

M. V. Ikonnikova

PhD in Philology, Associate Professor
Department of Foreign Languages
Khmelnyskyi National University
Khmelnyskyi, Ukraine

O. O. Komochkova

PhD in Pedagogy, Senior Lecturer
Department of Foreign Language Practice and Teaching Methodology
Khmelnyskyi National University
Khmelnyskyi, Ukraine

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY OF LINGUISTS: THE UK EXPERIENCE

ABSTRACT. *The research deals with the problem of professional competency of linguistics in the context of the UK experience. It covers such aspects as conceptual, content and practical framework of the research problem since they can fully disclose its essence. The conceptual aspect is rooted in the idea that British educators implement the principles of formal logic, psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and neurology in degrees in linguistics since it makes it possible to cover the most important branches of linguistics, where its achievements can be most effectively applied. The content aspect implies that the Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics developed by the QAA justifies the concepts of subject knowledge and understanding, which are the basis of professional training in linguistics. The practical aspect indicates that the UK universities are focused on the needs of the labour market, systematically conduct surveys among employers, students and educators to single out the most sought after skills and abilities in professional activities of linguists. Therefore, competency-based approach to professional training of linguists in the UK is based on such principles as fundamentalization, continuity, priority of scientific achievements and promotion of professional image. It is concluded that the UK is a leading European country that systematically develops techniques for improving professional training of various specialists, in particular linguists.*

Keywords: linguistics, linguist, the UK, professional training, benchmark, the QAA.

INTRODUCTION

Presently, the global community is witnessing rapid progress in many areas of human rights. The key is education itself, in particular higher education, as society needs modern, highly qualified specialists who are able to think critically, apply new approaches to professional activity, actively and productively use information and communication technologies and strive for professional and personal development. Professional competency of specialists is characterized by a high level of functional and integrated philosophical, sociological and cultural knowledge, as well as the ability and readiness to apply it in practice.

As a result of globalization and internationalization of linguistics as a cognitive science with an extremely wide application spectrum, the rapid development of information and communication technologies and large-scale computerization of the production process, professional training of linguists requires a rethink. This is due to the fact that society is in urgent need of specialists who not only have professional knowledge of morphology, syntax and pragmatics, formal analysis skills but also are able to compile thesauruses and ontologies, design algorithms and methods of automatic text processing, create speech-recognition and machine-translation technologies and conduct research activities with the aim to skillfully use information systems, adjust the language to the requirements of people with special needs, etc. (Anderson, 2011).

In view of the above, it is expedient to study the UK experience in applying competency-based approach to professional training of specialists, especially linguists. In the 1980s, the British government formed a new approach based on competency, which implies the correspondence of professional results to competence standards (Knasel and Meed, 1994). In the UK today, there is an association of managers who develop these standards, which are further approved at the national level (Camp, 1989).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF RESEARCH

A good command of a particular language involves acquiring a wide range of cognitive, social and interactive knowledge, abilities and skills. Therefore, the intellectual toolset needed for language proficiency must be based on certain scientific principles. Given the interdisciplinary nature of linguistics within both its objectives and methods, British educators consider it necessary to implement the principles of formal logic, psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and neurology in degrees in linguistics (Bowskill, 2010).

Since language is present in almost all human activities, linguistic studies cover an extremely wide range of issues and focus on the phenomenon of language in its practical aspect (Boyce, & Pahl, 2007). Having analyzed the specifics of degrees in linguistics in certain British universities, the authors of the research can conclude that the developers have attempted to cover the most important branches of linguistics, where its achievements can be most effectively applied. These branches include sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, clinical linguistics, computer linguistics, forensic linguistics, translation studies, lexicography, typology, linguodidactics, etc. (Study.com, 2015). They, in turn, encompass several areas for linguists to apply professional functions, namely:

- 1) the processing of linguistic information and speech recognition with the use of modern information technologies;
- 2) the development of various recording systems and standardized technical formats of languages;
- 3) the study of structure and characteristics of lexicon (lexicology);
- 4) the compilation of dictionaries and thesauruses (lexicography);
- 5) translation activities;
- 6) language planning and languages policies, in particular preservation, classification and revival of dying languages;
- 7) the study of such linguistic phenomena as second language acquisition, bilingualism, multilingualism, as well as the influence of linguistic and social factors on foreign language learning;

8) teaching English as a foreign language;

9) the study of speech disorders such as full or partial loss of speech (aphasia), autism spectrum disorders and the impacts of therapeutic interventions on these disorders;

10) the analysis of under-studied languages and their functions within cultures of indigenous peoples;

11) the study of communication connections between groups with different sociological, cultural and ethnic traditions;

12) perception of language and language ideology;

13) the development of computer technologies required to analyze large databases of spoken and written languages, in particular sign language, as well as the processing of their search engines;

14) forensic studies of speech and text as a linguistic category and the interpretation of linguistic data and other aspects of language in the legal context (QAA, 2015c).

