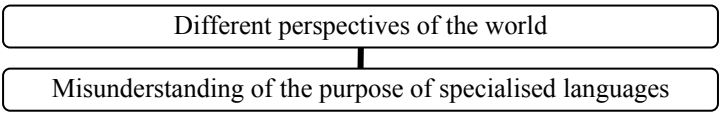


Figure 6: A graphic representation of a possible relationship between different perspectives of the world and misunderstanding the purpose of specialised languages

Once a situation whereby a misunderstanding of the purpose of specialised languages has come about a possible step in the wrong direction may very well be the conception and implementation of rather unique if predictably inefficient methods of teaching. (See Figure 7.)

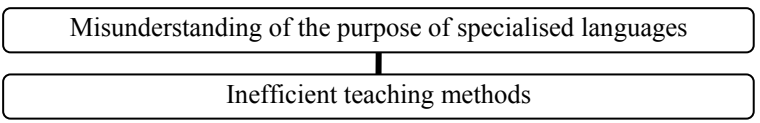


Figure 7: A graphic representation of a possible relationship between misunderstanding the purpose of specialised languages and the conception and implementation of inefficient methods of teaching

Traps

There is, of course, a large and colourful collection of exciting methods for the uninformed teacher of specialised languages to choose from. But experience has shown that there are certain preferences and, thus, classification is possible.

As such, there are certain main methods, like the teaching of non-specialised languages, which are a more widely used than the other secondary methods, such as the teaching of specialised languages, which are not used quite as often by junior academic staff beginning to teach. (See Figure 8.)

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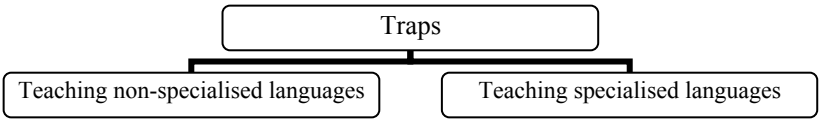


Figure 8: A graphic representation of a possible classification of the traps by junior academic staff teaching specialised languages.

Teaching non-specialised languages

This main type of traps usually has to do with teaching general language materials, which is rather unfortunate, for this choice means falling well short of the ideal goal of teaching specialised languages.(See Figure 9.)

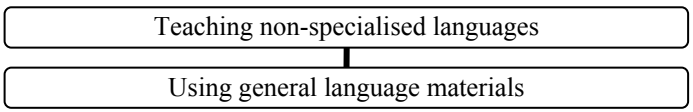


Figure 9: A graphic representation of a possible relationship between teaching non-specialised languages and using general language materials

To explain how and why these traps come to be, one has to understand the mentality behind it, which is taking the path of least resistance. Accordingly the whole process is reduced to a matter of logistics, which involves the acquisition of the most accessible materials. Herein, the term "accessible" has two connotations which underlie the seemingly reasonable motives for this choice. Firstly, these materials usually follow this pattern: theoretical observations on the first page followed by a page of relevant exercises. Secondly these materials are very cheap and readily available in large numbers from at least three sources: libraries, book shops and free websites. (See Figure 10.)

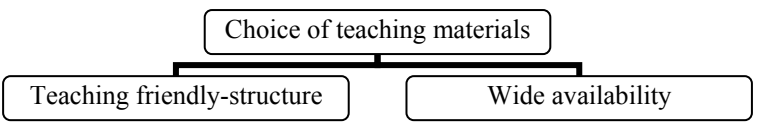


Figure 10: A graphic representation of possible reasons for the choice of teaching materials

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In this case, namely teaching non-specialised language, there are usually three methods in common use: focusing exclusively on grammar, conversely, focusing exclusively on non-specialised vocabulary or an admixture of the two, that is focusing on both grammar and non-specialised vocabulary. (See Figure 11.)

