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Synergy in Applied linguistics: Bridging Research and Practice in English Language Studies

Abstract

The present habilitation thesis entitled *Synergy in Applied linguistics: Bridging Research and Practice in English Language Studies* highlights the main components of my academic career, namely scientific research, teaching activities, editorial and administrative tasks, following its evolution during more than twenty-five years. Starting from the presentation of the milestones in my career, it moves to my scientific interest areas and professional achievements and ends with a projection of my career development, with a focus on future research, teaching and advising students. The accomplishments of my academic career presented throughout this thesis will hopefully be indicative of my capability to advise doctoral students in their research in the major areas of Applied linguistics.

The three parts of the thesis - Scientific and academic achievements, Future developments of the academic career and Bibliographical references connected to the elaboration of the habilitation thesis - introduce activities and areas that have been part of my university career since the beginning, more than twenty-five years ago. Teaching and elaborating course materials, advising students and doing editorial work, as well as participating in projects and having various administrative and managerial responsibilities are, together with academic research, nothing but parts of a whole, because they are at the same interdependent and complementary. As I will show further on, there has been an underlying (if not necessarily obvious) connection between certain courses and/or seminars I gave at the beginning of my career and later developments. For instance, *Academic writing* laid a sound foundation for the course *Academic writing and publishing* I taught at the Doctoral School of Economics and Business Administration (SDEAA), UAIC, between 2015 and 2019. I later drew on *Introduction to the methodology of scientific research and the use of new computer technologies* for the 1st year students majoring in English, Applied Modern Languages and American studies, to design and teach two courses in *Ethics and Academic Integrity*, the former for the 2nd year students in all the MA programs in the Faculty of Letters and the latter for the doctoral students in the Doctoral School of Philology, UAIC. Starting 2009, I also conducted a seminar called *School experience* and taught a course in *Instructional Technologies in TEFL*, both in the MA program of Applied linguistics. The latter is one of the best examples of

new courses one gets to teach mostly by chance (it was newly introduced in the Study Plan and an ‘enthusiastic volunteer’ was needed) that later brings opportunities for teaching and research, as well as good experience in dire straight conditions like those brought about by the pandemic. The above-mentioned seminar on TEFL methodology nurtured my budding interest in the field of EFL didactics which I was later going to advance after I became Associate Professor in 2013 by teaching, in the MA program Applied linguistics – TEFL, courses like *The Acquisition and Learning of Foreign Languages*, *TEFL and Applied linguistics*, *Linguistics for English teachers II*, or *Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis of the English Class*.

As I showed in the following sections, research results disseminated through publications and public presentations have indicated a consistent complementarity between my directions of study and my teaching, as research was mostly conducted in the fields associated with my courses, so that practice informed research and subsequently benefitted from its results. Numerous other administrative and editorial activities I have undertaken ever since I was a TA also result in a useful experience that completes my professional competence.

The first section describes my academic career path in an outline of my teaching activities and professional development in the Department of English Language and Literature of the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași. I started as a full-time PhD student at the English Department TA in 1996, I became a TA in 2000 and I went through all the stages of academic evolution, becoming a lecturer in 2005 and associate professor in 2013. In 2002, I defended the doctoral thesis entitled *The Comic Mode in Evelyn Waugh’s Fiction*, which was in part concerned with conversation analysis, so that while working on it I was able to continue to pursue my newly confirmed interest in the research of the English language. Over the years I have participated in various academic events and became a member of a few professional Romanian and international organizations so that I was able to join the larger community of researchers in the field of English and Romanian language studies.

Since the beginning of the academic career, both my teaching and my research have been directed at four areas in the field of Applied linguistics - English Morphosyntax and Language studies, L2 acquisition, learning and teaching, and tertiary language-education research, Translations and Cultural studies, and Romanian as a foreign language. Thus, the main practical courses, seminars and courses that I have taught are more or less directly associated with these areas, starting with the language and translation practical courses at the beginning of my career and continuing with courses and seminars in *English Morphosyntax*, *The theory and practice of language*, *Academic writing*, *Teaching English*, *TEFL and Applied linguistics*, *The Acquisition and Learning of Foreign Languages*, *IT in TEFL*, *Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis of the English Class*, *Introduction to the methodology of scientific research and the use of new computer technologies*, etc., as well as a course in Romanian as a foreign language I taught for many years to international students in the summer courses *Romania – Language and civilization* organized yearly by my university.

