

# Teaching Languages and Cultures

Developing Competencies,  
Re-thinking Practices

Edited by  
Nina Lazarević,  
Tatjana Paunović and  
Ljiljana Marković

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ..... ix

## **Part I – Teacher Education**

Using Lesson Study as a Developmental Tool in Initial Teacher Education with English as a Foreign Language Student Teachers ..... 3  
*Deborah L. S. Larssen and Ion Drew, Norway*

Integrated Performance Assessment: Assessment for Learning ..... 19  
*Nina Lazarević, Serbia*

EFL Teachers' Feedback on their Students' Writing in the Greek Context ..... 43  
*Lydia Mitits, Greece*

How to Motivate Students to Talk about their Emotions: A Linguistic Approach ..... 63  
*Freiderikos Valetopoulos, France*

Teaching Communication Skills to EFL Teachers ..... 79  
*Tatjana Paunović, Serbia*

## **Part II – Language Skills**

The Use of Listening, Speaking and Vocabulary Strategies among EFL Learners: A Quantitative Analysis..... 105  
*Biljana Radić-Bojanić and Jagoda Topalov, Serbia*

Lexical Guessing in Context during Reading Comprehension: A Case Study of EFL Learners..... 123  
*Brikena Xhaferi, FYR Macedonia*

A Comparison of Teachers' Perceptions of English Reading Instruction and Best Practice in Norwegian Primary Schools using Different Reading Approaches..... 141  
*Rebecca Charboneau Stuvland, Norway*

**Part III – ICC**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Fostering Intercultural Competence through Process Drama<br>in EFL Teacher Education..... | 163 |
| <i>Silje Normand and Milica Savić, Norway</i>   |     |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Fostering Intercultural Competence: Cultural Resources in “På Vei” –<br>Textbook for Learning Norwegian ..... | 187 |
| <i>Sofija Christensen, Norway</i>   |     |

**Part IV – ESP**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Tuning-in: Re-thinking an ESP Methodology Course in the Digital<br>Age ..... | 213 |
| <i>Maria Y. Kopylovskaya, Russia</i>   |     |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Error Analysis: Its Usefulness to Students and Teachers ..... | 237 |
| <i>Jelica Tošić, Serbia</i>                                   |     |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Developing Lexical Competence in ESP through Explicit and Implicit<br>Vocabulary Instruction ..... | 255 |
| <i>Maja Stanojević Gocić, Serbia</i>   |     |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Reading in a Foreign Language: Students’ Evaluation of EFL Classroom<br>Reading Activities in a Higher Education Setting ..... | 271 |
| <i>Milevica Bojović, Serbia</i>  |     |

**Part V – Different Languages, Different Contexts**

|                                    |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Slavic L1 vs. Finno-Ugric L2 ..... | 295 |
| <i>Edit G. Bogár, Hungary</i>      |     |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| The Contributions of Argumentation Theory to the Teaching of Spanish<br>as a Foreign Language ..... | 311 |
| <i>Liliana Karina Alanís Flores, Spain</i>  |     |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Reinventing South Slavic Philology? Border Studies and the Balkans<br>in Berlin..... | 329 |
| <i>Christian Voss, Germany</i>   |     |

Teaching Languages and Cultures:  
Developing Competencies, Re-thinking Practices

vii

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Commentary: Language Learning in the Context of International Student Exchange—How Much Time does a Student Need to Master the Language of the Host Country? ..... | 343 |
| <i>Dunja Živanović, Serbia</i>   |     |
| Contributors.....  | 349 |
| Index.....   | 357 |





# INTRODUCTION

The series of *Teaching Languages and Cultures* international conferences was started with the aim to contribute to keeping alive a long and fruitful tradition of applied linguistic research in the Balkan region. It brings together academics, scholars, researchers and practitioners in applied linguistics and language and culture teaching methodology, as well as experienced and novice language teachers of different backgrounds and from different educational contexts. The changes in the globalized world, the creation of job opportunities that were not even present a few years ago, and the increased mobility of people and information all set difficult tasks for both practitioners and researchers of language and culture: how to best prepare learners for such fast-changing environments, what competences to develop, and how to adapt the latest theoretical and empirical findings for practical classroom practices. These questions remain important as the friction between the contrasting views on the validity of the research and its application in practice (Medgyes 2017; Paran 2017) has not been reduced.

*Teaching Languages and Cultures in the Post-Method Era: Developing Competencies, Re-thinking Practices* is a volume comprising eighteen contributions by authors from different linguistic, academic, and theoretical backgrounds and from eight different countries: France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia, Norway, Russia, and Serbia. As a selection of papers, it represents just a snapshot of the inspiring discussions conducted within the second one in the series of international conferences organized and hosted by the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia.

Conceived as a meeting point of diverse perspectives in language and culture teaching worldwide, this volume brings forward topics of interest for language teaching as well as teacher education. These range from different aspects of foreign language instruction, over language skills and learning strategies, to issues of teaching and learning foreign languages in professional contexts, and the role of intercultural competence in language teaching and teacher education, that is, the importance of sociolinguistic and socio-cultural contexts for the study of specific languages.

In addition to this variety of topics, the volume also offers research findings and insights concerning teaching foreign languages other than English, as well as sundry descriptive displays and very different theoretical

approaches, thus reflecting the devotion of the *Teaching Languages and Cultures* conferences to the promotion of diversity and the recognition of substantially varied perspectives and contexts in language and culture teaching today.

\*\*\*

The eighteen contributions in this collection are organized into five chapters. The five papers grouped in the first section of the book, titled *Teacher education*, focus on several issues relevant for pre-service teacher training and development.

In their discussion of Lesson Study, **Deborah Larssen** and **Ion Drew** describe the implementation of this developmental tool in EFL teacher education, and highlight its positive outcomes in pre-service teacher development, as it enhances the quality of the teaching practice experience for the student teachers. In addition, it transpires that Lesson Study contributes to the professional development of the supervising teachers.

**Nina Lazarević** describes a study conducted with EFL teachers, involving the possibilities of applying Integrated performance assessment to strengthen the assessment process and the teaching practice as a whole. Her results show that teachers most often assess speaking over other skills, and that there is room for diversifying the testing techniques, with a heavier focus on integrated skills and formative assessment.

Discussing EFL teachers' feedback on students' writing, **Lydia Mitits** presents a study of teachers' views on the importance of error feedback and the factors that may influence it. She points out that the majority of teachers offer only content-based feedback and do not mark errors selectively, contrary to what is recommended in the literature.

Motivating students to talk about their emotions is discussed by **Feiderikos Valetopoulos**, from the perspective of the process of vocabulary teaching and learning. The findings of his study show that lexical variation was very limited in the task that asked the students to describe their happiest moment, and the author concludes that this may be the result of L1 influence, due to different conceptualizations of emotions.

In the last paper of this section, **Tatjana Paunović** analyses the curriculum for higher EFL teacher education at a Serbian state-funded university, and presents the findings of a study in which students were asked to reflect on and analyse the development of their communicative skills during their BA studies. She concludes that specific communicative skills, although often emphasised as central in both EFL teaching and teacher education, are neither explicitly stated as aims and outcomes nor included in the content of specific courses in pre-service teacher

education. She concludes that students' awareness of all the relevant aspects of communication skills and strategies should be raised.

**Part two** of the book presents papers focusing on *Language skills*.

**Biljana Radić-Bojanić** and **Jagoda Topalov** investigate the use of listening, speaking and vocabulary learning strategies in first-year English Department students. The authors point out that the students who are more successful in their interaction in the target language also tend to use listening and speaking strategies more frequently, employing a strategic approach when they learn, review, and recall new vocabulary.

The use of context to discover the meaning of unknown words while reading, i.e. lexical guessing, or the use of inferencing strategies is investigated by **Brikena Xhaferi**, with intermediate-level EFL learners. The author also discusses the positive attitudes students express towards vocabulary learning, and their success in using contextual clues, word features, general word knowledge and intrinsic clues as different vocabulary strategies.

Lastly, **Rebecca Charboneau Stuvland** discusses the increased expectations in EFL teaching, especially regarding the reading competence, introduced with the implementation of the *Knowledge Promotion curriculum* in Norway. She presents the findings of a qualitative study in which primary-school teachers using different approaches to reading instruction were interviewed about their use of materials, reading practices, grouping methods, learning aims, and views on reading instruction.

The **third section** of the volume is devoted to *Intercultural Communicative Competence* (ICC) and its role in the EFL classroom and EFL teacher education.

**Silje Normand** and **Milica Savić** focus on the use of process drama in teacher education, aimed at increasing prospective teachers' intercultural competence. The authors present a case study of implementing an 8-hour process drama project, focusing on two components of intercultural competence—developing empathy and multiperspectivity. The authors emphasise that the participants found the dramatic embodiment valuable for both their affective response and for a deeper reflection on the feelings of others.

With regard to fostering intercultural competence, **Sofija Christensen** discusses cultural resources incorporated in a textbook for Norwegian as a second language, and the role of these resources as mediators in the process of developing students' intercultural competence. The author does not focus only on the elements of the Norwegian society, lifestyles and values that are selected and presented in the textbook, but rather on the

ways in which the textbook uses the materials for the purpose of developing learners' intercultural competence.

**Part four** of the volume, titled *ESP*, is devoted to issues of teaching foreign languages for professional use.

This section opens with **Maria Kopylovskaya's** proposal of a new ESP methodology course in higher education, stressing the new demands placed on this field by the introduction of the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. She shows that ESP teachers need to use digital tools not only in the process of teaching but in the design of their teaching and assessment of its efficiency.

Error analysis as a teaching tool in ESP is discussed by **Jelica Tošić**, who presents the findings of her study of students' errors in a selection of ESP language tests, and highlights the ways in which this analysis could be used to improve the teaching process.

Explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction in developing ESP students' lexical competence is dealt with by **Maja Stanojević Gocić**. Her study compares the results of two groups of students, one employing implicit and the other explicit vocabulary instruction techniques. The findings show that implicit vocabulary instruction has proved much more effective for the students' long-term vocabulary retention.

Finally, **Milevica Bojović** explores ESP students' views on classroom reading activities. The results of her quantitative study show some gender differences in students' evaluations of their previous experience in reading and reading-comprehension activities, while the frequency of testing reading skills has proved to have a positive effect on the students' self-confidence in reading.

In **Part Five** of the volume, titled *Different languages, different contexts*, four authors discuss issues related to language research, teaching and learning from the perspectives of different foreign languages and various mother tongues.

Investigating the influence of a Slavic mother tongue on the process of learning a Finno-Ugric foreign language, **Edit Bogár** analyses potential problems for students at all the levels of linguistic structure, pointing out that teachers' practices must take into account these systemic differences. The author concludes that student motivation is crucial in the language learning process.

The possibilities offered by the Argumentation Theory in the context of teaching Spanish as a foreign language are discussed by **Liliana Karina Alanís Flores**. She describes the potential for using some aspects of the theory in the classroom, particularly some important concepts such

as topoi, modifiers and connectors through which students can understand and use the new language for effective communication.

**Christian Voss** discusses the study of Slavic Philology at the Humboldt University in Berlin, focusing on Border Studies and the Balkans. Setting off from the description of the current situation in the Slavic studies and their relevant socio-political, historical and cultural context, the author emphasises the importance of the constructivist notion of the *border*, concluding that the relation between symbolic and territorial, topographic and topologic processes of border drawing requires interdisciplinary, comparative and intersectional research approaches.

The last contribution explores the process of language learning in the context of high school student international mobility. **Dunja Živanović** explores the timeframe within which a student can master the language of the host country, and stresses the importance of the complex factors and circumstances in which the process takes place.

\* \* \*

*Teaching Languages and Cultures in the Post-Method Era: Developing Competencies, Re-thinking Practices* hopes to communicate to a wide audience of scholars and researchers as well as classroom practitioners. The questions raised and research findings offered by the contributors are undoubtedly of interest to a wide array of professionals in the fields of linguistics, applied linguistics, intercultural competence, and foreign language teaching, as well as to prospective language and culture teachers, MA and PhD students. We therefore thank the authors for their insights and efforts to add to the exploration of the important questions in language and culture teaching.

In the belief that the academic network needs to be as dynamic as the pace of the modern, changing world, *TLC* conferences and publications like this one aim to provide a forum for authentic and novel discussions, to encourage researchers to conduct studies with the teaching component in mind, and to invite researchers and practitioners to jointly consider how to implement the research findings in daily classroom practices, thus contributing to bridging the ever-present gap between theory and practice.

Editors  
September, 2017

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**PART I –**  
**TEACHER EDUCATION**





# USING LESSON STUDY AS A DEVELOPMENTAL TOOL IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION WITH ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENT TEACHERS

DEBORAH L. S. LARSEN AND ION DREW

## Outline

This paper reports on how Lesson Study (LS) has been used and researched as a supporting tool in EFL teacher education at the University of Stavanger. LS has been a compulsory part of EFL teacher education courses at the University of Stavanger since 2012. All EFL student teachers are required to carry out a LS project during their group teaching practice and to write a follow-up report that includes reflective notes and a presentation to their peers. Data collected over the last four years has included recordings of supervision sessions, video-recorded lessons, focus group interviews, LS reports and student reflection notes. These were analysed using two types of content analysis: the first was where the categories emerged from the text (Krippendorf 2013), while the second used a predesigned rubric adapted from Cochran-Smith et al. (2009). The experiences and research on LS in EFL teacher education at the University of Stavanger show that, while it is challenging and demanding, the student teachers nevertheless acknowledge that it makes a positive contribution to their professional teacher development. The implications are that there are clear benefits of using LS as a supporting tool in EFL teacher education.

**Key words:** Lesson Study (LS), English as a foreign language (EFL), EFL teacher education, teaching practice.

## Introduction

This article discusses the use of Lesson Study (LS) as a developmental tool in English as a foreign language (EFL) initial teacher education at the University of Stavanger (UiS). Tsui and Law (2007, 1294) define LS as

the “systematic investigation of classroom pedagogy conducted collectively by a group of teachers/students, with the aim of improving the quality of teaching and learning.” Firstly, the article describes the origin and nature of LS, followed by a brief overview of LS research. Secondly, it explains how LS has been implemented as a compulsory component during EFL student teachers’ teaching practice at UiS. Thirdly, it provides an overview of research carried out at UiS on the implementation of LS in initial EFL teacher education. Finally, it discusses the implications of practising LS as a compulsory part of this education.

### **An historical overview of Lesson Study**

The precursor to research lessons in LS was known as “object lessons”, namely lessons in focus (Makinae 2010). The idea of object lessons first came about during the Meiji era in Japan (1868–1912) as a tool to support the introduction of western arithmetic with Arabic numbers and calculations based on decimals. During this period of transition, pre-service teachers were trained to use the new arithmetical systems and methods before being sent out to elementary practice schools with pre-planned object lessons that they performed together with the local staff (Makinae 2010). Fellow student teachers were encouraged to review the lesson plans, observe the teaching and subsequently to critically assess the lesson against four main points: content, method, teacher and children.

The success of this early model for student teachers led to its wide-scale adoption by many local boards of education in Japan in the 1900s and an expansion of its role from pre-service to in-service professional development (Makinae 2010). Its gradual change into what is now recognized as Lesson Study is firmly established as one of the most common components of continuing professional development currently practised in Japan (Stigler & Hiebert 1999).

### **The nature of Lesson Study**

Lesson Study is normally practised by groups of in-service teachers or, as is increasingly common, by student teachers in initial teacher education. LS is investigative, cyclical in nature and grounded in what takes place in the classroom (Munthe, Helgevold & Bjuland 2015). Starting from a classroom challenge or innovation, and in connection with a learning aim, a research focus is identified and expressed through a research question (Dudley 2015). A number of “research pupils” are chosen from the class in question based on consideration of their suitability to yield data from

lesson observations and post-lesson interviews that may help to answer the research question. The group then plans a research lesson and, in addition, predicts what learning behaviours and outcomes may be expected from the chosen research pupils. During the teaching of the lesson, these pupils are closely observed and interviewed afterwards. This data, together with the experiences of the teacher and the group's predictions are then discussed and improvements are made to the research lesson as a conclusion of these discussions. This refined lesson is then re-taught to a similar but different class. A final debrief follows, as shown in Figure 1:

**Figure 1:** A Lesson Study cycle



## Research on LS

In an overview of LS articles, Xu and Pedder (2015) identified 67 articles connected to LS, published between 2002 and 2013. They noted that the first recognizable article on LS was written by Fernandez (2002). LS publications had previously tended to be introductory in nature, often discussing its potential. Between 2002 and 2007, 17 articles were published reporting empirical research on LS, with the number increasing

to 50 by 2013. The increase in the number of articles in this period reflected the global growth of LS.

Hu and Pedder (2015) pointed out that the earlier articles tended to be written in North America and Asia, although more articles had recently been published in Europe and Africa. These reviewed articles showed that LS was practised in all formal educational settings from pre-school to university, with the majority of the research focusing on primary/secondary schools and within initial teacher education. In relation to subject focus, the majority of the articles tended to concern LS in Mathematics and Science. However, some recent articles had focused on other subjects, such as EFL, literacy, economics, and business studies.

Hu and Pedder (2015) also identified four main categories of research foci in the LS articles. Firstly, there was a focus on the benefits and constraints that influenced LS in the various research contexts. Secondly, there was a focus on the way that LS was used by teachers and teacher educators to investigate specific aspects of teaching and learning. Thirdly, there was a more in-depth focus on understanding the deeper processes of professional learning and classroom practice. Finally, there was a focus on the contextual factors that influenced the success or failure of LS, with indications of how the method could best be implemented and sustained within a programme of study. The first three categories are especially relevant to the LS research on EFL reviewed later in this article.

## **An intercultural perspective on school reform, teacher education and professional development**

Unlike western nations, who view teachers as fully qualified when they finish university or college, teachers in Japan accept that they may never be fully qualified and, as a part of their job description, they are expected to undertake continuous professional development whilst at work (Stigler & Hiebert 1999). Although teachers in Norway are also allocated time for such professional development, it is the individual teacher who decides how this time should be spent rather than it being the responsibility of school heads to organise.

This difference in the way professional development is viewed in countries such as Norway and Japan impacts the opportunities there are for school innovation and reform. In Japan, educational improvement tends to be school-based and led by responsible professional practitioner teachers who have the knowledge and tools available to them to conduct classroom-based research (Stigler & Hiebert 1999). In Norway, in contrast, school reforms have tended to come from top-down initiatives

from the Department of Education, which teachers may find as burdensome and thus only partially implement (Møller & Skredmo 2013). However, studies such as those undertaken by Stigler and Hiebert (1999), which clearly show cultural differences in approaches to education and classroom teaching between countries, have meant that there is an increasing global interest in methods of teaching reform and improvement from countries such as Japan. LS is one such method and is increasingly considered as one of the tools that may facilitate improved teaching and subsequent learning as it “allows teachers to transform the way they teach the children they are teaching now in the lessons that they are teaching now” (Dudley 2015, 4). As Stigler and Hiebert (1999, 111) note:

The premise behind LS is simple: If you want to improve teaching, the most effective place to do so is in the context of a classroom lesson. The challenge now becomes that of identifying the kinds of changes that will improve pupil learning in the classroom and, once the changes are identified, of sharing this knowledge with other teachers who face similar problems, or share learning goals, in the classroom.

## **Students as researchers in teacher education in Norway**

As noted earlier, the Ministry of Education in Norway is often the driving force behind many of the educational changes undertaken in the country. One such change can be seen in the Guidelines for Teacher Education (2010), which state that:

All teacher education programmes in Norway must be organised so that they promote the integration of theory and practice training, academic progression, consistent professional orientation and a research basis... The teacher education programmes must be research-based. All school subjects and subjects relevant for work in schools must be anchored in an active research environment if the objective of being totally research-based is to be achieved.

These guidelines are clearly intended to support the development of research knowledge amongst student teachers and to provide them with the tools to continue researching within their own contexts and classroom settings once they are fully qualified. By continuously reviewing their practice, it is hoped that future teachers will become more innovative and responsive to their pupils' needs.

The facilitation of such guidelines has led to LS pilot studies at UiS, both as a professional development tool for practising teachers in the nearby municipality of Bomlø (Munthe, Baugstø & Haldorsen 2013), and as a teacher education tool in subjects such as Mathematics, Natural

Sciences, English as a Foreign Language, and Sports Science (Helgevold, Njæsheim-Bjørkvik & Østrem 2016). As a result of these pilot studies, which showed an increase in the focus on pupil learning and supported the development of improved teaching methods amongst both professional and student teachers, the EFL, Mathematics and Sport Science departments have implemented LS as an integral part of their BA and MA programmes at UiS. For the EFL department, LS takes place in the student teachers' fifth semester of their Bachelor of Education and is a compulsory component.

### **The Lesson Study cycle at UiS**

Dudley (2015, 5) notes that LS is a deceptively simple sequence of collaborative reflective practices that can be undertaken by any small group of teachers. It requires no technology or prior experience and can be adapted to many different contexts. In fact, the very adaptability of LS may be a problem if it loses key elements, such as rigorous clinical reflection, in an attempt to make it easier and less time-consuming to undertake.

Bearing this in mind, the LS cycle developed at UiS builds on a traditional LS model as described by Dudley (2015) and Stigler and Hiebert (1999), and starts with an introduction of the theme "Research in the English language classroom". Here students discuss their previous experiences of conducting research and the LS model is presented to them and consequently discussed. A LS guide has evolved over the last six years of practising the method within the department. This guide emerged as a consequence of employing many of the core questions used in Science subjects (Loughran, Berry & Mulhall 2006), together with supportive materials published online by Dudley (2014). However, in time it has been strongly influenced by comments made by the student teachers and their supervising teachers following the completion of the LS projects. This guide acts as a scaffolding for first-time LS participants, guiding them through the project step-by-step, asking critical questions, and offering rubrics that they can use at each stage of the process.

This is followed by the student teachers (usually in groups of three to four) visiting their teaching practice school approximately six weeks before practice commences in order to carry out a form of "needs analysis" of their upcoming classes. First, they meet their practice classes and discover the characteristics of their pupils and what technical support the classroom may have (e.g. smartboards, computer access). Their supervising teacher then presents the syllabus, highlighting the learning aims they will teach and providing any course-books they may need to prepare lessons. Finally,

the student teachers attempt to discover, with the help of their supervising teacher, what pre-knowledge the pupils may possess that can help them, or challenges that may prevent the pupils from learning and developing these learning aims and skills.

On returning to the university, the student teachers spend approximately 12 hours of the course and many more hours outside course time, meeting in their groups over the next three weeks. They discuss both on their own and together with their lecturers, deciding what learning challenge they wish to focus on and what is to be their research question. They subsequently design a research lesson, the aim of which is twofold: firstly, it must address both the learning aim for the lesson and, secondly, it must also yield data about the pupils' learning behaviours that may help the student teachers to answer their research question. An example of this from an EFL context could be the challenge of reluctant speakers and may result in a research question in connection with, for example, Readers Theatre, an activity in which groups read aloud a text (Black and Stave 2007). A possible research question could be: Will Readers Theatre, as an activity type, encourage reluctant speakers to participate orally more in the EFL classroom? The learning aim in this case can easily be contained within the Readers Theatre text and the student teachers are essentially testing out a new activity type that they have discovered at the university to see how it may influence pupil participation and subsequent learning. The student teachers receive feedback on this draft plan by the supervising teacher at a meeting organised at the university before the start of teaching practice (normally ten days beforehand) and in supervision sessions once practice has started.