Based on the analysis of degrees in linguistics at British universities, it can be concluded that they rely on the principles of competency-based, functional, personality-oriented, informational and activity-based approaches, as well as subject specialization, interdisciplinarity, modularity and fundamentalization taking into account modern linguistic challenges.

The evaluation and development of cognitive abilities in students make it possible to shape their subjective cognitive position. It implies that students not only study reality but also reform it and take an active part in creating an educational and social space around it. Being education stakeholders, students mostly comprehend the meaning and significance of their cognitive activities and future professional activities, which contribute to self-development and volitional regulation (A new training initiative, 1981; Camp, 1989; Bell, Stevenson, & Neary, 2009). Therefore, the main directions of innovation activities at modern universities are the design and implementation of competency-based model into professional training of specialists. The materials of the Bologna Process indicate that the use of the terms “competence”

and “competency” to outline guidelines of higher education proves the transition from academic norms of assessment to external assessment of university graduates’ professional and social readiness. In the UK, the competency-based model of linguists’ professional training formulates interdisciplinary, integrated requirements for the results of the education process and involves changing the focus from simple reproduction of knowledge to the development of the ability to update knowledge future linguists need to perform professional tasks (Cheetham, & Chivers, 1996; Knasel, & Meed, 1994; Quality Assurance Agency, 1999; Raven, 1984).

The flexibility of British educational standards and their predominantly advisory nature provide universities with wide autonomy in choosing the areas of training, outlining the content and structure of bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral programmes, methods and forms of their implementation. The universities themselves are entitled to choose professional competences, which their graduates must possess. This approach helps to easily create interdisciplinary programmes, that is, to prepare specialists for those areas, which offer most innovations.

RESULTS

The processes of specifying objectives, structuring the content, selecting the forms, methods and technologies of future linguists’ professional training and developing their professional competency are based on the principles of openness, continuity, predictability and are accorded with the requirements of global educational standards. In 2002, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) developed the first Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics, which sets out the criteria to be followed by working groups when designing degrees in linguistics. A second edition of the document was released in 2007 and a third one – in 2015. This is due to the fact that linguistics as science is actively developing; new sub-branches and technologies are appearing; the requirements of the labour market are changing (Quality Assurance Agency, 2007; 2015c).

The Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics justifies the concepts of subject knowledge and understanding, which are the basis of professional training in

linguistics and cover the levels of linguistic analysis, the domains of linguistic study and the applications of linguistic analysis. It also provides relevant information on generic and subject specific competences future linguists are expected to obtain during professional training at British universities. In addition, the document describes the main training forms of future linguists, as well as typical methods for assessing their academic achievements. It must be noted that competences within the limits of this document are interpreted as a “dynamic set of knowledge and skills” acquired by future linguists during professional training (Tuning project, 2012).

The elaboration of key generic competences and subject specific competences consisted of two stages: publishing the initial list of competences by the developers (31 generic competences and 23 subject specific competences) and discussing them with stakeholders, in particular university teaching staff, students and employers. The discussion was aimed at formulating the most relevant competences, which consider the challenges of linguistic globalization, the problems of linguistic ecology and language policies, the interdisciplinary nature of linguistics. Subsequently, the discussion participants were offered to evaluate the significance and expediency of the described competences in the form of ranking and to distinguish the most optimal five generic and subject specific competences. In general, ten generic competences and ten subject specific competences were selected, which formed the basis of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics (Tuning project, 2012).

The developers of the document have attempted to cover the most important aspects of linguistics such as: 1) the structure and use of language; 2) linguistic aspects of argumentation; 3) the principles of linguistic theories; 4) linguistic methods and their connection with theoretical contexts; 5) the role of language in society. The authors of the research believe that these aspects best reflect the subjective essence of linguistics, which in turn helps the developers of degrees in linguistics to provide future linguists with the necessary range of specializations.