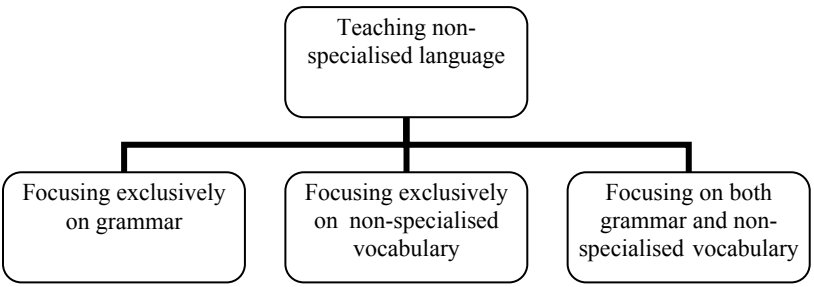


Figure 11: A possible classification of the types of methods used by the academic staff teaching specialised languages

Besides, being completely out of place in the environment of specialised languages these three methods have their own individual limitations which need to be scrutinised.

Focusing exclusively on grammar as a teaching method is problematic twice fold. While theoretical is a primary method of learning the building blocks of a language, it is not enough because it does not provide a context in which the student is bound to use the language. Furthermore, it is labour-intensive, because it is not natural, a fact which becomes painfully evident when compared to the first language acquisition, which undeniably occurred by sheer word-of-mouth. (See Figure 12.)

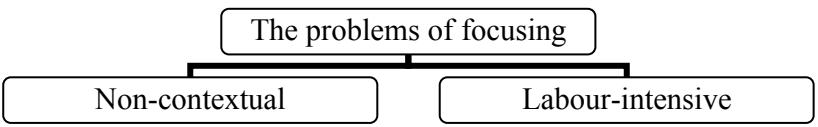


Figure 12: A graphic representation of the possible problems brought about by focusing exclusively on grammar

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Focusing exclusively on non-specialised vocabulary seems to have its perks: the students seem to like it, the exercises are easily solved and it seems to yield results quite literally over night. However these arguments can be rebuffed with ease. The students like it because it's closer to the manner of the first language acquisition. Exercises are easier to solve because the context has already been created. The results are not relevant, because one does not possess the competence to produce the proper building blocks of the language. (See Figure 13.)

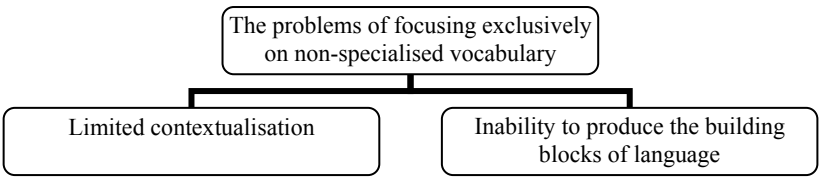


Figure 13: A graphic representation of the possible problems brought about by focusing exclusively on non-specialised language

Focusing on both grammar and non-specialised vocabulary seems to solve many of the problems of the two previous approaches. It is more appealing than focusing exclusively on grammar but not as appealing as focusing exclusively on non-specialised vocabulary; it offers a certain degree of contextualisation and it does focus somewhat on produce the proper building blocks of the language. But the recurrent term is "partial" and that is exactly the problem: its objective is to be limited. And, since the objectives are never 100% met in implementation, the results will be worse. (See Figure 14.)

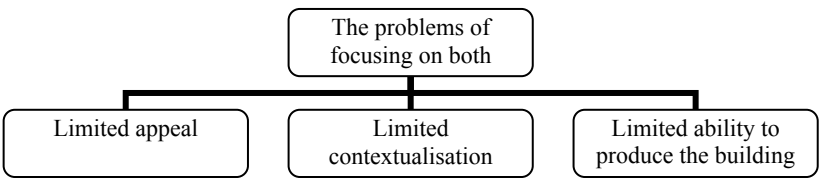


Figure 14: A graphic representation of the possible problems brought about by focusing on both grammar and non-specialised language

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Teaching specialised languages

When teaching specialised languages the main trap is focusing exclusively on specialised vocabulary. (See Figure 15.)

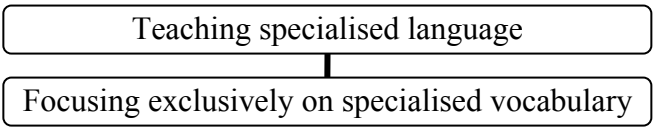


Figure 15: A graphic representation of the relationship between teaching specialised languages and focusing exclusively on specialised vocabulary

At this point it has to be said that focusing exclusively on specialised vocabulary is indeed rarer than the other traps due to a variety of factors, such as the need to invest resources, availability of materials and the willingness to innovate. (See Figure 16.)