During practice, the student teachers undertake two rounds of their research lessons with two separate but comparable classes. These rounds are highly choreographed in an attempt to signal to the student teachers and their supervising teacher that these are essentially research lessons and different in nature from the normal lessons they may have to teach. Once the supervising teacher has decided that the research lesson is appropriate for the first class, three "research pupils" are chosen to represent the variety of learner types in the classroom. Predictions are then made of the possible learning behaviours and outcomes these research pupils may display during the research lesson. In addition, they design interview questions to ask the research pupils after completion of the lesson that may add extra data to their analysis of the lesson. Finally, the student teachers' roles are determined randomly; one student teacher is chosen to teach the lesson while the others act as close observers. During the lesson, observations of the selected individual pupils take place; the observing student teachers



take notes as to how and in what way the pupils react to the lesson in relation to the predictions made in advance. The role of the supervising teacher is to adopt an *eagle-eyed* view of the classroom as a whole, spotting any behaviour or incidents that may add to the data.

Having taught the lesson and conducted the interviews, the student teachers regroup within 24 hours of the research lesson and debrief. Having reviewed their data, they first reflect over what they have found out about pupil learning and the different learning behaviours they have observed. They then decide what changes need to be made to their research lesson in order to offer more opportunities for learning before teaching it to a second class. The procedure of student teacher roles (i.e. one teacher and others as observers) is the same as before, and research pupils are once again selected and predictions made. After the second lesson has been taught, the group once again reviews their data from both classes and sums up their reflections of the whole LS project, with a particular focus on how their knowledge and understanding of pupil learning has developed. On returning to the university, the student teachers are given guidance on how they should write up their results into a LS report of approximately 8,500 words. They also write an individual reflection note of approximately 1,500 words on their own learning development and the whole group orally presents their project to their peers (25-30 minutes). As this is the final assessment for the course, clear criteria are available so that the student teachers know how they will be evaluated.

## **Research on the implementation of LS at UiS**

This section refers to three research studies in the context of LS in initial EFL teacher education at the institution in question. In order to compare the effects of LS with a normal teaching practice situation for EFL teacher students, the first study focused on student reflections on teaching English during a normal teaching practice period (Larssen & Drew 2014). Focus group interviews lasting between one and one-and-a-half hours were conducted with two groups of student teachers (one group of four and one group of three) to elicit their reflections on EFL teaching both before and after a three-week teaching practice period. The aim was to find out which aspects of their teaching practice the student teachers reflected upon and which factors influenced their reflections during this process.

In the pre-practice interviews, the student teachers' focus was on General Pedagogical Knowledge (GPK) and Pedagogical Content Knowledge

(PCK) (Roberts 1998). Aspects of GPK reflected upon were classroom management, choice of resources and activities, and motivation and assessment. These included premises for dividing the pupils into groups, parent involvement, and determining the pupils' learning styles. Reflections on PCK, i.e. their specific understanding and knowledge of teaching English, included discussions about the use of the target language in the lessons. Little attention was given to the content knowledge of English teaching (Roberts 1998), e.g. the specific topic being taught or the linguistic aim of the lesson.

In the post-practice interviews, reflections on GPK and PCK were still predominant, with little attention devoted to content knowledge of English teaching. In general, the student teachers "...seemed to be more focused on their own roles as teachers and less on their pupils' learning, especially on the development of the pupils' target language." (Larssen & Drew 2014, 168). For example, neither group showed an understanding of why and how the topics they were teaching would enhance the pupils' development of language and communicative skills. It also became apparent that the supervising teacher's focus largely determined the focus of the student teachers' reflections. In the one group, the supervisor had focused on the student teachers' ability to control and motivate the pupils and had paid little attention to the subject of English itself. In the other group, the supervisor's focus was on how to build a good lesson (Larssen & Drew 2014, 166). In this latter group, the student teachers experienced far more correspondence than in the first group between what they had learned at the university and what they had experienced in practice.

As a comparison to the above study, focus group interviews with two groups of EFL student teachers were again used as a forum for eliciting reflections on teaching practice, both before and after practice, but this time in connection with the use of LS in specific English lessons (Larssen & Drew 2016). One group, consisting of four student teachers, taught a seventh grade class in which the focus of the lesson was on the pupils writing a diary with supporting modelling. The other group, consisting of three pupils, taught a second grade class in which the lesson focused on using a children's picture book.

The post-practice focus group interviews showed that the student teachers reflected on the experience of using LS in their EFL practice in three main ways (Larssen & Drew 2016, 225-226). Firstly, they reflected on the contribution LS had made to the planning and execution of the lesson. They noted the necessity to plan the lesson in depth and, through the observational data and post-lesson interviews with the three selected pupils, they were able to focus on what these pupils had learned. This

input enabled them to modify the lesson so that when taught a second time, they could provide pupils with increased learning opportunities.

Secondly, the student teachers reflected on how LS had contributed to their own development. Their collective responsibility for the lesson had been considered as a strength in the process of their development. During the LS process, they had been able to “reflect on, discuss and be critical of both general classroom issues and subject-specific issues...in the lesson and the choice of appropriate learning activities” (Larssen & Drew 2016, 225). This had increased their self-confidence and made them better teachers.

Finally, the student teachers had reflected on the importance of linking theory to practice. They had been given a good deal of theoretical support at their institution before embarking on their teaching practice. For example, the group reading a children’s picture book had been required to read up on the literature about using children’s books with young EFL learners and had been advised on what to read. The student teachers had emphasized how important this pre-practice support had been for successfully carrying out their LS project, for which they had needed to be thoroughly prepared. In fact, the pre-practice support provided at the institution appeared to be more important than that provided by the supervising teachers during the teaching practice period itself, partly because the supervising teachers were less familiar with LS than the student teachers themselves.

The third and final study addresses how a LS cycle specifically influenced the second grade children’s picture book lesson referred to in the previous study (Larssen & Drew 2015). In this lesson, the student teachers used the picture book *Henry’s Holiday* to teach the theme of “the weather” to the second graders. Authentic children’s picture books had not previously been used with the class in question and the two supervising teachers were initially skeptical about the suitability of using such a book with their class. Data was gathered through video- and audio- recordings of the pre-lesson supervision session, the lesson taught to the first class, the modified lesson taught to another class, and the follow-up supervision session (Larssen & Drew 2015, 96).

In the first lesson, the student teachers appeared to have been influenced by the two supervising teachers’ concerns and, as a consequence, over-scaffolded the lesson by asking too many questions and often recasting questions in the L1. This resulted in a fragmented and relatively long reading experience for the pupils. As a result of the data gathered from researching the three selected pupils in the first lesson, the student teachers asked fewer questions in the second lesson and resorted less to the use of

the L1. The reading of the picture book happened in a more natural and fluent way. In general, the second lesson was more successful than the first. It was interesting to note that the differing starting points of the student teachers and the supervising teachers seemed to converge in the session between the two lessons:

The mentors took on board the students' ideology of using authentic picture books in English, which they would now use themselves with their pupils in future. The students for their part understood the necessity of adopting a more instrumental approach to their teaching. In this way, LS became a developmental tool for both the mentors and the students. (Larssen & Drew 2015, 103)

This LS experience is an example of how reviewing a lesson and teaching the same lesson again in an improved manner is central to the cyclical nature of LS. The focus is on pupil learning, while per se enhancing the quality of teaching.

## Implications

This section addresses the implications of the research conducted on the implementation of LS in initial EFL teacher education at UiS, considering its benefits, prerequisites and challenges.

One implication from the research on EFL teaching practice in a normal situation was that the experiences of the different student teachers were extremely variable and seemed to depend to a large extent on the supervision focus during lesson discussions with their supervising teachers. In one case, the supervising teacher stressed factors such as classroom control and the importance of motivating pupils and had little focus on the teaching of English as a school subject. In another case, the supervising teacher was much more focused on the structure and the subsequent teaching of a *good* English lesson. However, neither of these student groups experienced in-depth discussions during their supervision sessions about how best to address the learning aim in relation to English language content knowledge, something that had been focused upon during their courses at the university. There was thus a discrepancy, in this respect, between the student teachers' teaching practice experiences and the underlining focus of their university courses. In addition, the student teachers seemed to be more preoccupied with their own performances as teachers rather than with the effects of their teaching on pupil learning. On the basis of this research, one may conclude that there was room for improvement in the quality of teaching practice experienced by the student

teachers in their EFL education, especially its link between theory and practice.

The two other studies, based on data collected during the LS intervention, revealed that the student teachers experienced teaching practice in a number of ways different from those in the normal practice teaching situation. The implication from both studies was that LS had enhanced the quality of the teaching practice experience for the student teachers involved. During the post-practice focus group interviews, the student teachers reported that a consequence of LS was that they placed greater focus on the pupils themselves and their learning during the research lesson. They felt that this had aided their development and self-confidence as teachers and they had gained more methodological insight into how best to teach EFL. One reason for this was that they were able to make stronger connections between theory and practice during the LS process because of the need to justify their choice of activities during the research lesson. This thus fulfilled the Department of Education's (2010) requirement that theory should be linked to practice and that the subject should be anchored in an active research environment.

In the case where LS had been used to teach a picture book in a second grade class, one was able to gain insight into a complete LS cycle in an EFL context, one that evolved according to the principles and models for such a cycle (Dudley 2015; Stigler & Hiebert 1999). The student teachers moved from a specific learning aim, to researching how best to teach it, to planning and undertaking a research lesson, and then to researching the lesson. On this basis, they were able to re-teach what was subsequently considered to be a more successful lesson. Interestingly, one unexpected benefit of LS in this context was how it was able to contribute to the professional development of the supervising teachers in addition to that of the student teachers.

Although the above-mentioned studies conducted on LS at UiS have been small-scale and involving a small sample of student teachers, the trends from these studies have been confirmed through discussions with and reports written by other student teachers during the same period.

Based on the experiences of implementing LS as a compulsory element in initial EFL teacher education at UiS, the implication is that LS carries with it a number of benefits for EFL student teachers' professional development. Firstly, LS shifts their focus away from their own classroom performance and onto the effects and learning opportunities of that performance on their pupils. This thus helps them to understand the essential nature of teaching, namely to facilitate learning. Secondly, the LS process necessitates student teachers making the link between theory and

practice. This theoretical/practical knowledge is not confined to the university, but is used by the student teachers as topics for discussion in their practice schools. Thirdly, because the group and not the individual is responsible for the planning, teaching and evaluation of the research lesson, this shared responsibility creates a professional space for deeper critical reflection about teaching. Moreover, the group dynamic is not limited to the group, but is likely to have a positive effect on the individual student teacher's development.

However, it is necessary to acknowledge that LS places a number of demands on teacher trainers, school supervisors and, not least, on student teachers. It requires a good deal of time and effort both during courses at the university and also during practice. In the initial planning phase, student teachers require considerable scaffolding from teacher trainers. In addition, for LS to succeed, supervising teachers need both to be trained to work with the student teachers, and also to have the time and motivation to support their efforts during practice. Although the university lecturers can support student teachers during the initial phases of the project, once the student teachers move into the schools, they need to be supported by their supervising teachers. Successful LS projects are usually a consequence of supervising teachers allocating sufficient time and /or being sufficiently motivated to become thoroughly involved in the research. Therefore, supervising teachers also need to have insight into LS in order for student teachers to gain optimal benefits from a practice period including LS.

## Conclusion

In spite of the obvious demands that LS places on those taking part in it, our experiences of the benefits of LS as a compulsory component within initial EFL teacher education have been so positive that it will continue to be practised at our institution in the foreseeable future. Therefore, we strongly recommend that other institutions consider the potential for teacher development it has to offer in initial teacher education and beyond.

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# INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT: ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING<sup>1</sup>

NINA LAZAREVIĆ

## Outline

After a short summary of testing practices, the paper firstly looks into the current views on testing and assessment in English language teaching in Serbia in terms of teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment and available professional support. Secondly, the paper aims to introduce an alternative approach to assessment in the form of the Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) that has been used in the United States for several decades with considerable success. The results of a small-scale study done with English language teachers are used to look into the current practices and to point to particular elements that might be strengthened by the application of the IPA. The survey that sixteen teachers filled in online showed that teachers integrated skills when doing assessment, even if these were not equally included in teaching, that alternative assessment is sporadically present, and that the input students get is lacking in authentic material. It is discussed how for all these elements teachers might use the IPA to improve the teaching practice.

**Key words:** assessment in EFL, formative assessment, integrated assessment, teacher beliefs.

## Introduction

Teaching, learning, and assessment in language teaching have always been interdependent, but at the same time, students and, sometimes,

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teachers too, see them as separate, stand-alone segments of the educational process. Assessment should serve the purpose of supporting learning (Black & Wiliam 2006) but is oftentimes seen as a final, unchangeable element in the process of teaching and learning. This might be a left-over from the structural language syllabuses and discrete-point testing that characterized more traditional approaches to teaching. With flipped-classroom and learner-centered learning it would be expected that assessment would replicate these tendencies – be more integrated with learning and done to help learners develop and become independent. However, not much has changed in the form of EFL assessment – at least in the local context. Many teacher training seminars offered locally testify to the fact that assessment is a very important issue; still, the most important question why we assess learners is seldom addressed. As the review of studies and this small-scale research will show, it is not that teachers do not have competencies and training on both formative and summative assessment, but that the wider goals for assessment are not always clearly stated (Brown 2005).

With more communicative approaches to teaching, evaluation is conceived to be more authentic, more integrated “in both content and purpose” (Clapham 2000, 52). In communicative approaches that focus not on knowledge about but the ability to use language (Hymes 1972) learners are expected to negotiate the meaning, show their skill in interaction, use of different registers, and be creative with language. Assessment applied in communicative teaching should then be less ‘paper and pencil’ and more communicative. Task-based learning and cooperative learning are examples where learners not only perform but at the same time learn from each other and have more opportunities to do self-assessment and peer-assessment.

With this in mind, a logical next step should be insistence on assessing for learning, where learning and assessment are integrated. These days, terms assessment for learning and formative assessment could be seen as used interchangeably, though there is a slight difference. Formative assessment has been in use since Scriven’s (1967) introduction of the concepts of formative and summative evaluation (Scriven 1967, as cited in Gardner 2006, 2). Formative assessment is sometimes seen as a process of performing a series of ‘smaller’ evaluations, which are then used to provide a final assessment. However, these might not contribute to the students’ learning, which is the main aim in assessment for learning.

Assessment for learning “is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there”

(Assessment Reform Group 2002). Strategies that are used are peer- and self-assessment, and also making the formative use of summative assessment. Teachers might provide a range of assessment tasks and opportunities to make certain that a range of student learning styles are catered for. Also, teachers might work with students on how to perform better in summative assessment by making them understand how they learn. Finally, emphasizing learning that happened in summative assessment rather than just providing results might have beneficial effects on future efforts and achievements of students (Assessment Reform Group 2002).

Another intervention into traditional assessment can be done with alternative (integrative, holistic) assessment which mostly uses project work, work done over a period of time to collect information on progress, give feedback to a learner, and in that way help learning. Essays, portfolios, demonstrations, learner diaries or interviews with teachers show the authentic usage of language and reveal more about a learner's competencies and skills. Alternative assessment techniques are also often used for formative assessment to gather information on what to teach or review in the future stages of a course (Clapham 2000).

It has been recognized that “the current century will demand a very different set of skills and competencies from people in order for them to function effectively at work, as citizens and in their leisure time” (Ananiadou & Claro 2009, 13). Knowledge that is not functional will have little use, and skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, learning to learn, collaboration (Binkley et al. 2012) will be expected. Therefore, with the reform of learning in that direction, assessment should be reconsidered as well. Consequently, teacher education should focus on the interdependence of learning and assessment, insisting more on formative and alternative assessment and assessment for learning.

## **Testing and assessment of the English language in Serbia**

Formative assessment in Serbia has been formally recognized through regulations on assessment for both elementary and high schools. The regulations are nation-wide and set by the Ministry of Education, and together with the national curriculum guide teachers in their practice. There is some room for individual teacher intervention, but teachers need to meet the criteria in the curriculum and regulations in terms of the form and frequency of student assessment. For the elementary level, formative assessment is seen as a regular evaluation of achievements and insight into the behaviour of students during their work on materials. It includes feedback and suggestions for further advancement and is noted in

teachers' records (Regulation on assessment 2013). The form, frequency and other details are not commented on in the book of regulations.

The book of regulations for the high school level provides a similar description, and sees formative assessment as the regular and planned gathering of relevant data on student development, achievement of stated goals and particular level of competencies. Formative assessment should provide feedback for teachers to help create future stages in the learning process and suggestions to students for further advancement. Teachers can give a mark based on the data gathered through formative assessment: data on knowledge, skills, engagement, independence and responsible attitude to work.

Alternative assessment as a way of changing the more traditional practices, and the usual summative assessment as a more dominant approach, have been present in the local context, but to varying degrees on different educational levels. There has not been much research into the exact practices and alternative assessment application, save for peer- or self-assessment. Some work has been done in higher education, exploring how to enable students to become more independent writers through peer assessment (Savić 2010), or to use an e-learning platform to develop academic writing and facilitate peer-assessment (Ljubojević 2014). Teachers and students are found to share the positive attitudes towards the use of peer assessment, seeing it as beneficial for motivation and engagement. There is still some doubt, it seems, about the reliability and eligibility of such assessment (Jerotijevic Tišma 2016) – both teachers and students think that students might not have enough training or credibility to give marks. While these studies have been conducted with adult, university learners, there have not been similar studies in Serbia done with elementary or high school students learning the English language.

Professional development programs offered to teachers include seminars that completely or partially deal with assessment, though not on a regular basis. The trainings and seminars are offered by regional educational institutions: faculties, schools, publishing houses, centers for educational support, and they are carried out by teaching staff and Ministry consultants. All seminars have to be approved by the National institute for education (ZUOV) and are then recognized by the Ministry of Education. Even though many of the seminars and trainings include the component of assessment, they are not specifically focused on this topic, nor are they available to all teachers. Since seminars are organized in different locations, teachers, due to financial and time constraints, mostly attend those given locally. In the last 6 years, there have been three seminars offered locally to all teachers: the introduction and practice of

formative assessment forms, including the development of motivation and self-confidence of learners, preparing them for self-assessment; development of effective evaluation, testing and portfolios; finally, action research and techniques of self-assessment and peer-assessment. For EFL teachers in particular, there has been one seminar aimed at the creation and application of different forms of evaluation, mostly in terms of alternative assessment: portfolios, projects, individual and group work, and training teachers to provide effective feedback.

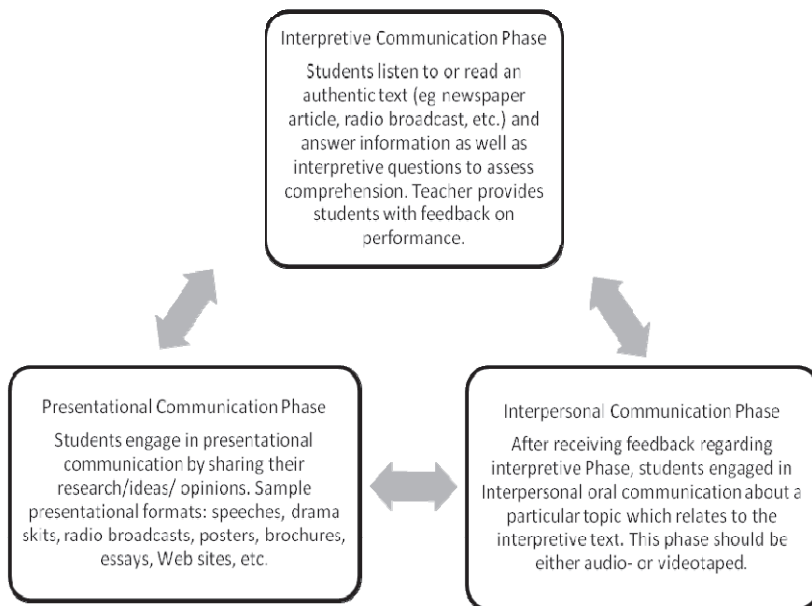
Therefore, it can be said that there is a formal, legal framework for the implementation of alternative and formative assessment, with both teachers and students sharing positive attitudes to it. However, some potential constraints should be taken into consideration when planning the application of alternative and formative assessments, such as the small number of classes – for many students only two 45-minute sessions per week, too extensive a curriculum, a lack of more systemic support for teachers, and not enough training for teachers.

## **Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA)**

Keeping in mind the context and possibilities, the Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) might provide some additional support to teachers as it might give them more freedom with respect to what aspects to highlight, but more importantly, it might be beneficial for students' involvement and their communicative and collaborative skills. The IPA “is a cluster assessment featuring three tasks, each of which reflects one of the three modes of communication—Interpretive, Interpersonal and Presentational” (Adair-Hauck et al. 2015, 24). The three tasks are “aligned within a single theme or content area” (ibid., 25), so that they follow the way in which students naturally acquire and use language in the real world.

Rather than focusing on separate skills, or on receptive and productive skills, the IPA is structured on multi-tasks, assignments which reflect the way people usually communicate with each other, or make sense of the material they read or hear, and finally, try to get their meaning across (Figure 1). With the three modes of communication, learners are expected to initiate, maintain, and sustain the conversation and to actively negotiate the meaning. Next, through written and spoken material, learners need to interpret the meaning, and finally, in the presentational mode, learners are expected to create oral or written messages for particular audiences.

**Figure 1:** A cyclical approach of the Integrated Performance Assessment (adapted from Glisan et al. 2003, 18)



The IPA is based on the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, first released in 1996 and later expanded in 1999 and 2006. They provide “a vision for language learning based on assumptions regarding the role of linguistic and cultural competence in the global community, the circumstances under which learners can be successful in acquiring this competence” (Adair-Hauck et al. 2015, 12). Though the standards cover five goals for language learning (communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, communities), for our context, we will look into communication, in its three modes: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational, as the main emphasis in them is on the context and purpose of communication. Other goals are important for an overall proficiency of learners; however, at this particular time we will give special attention to communication and its assessment as there is the greatest degree of overlap with the language learning standards in Serbia.

One important benefit that the implementation of IPA might bring is the authenticity of assessment tasks. If the students should show functional

knowledge, then instruction and assessment should provide a meaningful context for it. The IPA recognizes a task as authentic if it:

- tests the learner's knowledge and abilities in real-world situations;
- requires judgment and innovation;
- asks the student to "do" the [academic] subject rather than recite information so that the student uses the language in a meaningful way;
- replicates or simulates the contexts in which adults are "tested" in the workplace, in civic life, and in personal life so that students address an actual audience, not just their teacher;
- assesses the student's ability to use a repertoire of knowledge and skill efficiently and effectively to negotiate a complex task; and
- allows appropriate opportunities to rehearse, practice, consult resources, and get feedback, and refine performances and products (Wiggins & McTighe 2005, 154 as cited in Adair-Hauck et al. 2015, 15).

Another important element in the IPA is a 'backward' approach to assessment. While older students might be aware of the criteria they need to meet in order to obtain a specific mark, younger learners might still be unsure of them. Therefore, the IPA starts with what students should accomplish, where students need to understand the criteria for the task they want to master, and then instruction and assessment jointly try to help learners reach that goal. Teachers are advised to start their assessment design by responding to questions such as "Am I assessing performance using standards based and real-world tasks that are meaningful to students?" "Am I assessing the same way that the students are learning?" "Are the students able to demonstrate survival skills in the target language?" "How can I move beyond isolated, single skills assessment?" "How can I more effectively assess the interpretive skills of my students?" (Adair-Hauck et al. 2006, 365).