Figure 1 shows generic competences, which future linguists must obtain during professional training.

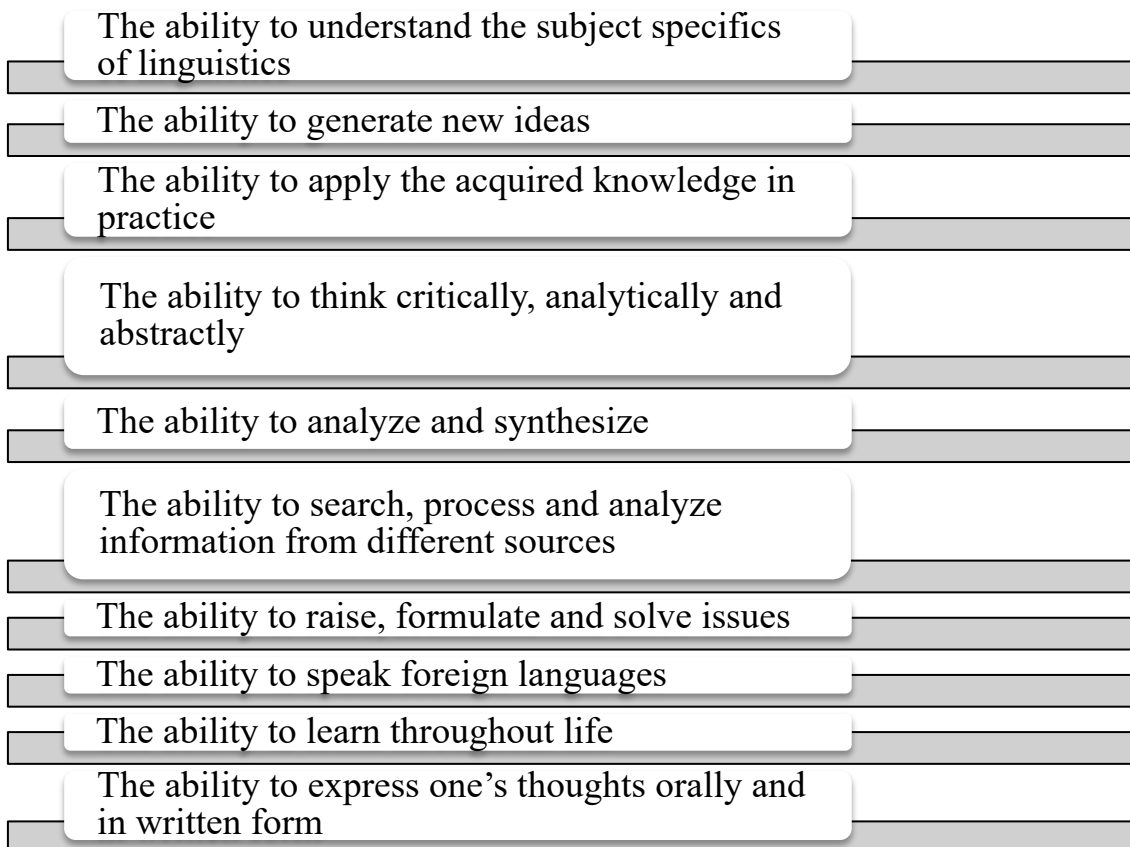


Fig. 1. Generic competences of linguists

Source: Tuning project. (2012). Reference points for the design and delivery of degree programmes in Linguistics (an abridged and adapted version of the United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's benchmark statement for linguistics)

The authors of the research assume that this approach to formulating generic competences of future linguists is rather formal since it focuses mainly on the development of analytical and critical skills. In the modern context, however, linguistics involves processing linguistic data from the point of view of theory and practice. Linguistic globalization requires that one should adapt to the rapid trends in the development of linguistic space, respect cultural, historical, moral and ethical heritage of different peoples, contribute to solving relevant political and social problems of a linguistic nature. Generic competences of future linguists should be based on the principles of preserving national historical, cultural and educational achievements. This,

in turn, might help towards understanding the structure of linguistics and its theoretical foundations required to enhance human communication, develop linguistic culture and linguistic thinking and justify a social nature of languages, etc.

It must be noted that the conceptual framework of subject specific competences is indeed well-aimed (see Fig. 2).