I have been lucky enough to get to teach not only language students, but also, at the beginning of my career, students in the faculties of Law, History, Physical Education, Mathematics, Informatics,

Economics and Business Administration, etc. or, more recently, the doctoral students at the Doctoral School of Economics and Business Administration (SDEAA), UAIC¹. Moreover, I have been teaching BA, MA and PhD students (that is, all the three degree-levels offered by my university) so that I could get a more complete picture of the teaching environment. For some of these classes I published course materials (*Limbă și civilizație română, Curs pentru avansați*, ed. Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Iași, 2005, *Morpho-syntax – An introduction with a special focus on the Romanian speaker of English*, ed. Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Iași, 2013, *Româna pentru cei mai buni. Limbă și civilizație română pentru studenți străini, nivel C1*, ed. Casa Editoriala Demiurg Plus, Iași, 2013, *English Morphosyntax - A brief course for EFL university students (with exercises)*, Casa Editoriala Demiurg Plus, Iași, 2021) or studies² that certainly contributed to the improvement of my teaching. Similarly, as I will explain further on, my expanding teaching experience has constantly been informing my research. Other course materials and studies based on the theoretical support I provide to my students weekly in the framework of the flipped classroom approach³ I have been taking for several years are yet to be published.

An important part of my career is concerned with guiding students either as a tutor or, much more extensively, as advisor of their BA or dissertation papers, as well as of teachers’ papers for obtaining the 1st degree in education or as referent in PhD committees. As a tutor for MA first and second-year students in the Applied linguistics – English as a foreign language program, I mostly help them make the best of their career path by presenting them the opportunities and challenges of the program, by answering their questions regarding various aspects of their activity and by facilitating their understanding of the academic environment. Because I have always thought this activity to be essential for an academic, since I became lecturer, I have coordinated over one hundred BA and MA papers (ten to fifteen or more every year) and more than thirty teachers’ papers. The main areas of research students’ papers were concerned with are listed in the first section, where I also describe the system I devised so that I could efficiently deal with the large number of undergraduates and graduates who choose to work on their BA or MA papers under my supervision every year. Thus, I have started from the idea that we have to work as a team, with students getting involved in the entire research and writing process and taking more complex roles than simply turning in what they write to be assessed by the advisor. Students are consequently invited to form pairs, preferably, but not obligatorily, with another student whose paper is in the same area, and to swap every section they have finished with their pair for reviewing before having it ready to send to the advisor. They are also told to discuss all questions related to the content they review with the author. As can be expected, this kind of revision resolves all spelling and language ‘accidents’ before they get to the advisor, thus saving both time and face. Every year at the end of June I invite the 2nd BA year and the 1st MA students who have chosen me as their advisor for the

¹ Between 2015 and 2019, I gave a course and a seminar in *Academic writing and publishing*.

² More will be mentioned in the following pages.

³ In the flipped classroom, students receive the course material in advance, a week before the actual class and perform techniques of critical reading on it, i.e., note-taking, questions, etc.

year to come to attend the ‘rehearsal’ of their 3rd BA and 2nd MA colleagues, so that they can see them perform during the presentations, as well as get inspiration for their own topics. Over the summer break, they have to read and take notes from an academic writing book I recommend to them that is going to help them find focus and narrow down their intended topics. In autumn, I set a meeting with the group of students I coordinate in which they have to report on their work in the form of a list of answers to a series of questions they received in the previous meeting. The questions are mainly meant to have them draw a description of their topic and a first draft of their thesis statement.

The research activity is outlined in the second section of the thesis and starts with an explanation of its title, which is actually based on the title of the thesis itself. It starts from the fact that Applied linguistics is the framework and the foundation for my whole research activity and it is what unifies the four directions of research (English Morphosyntax and Language studies, L2 acquisition, learning and teaching, and tertiary language-education research, Translations and Cultural studies, and Romanian as a foreign language (RFL)) that are its scaffold. Consequently, what at first sight may appear to branch in various directions is consistently held together by this common denominator, even when the interdisciplinary nature of a particular field of study is obvious. Most of my research is already published as single-authored books, studies in specialized journals indexed in international databases, in collective volumes, conference proceedings, and single- and co-authored chapters in thematic volumes. The results of my research have also been disseminated in presentations in conferences organized in Romania or abroad by universities and scientific organizations.