In order for learners to finish a task, they need to work through all three modes of communication: and the integrative nature of the approach is recognized in the way learners usually acquire and use language outside the classroom. The input learners get, either oral or written, will be an incentive for their productive skills. In other words, the interpretive mode "affords learners the opportunity to gain critical content or knowledge of the theme" (Adair-Hauck et al. 2015, 26). This content will provide opportunities to learners to interact interpersonally (e.g., discussing pro/cons or sending email messages to inquire about a particular issue).



Finally, the presentational mode enables learners to express their views either in writing or orally.

Teachers already use these elements, and in any communicative classroom these elements will be recognized – the authentic input, meaningful communication, and negotiation of meaning among other aspects. Tasks that are usually done through the IPA are similar to task-based instruction tasks or project work, where students need to negotiate the meaning either of the text or between their peers in order to achieve a particular goal. However, what the IPA might strengthen is the topicality and cyclical feedback for students, as a form of continuous formative assessment, as students work on smaller chunks and build their competence and skill to finish the main task. In the IPA students also interact and work on authentic input, and with the interdependence of the three modes, learners have to be on task and engaged, as they work both on material and with other learners.

When teachers follow and assess learners' work, criteria that they employ are stated separately for each of the modes of communication. Therefore, in interpretative tasks, it is expected that the learner shows both literal and interpretive comprehension. For the former, word recognition, main idea detection, supporting detail detection are assessed, and for the latter organizational features, guessing meaning from context, inferences, author's perspective, cultural perspective. Interpersonal and presentational modes are assessed on similar elements: language function, text type, comprehensibility, language control. However, for the interpersonal mode, it is important what communication strategies learners use (when there is a breakdown in communication, for example), and in the presentational mode the comprehensibility of learners (who can understand the learner's language – only sympathetic interlocutors used to the language of non-natives or a native speaker unaccustomed to the speaking/writing of non-natives?)<sup>2</sup>.

Another feature of IPA is that it recognizes three levels of proficiency that might be used in Serbian schools as a form of differentiated instruction. With novice, intermediate and advanced ranges that present different criteria for students, it might be easier for teachers to monitor progress and set particular requirements for individual students.

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<sup>2</sup> More detailed information on the IPA, together with rubrics, guidelines, and can-do statements can be found at <https://www.actfl.org>.

## Present study

In order to see whether teachers use some of the elements of formative assessment and assessment for learning, and whether the introduction of integrated performance assessment might improve the effort of teachers and results of learners, a small-scale study was conducted.

## Methodology

### *The questionnaire*

The survey had 31 questions in the form of an online questionnaire where the teachers were offered multiple-choice questions, while the survey ended with three open-ended questions. The questions investigated how different skills and areas are assessed and whether there was space for integrated skills assessment (see the Appendix). The questionnaire was shared in a closed internet forum for local English language teachers, mostly members of the local English language teachers' association.

### *The participants*

The survey was offered to teachers of different levels and different age groups. There were 16 teachers who filled in and submitted the survey. The sample is not representative, but it is purposeful, as it is composed of those teachers who are active in the local teacher association and showed willingness to do additional professional development. The teachers who took part in the survey were all quite experienced—their experience ranged from 8 to 35 years, with only one teacher who had 2 years of teaching experience and with the average number of years teaching being 15. All teachers but one work in city schools, while three work both in a city and a village school. Seven teachers work in high school or a vocational high school, while the rest are elementary school teachers—all of whom work with younger students (1-4 grades), and 6 of them with middle school students, too (grades 5-8). Finally, all the teachers are females, a fact that represents the make-up of the English language teaching workforce in Serbia, where female teachers still outnumber male ones.

## Results

The questionnaire started with the question to ascertain the number of marks a learner should have in a semester and all the participants were consistent on the answer of four marks. The participants stated that in

addition to the curriculum required tests they would give additional written tests if they saw fit, and were allowed a certain amount of freedom. One teacher mentioned that elementary school learners are tested more frequently, after each unit. The teachers stated that each learner should have a report card on many aspects of a learner's advance (effort, frequency of homework, pop-up test results, changes in their work, etc.).

### *Speaking*

To the question of the oral 'tests', five teachers said they did two oral interviews per semester. While the answers were uniform for the written tests, here the answers were more diverse. One teacher reported that there were not any 'official' oral tests, but that the learners' answers were assessed throughout the year, especially in classes 'dedicated to practicing speaking skills'. Two other teachers said that they would assess speaking every day, or every time students spoke, but they did not provide information as to how they recorded the marks and whether or not they gave feedback to learners. One teacher said that there were two interviews, but that they also included reading and listening and the motivation that learners showed for conversation. Finally, one teacher reported that instead of giving tests, each student who actively participated and was correct got a 'plus' each time a different skill was practiced, and that five such 'pluses' would make up a mark.

The teachers reported using mostly retelling, doing role-plays, and doing dialogues for the speaking assessment. 'Answering grammar questions' was chosen by eight teachers as a means for the assessment of speaking. Finally, eight teachers chose the open category as well, but did not provide any answers to specify what particular activities they had in mind.

### *Listening*

Listening is traditionally included in every class through audiotapes that introduce the lessons. However, it is not a skill that gets a lot of attention when it comes to assessment, which was seen in the answers that the teachers gave. Three elementary school teachers said they did not test listening at all, two reported they gave one grade, and the other four stated that they never gave a grade just for listening, two of them qualifying this answer adding they included listening in the oral performance grade. Two high school teachers reported that they never gave a separate grade for listening, and other two said they gave it rarely. Finally, vocational school teachers either included it in the oral grade, or gave one or two grades.

The elementary school teachers stated that they included the following types of listening activities in their assessment: listen and repeat, listen for

specific information, while half of the elementary school teachers included listen and retell, and a dictation. The results for high school and vocational school teachers were similar: they did listen and retell and listen for specific information, and half of them chose listen for the main idea and writing following the listening task, while only two teachers opted for a dictation.

### ***Reading***

The assessment of reading got similar answers – mostly that learners did not get any individual marks for reading, except for low-proficiency students, or, alternatively, for students in extracurricular drama classes. Two teachers reported giving marks for reading twice in a semester, while one teacher said that students performed role-plays, or read descriptions, and that the teacher monitored the learners' performances and based on them decided on one final mark for reading.

Asked when their learners read out loud, the teachers offered a number of very diverse answers, ranging from those who rarely did it, to the ones where the teachers expected peer feedback for student reading when students were called on to read, or when learners revised a lesson, or when they prepared to act out the text. The teachers also invited learners to read out loud their homework, some interesting facts, and a reading exercise in the lesson. Learners would also read the lesson that they had listened to already, or would read to get familiar with the text.

When asked what particular elements the teachers included in their reading assessment, all the offered options were chosen by more than half of the teachers: reading for general ideas, finding specific information, summarizing, finding main ideas. Although none of the teachers mentioned these in their previous answers, the teachers might have assumed them when reading was done in class.

### ***Writing***

For writing, the teachers mostly chose grammar correctness and vocabulary usage as the most important elements they focused on when assessing writing. Punctuation also got a high number of answers. Again, seven teachers chose the open category without providing concrete activities they did in class.

As for the assessment of writing with younger learners, in elementary school, the teachers chose these as elements they included in their grading: the ideas students expressed, organization, and creativity. The same elements were chosen by the high school teachers, but no one chose planning as the element that could be assessed.

### ***Grammar***

The grammar accuracy of learners was assessed by fill-in-the-blanks and multiple choice exercises, as all the teachers stated, both elementary and vocational/ high school ones. Elementary school teachers also selected true/false exercises as well as asking students to apply a grammar rule as frequently used. It was the same with high school teachers – five out of seven stated they used knowledge about grammar as a way to test grammar. Four teachers included paragraph writing into their grammar assessment – 2 from high school, one from a vocational school and one from elementary school.

### ***Effort***

The teachers reported that the final mark in English was calculated as an average of all the marks a learner got in a semester. However, not all marks weighed in equally when the final mark was calculated, and the teachers provided various answers on this issue. The answers ranged from ‘every answer counts’ to ‘depends on students’ capability, hard work, effort’. The teachers also believed that easier tests had a smaller part in the final mark, and for some speaking skills ‘overweigh grammar and vocabulary tests’. Finally, all the teachers stated that the effort learners showed was included in the final mark, seeing it as an inseparable element of the mark.

### ***Homework***

Half of the teachers graded homework and used it as a part of the final mark for learners, while the other half did not include it in the final mark. Eleven teachers elaborated on their answers, mentioning that they did not mark all homework assignments, only the exceptional ones, or the improvement of the performance of usually poorly performing learners. One of the teachers mentioned that homework might influence the final mark. Conversely, if learners did not do their homework regularly, they would get a lower mark. The teachers also stated that homework provided continuity to learners’ work, that it was important to show regular work, and even that it depended on a student if the homework assignments would be counted in the final mark.

### ***Feedback***

All the teachers who did the survey reported they gave learners feedback, mostly several times in semester, though four teachers stated they gave feedback every week, and another four opted for an open

answer, but did not specify their practices. All the teachers stated that they gave oral feedback and five of them gave written feedback.

### ***Alternative assessment***

#### *Portfolios*

The teachers responded in the majority that they included learners' portfolios in the final mark of students. When asked to elaborate, the teachers mentioned that some learners might be motivated by the project work, that they showed their effort in this way, that the record kept of the learners' activities might influence the final mark. One teacher stated that young learners did not do portfolios, but had classes dedicated to specific topic where it was expected that each learner would do their part. While they would not be given a mark for these activities specifically, the effort the learners showed could influence the final mark.

#### *Projects*

The participants' response on whether they included project work in their assessment showed that the project work was mostly a one-class task: writing essays, doing research about a topic and presenting to the class with a poster or a power point presentation. Only one teacher stated that the learners used certain websites to read stories, make role plays, and play games. Half of the teachers stated they included project work in their final marks, while two teachers reported they did not.

### ***Changes to assessment and evaluation***

The answers to this question were quite diverse, with ten out of 16 teachers answering the question. Two teachers stated they would do away with grades, and another added that grades from 1 to 5 could not show what students actually knew, and that it made students unnecessarily anxious, while one reported that assessment should be standardized and it should comply with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Another teacher acknowledged that 'assessment regarding foreign languages has always been different' from other subjects, while another mentioned that teachers need to focus on functional instead on grammatical aspects of language. Finally, one teacher mentioned the time constraint, which is understandable with teachers having two classes per week.

## **Discussion of results**

The formats of assessment, as well as the frequency of tests are regulated by the Ministry of Education and teachers have to comply with them. However, the realities of the classroom sometimes dictate

modifications, so teachers have some lee-way when it comes to the particular format, time, and frequency of assessment—as they themselves stated in the questionnaire.

The most important finding was that the teachers did not separate skills during assessment, but that they took into consideration different aspects of their students' performance. While in itself that might be a productive approach to teaching where a heavier focus is on integrated skills, some aspects might be changed—for example, testing the knowledge of grammar when testing speaking. Therefore, the teachers recognized that skills could not be clearly delineated when assessment was done; however, they did not insist on skills supporting one another, or tasks being connected. Project work and task-work are heavily based on integrated skill (Stoller 2006 in Dooly & Masats 2011), where students are engaged in authentic language use, and the IPA might be helpful scaffolding for students. The addition that the IPA brings to project work or task-based learning (TBL) would here be an integrated component of continuous assessment and feedback.

Even though assessment practices might be subject to individual school's philosophy, or particular learners' needs and abilities, still, there should be a consistency in terms of expectations set before the students. If a learner knows that each contribution in class counts for something, that might heighten their motivation. At the same time, not knowing exactly what is expected and how the contribution will be assessed might raise anxiety of learners. For example, if some homework assignments are included in the final grade, while some others are not, it is not always clear whether students know in advance which instances of their work will be evaluated. If students know that their final mark is dependent on how well they perform on tests and particular oral interviews, they might not see other classroom engagement as equally important. Finally, though the participants did not comment on this directly, the answers showed that differentiation obviously existed in the classroom, so the three performance levels might be used to make these teacher instruction decisions clearer to students. Sharing these criteria with learners, starting from what they should be able to perform—seeing a model, and then working on smaller tasks in order to achieve it, could help students see the purpose and the end results they need to get. In addition to giving a firmer structure to activities and feedback, these requirements might have a positive influence on learners' awareness of their own learning. The IPA might provide additional clarity of the existing criteria used by the teachers.

One of the important elements of learning is rich input and its authentic application. Unfortunately, the answers received supported the findings that authentic input in the classroom, regardless of its recognized usefulness, is limited (Guariento & Morley 2001)—especially for listening. Therefore, it seems that the skills of reading and listening, although practiced, were not done through authentic material, nor were they presented to students as important elements of their proficiency. Even in the small sample, the answers were almost unanimous to the question on the assessment of these skills. Though some teachers mentioned that they never assessed these separately, they did not state the ways in which they integrated them, or alternatively assessed them. We might conclude that these skills are rarely assessed. Consequently, learners will disregard reading and listening if they are never tested and/or assessed on them, they might not see them as having any importance for them. Integrated assessment could be of a twofold benefit here—learners will have to work with the input in a meaningful way and they will have to use it in order to be able to perform other two modes of communication. Listening will then be integrated with other skills, as an interpretive element of a task which learners will have to actively work on. Secondly, the IPA strongly suggests using authentic material, and with the availability of podcasts, internet resources, interactive platforms, it can be included more easily in teaching material.

The voices against authentic input at lower levels claim that “even with quite simple tasks, unless they have been very carefully selected for lexical and syntactic simplicity and/or content familiarity/predictability, the use of authentic texts may not only prevent the learners from responding in meaningful ways but can also lead them to feel frustrated, confused, and, more importantly, demotivated” (Guariento & Morley 2001, 348). However, the more important concern is that those listening and reading texts are well-executed. Since native speakers mostly listen for gist and general information, and partial comprehension happens in real life, it might follow that full comprehension for learners is less important than strategies that learners will develop in order to do the task. What the IPA might bring into the classroom is a discontinuation of the idea that a text and a task are separate, as “language input and language output usually occur as part of an integrated process of communication” (Guariento & Morley 2001, 352).

When it comes to reading aloud, it should be stated that this type of reading does not help learners actually become better readers, as they do not practice reading strategies. Where it is used for the practice of intonation, connected speech, and pronunciation, with young learners who



do it daily, it seems that their tasks do not go further than this. At the level of a 3rd grade, when they start reading and writing in English, their reading skills in Serbian should be good enough to read textual problems in maths classes, for example. While reading in English at this level will not be on the par with Serbian, nor should it be expected to, the insistence on the interpretation of texts and its connection to the productive tasks should be stressed and done to the capacity in which learners can manage it. This is another point which can be strengthened by the introduction of the IPA, where the interpretive mode starts with word recognition but also includes main idea detection and supporting detail, all of which might be helpful for students who are developing their reading skills in English.

Several teachers stated that they would assess speaking every time students spoke or showed an interest in work. In itself, this is a promising base for formative assessment, but this information was not followed by an explanation on whether learners got some feedback on how well they performed. Given the number of students per class, which is never below 25, it would be difficult for teachers to give detailed and timely feedback. However, with the IPA criteria, and with already instituted standards, a teacher could have a rubric or a check list for each learner to comment on the work and effort showed. More importantly, learners should have these as well, to have an insight on how well they are doing, and to be able to peer- and self-assess and increase their independence.

Since the teachers stated they were already using role-plays and dialogues for speaking, scaffolding these activities in terms of not only grammatical and lexical correctness, but appropriateness, comprehensibility, and the use of strategies would give more structure to activities and potentially help learners work more purposefully on their performance. A similar situation could be seen for listening, where the teachers stated that they expected their learners to listen and retell or listen for specific information, at least at higher proficiency levels. If teachers exchanged tapescripts for more authentic material (radio programs, announcements, podcasts, even audio books), followed up with interpretive tasks that would lead to productive, presentational, activities, learners would be involved in contextualized and meaningful tasks.

The number of marks learners got for different skills also showed there was not a balance between the skill usage and representation in class. The teachers themselves commented on the disproportionate practice of different skills: 'I feel like I do not have enough time for practicing reading and writing since I focus most on listening and speaking, wishing my students to be able to communicate in the first place'. This attitude is in keeping with the modern demands of language learning—the ease of

communication, mostly oral. However, for true communicative competence, all four skills should be practiced and perfected. If teachers were to change their attitude and see reading and writing practice as equally worthwhile, so would learners.

When it comes to grammar assessment, more traditional trends were seen. The participants did not state that grammar was assessed in any other way than in paper-and-pencil activities, mostly those that are focused on accuracy. With half of the teachers stating that they used questions on grammar as a means of speaking assessment, we can see a move towards more traditional expectations for learners' knowledge. Knowledge about language features is undeniably an important part of a learner's proficiency, but it does not represent an appropriate assessment of either grammar or speaking. It is here that integrated assessment and formative assessment in general might be better suited as learners would actively use language.

Alternative assessment strategies were positively commented on by the participants. They stated that they employed them, but also showed that they did not use a particular format of a portfolio and that the work done is recorded and kept mostly by the teacher—and for the teacher—not a student. Also, the teachers only mentioned project and portfolio work when prompted. When the answers to this question are compared to the answers given to what is included in the final grade, we can see that the teachers did not mention either projects or portfolios. Therefore, we might conclude that even when implemented, portfolios are not used to their full potential.

Apart from questions on projects and portfolios, the questionnaire did not offer any other form of alternative assessment, nor did the teachers themselves include it. Perhaps this is an area that should be further explored, with the addition of peer- and self-assessment. Even though it seems that both teachers and students show concerns and reservations towards the credibility and reliability of peer-assessment (Jerotijević Tišma 2016), there is room for training of both parties and for better results as well as an increased appreciation of alternative assessment.

While it was not among the questions in the survey, sharing grading criteria with learners is an important point in assessment. The introduction of rudimentary rubrics for learners to have and use to self-assess might help teachers introduce a variety of assessment tools in the classroom, while at the same time involving learners more in the whole process. Grading and assessment have always been seen as something done 'to' students, without them being able to be involved or have their say. Including more of formative assessment tools, and organizing assessment

using the IPA format, teachers might get better results and students should become more aware of the assessment process.

Finally, when it comes to changes to assessment, the teachers mentioned the issues that are usually raised by teachers—the lack of time to meet the curriculum requirements and use other types of assessment other than tests, the pressure that it put on students, and finally, there was one teacher who stated that standardized assessment should be used, in keeping with the CEFR.

Recent country-wide research in the form of a doctoral dissertation (Janković 2016) on the sample of 79 teachers showed that the teachers favoured standardized testing. The teachers believed that it would improve the quality of teaching (88.6%), and that those tests should be designed by the in-service teachers rather than working teams from the Ministry of Education. Still, only 13 teachers in that study responded with sample material they would include in a possible standardized test. Perhaps more formal venues should be taken to include teachers, where their work would be commissioned or in some other way recognized.

While Janković (2016) sees this favourable attitude as a welcoming prospect in future testing reform, we are of the opinion that standardized tests might be more harmful than beneficial, because at this particular point, the resources, logistics, staff and professional development is far from standardized in Serbia. Therefore, before the changes are made to the testing practices, even more should be done for teacher development and support on this issue.

## Conclusion

The small-scale study showed that speaking receives most attention, both in terms of class-time and assessment, as teachers report noting oral answers more often than other skill-based work. Results also showed that there is room for alternative and formative assessment to be used more. The participants did not report including learners into peer- or self-assessment process, therefore, teachers might incorporate these types of assessment more, and train learners to be more responsible for their development.

The Integrated Performance Assessment, though hailing from a different teaching and learning context, where English is a second language and language learners are trained with different aims in mind, still has a lot to offer to the Serbian context. The IPA might help learners understand, and more easily see the purpose of their learning. Keeping in mind that our students do not have good results in PISA testing, where the

21<sup>st</sup>-century skills are expected, the IPA might provide a contribution to overall student education, insisting on integration of skills. Also, requirements should be presented to learners and rubrics should be available to them. If requirements are clearly stated, and if learners can see where their achievements are at any given moment, perhaps they would be more willing to work on cognitive and metacognitive strategies for their learning. The IPA might in that case provide a safety-net for learners—guidelines and feedback.

The new accreditation cycle in higher education might provide room for courses that would incorporate assessment and material development, topics that are usually dealt with separately. The very structure of the IPA can be a helpful basis as it insists on the backward design, something future teachers usually struggle with as they think in terms of useful activities rather than objectives to be achieved in the classroom. The advantage of the IPA “is that the target for performance is always in focus, and consequently both learners and instructors understand what the goal is and how instruction and assessment work as one system to enable learners to reach that goal” (Adair-Hauck et al. 2015, 17).

Finally, for the professional development of teachers, the IPA could be a welcoming addition to the limited number of seminars on assessment. With an increased attention given to the inclusion of standards for learning in both teaching goals and teaching practice in Serbian schools, where assessment is determined through can-do statements and fulfillment of standards, the IPA could easily be adapted to the local context. The feedback cycle that the IPA offers, explicit criteria and space for student self-assessment are just some of the characteristics of a changed perspective on assessment, and they might provide teachers with a tool both evaluative and self-reflective (L. Resnick & D. Resnick 1992).

## Appendix—Survey

Please, give your views on grading and assessment of the English language in schools.

1. Years of teaching
2. Current levels of students you teach
  - elementary 1-4
  - elementary 5-8
  - high school
  - vocational high school
3. I teach in a
  - city school
  - village school
  - both
4. How many marks should a student have in a semester?
5. How many written tests do you give in a semester?
6. How many oral 'tests' do you do in a semester?
7. How many times do you give a grade for listening?
8. How many times do you give a grade for reading?
9. When you assess speaking, you ask your students to (check all that apply):
  - retell a lesson
  - do a dialogue with a classmate
  - do a roleplay
  - answer a grammar question
  - do a presentation
  - other:
10. When you assess writing, you focus on (check all that apply):
  - grammar correctness
  - punctuation
  - vocabulary usage
  - other:
- 11.1 For elementary school teachers: when you assess writing, you include (check all that apply):
  - ideas that a learner includes
  - organization of their writing
  - creativity
  - other:
- 11.2 For high school teachers: when you assess writing you include (check all that apply)
  - organization of ideas
  - structure of ideas
  - creativity
  - planning (making a draft)
  - other:
12. When do you ask learners to read out loud?