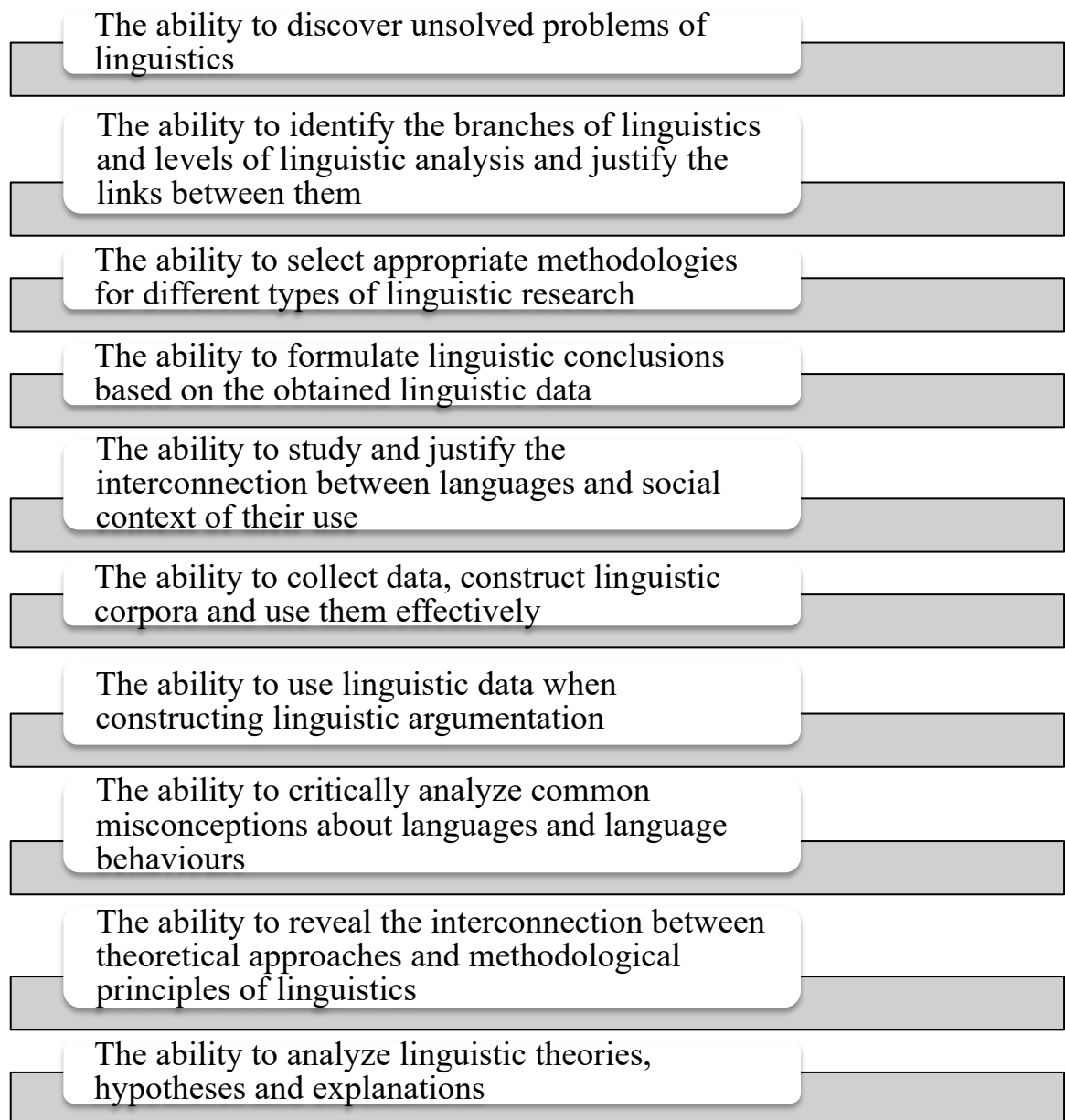


Fig. 2. Subject specific competences of linguists

Source: Tuning project. (2012). Reference points for the design and delivery of degree programmes in Linguistics (an abridged and adapted version of the United

Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's benchmark statement for linguistics)