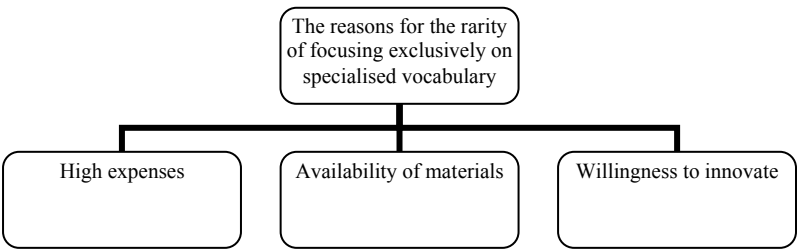


Figure 16: A graphic representation of the possible reasons for the rarity of focusing exclusively on specialised vocabulary

Having said that, its rarity cannot hide the fact that focusing exclusively on specialised vocabulary is a more of a problem than a solution for teaching specialised languages. However, a lexical exercise, regardless how specialised, is not enough to learn a language and be able to use it properly, to wit: focusing exclusively on specialised vocabulary does not built language functionality. Furthermore, this approach is highly empirical, and as such it does not truly help build the ability to research and write proper specialised texts. (See Figure 16.)

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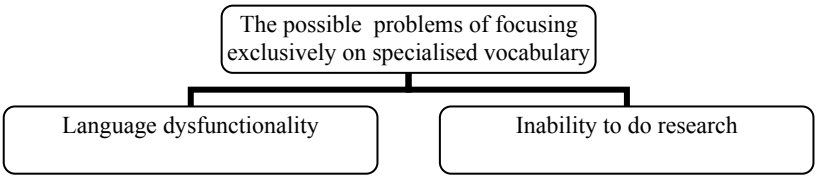


Figure 16: A graphic representation of the possible problems brought about by focusing exclusively on specialised language

Conclusions

Focusing on non-specialised languages because it's accessible or focusing exclusively on specialised vocabulary because it seems like the perfect solution to teaching specialised languages but still making life easy for the students are choices which underlie a few of the problems the inexperienced junior members of the academic staff are confronted with.

This approach shows that the lack of understanding leads to a lack of a proper methodology. Even more worryingly, experimenting with various methods as the main focus of the academic process ensures that an effective methodology will never be developed and implemented.

But this is not the end because there is hope yet. If the junior member of the academic staff is to avoid these traps one will have to leave behind the illusions of artistry and strict theory of the language, communicate with the students and approach teaching without cutting corners.

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FALLEN DES FACHSPRACHENUNTERRICHT
(Inhaltsangabe auf Deutsch)

Schlüsselwörter: *Fallen, Unterricht, Fachsprachen*

Alles beginnt mit einem Missverständnis des Zweckes von Fachsprachen im Auftrag des Nachwuchswissenschaftlers. So wird eine Fülle von Methoden, die für den Unterricht von Fachsprachen gany und gar ungeeignet sind, umgesetzt. Dies führt zwangsläufig zum Verlust des Interesses der Studenten in Fachsprachen. Im laufe der zeit, wird es zu ein allgemeines Gefühl des Mangels an Bedeutung der spezialisierten Sprachen führen. Allerdings, indem es ernst und ständig mit den Studenten kommuniziert kann eine Haltung des Verständnisses der Bedeutung des Studiums spezialisierte Sprachen erstellt werden.

CAPCANE ALE PREDĂRII LIMBAJELOR SPECIALIZATE
(Rezumat)

Cuvinte-cheie: *capcane, predare, limbaje specializate*

Totul începe cu neînțelegerea scopului limbajelor specializate de către tinerii asistenți universitari. Astfel, se ajunge să se pună în aplicare o paletă de metode nepotrivite predării limbajelor specializate. Consecința imediată a acestui fapt este că studenții își pierd interesul în limbajele de specialitate. În timp, aceasta va crea un sentiment de lipsă de importanță a limbajelor de specialitate. Însă, dacă această misiune este luată în serios și are loc o comunicare reală cu studenții, se poate crea o atitudine de înțelegere a importanței studierii limbajelor de specialitate.

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