13. When you assess reading, you ask learners to (check all that apply):  
read for general understanding  
find specific information  
summarize what they've read  
find main ideas  
other:
- 13.1 For elementary school teachers: when you assess listening, you ask students to (check all that apply):  
listen and repeat  
listen and retell  
listen for specific information  
do a dictation  
other:
- 13.2 For high school teachers: when you assess listening, you ask students to (check all that apply):  
do a dictation  
listen and retell  
listen for specific information  
listen for the main idea  
listen and write a response  
other:
14. How do you test grammar? (check all that apply)  
fill in the blanks  
paragraph writing/ essay  
ask a learner to apply a grammar rule  
true/false exercises  
multiple choice test  
other:
15. Do all tests done during the school semester 'weigh in' equally in the final mark?  
Yes  
No  
Please, explain your answer:
16. Do you give feedback on students' performance?  
Yes  
No
17. How often do you give feedback during a semester?  
every week  
every month  
several times in a semester  
other:
18. What is the form of your feedback?  
written  
oral  
other:

19. Do you include students' portfolio (compilation of all their work) in your final grade?  
Yes  
No  
Please, explain your previous answer
20. What kind of projects do you do with learners?
21. Do you use project work to assess students?  
Yes  
No  
Other:
22. Do you grade homework?  
Yes  
No
23. Does homework add up to the final grade?  
Yes  
No  
Other:  
Please, explain your answer
24. Less than 70% of all homework satisfactorily done lowers the overall grade average for half a grade.
25. Does the effort your students put into work (having homework, being active in class, showing interest) show in their grade?  
Yes  
No  
Please, explain your answer
26. Do you have freedom in choosing the manner and frequency of assessment, or are you required to follow certain regulations?
27. What would you like to see changed in how assessment is done?
28. Is there an aspect of assessment that you'd like to explore more or have a workshop on?
29. If you have any additional comments, or you feel that certain points have not been included, please, leave them here:

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# EFL TEACHERS' FEEDBACK ON THEIR STUDENTS' WRITING IN THE GREEK CONTEXT

LYDIA MITITS

## Outline

Feedback on writing in the EFL classroom is widely seen as crucial for encouraging and consolidating learning, and its importance is acknowledged in process-based classrooms and by genre-oriented teachers. The last couple of decades have seen changes in writing pedagogy and research, which have transformed feedback practices. While research has mainly focused on whether and how teachers should correct errors in student writing, teacher beliefs and practices regarding feedback on writing have received relatively little attention. This study investigates EFL writing teachers' views regarding error feedback and factors influencing them. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 EFL teachers on how they correct student errors in writing and how they perceive their work in error correction. Samples of student writing with teacher feedback were analyzed with respect to how far the teachers' interview responses matched their classroom practices, followed by classroom observation of 3 participants. The results of the study show that, although a process-oriented approach and selective marking are recommended both by the English language curriculum in Greece and by relevant literature, the majority of teachers offer only content-based feedback and mark errors comprehensively. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications that arise from the study.

**Keywords:** process writing, feedback, error, EFL.

## Introduction

The last couple of decades have seen changes in writing pedagogy and research, which have transformed feedback practices. We, as English teachers, often find ourselves in the position of writing teachers. There seems to be a lot of uncertainty about our role in the context of the

'process-writing' approach as opposed to some more traditional approaches. Most of us appear stranded somewhere in-between; treating our students' writings as drafts to be improved on and used as a means of their development as writers and, more frequently, as final products to be marked, assessed and graded.

## Theoretical background

This paper looks into the current research and practical implications of teaching writing in the EFL context, based upon the teachers' rationale, their classroom practices, and their consistency and discrepancy with the latest theory and practice. Research has mainly focused on how different approaches influence writing (Badger & White 2000), what the role (Hyland & Hyland 2006), the aim (Muncie 2000), and the effect of feedback (Chandler 2003; Eslami 2014) is, as well as learners' reactions to and preferences for feedback (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz 1994; Saito 1994). However, teacher beliefs and practices regarding feedback on writing have received relatively little attention (Lee 2016; Zacharias 2007). According to Ferris (2015), although empirical work on feedback to writing has continued, the majority of studies on this topic peaked in the 1980s and 1990s. Few of the following studies have addressed other important topics, such as teachers' written commentary, peer response, teacher-student writing conferences, the influence of technology on teacher and peer feedback, etc.

An overall agreement can be detected as far as the communicative purpose of student writing is concerned. If "effective expression is not to be confused with accurate expression" (Byrne 1979), then what we teachers should concentrate on is responding to writing as a mental process at work rather than an ultimate fixed product. A need to develop feedback techniques that would reflect this shift becomes obvious.

The concern about treating student writing as a 'process' or a 'product' is present in much of the relevant literature (Brookes & Grundy 1991; Frankenberg-Garcia 1999; Leki 1990; McDonough & Shaw 1994; Reimes 1983; Zamel 1988). Kobayashi (1992) outlines a distinction between "evaluative" feedback (a judgment of writing quality), and "corrective" feedback, (corrections made by editors). In other words, this brings us to the well-known distinction between 'feedback on content', which are mainly comments written by teachers on drafts that usually point out problems and offer suggestions for improvements on future rewrites, where students are usually expected to incorporate information from the comments into the following versions of their papers, and 'feedback on

form', which usually includes three ways of error treatment: outright teacher correction of surface errors, teacher markings that indicate the place and type of error without correction, and underlining to indicate only the presence of errors.

A further point that requires clarification is whether writing in EFL is a 'channel' or a 'goal' (Wingard 1981, 140) or 'writing to learn' and 'learning to write' (using writing as a means of learning the language or developing writing skills). O'Brian (2000, 3) reminds us that how students write is of surprisingly little concern to EFL writing teachers. As they see writing as products to be marked, their primary interest appears to be in how well students have mastered grammar and vocabulary. The communicative value of a piece of writing is rarely commented on. Higher-level discourse features, such as discourse markers, organization, paragraphing, reference, etc. are seldom integrated into the general feedback practice.

Practitioners would argue that appealing though theoretical views may be, practical restrictions are those that influence the nature and quality of feedback. In a class of 35 teenage students, with institutional constraints and a strict syllabus to follow, little can be done. However, even in such situations, if students' needs (e.g. personal, motivational, educational, etc.) are closely analyzed and monitored, a conscientious teacher can yield positive results.

The English language syllabus in the Greek Unified Framework for Teaching languages is aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and one of its goals is the development of the writing skill. It stresses the need to help learners develop a critical communicative approach to writing, where they will be able to express their opinions, views and arguments. Thus, focusing feedback only on formal errors and not on written content does not facilitate the fulfillment of the particular goal.

## **Method**

### ***Research questions***

For the purposes of the study the following 4 research questions were posed:

- a) How do EFL teachers teach writing?
- b) How do EFL teachers treat errors in writing?
- c) What is EFL teachers' approach to feedback on writing?
- d) What techniques do EFL teachers use when offering feedback on writing?

The present investigation was a mixed methods small-scale qualitative study. The instruments that were employed were semi-structured interviews, classroom observation and student writing samples' analysis.

### ***Participants***

Twelve EFL teachers (11 females, 1 male), with the average age of 43.3 and the age range from 32 to 50 years, participated in the study. They were all experienced teachers with the average number of years 19.2, ranging from 7 to 25 years of teaching English. Throughout their teaching careers 7 of them have worked in primary, 6 in secondary, 2 in tertiary education, and 8 in private language schools.

### ***Instruments***

The semi-structured interviews were devised and conducted by the researcher (see App. 1). The 15 questions were developed with the aim to reflect the principles of the process-writing approach and were grouped into 4 categories. Questions 1-4 investigated the approach to teaching writing, Qs 5-8 sought to find how the teachers treated errors in writing, Qs 9-12 focused on feedback approaches, and Qs 13-15 recorded the participants' feedback techniques. The participants' responses were recorded and transcribed. During the interview, clarifications and explanations were occasionally provided by the researcher when required but overall the interview format and protocol were respected.

Next, samples of student writing with teacher feedback were collected and analyzed (see App. 2). They covered various age and EFL level students' writing assignments and came from different teaching contexts. Questions 5-15 from the interview were used to track how the teachers provided feedback (see App. 1).

Lastly, classroom observation was employed. Three participants' writing classes were observed for questions 1-4 mainly (see App. 1) and notes were kept and analyzed. The observation was limited to 1 teaching hour each due to practical and institutional constrains.

## **Results**

### ***Interview results***

The interviews' results are presented here as a summary of the participants' responses to the four groups of questions.

#### *How do EFL teachers teach writing?*

They reported that they generally follow the textbook guidelines that they currently teach. The majority of the teachers said that they offer a lot

of input (vocabulary, expressions, and grammar) as well as sample writing assignments. They also practice brainstorming ideas, using idea maps, and conduct discussions with their students during the pre-writing stage. One teacher reported that she did genre analysis, group writing, and paid particular attention to register and style. Everybody agreed that their students produced written work (paragraphs, essays) mostly as homework and rarely in class.

*How do EFL teachers treat errors in writing?*

They all agree that it depends on the student level and the type of error. With higher-level students errors are indicated while with lower levels they are corrected. Grammar errors are corrected and appropriate expressions provided. The most important for the majority of teachers are grammar, expression, vocabulary, usage, and syntax errors. For one teacher, coherence, cohesion, and style are also significant. On the other hand, the least important are incorrect spelling and punctuation. A few teachers reported that they note repetitive errors for remedial purposes.

*What is the EFL teachers' approach to feedback on writing?*

The participants describe feedback as a guide (10 teachers), a confidence boost (8 teachers), a means of monitoring progress (12 teachers) and asserting the teacher's domineering role (3 teachers). They all provide written comments, while three teachers do it orally as well. Half the teachers regularly balance critique with positive commentary. Overall (except for 3 teachers) feedback is provided only during the post-writing phase, which involves error correction and, in some cases, class discussion of the outcomes of the students' writing.

*What techniques do EFL teachers use when offering feedback on writing?*

None of the teachers report using a correction code, although one is positive to the idea. They justified this practice by saying that it is impractical and that their students do not respond to it. Self-correction is employed only orally whereas peer-correction is viewed as antagonistic, and it is believed by the majority of the teachers that the lack of expertise by the students makes them incompetent to correct their own work. Two teachers report using it. One-to-one conferences are done only with students experiencing great difficulties in writing, as a result of a lack of time.

The following is a transcript of a typical teacher response from the interview:

*I don't overcorrect. I correct grammar, syntax, vocabulary: mostly mistakes that seriously impact the meaning. I use symbols or write short*

*comments. I often collect some of their mistakes and write them on board so that they can try to correct them in groups, in class.*

### ***Analysis of student writing samples with teacher feedback***

The teachers' techniques in providing feedback can illustrate some common practices employed by writing teachers and the misconceptions widely held, as well as an attempt to incorporate relevant research into an EFL class (see App. 2).

In the first example, the class whose writings have been sampled is an upper-intermediate class, namely students, aged 13-15, preparing for a B2 level exam in a private language institute. The writing paper of the exam reflects the students' needs, such as a preparation for different discourse types (mostly transactional: letters, reports, articles and descriptive and narrative essays as well) and solid knowledge of the language, topics, scripts (our writing experience and knowledge stored in our memory) and audience awareness. From the sample (see App. 2, p. 10) it is evident that the teacher is randomly selective, as it is not apparent what types of errors she systematically focuses on in the correction she offers (see App. 2, p. 10: 6, 7), and attends mostly to surface errors (spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.). There is no side commentary and there is little positive feedback (see App. 2, p. 10: 11, 17, 21, 21). The teacher does not mark the essay, but the end commentary is rather vague and prescriptive. On a more positive side, however, the teacher comments on the organization of ideas, style and appropriateness (see App. 2, p. 10: 13, 33, 34). In the second sample, the teacher hopes to improve upon her feedback by mirroring some of the current tendencies in the field (see App. 2, p.11). There are side commentaries that attend to meaning errors rather than surface ones. The teacher investigates the causes of errors and offers solutions (see App. 2, p. 11). Still, since the students are generally not asked to rewrite their drafts it proves that writing is treated as a final product.

The other sample writings are from the students taking a B1 and C1 level courses. The teacher does most of the work for the students by employing 'overt correction' or indiscriminate marking and leaving little space for them to develop as writers (see App. 2, p. 12). There are no side commentaries and the end-one is similarly unspecific and prescriptive (see App. 2, pp. 13-14). There is very little or no comment at all on the ideas expressed, discourse markers used, overall and paragraph planning, appropriateness of style and expression, the need for both accurate and natural expression (particularly in the C1 class) (see App. 2, pp. 13-14: 21, 24, 32). On the other hand, there is a tendency to balance positive and negative comments.

### ***Classroom observation findings***

The observations reveal that the three teachers share common practices with differences that are mostly related to the teaching context rather than the teachers' beliefs and practices. The writing is dealt with in pre-, while- and post-writing stages. During the pre-writing stage a purpose is created, a target reader established, the topic analyzed, the writing planned and organized. There is no intervention during the while-writing stage as it is almost exclusively set as homework. There are, though, occasional workshops where students are encouraged to produce writing in class, but the kind of help offered is limited to developing dictionary skills, brainstorming ideas, etc. There is no genuine interest expressed by the teacher in the process of writing and the students usually ask for help with spelling and vocabulary. The post-writing mostly takes the form of written comments on students' writing products (see App. 2), coupled with teacher-to-class feedback on students' shared problems spotted in their writings, and, finally, teacher-to-student conferencing during or after class where specific, more serious problems are discussed. Writing is discussed in class where the teacher functions as a facilitator. She points out the errors commonly made by her students and asks them to self-correct them in lockstep. She also emphasizes the use of expressions and topic vocabulary and offers alternatives which students copy in their notebooks and are expected to use in future writings. Nevertheless, there is no process intervention due to institutional constraints and the focus of feedback is the correction of surface errors with an insufficient attempt to attend to meaning problems.

## **Discussion**

From the above investigation and the relevant literature, a number of inferences can be made. All the teachers seem to employ what Lee (1997) calls "overt correction". According to her, over-marking can have a counterproductive effect on student writing as it encourages students to passively accept correction without questioning it and, even worse, without engaging in self-correction. From the sample writings, it is clear that surface errors are almost exclusively attended to, despite the emphasis in the literature on the need for correcting meaning errors (ibid., 471). Frankenberg-Garcia suggests that "the best moment for responding to student writing is before any draft is completed" (1999, 100). The teachers in question do not seem to be aware of the limitations of product-based feedback and the need to comment on the cognitive process. However, her



suggestion to set up workshops to overcome this problem is occasionally present in the researcher's own writing class.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that all the teachers' responding behavior should change. Zamel (1988) offers some practical implications for improving our feedback techniques, such as replacing vague with specific comments, adopting a flexible standard (communicative purpose should be of prime concern), not responding to a text as a final product, establishing priorities (not all errors are equally important), modifying the teacher's role (a teacher should be a consultant, assistant, facilitator), and, finally, not limiting ourselves to written comments but conducting collaborative sessions and conferences, as well.

Lastly, if we as writing teachers assume the role of a genuine, interested reader and respond to the communicative value of a text (White & Arndt 1997), we are likely to help our students develop as EFL writers.

## Conclusion

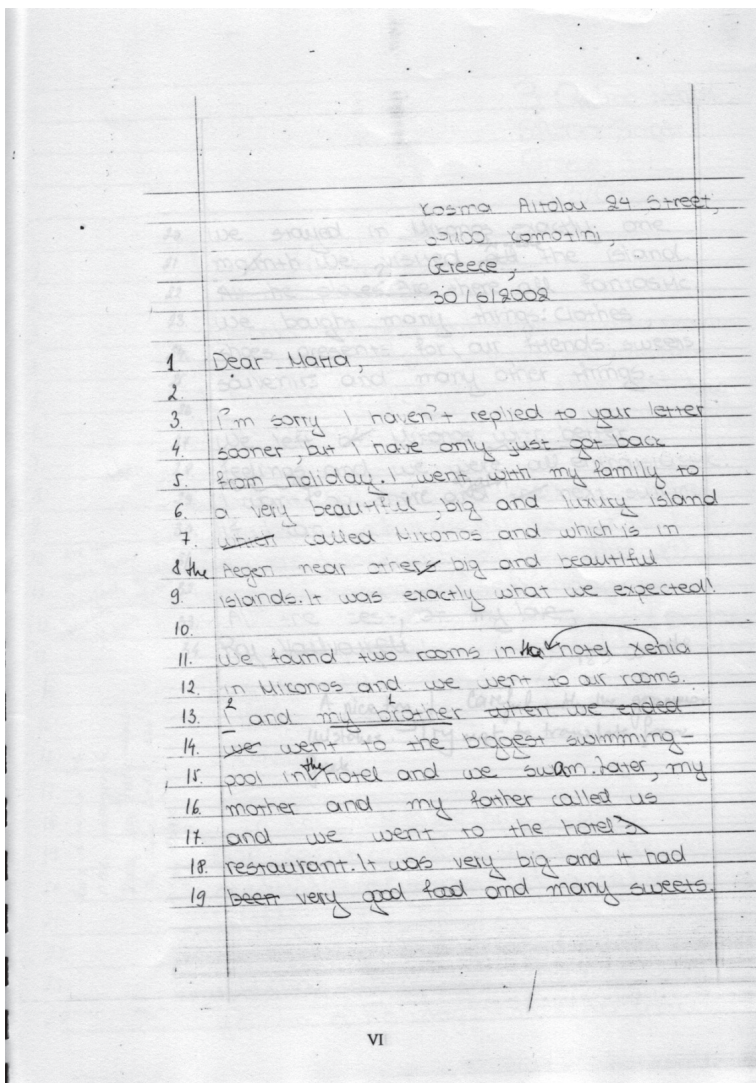
The results of the study show that, although a process-oriented approach and selective marking are recommended both by the English language syllabus in the Greek Unified Framework for Teaching languages and by the relevant literature, the majority of teachers offer mostly form-based feedback and mark errors comprehensively. Methods such as outright correction of surface errors, inconsistently marking errors, unclear and vague responses on content have all been found to have little positive and some negative impact on student writing skills. They can lead to feelings of confusion and frustration as well as passive action and indifference on behalf of the students. Teachers need to develop more systematized and consistent forms of feedback that take advantage of the process approach and make it clear to students what the feedback means and what they are to do with it. Moreover, teachers need to familiarize and train students in how to effectively use the feedback in order to make gains in their proficiency and competence as English writers.

Lastly, as there seems to be an apparent effect of factors such as age, teaching experience and teaching context, a larger sample and more quantitative data (e.g. a standardized questionnaire) would help further investigate teachers' approaches to offering feedback.

## Appendix 1—The interview questions

1. *Do you teach writing and how?*
2. *How do your students produce written work?*
3. *How do you correct students' writing?*
4. *Do you read the writing first or start marking straight away?*
5. *How do you treat errors?*
6. *Do you correct or indicate errors?*
7. *Do you try to determine the cause of errors?*
8. *Which errors do you find the most and which the least important?*
9. *Do you provide students with feedback and why?*
10. *How do you provide it? (written comments, reactions, orally...)*
11. *Do you balance critique with positive commentary?*
12. *At what stage during writing do you provide feedback?*
13. *Do you use a correction code? If yes --- why yes, if no – why not?*
14. *Do you employ peer-correction and/or self-correction?*
15. *Do you conduct one-to-one conferences? If yes – what do you discuss there, if no – why not?*

## Appendix 2—Samples of student writing assignments with their teacher's feedback



3. Olive street  
69500 Sagra  
Greece  
29/6/09

20. We stayed in Mikonos exactly one  
21. month. We visited ~~the~~ <sup>the whole</sup> the island.  
22. ~~All the places~~ are there all fantastic.  
23. We bought many things: clothes,  
24. shoes, presents for our friends, sweets,  
25. souvenirs and many other things.  
26.  
27. We left ~~of~~ Mikonos with better  
28. feelings and we were all enthusiastic.  
29. I want to go there <sup>again</sup> ~~and~~ ~~to~~ the next summer.  
30. If I can.  
31.  
32.  
33. All the best, ~~am~~ my love,  
34. Roy ~~Vallvaretti~~ 183 words

A nice try! Careful with the grammar mistakes. Try not to translate from Greek.

VII

3 Ouzirou street  
69300 Sapes  
Greece  
29/6/09

Dear Merih,

Thanks for your last letter. I am really sorry I didn't write back earlier, but I have only just got back from holiday. I went with my sister and two cousins.

where?

We booked some rooms in a hotel in Thasos, but when we arrived in the hotel, we were disappointed. The bathroom <sup>was</sup> very old. So we decided <sup>to</sup> change.

The other hotel <sup>was</sup> perfect. It <sup>was</sup> clean and it had the biggest swimming-pool I <sup>have</sup> <sup>ever</sup> seen. The hotel <sup>wasn't</sup> so expensive.

In the hotel we had a good time. We spent our time <sup>doing</sup> different activities and we met a lot of friends.

What about you? Are you going to go on a holiday? Where do you

are you sure your English friend knows about Thasos?

you have repeated the same words as in the model

this should be one paragraph. Please you talk about the same hotel, don't you think?

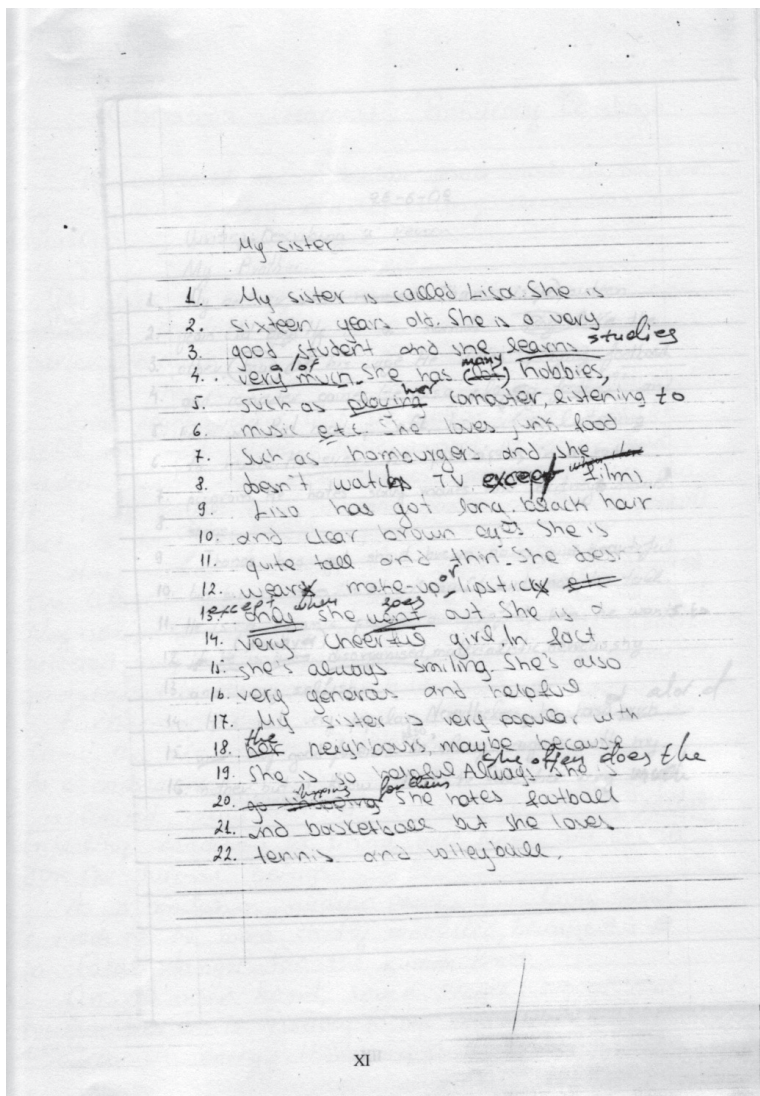
VIII

? → there is something missing here  
 want. → why don't you write Merih to Greece?  
 Love,  
 Gioonez

This is a nice try  
 You've included all the information  
 Be careful when correcting modal letters because  
 you've obviously copied some mistakes.