The significance of linguistics lies in its interdisciplinary justification of fundamental principles of being, nature and society since the views on language as a sign system, its nature and functions, genetic and structural typology make it possible to unify scientific and technical and special terminology, compile reference guides and thesauruses, design functional methodologies for analyzing language acquisition and study such processes as perception, interpretation and planning of speech (Avgeriou, Papasalouros, Retalis, & Skordalakis, 2003; Ellis, 2002; Joseph, Love, & Taylor, 2001). It contributes to preserving linguistic diversity and connecting people in social, political, economic and cultural contexts since language as a social phenomenon is a means of communication which helps to accumulate and transfer human experience (Hymes, 1972). The authors of the research believe that this approach to determining subject specific competences reflects the compliance of British educational standards with the trends of linguistic globalization, sectoral integration, university internationalization and sustainable development of information technologies. Future linguists learn how to collect and analyze, systematize and interpret linguistic facts, flexibly and efficiently use languages to solve communication problems in various spheres of life, freely employ special terminology to perform professional tasks, effectively process information (organize, classify and systematize), describe speech phenomena and processes and the links between them.

Specific attention should be paid to organic interaction between knowledge, skills and competencies reflected in the Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics. The document was developed in terms of complexity and included the main principles of professional training of linguists in the UK: scientificity and career orientation. It also contains the tables corresponding to the first, second and third cycles of higher education. The content of the tables reflects the subject specifics of bachelor, master and doctoral degrees in linguistics. In addition, this document includes the views of university teaching staff, students and employers on the essence of generic and subject

specific competences future linguists are expected to acquire during professional training in higher education institutions. It is important to analyze them in more detail.

The first cycle of higher education requires that graduates with a bachelor's degree in linguistics should undergo fundamental training. Thus, they should be able to acquire advanced knowledge of the branches of linguistics and identify the main problems in this area. Also they should be ready to conduct linguistic analysis, apply theories and methods of linguistics to improve the knowledge of sociolinguistic, linguocognitive, functional and pragmatic parameters of levels of linguistic analysis (see Table 1).

Table 1

The structure and content of knowledge, skills and competences of graduates with a bachelor's degree in linguistics

<i>Graduates with a bachelor's degree in linguistics should be able to acquire the following knowledge, skills and competences</i>
Knowledge
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To demonstrate advanced knowledge and understanding of linguistics and its theoretical principles. 2. To demonstrate advanced knowledge of linguistic argumentation. 3. To demonstrate knowledge and understanding of linguistic theories, principles, hypotheses and interpretations. 4. To demonstrate knowledge of linguistic methodologies and their interconnection with linguistic theories. 5. To demonstrate advanced knowledge and understanding of language's role in society. 6. To demonstrate knowledge of the interconnection between linguistics and other sciences. 7. To demonstrate knowledge of such processes as acquisition, generation and comprehension of speech.
Skills
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To address relevant problems of linguistics in the context of its practical

application.

2. To analyze linguistic data using appropriate linguistic methods and techniques.

3. To summarize the findings of linguistic studies based on structured data.

3. To collect, systematize and interpret linguistic data under the supervision of qualified specialists.

5. To justify the expediency of conducting linguistic studies based on the obtained data.

6. To explain the main principles of linguistics to non-specialists.

7. To use professional terminology in oral and written forms.

8. To think abstractly, analyze and synthesize.

9. To search, process and analyze information from various sources.

Competences

1. Readiness to engage in self-study.

2. Ability to adequately evaluate their own level of knowledge and skills.

3. Ability to critically evaluate their own professional activities and decisions.

4. Ability to critically evaluate their own problem-solving skills.

5. Ability to justify the main trends in the development of linguistic branches.

Source: Tuning project. (2012). Reference points for the design and delivery of degree programmes in Linguistics (an abridged and adapted version of the United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's benchmark statement for linguistics)

Thus, one can conclude that graduates with a bachelor's degree in linguistics acquire core professional knowledge, skills and competences in the field of linguistics, which help them not only to conduct fundamental linguistic studies but also to develop linguistic argumentation, which plays a leading role in professional development of young specialists without much practical experience.

Master's degree in linguistics aims to consolidate professional knowledge of this science and reveal the research potential of linguists. Firstly, graduates with a master's degree in linguistics deepen the knowledge of linguistic theories, principles and hypotheses, and, secondly, learn to develop their own linguistic concepts. As a result, they practice and improve their own research skills when conducting independent linguistic studies (see Table 2).

