



A different angle

One of the most interesting things about returning to study is the opportunity to see familiar things from a different point of view, and understanding them in a different way.

Recently on my SLT course I have heard theories of language learning explained by a psychologist (rather than a linguist) and had an update on Grice's maxims, 30 years after first meeting them. They were the same ideas I had heard before, but this time from different perspectives.

Phonetics was the biggest eye-opener, though. I had hoped that this part of the course would be relatively straightforward, since I've been teaching English sounds for 30 years now. What I have realised, though, is that English teachers tend to describe and demonstrate the target sounds, and provide opportunities to practice them. SLTs have to work out what the hidden barriers are that might prevent people from producing them, and then figure out how to help overcome those barriers. Same sounds – different approach.

So if you're planning a course, or designing materials, let me encourage you to regularly take students back over familiar ground, perhaps via a different route. When we revisit material in different contexts, we notice different aspects of it, and make new connections with what we already know. That allows students who didn't quite get it the first time to have another go - and those who did get it will develop a deeper understanding of the topic. Everybody wins 😊