Mervet Qalw Gioonez

IX



26-6-09

Writing: Describing a person

My Brother

1. My brother, ~~who~~ named Thomas is ~~of~~ sixteen
2. years old ~~old~~. He is a normal Boy like the
3. other boys ~~of~~ his age. He likes playing football
4. and computer games. He also plays football and
5. basketball. But most of all, he likes listening
6. to music. However he participates in a radio
7. program. He hates song movies and entirely secular
8. songs.
9. Thomas has got short brown hair and beautiful
10. big brown eyes. He is well built but not too tall.
11. He is a dynamic person and happy when he wants to
12. ~~be~~ However he is disorganised, materialistic, nervous, shy
13. and very selfish.
14. He is not very popular. Nevertheless, he has not alot of
15. not very good friends. He always argues with my
16. mother, but I know that he loves her very much.

XII



## Christina Georgiou Proficiency Cambridge

The increased use of nuclear power would be the best way to provide energy whilst protecting the environment  
Discuss.

The lack of energy sources is a characteristic of ~~the era nowadays~~ <sup>the era</sup>. Population is on the increase. The natural sources on earth are threatened with extraction, as they can't cover the needs of the increasing population.

Some people believe that the nuclear power can be useful and may provide a large amount of energy that is needed. However, it is risky to say something like this. It ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> possible that nuclear power can be beneficial but it has ~~many~~ <sup>also</sup> ~~disadvantages~~ <sup>harmful</sup>.

Many nuclear accidents have happened ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> (have) costed the lives of thousands of people, like in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where the nuclear ~~reactor~~ <sup>bomb</sup> exploded. The inhabitants suffered from nuclear pollution years afterwards, many generations ~~felt~~ <sup>have</sup> felt the side effects. ~~Wastes of~~ <sup>wastes of</sup> nuclear industry

Furthermore, the ~~wastes~~ <sup>wastes</sup> have polluted the land, the air and the sea. ~~The~~ <sup>The</sup> ecological system is in danger. As a consequence, humanity suffers. The oxygen is limited, many ~~animals~~ <sup>animals</sup> are extinct, the sea is polluted. Unhealthy conditions of living will have bad effects ~~on~~ <sup>on</sup> the human beings.

As a conclusion, nuclear power is a living threat. It needs to be more strictly controlled, because it is ~~a~~ a fatal danger for the human kind.

On the other hand, some people suggest that nuclear power is friendly to the environment and is a ~~source~~ <sup>valuable</sup> source of energy. It is ~~known~~ <sup>known</sup> that ~~the~~ earth produces

a large amount of nuclear power that can cover ~~many~~ <sup>most of the</sup> needs of people. <sup>(consequence)</sup> Nobody can object to ~~this~~ <sup>its</sup> fact being true. However, a ~~small~~ small mistake in its use can cost ~~in~~ thousands of lives who can take this risk? After all, it is a source of energy that only the earth <sup>has the power to</sup> control. By the way, the best that can be done is a balanced and controlled use of the nuclear power. Because people do need energy but they do need a healthy and (ordinary) <sup>steady</sup> life, too.

~~Pass!!~~ PASS!! It's correct & ambitious. There is limitness of vocabulary, though!! B2 award of your expression!!

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# HOW TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS TO TALK ABOUT THEIR EMOTIONS: A LINGUISTIC APPROACH

FREIDERIKOS VALETOPOULOS

## Outline

The aim of our paper is to provide an example about the development of the written and oral skills of learners focusing on a specific lexical field: *feelings* and *emotions*. This lexical field plays an important role in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Baider & Valetopoulos 2012; Baider, Shiamm & Valetopoulos 2011). But there has been no advice on how to teach this lexicon, especially since our knowledge is limited to what learners themselves know about the expression of emotions in their first language. In order to make our teaching methods more efficient, we proposed an experiment permitting learners of French as a foreign language to express their emotions during a written and an oral task. The written task asked the students to describe the happiest and the saddest moment of their lives and to describe the antecedent provoking the specific emotion (cf. Bannour 2009; Scherer et al. 1986). The oral task consisted of four pictures, two of them describing an emotion and the other two provoking an emotion (cf. Baumgartner et al. 2006; Gil 2009). Learners had to describe the pictures and to express the emotions they felt watching these pictures. The objective of this experiment was multiple: we wished to know a) how learners conceptualise the different emotions, b) how they can express their emotions (lexicon and other strategies), c) how they can be involved in a communicative skill using the adequate lexicon, d) how authors can modify textbooks in order to contextualise teaching of emotions and motivate students to talk or to write.

**Key words:** communicative skills, written and oral skills, lexical field of feelings and emotions, French as a foreign language.

## Introduction

This article deals with the process of learning and teaching vocabulary in a foreign language learning process. In this study, we will concentrate, for a number of reasons, on lexical units expressing emotions. First of all, as has already been pointed out by Titsworth et al. (2005, 432), in reference to Lupton (1994), “[e]motion and communication are inherently intertwined as communicators symbolically experience, construct, and express feelings toward others and their environment”. If we focus on the didactic references, and more precisely, on the Common European Framework of Reference for language learning, teaching and assessment, we may observe, in many excerpts, that authors tend to emphasize the importance of emotions in communicating: e.g. a learner, in B1 level, “[c]an give detailed accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions” (ibid., 59), “[c]an write accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions in simple connected text” (ibid., 62), “[c]an understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters well enough to correspond regularly with a pen friend” (ibid., 69), “[c]an express and respond to feelings such as surprise, happiness, sadness, interest and indifference” (ibid., 76).

The second reason is related to the multiple functions that this specific vocabulary can assume in the discourse of both the speaker and the learner. According to Valetopoulos (2016), and as we will shortly see, a speaker may express an emotion using verbal or non-verbal strategies. At the same time, a speaker may describe his or other people’s emotions and also evoke an emotion using different verbal strategies.

Finally, the third reason relates to the difficulty in teaching this kind of vocabulary. Based on a number of studies in this field, Valetopoulos (2014) pointed out that teaching words pertaining to emotions presupposes the teaching of a number of other aspects, such as:

- a. the cultural specificities of emotion. What is the difference between the English word *love*, the French *amour* or the Greek *αγάπη* and *έρωτας* (see Valetopoulos 2013a, about *fear* and *surprise* in Greek and in French)? How can learners translate the English word *awe* into French? Furthermore, one may also wonder about the semantic associations of emotions.
- b. the cognitive characteristics of emotions. How can learners describe an emotion, and would this description be the same for both languages?

- c. the verbalisation of emotions. In other words, what would the lexical combinatorics of predicates that express an emotion be (adjectives, adverbs, verbs, metaphors and metonymies)?
- d. the presupposition of the teaching of other verbal and non-verbal information such as intonation and gestures.

### Functions of the emotion lexicon

According to our analysis, which resulted after having studied the French as a foreign language textbooks (Valetopoulos 2016), the emotion lexicon can assume four different functions: to *react* or *express* one's emotions, to *describe* one's emotions, to *mediate* the emotions of others and to *evoke* an emotion.

The first and the second functions refer to the distinction between *connoted* and *denoted* emotions (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2000, 61). The first ones include all the constituents (linguistic or non-linguistic) signalling emotion (*emotional talk*, Caffi & Janey 1994). More precisely, when someone hears or sees something that may evoke an emotion, then one can react using different strategies in order to respond or to express emotions. These include:

- a. non-verbal and para-verbal components (facial expressions, prosody, posture, see among others, Scherer et al. 1986 or Ekman & Friesen 1986);
- b. interjections (*Wow!*, *Ah!*, *Oh!*, see among others, Wierzbicka 1992);
- c. other morpho-syntactic elements such as expressive derivations with evaluative suffixes (Hummel 2015) or hypocoristic formations (see Plénat 1999 for an analysis of French reduplicated hypocoristic forms);
- d. typographic displays and pictographs (emoticons and emojis, Wolf 2000; Marcoccia 2000);
- e. expressive punctuation marks (see Aguert *et al.* 2012);
- f. lexical units including both emotion predicative forms (*happy*, *unhappy*, ...) and words with emotional charge such as sweet words (see Sifianou 1992 regarding politeness) or swear words.

Denoted emotions are expressed by verbal, nominal or adjectival predicates (*emotion talk*, Caffi & Janey 1994; Bednarek 2008). A speaker can describe an emotion, whether experienced or not, in a number of ways. In order to describe it, one first moves through the conceptualization of



one's emotional state, after having appraised the event that caused it, and having found the appropriate words permitting to describe this emotion. In order to observe this function, we propose to analyse a brief passage (Harwood et al. 2012, 218):

(1) [*In frustration*] Ahh!! I'm angry! I'm angry. I'm just really angry. It's very hard to be angry, because [*crying*] I feel ashamed when I feel angry. It makes me feel really ashamed. I feel like I'm doing something very slimy being angry. It feels very, very like I'm really not being nice. And that feels worse than the anger. [*Sobbing*] I feel so ashamed of feeling angry. [*Continuing to cry*] God, it's so weird. [*Calmer*] Aah. What I'm really feeling is ashamed.

Aside from the non-linguistic reactions, such as physio-somatic, and linguistic reactions, such as interjections or other direct and indirect expressions of emotion, we may observe, from the above excerpt, that the speaker is using emotion predicates in order to describe his emotional state. This use does not denote that the person is actually feeling the emotion in question, but that, after appraisal of the events (*It feels very, very like I'm really not being nice*), the reader can describe and name the emotion felt: *angry, ashamed*.

The third function corresponds to a specific use of the emotion predicates. The speaker does not have a personal experience of the emotion, which he expresses through a filter of subjectivity.

(2) Depression is definitely sinking in. Greeks feel all the more pessimistic about their future and that is the most negative aspect of the economic crisis. If the national mood doesn't turn soon, no amount of economic recovery will be enough to turn things around.  
[<http://www.thetoc.gr/eng/politics/article/new-poll-depression-sinking-in>]

The speaker tries to describe the feelings of other people, but he does not identify with them. While *Depression* and *pessimistic* correspond to the appraisal of the emotional state of Greeks, the one experiencing them is someone else. In the following example, we may observe a similar situation: the author can name the emotion, but feels the need to justify his supposition.

(3) A mon avis l'auteur éprouve un sentiment de fierté pour eux car, d'après les écrits de l'auteur il dit d'eux : qu'ils sont des héros anonymes, avec orgueil il les a serrés la main tout en étant fier et les mineurs disaient de parler d'eux et c'est ce que l'auteur a fait tout simplement.  
[<https://nosdevoirs.fr/devoir/263983>]

In this case, the speaker uses connoted lexicon (interjections, diminutives, etc) in order to express the feelings of other people due to its

subjective status. Any facial reaction or use of diminutive form would immediately be understood as a comment on what is said.

And lastly, the fourth function corresponds to the creation of an emotion (see, for instance, Micheli 2010 about emotion and argumentation). In other words, when one reads a book, a poem, or a newspaper, one may experience an emotion. Whereas the text may or may not include emotions or emotional terms, the target of the discourse, whether written or oral, is of utmost importance, as well as the impact it can have on the addressee (or receiver) of the message. Reading the literary passage below (example 4), the reader may feel something according to his/her sensitivity or his/her comprehension. For instance, the phrase “*it was kind of a social recognition*” reveals the ironical mood of the writer:

(4) Not that I never saw a corpse before, mind you; far from it. Before the war it was an everyday sight. [...] Lying there in the casket with the bearer walking alongside holding the cover and the priest following along behind, chanting and greeting people he knew on the street. [...] They planned the funeral march so it would pass through all the main streets of Rempartville, that’s what almost all the relatives of the dear departed insisted on, plus it was kind of a social recognition, [...] (P. Matesis, *The Daughter*, p. 35)

In the second excerpt (example 5), we may immediately discern the objective of the person talking. The sentence may cause the reader to feel pity or other possible emotions, such as anger and frustration.

(5) Refugees in Greece ‘could freeze to death’ in snow due to inadequate winter preparations, warn aid groups.  
[<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugees-greece-freezing-weather-snow-winter-preparations-middle-east-syria-charities-unhcr-doctors-a7517491.html>]

In the second part of this paper, we will focus on an experiment realised in the University of Poitiers that had as its main objective to analyse the use of emotional lexicon by learners of French as a foreign language.

## Method

### *Participants*

More than sixty learners of French as a foreign language, twenty native Greek speakers and twenty native French speakers participated in the investigation.

Learners were native speakers of Polish (twenty-nine subjects, PL-Corpus) and of Greek (twenty Cypriots, CY-Corpus, and twenty Greeks,

GR-Corpus). All learners had the same profile: students in the third or fourth year of the French program in three Universities, University of Warsaw-Poland, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki-Greece and University of Cyprus. All these learners studied *French literature*, *French linguistics* and *French Civilisation* and generally were at the B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It is worth noting that their level has been defined according to the diplomas and other certifications obtained in French and the number of hours in French they followed and succeed during their university studies. Another twenty French students participated in the experiment. These native speakers were studying at the University of Poitiers, in the first and second year of the master's degree (FR-Corpus). Native Greek students were studying at the Pedagogical University of Volos. For the needs of this paper, we will analyse the PL-Corpus and CY-Corpus.

### ***Stimuli***

The experiment involved two principle stages. The first stage dealt with oral and the second with written skills. For the oral stage, four pictures were used as stimuli. Learners described first what they saw in the picture and then they talked about the emotions generated by the picture. Learners may have different reactions: they could feel the emotions they describe or they could just describe an emotion they have never felt but would correspond to the picture. After having seen all the pictures, they chose one picture and explained the reasons of their preference.

During the second stage, learners were given one hour to write two essays answering the following questions: 1. Which was the happiest moment of your life? Describe your feelings, and 2. Which was the saddest moment of your life? Describe your feelings. This approach was based on the principle of *expressive writing* that concentrates more on the author's feelings and less on the events (see among others Bannour et al. 2008; Bannour 2009). Learners were free to describe events they considered important to themselves. The importance of this method, for our needs, is the fact that learners were able to come up with different strategies in order to express their feelings on a lexical level and that they could associate the events with a feeling, which, in turn, would reveal several cultural similarities between the different linguistic communities.

### ***Experimental conditions***

The interviewer explained to the participants all stages of the study but refrained from explaining its objectives. The participants were interviewed individually in a quiet environment and were given thirty minutes to answer the questions. If the learner was unable to comment, the

interviewer, without insisting on an answer, would then continue to a new question. All interviews were filmed and recorded.

### ***Transcription***

The recordings were then orthographically transcribed using transcription conventions (Baude et al. 2006) and analysed with respect to criteria of verbal productivity, grammatical complexity and information content. Similarly, the essays were also transcribed according to Valetopoulos's conventions (Valetopoulos 2013b). The resulting corpus from both the oral and written stages ended up containing 15 000 tokens.

## **Theoretical framework**

In a number of linguistic approaches, the study of 'feelings' emerged as an important subject during the last three decades. Several studies in French, written in various frameworks and with different objectives, tried to define what is known as "feeling" or "emotion", and then describe their syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and cognitive properties not only in French but in other languages as well. Some works, such as those in the framework of "object classes" (Valetopoulos 2003; Buvet *et al.* 2005), attempt to establish a classification based on the syntactic and semantic properties of these lexical units: *feelings* (sentiments), *emotions* (émotions) and *moods* (humeurs). This classification finds its inspiring principle in the lexicographic definition of these terms. According to the French dictionaries, a *sentiment* (e.g. *love*, *hate*) would be a complex affective state, stable and long-lasting. An *emotion* (e.g. *joy*, *irritation*, *frustration*) would be an affective state caused by an external factor provoking a strong, sometimes physical, reaction. A *mood* (humeur) would be the way someone feels at a particular time (e.g. *grumpy*). Wierzbicka (1999, 1-7) presents different definitions proposed by psychologists and anthropologists, in order to illustrate the confusion surrounding the terms *emotion* and *feeling*, concluding that *feeling* "is universal and can be safely used in the investigation of human experience and human nature" but *emotion* "includes both a reference to feelings and a reference to thoughts (as a reference to the body), and culture often shapes both ways of thinking and ways of feeling".

Ruwet (1972, 1994), in a different theoretical framework, examines the psychological verbs and starts from the principle that several linguists have confused psychological verbs *stricto sensu* with non-psychological verbs. In his articles, he has endeavoured to formalize the syntactic particularities of these verbs, and also illustrated the complexity of this group. In 1975, in the framework of Lexicon-Grammar, Gross provided an

analysis. Table 4 of his study constitutes the first complete list of  $\Psi$ -verbs and their syntactic properties. In line with these analyses, the framework of *object classes* (Valetopoulos 2003) suggested the study of the lexical combinatory, in other words the distribution of syntagmatic lexicogrammatical patterns: e.g. emotional nouns and adjectives qualifying these nouns, emotional verbs and adverbs, emotional adjectives etc. Our study is based on this last theoretical framework.

## Research questions and hypotheses

Languages conceptualise emotions in different ways. As pointed out above, cultural and linguistic constraints are reflected through a vocabulary which cannot—or can barely—be translated from one language to another (see, among others, Weigand 1988; Valetopoulos 2015). On this basis, we can make various assumptions. First of all, we may assume that learners of a foreign language may use emotion predicates with different meanings, thus, realising lexical transfer. According to Jarvis (2009, 99), *lexical transfer*, or *cross-linguistic influence*, “can be defined as the influence that a person’s knowledge of one language has on that person’s recognition, interpretation, processing, storage and production of words in another language” (see also Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008). A second assumption is that learners may find different lexical strategies permitting the expression of emotions. According to this hypothesis, learners may use emotion verbs, adjectives, nouns or adverbs but they may also use other lexical units such as axiological adjectives in order to describe their emotions. This hypothesis is dependent on the lexical richness of students (see, among others, Laufer & Nation 1995; Nation 2001) and, more specifically, on different aspects such as lexical diversity, lexical variation and number of lexical words.

Based on the various considerations outlined above, this study aims to investigate the way learners use lexical strategies in a written task. Within this framework and for the current investigation, the following research question was formulated: Do French as a foreign language learners use the same strategies when trying to express their emotions?

## Corpus Data and results

The outcome of the two research questions that guided this study is summarized in the following tables. Table 1 illustrates the ratio of words and tokens found in the two sub-corpora. Table 2 shows the ratio in the two sub-corpora according to the thematic, positive or negative. Table 3

illustrates the number of emotional predicates in the written productions of Polish and Greek-Cypriot students.

**Table 1:** Ratio of types and tokens

|           | Written corpus |        |        |
|-----------|----------------|--------|--------|
|           | Types          | Tokens | TTR    |
| PL-Corpus | 1185           | 4760   | 24.89% |
| CY-Corpus | 1710           | 7823   | 21.86% |

Table 1 shows that, despite the high number of words, the vocabulary in Greek-Cypriot learners' texts is less varied than in the texts of Polish learners. The difference between these two sub-corpora is significant ( $p < .001$ ). But we may also notice that the two sub-corpora indicate relatively little lexical variation.

**Table 2:** Ratio of types and tokens – sub-corpora

|           | Happy moment |        |        | Sad moment |        |        |
|-----------|--------------|--------|--------|------------|--------|--------|
|           | Types        | Tokens | TTR    | Types      | Tokens | TTR    |
| PL-Corpus | 519          | 2042   | 25.42% | 666        | 2718   | 24.5%  |
| CY-Corpus | 950          | 4229   | 22.46% | 760        | 3594   | 21.15% |

In Table 2, the corpora are compared according to the task, calculating separately the TTR of texts describing a happy moment and the texts describing a sad moment. Results show that the difference between the thematic sub-corpora is insignificant (PL-Corpus,  $p = .471$ ; CY-Corpus,  $p = .160$ ).

The analysis will now focus on the emotional lexicon applied in the different sub-corpora and more specifically on the texts describing a happy experience.

As Table 3 points out, the emotional predicates correspond to 1.89% of the tokens in the CY-Corpus and to 3.13% of the tokens in the PL-Corpus, which is significant ( $p = .002$ ). But the difference between these two sub-corpora is no longer significant when we compare the word types ( $p = .109$ ). However the case, it is worth noting that both groups of students

show a clear preference for the nouns <EMOTION> and adjectives <EMOTION>, the \* indicating a misuse or a non-grammatical form:

(6) Nouns <EMOTION>

PL-Corpus: attendrissement, bonheur, espérance, euphorie, fierté, impatience, inquiétude, joie, peur, souffrance, soulagement, surprise

CY-Corpus: apathie, enthousiasme, impatience, inquiétude, joie, jouissance, mélancolie, nostalgie, peur, ravissement, stresse, surprise, tristesse

(7) Adjectives <EMOTION>

PL-Corpus: excité, \*inquiété, amoureux, déçu, désespéré, triste, impressionné, \*impressionnant, jaloux, surpris, stressé, content, heureux

CY-Corpus: \*chaleureux, \*inquiété, calme, choqué, content, émouvant, enthousiaste, étonnant, excité, heureux, impatient, inquiète, mélancolique, paniqué, ravi, satisfait, stressé, surpris, terrifié, triste, touchant

**Table 3:** Emotional predicates

|                         | CY-Corpus |        |        | PL-Corpus |        |        |
|-------------------------|-----------|--------|--------|-----------|--------|--------|
|                         | Types     | Tokens | TTR    | Types     | Tokens | TTR    |
| Verbs <EMOTION>         | 2         | 8      | 25%    | 4         | 5      | 80%    |
| Nouns <EMOTION>         | 13        | 28     | 46.43% | 12        | 20     | 60%    |
| Adjectives<br><EMOTION> | 21        | 44     | 47.73  | 13        | 39     | 33.33% |
| Total                   | 36        | 80     | 45%    | 29        | 64     | 45.3%  |

These adjectives and nouns are used with the support verbs *être* “to be” (examples 8 and 9), thirty-one occurrences in the CY-corpus and twenty in the PL-Corpus, and (*se*) *sentir* “to feel” (examples 10 and 11), ten occurrences in the CY-corpus and eleven in the PL-Corpus (see Valetopoulos & Lamprou 2014 about support verbs and emotions). Concerning the verb *éprouver* “to feel” (example 12), which is the most frequent support verb for the French nouns of emotion, we notice only seven occurrences in the PL-Corpus.

(8) Je sentais aussi orgueilleuse de moi même et *j'étais* très contente mais en même temps je sentais nostalgie parce que je savais qu'après, avec l'université, venaient aussi les responsabilités. (CY-PANA)

(9) Le deuxième jour de notre séjour, mon petit ami m'a demandé si je voudrais passer toute ma vie avec lui. *J'étais* très contente, impressionnée et

*j'étais* très heureuse. Je crois que c'est un événement de ma vie le plus important pour moi. (PL-A08)

(10) Durant la nuit et mon travail *je \*sentais* très heureux mais stressé en même temps, comme j'avais l'envie forte de performer bien ma musique. Enfin, j'ai terminé mon travail et mon nouveau patron m'a informé que je travaillerai là. A ce moment là, *je me suis senti* rassuré mais aussi vraiment heureux! (CY-CHRI)

(11) En Italie, j'ai oublié de tous mes problèmes. *Je me suis sentie* libre et reposée. (PL-A06)

(12) *J'ai éprouvé* pleines d'émotions positives telles que la joie, la fierté, le sentiment d'être apprécié tout simplement. (PL-A07)

Analysing the non-emotional lexicon, it is worth highlighting the fact that students from both groups used a large number of adjectives modifying nouns such as *sentiment/ emotion* 'feeling/ emotion' or *moment* 'moment', trying to attribute in this way an emotionally charged character, positive or negative, to the noun.