English Language Studies (ELS) is yet another important field of investigation for my studies because it is a place where linguistics and literature come together. In the current view, ELS is a field that “considers the history and present status of the English Language. Study of the English language is an important tool for the study of literature” (Department of English, 2022) so ELS is concerned, among other things, with the study of the history of the English Language, of American English, of language variation, of lexicography, of the dictionary as text, of empirical research on dictionary use, and the history and theory of lexicography, as well as of corpus linguistics. Literature is seen as “an important source of evidence for the study of the language across cultures, regions, nations, and time” and “stylistics embodies the essential connection between literature and ELS in grammar, discourse, and cognition. English Grammar, ESL Error Analysis, Second Language Acquisition, and the Linguistics of Speech treat specific topics and theories related to ELS. Following this description, I consider that some directions of my research related to the morphosyntax of idioms, to pragmatics and the broader area of linguistic communication belong here.

The subsection *L2 acquisition, learning and teaching, and tertiary language-education research* refers to the 2nd direction of my research and probably the most ‘internationalized’, since it has attracted interest from researchers from countries like Australia, India or China. The teaching approach I am using in my classes (described in *Medierea în lingvistică aplicată, Dinspre teorie spre practică* and in other papers where I reflect on my teaching) has informed my research when

I investigate current forms of assessment that include self- and peer-assessment, students' oral presentations, their perceptions of achievement, etc. The administrative component of my career has greatly influenced my relation with the academic environment and has informed research in the direction of tertiary education research.

The last two directions presented in this thesis, Translations and Cultural studies, and Romanian as a foreign language (RFL), are also closely connected with the classes I have been teaching and with a deep interest for the Romanian language and culture especially when it is viewed from the external standpoint a non-native might adopt. My two coursebooks for RFL⁴ and other studies concerned with key issues about Romanian language and culture⁵ are proof enough for that interest. In fact, these two directions also demonstrate that a clear delineation between them and the two previously mentioned is quasi-impossible simply of the synergy in the field of Applied linguistics, at the confluence of several feeder disciplines and informed by practice and real-life language-based problems.

The final section of this habilitation thesis is actually a projection of how I intend to develop the current directions of research, as well as my teaching and administrative activity, together with that of advising students and young researchers. For this, I mainly intend to focus on: a) developing the current directions of research and expanding them with new updated contributions; b) advancing my teaching strategies by reading and investigating the literature and keeping course content up-to-date c) improving my academic visibility. At the same time, I plan to perfect the system I have devised for managing the research program of the students I have been advising, perhaps by trying to engage future students under my supervision more directly in some common sub-projects within their main line of research, as well as by guiding them on how to integrate their work experience into their research and, vice versa, their research into their work. All these developments have the potential of improving my competence in advising future doctoral students.

The last section of the habilitation thesis contains a list of bibliographical references organized in two subsections: the authored texts and edited works mentioned in the thesis, and the works cited in this paper.

Because I stand by the idea that many of the turns in one's academic career usually create a window of opportunity for the development of new directions of teaching and/or research, this is how I look at the wide range of classes and courses I have been teaching, at the numerous students' papers that I have advised and at all the academic and administrative activities I have been engaged in.

⁴ Macari, Ileana Oana, *Limbă și civilizație română, Curs pentru avansați*, ed. Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" Iași, 2005; Macari, Ileana Oana, *Româna pentru cei mai buni. Limbă și civilizație română pentru studenți străini, nivel C1*, ed. Casa Editoriala Demiurg Plus, Iași, 2013

⁵ Macari, Ileana Oana, in Platon, Elena; Lavinia-Iunia Vasiu & Antonela Arieșan (eds.), *Discurs polifonic în româna ca limbă străină (RLS)*, Casa cărții de știință, 2018, *Manifestări ale atriției limbii române ca limbă maternă – o analiză de corpus din perspectiva erorilor*; Macari, Ileana Oana/ Iulia Andreea Milică (coord.), *Romanian culture – A crash course*, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași, 2021;