Table 2

The structure and content of knowledge, skills and competences of graduates with a master's degree in linguistics

<i>Graduates with a master's degree in linguistics should be able to acquire the following knowledge, skills and competences</i>
Knowledge
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To demonstrate specialized knowledge of linguistic branches in accordance with the subject specifics of the degree. 2. To demonstrate systematized theoretical knowledge of the role of linguistic data in linguistic argumentation. 3. To demonstrate profound knowledge of linguistic theories, principles, hypotheses and interpretations. 4. To demonstrate specialized knowledge of linguistic methodologies and their interconnection with linguistic theories. 5. To demonstrate specialized knowledge of the interconnection between linguistics and other sciences.
Skills
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To address relevant theoretical problems in the field of linguistics. 2. To formulate grounded conclusions and generalizations based on the data obtained during independent linguistic studies. 3. To select the most appropriate research methods independently. 4. To collect and systematize language data independently. 5. To analyze and interpret complex language data based on the chosen concept.

6. To apply appropriate linguistic methods and techniques when processing speech data.
7. To express theoretically justified arguments for or against initiating a linguistic study based on complex data.
8. To explain the main principles of linguistics to non-specialists.
9. To speak one or more foreign languages.
10. To use different styles of professional communication (formal, informal, professional).

Competences

1. Ability to generate new ideas.
2. Readiness to clarify the essence and specificity of a problem and select appropriate approaches to its solution.
3. Ability to think critically.
4. Ability to critically evaluate one's own problem-solving skills.
5. Ability to develop abstract ideas independently.
6. Readiness to independently search, process and analyze information from different sources.

Source: Tuning project. (2012). Reference points for the design and delivery of degree programmes in Linguistics (an abridged and adapted version of the United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's benchmark statement for linguistics)

Therefore, master's degree in linguistics seeks to prepare a modern researcher linguist who is able to skillfully employ knowledge of the essence and specifics of linguistics and its branches, address relevant linguistic problems and discover effective methods and approaches to their optimal solution.

Doctoral degrees in linguistics are characterized by a clear tendency toward preparing a scholar linguist who is ready to justify scientific theories of linguistics,

introduce them into scientific discourse and develop relevant objective argumentation (see Table 3).

Table 3

The structure and content of knowledge, skills and competences of graduates with a PhD degree in linguistics

<i>Graduates with a PhD in linguistics should be able to acquire the following knowledge, skills and competences</i>
Knowledge
1. To demonstrate highly specialized knowledge of linguistics.
Skills
1. To develop concepts and conduct comprehensive linguistic research.
2. To write and present one's findings to the target scientific audience.
3. To provide clear, convincing and scientifically justified arguments during scientific disputes.
4. To address relevant and scientifically important problems in the field of linguistics.
5. To use scientific terminology in professional communication.
Competences
1. Ability to think originally in the context of linguistics.
2. Ability to generate and recognize key achievements in the field of linguistics.
3. Readiness to promote original linguistic ideas to the target audience.

Source: Tuning project. (2012). Reference points for the design and delivery of degree programmes in Linguistics (an abridged and adapted version of the United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's benchmark statement for linguistics)

It must be noted that despite certain conventionality of the British education system its innovation is rooted in the development of conceptual thinking in future scholar linguists through the motivation to generate original scientific linguistic

ideas. Therefore, the very motivation is as a key concept in the process of professional training of graduates with a PhD in linguistics. The latter are eager to demonstrate their ability to think scientifically and generate meaningful linguistic ideas since their achievements are highly appreciated. This enables them to promote their own scientific portfolio, participate in leading international conferences on linguistics and develop the potential of linguistics globally.

DISCUSSION

In the UK, competency-based approach to professional training of linguists is based on such principles as fundamentalization, continuity, priority of scientific achievements and promotion of professional image.

Within the current research, it is also vital to analyze the experience of British universities in introducing special modules aimed at familiarizing future linguists with the specifics of professional competencies on the example of the University of Westminster.

The University offers the module titled “Developing career competences for linguists” at the undergraduate level. This module is practical in nature. At the beginning of the study, linguistics students familiarize themselves with the basics of web design. They need these skills to create web pages that will promote their own career portfolios. It helps to develop self-criticism skills (University of Westminster, 2014).

Innovation lies in introducing tasks that involve virtual promotion of their own (fictitious) companies. Students should develop the conceptions of these companies and promote them in new markets. To do this, they must study in detail the market of the country whose language they learn. Subsequently, they develop theoretical materials in this very language, which should be used to attract potential customers. In this way, future linguists learn to apply intercultural communication skills. In addition, they develop networking skills, that is social and professional activities aimed at solving business issues quickly and effectively by means of maintaining various contacts.