(13) La période des examens est une période *dure et pressante* qui nous provoque du stress. (CHY-MICH)

(14) Ce moment continue et il continue d'être une situation *horrible et mauvaise*, ... (CHY-POLY)

(15) Ce voyage en Norvège était tout entier très très *superbe* mais le moment qui m'a plut le plus était quand j'ai vu pour la première fois une énorme cascade. J'étais toute mouillé et plus heureuse au monde, le soleil brillait sur le ciel, il faisait chaud et je ne pensait à rien. C'était *formidable*. (PL-A20)

**Table 4:** CY corpus and PL corpus 1

|                               | CY-Corpus |    | PL-Corpus |    |
|-------------------------------|-----------|----|-----------|----|
| <i>moment</i> + Adjective     | 12        | 48 | 4         | 27 |
| <i>sentiment</i> + Adjective  | 6         | 7  | 2         | 3  |
| <i>expérience</i> + Adjective | 2         | 3  | 0         | 0  |

We may infer that although the emotional lexicon seems to be quite limited, learners tend to use various other strategies to express their emotional state. They often resort to a lexicon with emotional charge such as adjectives that allow the qualification of the different aspects of their experience. More often than not, these adjectives qualify either the emotion or the event evoking the emotion.



Further, we should also take into consideration the use of adverbs in the sub-corpora. Although we may deduce that students tend not to use emotional adverbs, they do prefer the use of adverbs when needing to intensify their emotional state.

CY-Corpus: tellement, très, vraiment

PL-Corpus: tellement, très, vraiment

Even though the adverbs are the same, we may notice the varying frequency of their appearance:

**Table 5:** CY corpus and PL corpus 2

|                                | CY-Corpus |       | PL-Corpus |       |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|
| <i>tellement</i> 'so' + Adj    | 1         | 3%    | 4         | 16.5% |
| <i>très</i> 'very' + Adj       | 17        | 51.5% | 18        | 75%   |
| <i>vraiment</i> 'really' + Adj | 15        | 45.5% | 2         | 8.5%  |

(16) En outre, cet événement a fait mes parents fiers de moi, alors j'étais *vraiment* heureuse de les voir, *tellement* contents. (CY-KARA)

(17) Le soleil brillait, les oiseaux chantaient et moi, j'étais *très* heureuse. Quand j'étais dans la voiture j'éprouvais des émotions *très* fortes et différentes—d'une part j'étais excitée mais de l'autre j'avais peur ... (PL-A10)

As a final point, we would like to address the issue of what is known as *emotional frame* (see *contour émotionnel*, Valetopoulos 2016). According to our corpus, we may observe the fact that students use different creative writing strategies in order to define or intensify their emotional state. These strategies can be divided into two different types: a. the embodiment and b. the description of the environment.

The first strategy seems quite complicated for a learner because the use of this type of lexicon demands a high level of knowledge of the foreign language. At the same time, it reveals the cognitive schemes the students create, which are themselves influenced by the schemes of their native language. We shall use the principle of embodiment in a meaning broader than in cognitive linguistics, used especially in the study of metaphor (Goschler 2005; Köveczes 1990, 2000; Lakoff & Johnson 1999). In our analysis embodiment mostly refers to body responses as a reaction to an emotional state: a large beating heart (example 18), cry of joy (example 19), laugh and cry (example 20).

(18) Je sens un liaison magique avec la reste des personnes. Chaque concert est pour moi *comme un grand coeur battant*. (PL-A02)

(19) Nous avons regardé les paysages qui me faisaient *pleurer de joie*. J'étais tellement heureuse dans ce pays que je voulais y rester pour toujours. (PL-A20)

(20) Ainsi, quand j'ai lis les résultats sur l'Internet j'étais surprise. Après, j'ai commencé à *rire et à pleurer très fort*. Ma joie était doublée parce que ma sœur jumelle «a gagné» une place aussi à l'Universite de Chypre. (CY-POLY)

The second strategy deals with the description of the student's environment which reflects the emotional state. This description uses the standard metaphorical schemes, such as light and heat for a happy occasion (example 21).

(21) Il faisait très chaud. Le temps était formidable. Le soleil brillait, les oiseaux chantaient et moi, j'étais très heureuse.

## Limitations and conclusion

Emotional lexicon is an integral part of teaching and learning vocabulary in a foreign language. However, this kind of vocabulary encapsulates some special features: the choice of the emotional predicates may depend on the influence of the L1 because of the varying conceptualizations of emotions in the languages; the richness of the vocabulary may vary in the learners' productions, written or oral, because other strategies may be used towards a similar effect, etc.

We suggested an experiment asking learners of varying L1 to write about their saddest and happiest moment and the feelings they experienced. In this study, we focused on the happiest moment. The analysis of the corpus not only showed that the vocabulary in Greek-Cypriot learners' texts was less varied than that of the Polish learners but also that in both sub-corpora the lexical variation was very limited. Additional other strategies expressing the emotional state compensate for this limited richness. Learners use a lexicon with emotional charge, that is, adjectives that allow the qualification of different aspects of their experience.

This study focused on one part of the corpus; the next stages of this analysis would be to focus on three different comparisons: a comparison with the native speakers' corpus in order to define the strategies used by the native speakers, in Greek, French and Polish; a comparison with the productions describing the saddest moment in order to highlight similarities or differences in the strategies employed by learners according

to subject. The third stage would focus on the oral productions and the vocabulary employed by learners and native speakers.

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# TEACHING COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO EFL TEACHERS

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## Outline

This paper presents a study of the role of communication strategies and skills in L2 teachers' pre-service tertiary education. In the first part of the study, a critical review is presented of an EFL teacher-education curriculum at a state-funded university in the Republic of Serbia, aiming to identify the courses and/or course elements that focus specifically on the development of students' communication strategies and skills. In the second part of the study, a qualitative analysis of a focus-group interview with senior students at the English department of the Faculty of Philosophy University of Niš is presented, aiming to highlight prospective L2 teachers' views on and their awareness of the communication skills they need to develop for L2 teaching.

**Key words:** communication skills, communication strategies, communicative competence, L2 teacher education, EFL.

## Introduction

Although views on communicative language teaching (CLT) have changed over time, the notion of *communicative competence* (Canale 1983; Canale & Swain 1980) is still essential for foreign language (L2) pedagogy. In addition to learner autonomy, alternative assessment, developing critical and creative thinking skills, and the importance of diversity in L2 classrooms (Jacobs & Farrell 2003), the core principles of contemporary L2 approaches also place emphasis on the social, cooperative and interactive nature of language learning. Furthermore, beside grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies (Richards 2006), the notion of communicative competence has grown to encompass the intercultural component as well (Byram 1997), including a critical understanding of global communication and its impact on L2

teaching (Cameron 2002). Therefore, the notion of communicative competence in contemporary L2 learning and teaching comprises knowing how to use L2 for different purposes and functions, how to vary the use of language for different settings, contexts and participants, how to understand and produce different types of texts, and how to maintain communication despite one's limitations in L2 (Richards 2006).

Language teachers have always been faced with great expectations, and pre-service L2 teacher education has always been a complex undertaking. However, today more than ever, "new and varied leadership roles teachers are expected to fill" (Hinkel 2011) pose new challenges, too. Can we claim that contemporary L2 teacher education provides adequate preparation for the increasingly demanding professional task of being a successful and efficient teacher of a foreign language? If we accept that the "crucial skills of effective teachers" and thus the main outcomes of teacher education should be "culturally responsive teaching", self-knowledge, understanding and willingness to change, connecting with the world beyond the classroom, reflective skills, management skills, and "communication and collaboration skills for building relationships" (Grant & Gillette 2006), we need to re-think the L2 teacher education curriculum, and the role played in it by both communication theories and communication skills.

Traditional teacher education curricula expressed the belief that L2 teaching is essentially a skills-based profession (Tsui 2011), and that pre-service teacher training, typically consisting of a theoretical course on L2 teaching methodology (with or without a practicum), was an ample addition to the 'main' courses in L2, linguistics, and the L2 literature and culture. However, as pointed out by Grant and Gillette (2006, 296), "[t]he science of teaching may lie in the content, but the art of teaching is in the delivery of the content". Therefore, communication as skilled performance, as a set of skills or abilities (Hargie 2006), is crucial for L2 teachers' professional and social competence.

Communication skills develop gradually, through use, and are refined over time through implementation (Greene 2003, 51). Some of the important "behavioural indicators" of skill improvement are speed, accuracy, flexibility and multiple-task performance, and some cognitive indicators are the level of cognitive effort required, the level of apprehension, and awareness of what we are doing (Greene 2003, 53). These skills are also "teachable" (Dörnyei 1995) and should be taught to L2 learners. So, do we teach them to prospective L2 teachers? Does the traditional curriculum offer enough opportunity for prospective L2 teachers to develop *their own* communication skills, and does it provide an

adequate theoretical background to understand the complexity of the communication process?

## Communication strategies and skills

Communication strategies, being central to communicative L2 teaching and learning, were in the focus of attention for several decades of the past century. As pointed out by Dörnyei (1995, 56), although authors disagreed on some points, the commonly accepted research definition viewed these strategies as systematic techniques used by a speaker to “enhance the effectiveness of communication” (Canale 1983, 11) and “to express his [or her] meaning when faced with some difficulty” (Corder 1981, 103, in Dörnyei 1995, 56), mostly due to limitations in linguistic resources.

Therefore, communication strategies encompass various devices used to “compensate for a lack of L2 knowledge”, such as meaning-negotiation mechanisms and general problem-solving mechanisms used in L2 communication (Dörnyei 1995, 58), i.e. “every potentially intentional attempt to cope with any language related problems of which the speaker is aware during the course of communication” (Dörnyei & Scott 1997, 179). These would include *avoidance* or *reduction* strategies (message abandonment, reduction, and replacement; topic avoidance), as well *achievement* or *compensatory* strategies (paraphrase, circumlocution, describing, and exemplifying; approximation; restructuring; literal translation; appeal for help; word coinage; ‘foreignizing’; code switching; non-linguistic means such as mime, gestures, imitation, mumbling), and, finally, *stalling* or *time-gaining* strategies (fillers and hesitation devices). They comprise both *conceptual* strategies (“manipulating the target concept to make it expressible through available linguistic resource”), analytic as well as holistic (e.g. circumlocution vs. approximation), and *linguistic code* strategies “manipulating the speaker’s linguistic knowledge” (e.g. morphological creativity, transfer from another language) (Dörnyei 1995, 57-8).

Focusing on practical aspects of language use, rather than on the notion of communicative competence itself, a number of practical communication-skill practice frameworks define communication skills as ‘social skills’, ‘interpersonal skills’, or ‘soft skills’. These are often grouped into three categories: a) sending a message that can be understood; b) understanding received messages; and c) relationship-building skills, and are further analysed into more specific sub-skills, such as picking the right medium; opening/closing; listening; nonverbal communication; questioning; reinforcement, encouraging; explaining, clarifying; persuasiveness; reflecting;



or providing feedback. Hargie (2006), for instance, specifically lists eight such ‘core communication skills’: nonverbal communication, questioning, reinforcement, reflecting, explaining, self-disclosure, listening, and humour and laughter.

## **Communication in L2 teacher education**

Teachers’ communication skills are commonly assumed to be part of their professional competence. Their ability to interact effectively, appropriately and competently with others, or their ‘social’ or ‘interpersonal skills’ are, however, often just assumed or expected to develop on their own. As pointed out by Hargie (2006), in traditional teacher education emphasis is placed on cognitive and technical knowledge, while interpersonal skills are largely neglected. While in some other professional contexts where interpersonal skills are important, such as healthcare, business, or IT, we see the development of more and more research studies (Greene 2003), methods of assessment (Spitzberg 2003), and training programs aiming to develop communication skills, in the field of teacher education and professional development these are still scarce (Hargie 2006).

However, communication skills are particularly important for L2 teachers’ professional competence, and are seen as such by L2 learners, too. Investigating ‘the distinctive features’ of L2 teachers, Borg (2006) found that the participant students believed that, in addition to being creative and having a sense of humour, important traits of language teachers also included being flexible, ‘actor-type’, motivating, enthusiastic, and being able to “communicate freely and radiate positive feeling” (Borg 2006, 23). And although Borg emphasizes that “there was no suggestion that other teachers did not require such qualities”; it was clear that these were particularly important, “almost essential” for language teachers, and “only desirable” for other teachers.

Reviewing research studies on L2 teacher education and development, Tsui (2011, 24) states that L2 teaching was traditionally considered to be ‘skill-based’, involving the acquisition of practical skills in the classroom but requiring little ‘knowledge base’. However, being cross-disciplinary in nature, L2 teacher education requires much wider theoretical underpinnings, including both the ‘subject-matter knowledge’ and ‘language awareness’ (Tsui 2011, 27). She finds that “despite the emphasis given to the centrality of pedagogic content knowledge, few studies have focused on the ways in which L2 teachers are able to effectively represent subject matter knowledge to students, the difficulties students have in

understanding how the language works, and how they could be helped” (Tsui 2011, 34). She concludes that L2 teachers’ pedagogic content knowledge should involve “a sound knowledge of the language systems”. We would, however, add that the knowledge base of L2 teachers also needs to include a much more thorough and wider-angled understanding of how language systems are used in communication, and of the notions of communication strategies and skills.

## **Present study**

The study presented here consists of two parts, one addressing the status of communication strategies and skills in a university curriculum for the pre-service tertiary education of teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL), and the other investigating the prospective EFL teachers’ views on and awareness of their own communication strategies and skills, and how they are developed.

In the following section, we present the details of each part of the study separately, including their aims, the methodology applied, and the discussion of the findings.

## **Study I**

In the educational system of the Republic of Serbia, the MA degree is a requirement for all L2 teachers in state-funded schools, primary as well as secondary, including vocational schools. Within the Serbian higher-education system, study programs that could lead to the qualifications required for L2 teachers are offered mostly by state-funded universities, and just a small number of privately-owned universities. Therefore, we chose to analyse the BA and the MA study programs at a state-funded university, the study programs in English language and literature at the English Department of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš. These programs explicitly state that they aim at educating, among other professions and specializations, prospective EFL teachers. This study investigated the extent to which such university study programs incorporate elements relevant for either the development of specific communication skills or the understanding of the communication process and communicative competence.

The investigated curriculum is a two-component study program. The BA study program comprises 4 years of study, i.e. 8 semesters, carrying 256-264 credits by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), while

the MA study program is a 1-year i.e. 2-semester program, carrying 60 ECTS credits.

The corpus for analysis included the official documents describing the curriculum structure and the course syllabuses, including the specified teaching aims, objectives and procedures in each course. The analysed documents included the syllabuses prepared for the accreditation of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, completed in 2014. In the analysis, the explicit mention of any elements directly connected to communication, communicative strategies or communication skills was taken as a relevant indicator. The analysis involved a qualitative content analysis of the documents, aiming to identify all curriculum and syllabus elements that could be considered relevant for the development of students' communicative strategies and skills.

### **BA curriculum**

In each of the 8 semesters of BA studies, there are several obligatory 'core' courses, and in this respect the structure of all the 8 semesters is symmetrical. The 'core' courses include: a course in contemporary English (*Contemporary English 1–8*), typically comprising grammar and vocabulary use, writing, translation, and some integrated skill practice, at levels ranging from B2+ to C2 by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR); a theoretical course in a linguistic discipline (including *Introduction to the study of English, Phonetics, Morphology, Syntax, Cognitive linguistics 1 and 2, and Semantics 1 and 2*); a course in Anglophone literature; and a course in an English-speaking culture (British, American, Australian, Canadian studies).

In each semester, there is a 'block' of elective courses in various areas related to the major subject of study – language, linguistics, literature, or culture. Finally, in each semester, one block of elective courses is devoted to general education, e.g. *Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology, Pedagogy, Serbian language*, an additional foreign language.

#### ***Cognitive component, technical component***

The analysis of the syllabuses of the obligatory 'core' courses showed that they mostly contribute to the 'knowledge base' (Tsui 2011) of prospective EFL teachers, i.e. the cognitive component of their professional competence, since they mostly focus on theoretical knowledge, with some theoretical-practical application, for instance, in linguistic or literary analysis, or the knowledge about specific aspects of the language system.

The specified aims, outcomes, methods and techniques in core courses' syllabuses do not explicitly list any elements that can be related to the development of specific communication skills, although some include particular forms of assessment other than formal testing – e.g. student presentations or project work, which do involve students' communicative skills. Still, these are not explicitly addressed in coursework, but rather assumed.

Even the most complex 'core' courses in contemporary English, which typically focus on students' grammatical proficiency, vocabulary building, and the four main language skills, can be said to contribute to prospective EFL teachers' cognitive competence component, the knowledge base of the profession. Although "developing students' communicative competence" is often stated as one of the course's aims, specific elements, such as particular communication strategies or specific communication skills are rarely explicitly mentioned in their syllabuses as elements of the course content. Only a few elements could be identified (e.g. in the *Contemporary English 5* syllabus) related to language use and the notion of language appropriateness (e.g. levels of formality, register, written/ spoken expression, language functions), with "some practice in horizontal and vertical register shifting".

The analysis, therefore, showed that the cognitive component, or the knowledge base of prospective teachers' professional competence, was dominant in both the curriculum structure and the content of specific course syllabuses. In addition to this, some electives focused on specific technical skills, e.g. using technology for L2 teaching in *Computer-assisted language learning* (8<sup>th</sup> sem.) adding to the technical, 'hard' skill component of prospective teachers' professional competence.

### ***Communication component***

When communication skills and strategies are concerned, the analysis showed that a very small number of courses contained elements in their syllabuses that would explicitly list developing particular communication skills or aspects of communicative strategies as either a course objective or an activity included in the course content.

Like obligatory courses, a number of elective courses in various areas include alternative forms of assessment (projects, student presentations, homework assignments) that rely on specific communication skills; however, these are not explicitly addressed by course activities, but rather assumed.

### ***Communication-skill or 'soft-skill' courses***

In the BA curriculum, only six elective courses were identified that focus explicitly on developing some aspects of students' communicative skills, and state it as either their objective or course content.

One elective, *Developing pragmatic competence* (4<sup>th</sup> sem.), addresses appropriateness and effectiveness of communication. The syllabus states that the course objectives are to “develop Ss’ understanding of how communicative contexts influence the choice of verbal and non-verbal signals, raising their awareness of how linguistic devices are used for speech acts in contexts”. The course content includes practical communicative activities, such as role-play.

Two elective courses directly address communication skills in the domain of speaking: *Developing speaking: Oral presentations* (3<sup>rd</sup> sem.) and *English through debate* (3<sup>rd</sup> sem.), and both course syllabuses state that they aim at “enhancing students’ communicative skills in public speaking”. In *Oral presentations*, in addition to the use of linguistic ‘tools’ i.e. phonological devices of intonation, pitch range, pause, tempo and loudness, some relevant non-verbal and non-linguistic aspects of oral communication are also explicitly addressed – posture, gesture, facial expressions and eye contact, as well as space management, and time management. The strategic communicative devices used to enhance the clarity and persuasiveness of speech are also explicitly included in the syllabus. In the other course, *English through debate*, the skills explicitly stated in the syllabus as course objectives are tolerance and language appropriateness (style, register).

Two electives deal with communication skills in written language. *The form and the content* (6<sup>th</sup> sem.), a course in academic essay writing, aims to enhance students’ use of linguistic devices to achieve clarity, sound argumentation, and persuasiveness. The syllabus also states increasing students’ social awareness as an objective, as well as enhancing the appropriate and effective formulation of the message. *Critical reading* (4<sup>th</sup> sem.) aims at developing students’ ability to understand the message of the text, to reflect on the structure of arguments, to identify explicit and implicit meanings, as well as developing critical thinking. Specific communicative skills included in the course activities are summarizing, presenting, clarifying and paraphrasing.

Finally, one of the ‘general education’ electives in psychology directly addresses one component of interpersonal communication skills – *Non-verbal communication* (8<sup>th</sup> sem.). It includes both the theoretical underpinnings of the psychological theory and some practical elements

that contribute to the students' understanding of the role of the non-verbal elements in communication.

### ***'Diversity awareness' courses***

Contributing to developing students' communicative competence in the broader sense, in the domain of socio-pragmatic and intercultural competence, several elective courses were identified that state enhancing these aspects of communicative competence as their aim.

Two electives address the issue of intercultural competence and list several communication skills as objectives: *Intercultural communicative competence* (5<sup>th</sup> sem.) and *Cultural elements in EFL teaching* (7<sup>th</sup> sem.). The syllabuses explicitly state that the courses aim at "enhancing communication skills such as open-mindedness, empathy and respect, non-verbal communication signals related to body movement (kinesics), space management (proxemics), posture, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact", as well as reflection, self-awareness and self-expression, explicitly aiming to "help students develop social (intercultural) awareness".

In this broader sense, another elective can be said to contribute to developing prospective EFL teachers' intercultural awareness, *Pronunciation in EFL teaching* (8<sup>th</sup> sem.). Addressing primarily the need to integrate pronunciation instruction in different aspects of L2 teaching, it also states as one of its aims "increasing students' social and intercultural awareness, and a critical perspective on the globalized context of EFL teaching, reflected in issues of accent and pronunciation".

Finally, in the broadest sense, a group of electives could also be seen as contributing to developing students' awareness of diversity: three elective courses on less frequently studied English-speaking cultures, *Scottish* (3<sup>rd</sup> sem.), *Irish* (8<sup>th</sup> sem.), *Afro-American studies* (8<sup>th</sup> sem.), as well as four 'general education' electives – *Introduction to the sociology of gender* (1<sup>st</sup> sem.), *Sociology of minority identities* (1<sup>st</sup> sem.), *Society and culture* (1<sup>st</sup> sem.), and *Introduction to the religions of the world* (1<sup>st</sup> sem.). However, the analysis of the course syllabuses showed that they mostly offer a contribution to the knowledge-base or the cognitive component of prospective teachers' professional competence, rather than to the development of their communicative strategies or skills.

### ***ELT methodology or 'teacher-training' courses***

In the BA curriculum, there are two obligatory ELT methodology courses, the one in the 5<sup>th</sup> semester providing the theoretical foundation and practical teaching preparation for pre-service teachers (e.g. lesson planning, activities, materials, micro-teaching), and the one in the 6<sup>th</sup>

semester including students' practicum (teaching practice). Naturally, both these courses include, in their objectives as well as in the course content and activities, many of the essential communication skills, such as team work, problem solving, decision making, time management, self-management, responsibility and accountability, clarity and concision, feedback, or presentation skills.

### **MA curriculum**

This 2-semester study program comprises one obligatory course, *Scientific research techniques* (1<sup>st</sup> semester) and a block of 15 elective courses, of which each student chooses 4. Of the 15 electives, six are devoted to linguistic disciplines, seven to Anglophone literatures and cultures, and only two specifically to EFL teacher-training (*Language teaching methodology*; *Material design*). One of the linguistics courses is devoted to *Pragmatics*, but its syllabus shows that both its objectives and its content contribute to students' theoretical knowledge, and not to developing their communicative skills. With the exception of the two teaching methodology courses, the syllabuses of other electives in this curriculum contain no explicitly listed elements that could be considered as contributing to developing students' communicative skills and strategies.

### **Identified problems**

The analysis showed that the current curriculum educating prospective EFL teachers (accredited in 2014) indeed contains a wide array of elective courses, some of which do address communication skills. However, the main problem is that all these courses are electives, 'competing' in the same 'block' with a much wider array of other electives that address either the cognitive or the technical component of prospective teachers' professional competencies, but not communication skills. Consequently, only a relatively small proportion of students get to work on developing their communicative strategies and skills in these electives. Of the obligatory courses, taken by all students, only a very small number offer some elements devoted to developing communication skills, and only the two EFL teaching methodology courses are substantially focused on these skills. This is by no means enough, bearing in mind that communication skills "need to be practiced over time and require repeated and spaced practice" (Greene 2003).

Another problem highlighted by the present analysis is that even the electives that do focus on developing communication skills do not share

common objectives. For instance, in the 3rd semester elective block, *Debate* and *Oral presentations* cover the same area, public speaking, but they focus on quite different communication skills. There is room for much more coordination in defining course aims and objectives, so as to ensure that students develop similar communication skills in different courses.

Finally, only a limited number of specific communication skills are explicitly addressed even in the skill-oriented courses. Many skills are not covered at all, or at least this is not explicitly stated in the course syllabuses, while communication strategies are included only tangentially in a few course syllabuses. Although the cognitive knowledge-base and the technical skills are both very important for EFL teachers' professional competence, the development of students' communicative skills needs much more space in the curriculum, as well.

## Discussion

Bearing in mind that this analysis included only the *official* documents, the curriculum and course syllabuses prepared for the accreditation process and available at the Faculty website, it could be claimed that, since these documents comply with a pre-designed form, and are rather limited in their scope, they do not include much detail about the actual realization of the course and all the aspects of the course content. Therefore, it is highly possible that in the realization of the courses the instructors indeed employ some activities or include some course content that could be identified as aiming to contribute to the development of specific communication strategies and skills. Still, whether these are explicitly stated in the official syllabus or not, as either a course objective or part of the course content, was taken as a relevant indicator of the syllabus maker's own awareness of the importance of including these elements in the course, and of the curriculum makers' awareness that communication skills cannot be expected to develop on their own, as a by-product of classroom work, but need to be addressed directly and actively.

Along these lines, Dörnyei (1995, 63) lists six important aspects of teaching communication strategies (and skills) without which we cannot expect them to develop in our L2 students. They include awareness raising, providing models and drawing students' attention to how they are used by different speakers, providing opportunities for focused practice of communication strategies and skills, and, not the least importantly, raising students' awareness about the cross-cultural differences in the use of communication strategies and skills (Dörnyei 1995, 63). What Dörnyei



particularly emphasizes, and what is particularly relevant for our claim in this study, is paying conscious attention to the use of communicative skills, and explicit, direct instruction of communication strategies by “presenting linguistic devices that can be used to verbalize them”. As shown by our analysis, these direct steps in teaching communication strategies and skills need to find a much more central place in the current EFL teacher education curriculum.

Because they are ‘interpersonal’, communication skills are often only assumed in tertiary-level students, i.e. expected to have already been developed, at home or at lower levels of education. Because they are ‘soft’, communication skills are often seen as peripheral and optional, as an ‘add-on’, compared to the knowledge base and the technical ‘know-how’ of teaching. Because they are ‘social’, communication skills are often expected to develop spontaneously, collaterally, on their own, as a by-product of the studies focusing on other components of EFL teachers’ professional competence. Finally, the question of how students’ communication skills and strategies are assessed is not even raised. They are often evaluated and assessed only as part of students’ overall proficiency in English, or as part of their ability to demonstrate their cognitive, knowledge-based and technical proficiency. Lastly, although intercultural competence is recognized as a desired outcome of EFL teacher education, students’ communicative skills are often evaluated completely disregarding the ideological, cultural and social factors relevant for communication evaluation, just as they are expected to develop in prospective EFL teachers without focused, direct practice and awareness raising.

## **Study II – Prospective EFL teachers’ views**

Taking the first part of the study as a formal contextual-educational framework within which prospective EFL teachers’ communicative skills are expected to develop, the second part of the study turned to the students, aiming to investigate their views on and awareness of not only their own communication skills and strategies but also the elements of their studies that contributed to their development. It also aimed to investigate the extent to which students were aware of the important aspects of the communication process, and their understanding of the notion of communicative competence.

The methodological tool used in this part of the study was a focus-group interview, followed by a qualitative content analysis of the transcript. The methodology applied in this part of the study can, thus, be

described as qualitative and exploratory (Perry 2005), since no initial hypotheses had been made about the views the participants would express. For purposes of triangulation, the researcher's notes taken during and after the focus-group interview were used.

### ***Participants***

The focus-group interview was conducted with seven senior students (five female, two male) of the English department at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, in the spring semester of 2016/2017, as a course-related no-credit activity within the elective course *Pronunciation in EFL* teaching. The participants were fairly proficient EFL learners (C1 CEFR level, according to the curriculum standards). The participants' age was 21-24 (average 22). The participants were randomly chosen from a larger list of volunteers, and thus constituted a convenience but purposeful random sample (Patton 2002, 240), reflecting the usual gender structure of students at the Department (fewer male students).

As for the participants' potentially relevant history at the time of the study, they had already completed their obligatory *ELT Methodology* courses in the previous year of study, and were narrowly focused on the professional identity of an EFL teacher, partly also because the interview was organized as a course-related activity in a teacher-training oriented course. In addition, during their studies, they had had an opportunity to regularly interact with two American lecturers, each a one-year fellow engaged through an educational program of the USA government. Also, all the participants had previously been engaged in an extracurricular cultural exchange program at the Faculty of Philosophy, visited by a group of students from the University of Alabama, USA.

### ***Procedures***

The technique chosen for data collection was a loosely structured focus group interview. This was chosen over one-to-one interviews since the participants came from a relatively homogeneous group, and since the purpose of the interview, very loosely guided by only a few pre-set open-ended questions, was to provide exploratory data, to elicit students' opinions and statements that would indicate their awareness, and to probe for the statements that would document these.

At the beginning, the participants gave their consent to record the interview. The interviewer then offered a very brief introduction of the topic of communication, asking what they think and feel about their own communicative competence. Although initiated by pre-set opening questions, the interview allowed the participants to freely interact with one

another, rather than with the interviewer. They chose how much, how often and when they wanted to contribute to the discussion. The interviewer kept herself in the background, and intervened minimally, in an unobtrusive way, when the participants hesitated to continue with the discussion. In the closing, the participants were asked several general questions about their own educational background in EFL, to complete the researcher's notes, and at the end the group was helped by the interviewer to sum up the main points that came up during the interview. The interview lasted for 50 minutes. The irrelevant parts (opening, closing, technical problems, long hesitations, silence) were filtered out, producing 27 minutes of the participants' discussion.

### *Analysis*

The analysis included the following procedures. First, the recordings were transcribed verbatim and re-coded for anonymity. In accordance with the study aim, we did not opt for a detailed transcription system, since the analysis was not intended to capture the conversational details and the nature of the participants' interaction, but rather the content of the participants' thinking process. Therefore, the transcription recorded only the basic structure of the interaction (turn beginnings and endings, pauses, interruptions, etc.). At the end, most of the interviewer's back-channelling and encouraging lines were edited out of the transcript, leaving only the important exchange. Second, the transcript was analysed quantitatively, using the TextSTAT 2.8 software for content analysis (Hüning 2007), in order to identify words, phrases, concepts, and themes of potential interest, bearing in mind that the frequency of occurrence can indicate the participants' focus of attention (Weber 1990).

The main part of the analysis included a qualitative conceptual content analysis of the corpus (Weber 1990) to identify the topics, themes and concepts of interest, to compare, sort and chart them, and to develop 'conceptual analytical categories' to classify them (Patton 2002, 91-92). The corpus was manually coded into content categories, and each concept was analysed in the context in which it occurred. The analysis aimed to identify all the concepts relevant for communicative competence, communication strategies and communication skills brought up by the students intentionally during the interview. Since some themes and concepts were pre-conceived, e.g. the definitions and descriptions of communication strategies and skills, while others were allowed to emerge from the data, the research can be described as partially grounded or emergent (Stemler 2001).

## Results and interpretation

In our interpretation of the data, we relied on the basic principles of discourse analysis. In Blommaert's terms, the idea particularly relevant for the interpretation of the data was language awareness, and, to a certain extent, the institutional discourse within language education (Blommaert 2005, 26-27). The ordering of themes was also considered important (Patton 2002, 53), because it was taken to indicate the relevance the participants assigned to them.

The analysis revealed a number of topics, concepts and elements that fell into four main thematic categories relevant for our research aim, in the order of relevance based on frequency as well as relative priority: *communication as speaking and self-expression; attributions; correctness; and appropriateness as politeness.*

### ***Communication as speaking***

The first major observation that could be made based on the data analysis was that for our participants 'communication' was construed as almost synonymous with the skill of *speaking* fluently, with the purpose of expressing one's own thoughts, feelings and opinions. They used the terms 'communication' and 'speaking' as fully interchangeable, and not once referred to a context in which communication would include either written language forms, or the receptive skills of listening and reading, or, as it were, communication as *interaction*.

This must be taken as a surprising finding, for several reasons. Firstly, considering the amount of written texts English Department students deal with in all their courses, it should be expected that they would subsume the written aspect of language, too, under the concept of 'communication'. This can, therefore, be understood as an indicator that supports a more and more commonly encountered classroom observation that EFL students, generally, tend to be increasingly orally/aurally-oriented.

Secondly, this can be interpreted as an indicator of the students' limited communication competence. Namely, even if construed as primarily *spoken*, communication is an interactive, social process, and being focused on one's own contribution rather than on the interaction with others is certainly undesirable. Seeing communication mainly as a (one-way) channel of self-expression indicates a discouraging lack of awareness of the complexity of the process of communication. Even if we choose to interpret this as the participants' focusing on the formal educational context due to the general formal educational framework of this study, the fact that they did not express any awareness of the social,

interactional and multi-level aspects of communication can be taken as a sign of their limited understanding of the notions of communication and communicative competence.

Moreover, the fact that they never questioned their own understanding of these concepts can even be interpreted as ideological in Fairclough's terms, since the participants took the definition of communication as speech, and as self-expression, as 'given' (Fairclough 2003, 58). This was indicated by the fact that the interviewer did not manage to prompt, elicit and probe an elaboration or explanation when the participants used phrases such as '*good communication*' '*successful communication*', or stated that people '*really communicate*' when they are '*fluent*'. The question '*What do you mean?*' would just prompt the participants to rephrase the statement, or to state '*When... you know... when you speak freely... speak your mind freely.*' (S4-11).

Being good at communicating was defined by our participants partly as the result of being competent in the language of communication (e.g. '*...if you know English and can say what you mean, then you must be good in communication*' (S3-16)), and partly as a personal, individual trait of certain people, who are '*extrovert and communicative*', '*talkative and direct*'. Being a good communicator involves, in our participants' view, a '*willingness to communicate*', '*readiness to express your feelings, thoughts and opinions and not hide them*', being '*direct, frank*', and '*not be shy or buttoned up*'. Individual traits they brought up even included being '*friendly, sociable*'. This tendency to view communication primarily through the prism of individual, psychological differences, as an ability that you either have or have not, rather than as a set of strategies and skills that can be developed and improved, can be interpreted as a lack of awareness of communication strategies and skills in our participants.

To sum up, the participants' lack of awareness that communication skills and strategies are something that can be learned, practiced and improved is best illustrated by a statement all the participants readily agreed with:

*People usually just talk... we don't think about it a lot... when you have something to say you just... you say it and so... It's not something you really think about... I mean, you think about what you want to say and how... but not really think about this 'communication' thing you want us to think about now... [laughter] I usually think about grammar... not to make a mistake' (S1-6)*

### ***Attributions***

The participants mostly focused on their personal experience and their own perspective, and elaborated on their understanding of the concept of communication mostly in the form of ‘I like/ I don’t like’ statements, or as attempts to describe their own behaviour in communicative situations, or in the form of attributions.

*I am shy and it is never easy for me to ... speak in the class... or with others, generally... I can't start talking... can't remember the right word... it's very difficult for me... and I don't like it when people pressure on me... like in the exams, ha, ha, ha [laughter]. No, really, we are not all the same, and I am really shy, and some people are... I don't know... open...extrovert, it's easier for them.’ (S7-31)*

*I don't like talkative people, they are... uh... maybe I ... they are... I don't want to offend you ... people here... I wanted to say 'annoying'... But maybe not annoying, maybe just... aggressive, ha ha, that's even worse, sorry... I want to say talking a lot, when you're communicative... isn't always a good thing, right? (S4-19).*

In other words, along the lines of the Attribution theory, our participants made both internal and external attributions (Heider 1958), linking successful communication with the speakers’ character, personality, or sometimes attitude, but also including possible external factors of the context of the situation causing either success or failure in communication. Also in line with attribution analysis (e.g. Weiner 2006, 188), they often attributed success to personal ability, effort and desirable individual traits, while they attributed failure to external, situational factors, such as, for instance, the ‘pressure’ that ‘oral exams’ put on them.

### ***Correctness***

An important part in the participants’ discussion was played by what they labelled ‘language’ or ‘grammar mistakes’. Most of them readily attributed their own communication failures or communication apprehension to inadequate language knowledge and proficiency, and particularly to their fear of ‘making mistakes’.

*I'm usually good in oral exams, better than in [laughter] ... OK, I'm not talking about it... but I think it's because nobody really expects you to speak as good as you ... I mean it's just normal conversation, and some words from the text...(S7-29)*

*Sometimes you retell the text and that's it... the essay is much more difficult.... Because... they expect you to use the 'difficult' words... ha ha [laughter] and not to make grammar mistakes.... (S1-9)*

*To have a beautiful sentence... when you speak... their expectations are .... smaller.... and I feel relaxed...’ (S4-16)*

In the general context of this study, since the participants were EFL students and the study was organized as a course-related activity, this was somewhat understandable. However, bearing in mind that these were senior-year students, who had already passed their EFL teaching methodology training, and whose language proficiency was expected to be rather high by the curriculum standards, the fact that they focused on language correctness much more than on fluency or efficiency of communication, as well as the fact that they almost uniformly expressed a high level of communication apprehension, was rather surprising.

Furthermore, their belief that grammatical correctness is central to ‘successful communication’ can also be interpreted as their lack of awareness that communication strategies can be used to bypass linguistic limitations. It can also be interpreted as the result of the students’ lack of experience in practicing these strategies and skills in their own work during the studies, which is further supported by the fact that although they did talk mostly about their own experience in the educational context, they never brought up any topics related in any way to communication skill or strategy practice.

Lastly, the participants’ focusing only on ‘grammar mistakes’ and not, for instance, on ‘vocabulary mistakes’ or the ‘mistakes’ in other aspects of language use, or on other, non-linguistic aspects of communicative behaviour, can be taken as an indicator of their very limited definition of communicative competence.

Finally, the fact that they mostly brought up communicative situations related to the formal contexts—their own studies, classroom communication, their teaching practicum experience, their oral exams, some extracurricular activities they participated in at the Faculty—and not some less formal communicative contexts, e.g. from their personal experience, could be, as already stated, seen as a result of the formal educational context of this study, i.e. of its being limited in this way.

Alternatively, however, this can be interpreted as a sign that the students may indeed have a limited experience with using English in different kinds of communicative contexts, outside the formal context of the classroom. Despite the common belief that today’s students benefit from the modern technologies that offer various communication opportunities, this may not be true, i.e. this cannot be something we rely on for students’ communication practice outside the classroom.

### *Appropriateness as politeness*

The last conceptual category identified in the data was the participants' understanding of the notion of appropriateness in communication. Several participants commented on the importance of using 'appropriate language' when communicating, as part of 'being polite' and trying 'not to offend people', 'to choose your words when you speak...', especially 'when you don't agree... when you have a different opinion' (S1-18).

However, it is very important that 'being polite' in this respect, i.e. using 'appropriate language' was also understood by the participants as something linked to individual, personal traits and properties, not as something that results from one's communication skills. For instance, politeness was related to 'being nice', 'being kind to people', even to being 'cultured... I don't know, the way your parents brought you up... (S4-33)'.

The interactive, social, not to mention culturally-shaped aspects of 'appropriate' communication were not brought up by any of the participants. Nor could they elaborate on what it means to choose 'appropriate' language in communication. When probed, some of them offered paraphrase ('adequate'), some referred again to the notion of 'correctness' ('the right language for that situation', 'expected'), while others relied on their previous experience, but not explaining what these differences involved 'The words and phrases usually used in that kind of situation... for example... when you talk to your teachers or to a colleague ... it's not the same' (S6-11).

Bearing in mind Spitzberg's (2000) observation that appropriateness and effectiveness are the two main criteria we all use in our "social evaluation of behaviour" (Spitzberg 2000, 380), others' as well as our own, we could conclude that in this respect our participants indeed demonstrated a remarkable level of awareness, albeit unable to precisely define what appropriateness involves. Spitzberg defines appropriateness as "the valued rules, norms and expectancies of the relationship" which "must not be significantly violated" (Spitzberg 2000, 380), and in this respect our participants indeed agreed with his views. Furthermore, considering that 'any given behavior ... may be judged competent in one context and incompetent in another' (Spitzberg 2000, 380), we may say that a participant's observation that "talking a lot, when you're communicative... isn't **always** a good thing, right?" (S4-19) expresses precisely this kind of view.

However, the other fundamental principle of successful, competent communication, that of effectiveness, as "the accomplishment of valued goals or rewards", resulting in accomplishing "the objectives in a manner that is appropriate to the context and relationship" (Spitzberg 2000, 380),



was not mentioned by our participants. Considering that communication strategies have been commonly defined as “systematic techniques used by a speaker to enhance the *effectiveness* of communication” (Canale 1983, 11, italics mine) and “to express [...] meaning when faced with some difficulty” (Corder 1981, 103) primarily due to language insufficiency, we must conclude that this should also be interpreted as an indicator of the participants’ limited awareness of communicative competence.

## Discussion

The most striking finding of this study was an obvious lack of awareness on the part of our participants of the various aspects of communication, primarily of the ways in which communication strategies and skills are used, but also of the various kinds of behaviours involved in communicative situations, linguistic as well as non-linguistic. The fact that they focused mostly on speaking, self-expression and linguistic (grammatical) correctness, while they never mentioned anything related to nonverbal communication, or the importance of attentive listening, indicated their very limited awareness of the social, interactive and contextual nature of communication, and of the communication skills that help us navigate it competently. In this respect, we can say that they were focused on only one aspect of communication skills, “sending a message that can be understood”; but neglected the other aspects, “understanding received messages” and, particularly, “relationship-building skills”, such as humour, or self-reflection (Hargie 2006).

This lack of awareness, however, should not be understood as the participants’ lack of practical communicative skills. Quite the contrary, in this interview, these participants demonstrated fine abilities in all these aspects of communication, and a skilful use of various communication strategies, including paraphrasing, circumlocution, exemplifying, reduction, appeal for help, specific skills, such as providing feedback and encouraging each other during the discussion, and even time-gaining strategies, humour, and various non-linguistic devices. Still, the absence of their awareness of these strategies and skills was overwhelming – simply put, the students could use them, but were not aware of using them at all. Also, they expressed an unexpectedly high level of communication apprehension, at least in their own perception of their own communicative behaviour, as well as a complete disregard of the fact that purposeful communication leads to realizing certain real objectives, and that it should be effective in addition to being ‘appropriate’.

If we remember Greene's observation that the important behavioural indicators of communicative skills are not only the accuracy, but also the speed and flexibility of communication, while the cognitive indicators include not only the level of cognitive effort required but also the level of communication apprehension, and, most importantly, "an awareness of what we are doing" (Greene 2003, 53), we must conclude that prospective EFL teachers need much more work on bringing these aspects of communicative competence to the level of conscious attention. Not only will they benefit from this by improving their own communicative skills, but they will be much better prepared to help their own future EFL students to develop and improve their communication skills.

## Conclusion

Although limited in many respects, from its limited scope (the curriculum of only one state-funded university, a small number of student participants) to the use of qualitative methodology only, the study presented here undoubtedly pointed to the fact that we need to "change the center of gravity" (Zeichner 2006) in L2 teacher education.

It is commonly assumed that EFL teachers, and more broadly all L2 teachers, need to be communicatively competent themselves before they can be expected to develop communication skills in their students. However, in order to ensure this, as shown in our study, L2 teacher educating curricula must offer much more focused work and direct practice, either through specialized courses devoted primarily to developing certain communication skills and strategies, or by including the most important aspects of teaching communication skills explicitly in the course syllabuses devoted to other aspects, cognitive or technical, of EFL teachers' professional competences. Awareness raising through providing, analysing and discussing different models of communicative interaction, providing opportunities for focused practice, and specifying explicitly the verbal and non-verbal and non-linguistic devices that are used in competent, effective communication should obviously find much more room in teacher educating curricula.

No less importantly, the knowledge-base of L2 teachers should be widened to include not only the pedagogical and linguistic domains, but also some more understanding of the complex process of communication and how it works in specific social, cultural and interactive contexts, particularly bearing in mind that teaching communication skills, like any aspect of language, can have "normative and standardizing effects" (Cameron 2002, 79), and needs to be socio-culturally sensitive in defining

what constitutes ‘competent communication’, both appropriate and effective or successful. Lastly, the question of evaluating and assessing students’ communicative competence and their use of communicative strategies and skills needs to be addressed in EFL teacher education curricula, like all other aspects of their professional competence.

To conclude, it is surprising indeed that the notion which is considered central in language teaching, and has been considered thus for many decades now, has such a dubious status in the education of prospective language teachers. Particularly if we agree with Greene and Burleson that not only in language learning and teaching, but in all social interaction, “[o]ur ability to create and sustain our social world depends in large measure on how well we communicate” (Greene & Burleson 2003, xiii).

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**PART II –  
LANGUAGE SKILLS**



# THE USE OF LISTENING, SPEAKING AND VOCABULARY STRATEGIES AMONG EFL LEARNERS: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS<sup>1</sup>

BILJANA RADIĆ-BOJANIĆ  
AND JAGODA TOPALOV

## Outline

Among the most important aims of foreign language instruction is the necessity to enable learners to engage in interaction with fluent speakers of the target language. Learners need to be equipped with tools that help them cope with meaning-based input and meaning-based output in the foreign language quickly and simultaneously in order to ensure that there are no breakdowns in communication. Within this context, language learning strategies, the purpose of which is to facilitate internalization, storage, retrieval and use of the new language, play an important role in the development of both receptive and productive language skills. The aim of this paper is to investigate the use of listening, speaking and vocabulary learning strategies among EFL learners. The participants in the research included N=27 first year students at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad who were taking a course in EFL as a faculty requirement. The instrument used in the research included a questionnaire developed by Cohen, Oxford and Chi (2006) comprising statements that covered the participants' habits in using listening, speaking and vocabulary strategies. Proficiency in interaction was measured at the end of the school year. It is hypothesized that the students who have more success in the interaction in the target

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language also tend to use listening and speaking strategies more frequently as they prepare for interaction, take part in it and deal with comprehension and production breakdowns. It is also hypothesized that these students are more likely to employ a strategic approach when they learn and use new words and review and recall vocabulary.