Such modules are extremely useful for professional activities of future linguists. First, they help them to develop skills not only in using virtual environment but also in a very specific aspect – web design. Future linguists learn to design their own projects, justify concepts for them, promote them in the labour market, analyze the needs of consumers and improve communicative skills. In addition, they develop their own business skills including intercultural communication and networking skills.

Specific attention should be paid to practical value of such modules. Generic competences include the ability to speak foreign languages, which highlights both theoretical and practical nature of linguistics. Given that British degrees in linguistics are specifically oriented towards the needs of the labour market, future linguists learn to develop knowledge and skills of traditional linguistic levels and promote foreign language skills.

The UK universities are focused on the needs of the labour market, systematically conduct surveys among employers, students and university teaching staff to single out the most sought after skills and abilities in professional activities of linguists. The authors of the research believe that such an approach should be applied in the global context since it can significantly improve career prospects of future linguists. Considerable attention should be paid to the practice of implementing career modules with information and methodological support of degrees in linguistics. During lectures, practical classes, workshops and seminars linguistics students receive practical recommendations from the representatives of career departments, which function at universities, related to searching for placements, improving employment opportunities.

University teaching staff provide linguistics students with information by means of virtual learning environment, run online blogs, give recommendations and advice. This approach is also extremely effective since it helps students to develop communication skills due to information technologies in the context of professional communication. University teachers, in turn, are able to effectively monitor

achievements of linguistics students, timely detect errors in real time, adhere to subordination and ethics of communication in virtual environment.

One of the attempts to solve a set of problems related to improving the quality of future linguists' professional training is the demand for maximum activation of academic and scientific mobility proclaimed in the Bologna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area, which is currently the leading trend in the development of education systems. Over the past years, many countries have attempted to intensify both external and internal academic mobility (the introduction of the credit-module system into the organization of the education process; the introduction of a European type diploma supplement; the increased university autonomy in developing curricula; the implementation of students' right to form their own individual educational trajectory due to optional courses, etc.). However, the lack of both legal framework and mechanisms for funding the infrastructure of international exchanges makes it impossible to develop the system of academic mobility for future linguists. Therefore, it is necessary to create legal support for academic mobility of future linguists and introduce a system of university and individual grants for its provision globally. It is also crucial to create the infrastructure for adaptation, counselling, social and cultural support of foreign linguistics students since it can positively affect the cooperation between universities worldwide.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the UK is a leading European country that systematically develops techniques for improving professional training of various specialists. The introduction of competency-based approach to professional training in the 1980s was an impetus for a qualitative change in the paradigm of professional training of various specialists, which, in turn, marked the beginning of developing a modern person able to critically think and skillfully apply the acquired professional knowledge, abilities and skills.

Therefore, competency-based approach to professional training of linguists in the UK is characterized by innovation, originality, continuity, scientificity,

connection between knowledge, skills and competences at the first, second and third cycles of higher education. The Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics reflects the advanced nature of the interaction between universities and employers, university teaching staff and students, employers and students. The process of developing generic and subject specific competences in future linguists is based on the innovative forms, methods and technologies of teaching.

The proposed solutions in discussion section can rather enrich the system of professional training of linguists in the global context since they cover the most relevant areas to be addressed by stakeholders. Special attention should be also paid to the idea of benchmarking. As an example of the UK Quality Assurance Agency, the current research illustrates the use of educational benchmarking, in particular in higher education. Thus, the Agency has developed standardized descriptions of subject areas that are of a purely advisory nature. The authors of the research believe that this is their main advantage, since universities reserve the right to develop degree programmes according to their own defined educational trajectory. Degrees developed under the guidance of delegated experts, in particular representatives of Quality Assurance Agencies, university representatives and employers, may become success since they take into account the general needs of universities and, most importantly, the needs of the labour market.

The current research suggests that the aforementioned positive aspects of the UK experience in applying competency-based approach to professional training of specialists, in particular linguists, can be used by working groups to improve the process of future linguists' professional training in higher education institutions worldwide.

However, the conducted research does not reveal all the aspects of the problem. Therefore, further research should attempt to study foreign experience, in particular the leading European countries (Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands), in applying competency-based approach to professional training of linguists.

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