**Key words:** language learning strategies, speaking, listening, vocabulary, EFL learners.

## Introduction

Tertiary education nowadays focuses heavily on equipping students with practical and real-life competences they will need in their future workplace. Having in mind that English as a global language and the *lingua franca* of the modern world plays a crucial role in virtually every profession regardless of the field, it is practically a requirement to a greater or lesser degree in all institutions of higher education today. The curricula and the educational context of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, Serbia, fall in line with this trend and so the majority of students take English as a faculty requirement in the first two years of their studies. Because of the variety of educational backgrounds which students come from and because of the differences in their own language learning aptitude, the level of their English language proficiency varies from A1 to B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Before they are put in groups students take a placement test, which ensures that their grouping is homogenous and that they take English classes on the same level. This guarantees that the students will make progress in the English language proficiency over the course of two years.

As it turns out, a great number of students score highly on the placement test and are classified as B2 according to the CEFR, which means that they enter the classroom with a supposed high level of English language competence and should be able to perform many demanding tasks in all four language skills. This paper, therefore, intends to investigate the performance of the said B2 students with a special focus on the strategies of oral production and reception (speaking and listening) along with vocabulary learning strategies. The research included one group of students (N=27) who filled in a questionnaire developed by Cohen, Oxford and Chi (2006) comprising statements that covered the participants' habits in using listening, speaking and vocabulary strategies both for production and reception, as well as learning and revising. These results were observed through the prism of the students' proficiency in interaction, which was measured at the end of the school year.

## Theoretical background

Language learning strategies are gaining momentum in the field of foreign language acquisition as they are some of the most important cognitive processes in foreign language acquisition (Pavičić Takač 2008, 26). “An explanation of how language learning strategies contribute to language acquisition and retention must include a whole range of variables, from the social and cultural contexts to different factors that influence the choice and use of strategies” (Radić-Bojanić 2012, 197). While using strategies, students select, acquire, organize and integrate new information (Weinstein & Mayer 1986), which makes them active participants in the teaching process. Learning strategies which activate mental processes are more efficient and can become automatized following frequent use (O’Malley & Chamot 1990) and, furthermore, they can be taught and learnt, which is a clear indication of their significance in the general effort to improve language learning. All in all, it can be concluded that: (1) language learning strategies are a conscious effort made by students, who invest time and energy into the language learning process, thus taking control over their own learning; (2) strategies influence the success of the learning process, which becomes evident very quickly and students get confirmation that their effort is well-invested; (3) strategies are one of the aspects of individual learner differences because different students will use different sets of strategies, depending on their personalities and educational backgrounds; (4) strategies are thought to be very prone to changes, since they can be learnt and practiced until they become automatized, i.e. until students become proficient and fast in their use (Radić-Bojanić 2012, 197-198).

There are different classifications of language learning strategies (e.g. O’Malley & Chamot 1990; Oxford 1990, etc.) and they mostly rely on the types of cognitive, metacognitive, social and affective processes that lie at the heart of each group of strategies. Observed from that perspective, groups of strategies are applied for a variety of purposes – to memorize, to revise, to practice, to organize, to alleviate emotional pressure, etc. However, another approach to strategy classification is possible and that is the angle of a particular segment of foreign language teaching and things that students do when e.g. speaking, writing, learning grammar etc. From a researcher’s point of view this perspective is more revealing since it pinpoints the exact procedures students do or do not employ when, for instance, reading a text or when revising units of vocabulary. By establishing the regularities in the process of learning, encoding and decoding, teachers and researchers can define with precision which

strategic areas need to be developed and which already serve their purpose.

For example, Zhang and Goh (2006) investigated their students' awareness of listening and speaking strategies and established that despite the fact that the informants assessed 32 out of 40 strategies as useful, they only reported using 13 of them frequently, which is a sign that the students do not use strategies with confidence. It is clear from these results that teachers need to work actively on increasing the number of strategies used, not just on raising awareness. Furthermore, Gu and Johnson (1996) established that their students used a wide variety of vocabulary learning strategies such as contextual guessing, skillful use of dictionaries, note-taking, paying attention to word formation, contextual encoding, and activation of newly learned words, but they also uncovered some dispreferred strategies like visual repetition of new words. In addition, they discovered that vocabulary strategies only contributed to vocabulary size, not to proficiency in English, which does not aid communicative competence and does not fulfill the ultimate purpose of learning a foreign language, i.e. fluent communication. This very issue was under scrutiny in a research study by Nakatani (2010), who tried to establish which strategies facilitate students' oral communication. Using several types of data collection he came to the conclusion that strategies for maintaining discourse and negotiation of meaning could enhance learners' communicative ability, but he also found out that the informants did not vary their output much, which could mean that they do not have enough opportunities for practice.

In this paper we observe the students' strategic competence in the field of oral production and reception as well as vocabulary learning and revising skills because a high level of performance in these domains falls in line with the descriptors of the B2 level of CEFR. In terms of spoken fluency, this means that the students are expected to be able to

communicate spontaneously, often showing remarkable fluency and ease of expression in even longer complex stretches of speech. [The students] can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he/she searches for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses. [The students] can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party (Common European Framework 2001, 129).

The speaking skill implies the ability of the speaker to adapt to different purposes for oral production in a variety of situations which are profiled by the topic or field and by the relationship with their interlocutor

(Jenkins 2006). In other words, skilled speakers should be able to adjust their speech to the level of formality by choosing more or less colloquial expressions and by fine-tuning their pragmatic competence to answer to the demands of a particular situation. In addition, when it comes to the groups of strategies that were investigated, we can notice that their purposeful and timely application allows students to practice alone so they can be prepared for subsequent conversations in which they will be involved. This also helps students gain confidence, which will later alleviate anxiety when speaking. Furthermore, some strategies allow students to control the situation and turn it into a learning experience (e.g. “Encourage others to correct errors in my speaking.” or “Try to figure out and model native speakers’ language patterns when requesting, apologizing, or complaining.”), which does imply a certain level of metacognition among those that score highly in these strategies. Finally, some strategies acknowledge the stressful nature of language production, which then lifts the affective filter and may block fluent speaking to a greater or lesser extent (Topalov & Radić-Bojanić 2014). Therefore, the development of these strategies will help the students compensate, circumvent or overcome obstacles in spoken production because they will use a synonym or a description, make up words, use gestures to convey the desired meaning, etc.

The other side of the coin, the listening skill, is, we believe, the most neglected of all skills because many think it happens naturally and with ease so no special preparation or training is necessary. However, “while listening, learners must comprehend the text by retaining information in memory, integrate it with what follows, and continually adjust their understanding of what they hear in the light of prior knowledge and of incoming information” (Mendelsohn & Rubin 1995, 35). From this it follows that the listening skill, just like any other skill, needs to be practiced and it requires a strategic approach for successful application. Strategies used while listening can be grouped in those that deal with the local or micro-level of listening and those that deal with the global or macro-level of listening. The first group focuses on understanding the sounds of L2, the pronunciation of the speaker, his/her intonation, pauses, key words, etc. At this level the listener will attempt to apply a selective and focused approach to the text he/she is listening to in order either to single out segments crucial for the comprehension of the text or to practice understanding the sounds of the foreign language. Conversely, the global strategic approach to listening implies the listener’s attempts to become exposed to different sounds of L2 in a variety of situations (if possible, authentic sounds and authentic language). Moreover, a strategically

successful listener will practice prediction of meaning based on various cues (visual, textual, contextual, etc.) and, in case he/she does not understand segments of the text, will either ask for clarification or will be able to compensate for the parts that they missed or misunderstood (by making educated guesses, by referring to their general background knowledge, or by observing the interlocutor's body language).

The third aspect of successful oral communication, which implies fluent speech and effortless comprehension of oral production, is a fairly good command of vocabulary and a certain number of lexical units stored in the speaker's and listener's mental lexicon. Although participants in communication undergo a far more complex process in trying to understand language than just adding the meanings of the individual words together (Cacciari & Glucksberg 1994), the ability to understand spoken language begins with unimpeded word recognition which is, in turn, facilitated by a well-developed word stock. In this respect, a strategic approach to vocabulary learning has the potential to help students raise their awareness of the importance of developing their lexicon and to equip them with tools to achieve this. The strategies in this domain are grouped as follows: (1) strategies used to learn new words, which can happen regardless of the context of oral production; (2) strategies used to review the new words, important for the memorization of new units of vocabulary; (3) strategies used to recall different units of vocabulary, used during comprehension and can be combined with listening strategies; (4) strategies to make use of new vocabulary, which happens during production and can be combined with speaking strategies.

## Method

The dominant focus of the current study was to explore listening, speaking and vocabulary strategies that EFL learners use when they are engaged in speaking production in the English language, with the aim of providing an answer to the following research question: Is there a relationship between the students' proficiency in the interaction skill and their use of speaking, listening and vocabulary learning strategies? Corresponding to this research question, a set of three null hypotheses were formulated:

- H01 – There is no relationship between proficiency in interaction and the use of listening strategies,
- H02 – There is no relationship between proficiency in interaction and the use of speaking strategies,

- H03 – There is no relationship between proficiency in interaction and the use of vocabulary strategies.

### ***Participants***

The study involved a total of 27 first-year students studying at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad who were taking a course in English as a faculty requirement. Based on the results of the Quick Pen and Paper Test<sup>2</sup> which the students took at the beginning of the academic year, the participants were all placed at the B2 level of CEFR. The sample consisted of 55.5% male students and 44.5% female students, which further means that the gender structure of the sample was fairly equally distributed. The average age of the students was 19.36.

### ***Instrument***

In order to assess the range and frequency of the students' strategic behavior while they were engaged in the spoken production of the English language we used the Language Strategy Use Inventory – LSUI (Cohen, Oxford & Chi 2006). The original questionnaire investigates strategies related to all four language skills, including vocabulary strategies. However, since this study focuses on the speaking skill, this investigation covered groups of strategies that were deemed important for developing speaking skills. For that reason, the questionnaire included listening, speaking and vocabulary strategies. The questionnaire consisted of statements that the participants rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“This strategy does not fit for me”) to 5 (“I use this strategy and like it”).

### ***Variables***

The response variable in the study was the speaking proficiency of the participants that was obtained through grading the students' interaction skills during a pre-exam testing session. The teachers analyzed the participants' level of grammar, lexis, fluency and coherence as they correspond to the CEFR global and analytic assessment scales and assigned a grade between 5 and 10 (Common European Framework 2001, 28-29). For instance, grade 5 was given to a candidate who did not produce sufficient language to be graded; grade 6 to a candidate who had a

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<sup>2</sup> Oxford University Press / University of Cambridge / Association of Language Testers in Europe: *Quick Placement Test: Paper and Pen Test*. Oxford University Press: Oxford 2001.

basic repertoire of words and phrases, limited control of simple grammar and could not maintain interaction beyond short simple sentences; grade 8 to a candidate whose grammar and vocabulary were sufficiently accurate to deal with the tasks with occasional inaccuracies and could maintain the flow of language without major prompting; grade 10 to a candidate who used appropriate and varied vocabulary, had a wide range of linguistic resources and maintained flow of language.

The explanatory variables included groups of listening, speaking and vocabulary strategies which included the following subgroups:

1. Listening strategies
  - increasing exposure to the target language (4 items)
  - becoming familiar with the sounds (4 items)
  - preparing to listen to conversation in the target language (3 items)
  - listening to conversation in the target language (8 items)
  - removing comprehension breakdowns (7 items)
2. Speaking strategies
  - practicing speaking (3 items)
  - engaging in conversations (9 items)
  - production breakdowns (6 items)
3. Vocabulary strategies
  - learning new words (10 items)
  - reviewing vocabulary (2 items)
  - recalling vocabulary (3 items)
  - using new vocabulary (3 items)

### *Procedure*

The questionnaire was distributed during regular classes. On average, the students completed the questionnaire in 20 minutes.

In order to test the relationship between the explanatory and response variables, the analysis included Pearson's correlations and a multiple regression test using SPSS Statistics 20 software.

## **4. Results**

For each of the explanatory variables and for the response variable means and standard deviations were computed. The results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Variable means and standard deviations

|                         |  | Mean | SD   |
|-------------------------|--|------|------|
| Interaction proficiency |  | 7.22 | 1.72 |
| Listening strategies    | increasing exposure to the target language                 | 3.03 | 0.49 |
|                         | becoming familiar with the sounds                          | 2.79 | 0.57 |
|                         | preparing to listen to conversation in the target language | 2.91 | 0.52 |
|                         | listening to conversation in the target language           | 3.07 | 0.40 |
|                         | removing comprehension breakdowns                          | 3.04 | 0.39 |
|                         | TOTAL average  | 2.97 | 0.96 |
| Speaking strategies     | practicing speaking  | 2.79 | 0.67 |
|                         | engaging in conversations                                  | 2.92 | 0.61 |
|                         | production breakdowns                                      | 2.67 | 0.59 |
|                         | TOTAL average  | 2.79 | 0.63 |
| Vocabulary strategies   | learning new words   | 2.47 | 0.48 |
|                         | reviewing vocabulary                                       | 2.87 | 0.70 |
|                         | recalling vocabulary                                       | 2.83 | 0.68 |
|                         | using new vocabulary                                       | 2.91 | 0.70 |
|                         | TOTAL average  | 2.77 | 0.64 |

In examining strategy use among students on the LSUI scale, which ranges from 1 to 5 (1=low strategy use; 5=high strategy use), three types of use as suggested by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) for general language learning strategy use can be identified: high (mean $\geq$ 3.5), medium (mean=2.5-3.4) and low (mean $\leq$ 2.4). From the results it is clear that there are no strategy groups that are used with high frequency. The most frequently used strategy group among students is the group that includes strategies used while actively listening to a conversation in the target language, which is used with medium frequency. Another 10 strategy groups are also used with medium frequency and only one with low frequency of usage (the group of strategies that focus on learning new words). A closer inspection of the mean score students received on their interaction pre-exam testing suggests that the score is relatively low, averaging at about 7.22 on a scale of 5 to 10.

The results of Pearson's correlations between dependent variables can be seen in Table 2.



**Table 2:** Pearson's correlation coefficients for explanatory variables

|     | LS1   | LS2   | LS3   | LS4   | LS5   | SS1   | SS2   | SS3   | VS1   | VS2  | VS3   |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|
| LS2 | .226  |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |      |       |
| LS3 | -.191 | -.076 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |      |       |
| LS4 | .175  | .258  | .468* |       |       |       |       |       |       |      |       |
| LS5 | .278  | .486* | .447* | .525* |       |       |       |       |       |      |       |
| SS1 | -.269 | .095  | .315  | .396* | .245  |       |       |       |       |      |       |
| SS2 | .025  | .012  | .143  | -.027 | -.171 | .114  |       |       |       |      |       |
| SS3 | .340  | -.196 | .387  | .337  | .155  | .027  | .152  |       |       |      |       |
| VS1 | -.114 | .135  | -.002 | -.110 | -.054 | .004  | .641* | .102  |       |      |       |
| VS2 | .253  | -.021 | -.064 | .003  | .240  | -.176 | .254  | .415* | .443* |      |       |
| VS3 | .435* | .126  | .328  | .495* | .665* | .214  | -.036 | .309  | -.087 | .362 |       |
| VS4 | .137  | .200  | .258  | .480* | .484* | .398* | -.104 | .102  | -.260 | .038 | .597* |

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

LS1 – increasing exposure to the target language, LS2 – becoming familiar with the sounds, LS3 – preparing to listen to conversation in the target language, L4 – listening to conversation in the target language, LS5 – removing comprehension breakdowns, SS1 – practicing speaking, SS2 – engaging in conversations, SS3 – production breakdowns, VS1 – learning new words, VS2 – reviewing vocabulary, VS3 – recalling vocabulary, VS4 – using new vocabulary.

Significant correlations at the 0.01 level range from moderate positive ( $r=0.3-0.5$ , a total of 10 correlations) to strong positive ( $r=0.5-1$ , a total of 4 correlations). The fewest number of correlations was found for Speaking strategies (4 positive correlations), whereas a higher number of correlations was found for Listening (10 positive correlations) and Vocabulary strategies (9 positive correlations).

Table 3 shows the results of the Pearson's correlational analysis between independent and dependent variables.

**Table 3:** Pearson's correlation coefficients between dependent and independent variables

|           |                                     | Speaking proficiency |       |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-------|
| Listening | Increasing exposure                 | r                    | .061  |
|           |                                     | p                    | .764  |
|           | Becoming familiar with the sounds   | r                    | -.018 |
|           |                                     | p                    | .927  |
|           | Preparing to listen to conversation | r                    | .396* |
|           |                                     | p                    | .045  |
|           | Listening to conversation           | r                    | .083  |
|           |                                     | p                    | .682  |
|           | Removing comprehension breakdowns   | r                    | .394* |
|           |                                     | p                    | .042  |

|            |                           |   |       |
|------------|---------------------------|---|-------|
| Speaking   | Practicing speaking       | r | ,456* |
|            |                           | p | ,017  |
|            | Engaging in conversations | r | ,371  |
|            |                           | p | ,057  |
|            | Production breakdowns     | r | ,142  |
|            |                           | p | ,479  |
| Vocabulary | Learning new words        | r | -,160 |
|            |                           | p | ,426  |
|            | Reviewing vocabulary      | r | -,119 |
|            |                           | p | ,555  |
|            | Recalling vocabulary      | r | ,330  |
|            |                           | p | ,093  |
|            | Using new vocabulary      | r | -,154 |
|            |                           | p | ,444  |

The results reveal that of the 12 explanatory variables only 3 yield significant correlations with Interaction proficiency. The analysis indicates that the respondents who scored higher in the interaction skills are more likely to strategically prepare to listen to conversations ( $r=.396$ ,  $p=0.045$ ), apply strategies to repair comprehension breakdowns ( $r=0.394$ ,  $p=0.042$ ) and practice speaking ( $r=0.456$ ,  $p=0.017$ ).

In order to establish which explanatory variables have the independent power to explain the level of English interaction proficiency among students, a linear multiple regression analysis was conducted with the results presented in Table 4. To test the model we used sequential (hierarchical) regression, as our goal was to determine how much of a variance each variable can account for individually. The variables were entered in the manner shown in Table 4 based on the results of the statistical analyses given above, in the order of descending statistical significance.

**Table 4:** Linear multiple regression analysis results

| Model   | R                 | R <sup>2</sup> | R <sup>2</sup> Change | F     | p                 |
|---|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-------|-------------------|
| 1   | ,444 <sup>a</sup> | .197           | .197                  | 6.127 | ,020 <sup>a</sup> |
| 2   | ,446 <sup>b</sup> | .199           | .002                  | 2.978 | ,070 <sup>b</sup> |
| 3   | ,471 <sup>c</sup> | .222           | .023                  | 2.189 | ,117 <sup>c</sup> |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Speaking strategies  |                   |                |                       |       |                   |
| b. Predictors: (Constant), Speaking strategies, Listening strategies                        |                   |                |                       |       |                   |
| c. Predictors: (Constant), Speaking strategies, Listening strategies, Vocabulary strategies |                   |                |                       |       |                   |

The results indicate that the first model, with just Speaking strategies entered as an explanatory variable, accounts for 19.7% of the variance ( $R^2=0.197$ ). The second model that was tested adds the predictor of Listening strategies. The coefficient  $R^2$  is 0.199, with the second variable included in the model adding 0.2% of explanation for the variation in scores of speaking proficiency. The third model included the predictor of Vocabulary strategies. With  $R^2$  being 0.222, this variable can independently explain 2.3% of variance in speaking proficiency among participants. As is evident from the results, significant values were not found for the second ( $p=0.070$ ) and the third models ( $p=0.117$ ), which further means that we can adopt the first regression model, according to which the explanatory variable of Speaking strategies can successfully account for 19.7% of variation in the levels of interaction proficiency among the students.

Based on all the aforementioned results it is possible to confirm the first null hypothesis—the regression model indicates that there is no relationship between proficiency in interaction and the use of listening strategies. The second null hypothesis, however, has to be rejected—from the results of the regression analysis there is a significant positive relationship between proficiency in interaction and the use of speaking strategies. The third null hypothesis, on the other hand, is confirmed—the multiple regression model reveals that there is no relationship between proficiency in interaction and the use of vocabulary strategies.

## Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to explore listening, speaking and vocabulary strategies EFL students at B2 level of CEFR use when they are engaged in interaction in the English language. Our aim was to determine if there is a relationship between the students' proficiency in the interaction skills and their use of speaking, listening and vocabulary learning strategies. The results of this study must be interpreted with caution due to the relatively low sample size of respondents. In this section we interpret the findings within the context of the research question posed at the outset of the study.

In general, the participants in the study reported a medium-to-low frequency of strategy use with strategy groups averaging at 2.97 for Listening strategies, 2.79 for Speaking strategies and 2.77 for Vocabulary strategies. The relatively low average value of the frequency of strategy use also points to a low metacognitive awareness of strategies among the students and an underdeveloped understanding of the potential benefits strategies have in the process of foreign language acquisition. The results

also put in question the students' overall strategic competence as defined by Bachman (1990) according to which speakers set communicative goals as part of the assessment stage, retrieve the relevant items from their language competence and plan their use as part of the planning stage, and implement the plan as part of the execution stage. Overall, the results suggest that in the institutional context of learning and using the English language the students moderately often make plans with respect to their language production and reception and they occasionally make conscious efforts to monitor and control it. We would, at this point, like to stress a limitation of a survey as a principal method of data collection—namely, it is a self-report measure and, as Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) indicate, it is impossible to claim with absolute certainty that the students actually engage in the strategies they report using. When conducting a survey research, there is always a potential threat to the internal validity stemming from subject effects, since the respondents are aware that they are in a study and may give what they believe to be acceptable answers. In this case, the participants were instructed that the goal of the research was to “identify strategies that can help students master a new language” (Cohen, Oxford & Chi 2006). From this it can be inferred that the acceptable answer would be one that reflects a developed strategic inventory and its more frequent use. Since the results presented in this paper indicate the opposite of this, we believe that it is not reasonable to expect that the possible subject effects were likely to affect the results. We do not, however, make absolute claims.

In examining the results further, it is evident that certain combinations of strategies seem to be more popular among students and that they are deemed more useful. This is in line with a number of previous research studies which showed that language learners tend to select strategies they believe work well together (Chamot & Kupper 1989; Wenden 1998). The results of this study reveal that the students who utilize strategies to repair listening comprehension breakdowns are more likely to make conscious efforts to become familiar with the sounds in the English language, actively prepare to listen to conversations in English, pay strategic attention as they are listening, attempt to use new vocabulary and employ various strategies to help them recall vocabulary. Furthermore, it was found that the students who apply strategies to use new vocabulary are more likely to pay strategic attention as they are listening to the speaker in the English language, repair comprehension breakdowns using a strategic approach, practice speaking and use a number of different strategies as they attempt to recall vocabulary. The two identified clusters of strategies both seem to be motivated by the need to actively use language in an

institutional setting. It follows that students who are aware of the different techniques available to them when they encounter comprehension breakdowns also have a better metacognitive awareness of the communication act which they are a part of; they monitor their understanding of the language and can consciously control it; they further make plans revolved around learning and using the language and make reflections regarding their language skills after the act of communication. However, in light of the findings stated above in this paper, overall medium-to-low average values of the frequency of strategy use would suggest that the number of students who are aware of different combinations of strategies and the potentials for their use is not high.

The results further reveal that the planning and reflection components of the students' strategic competence do not correlate consistently with the execution component. In other words, a more frequent use of the groups of strategies used for setting communication goals, planning and rehearsing (LS1, LS2, LS3, SS1 and SS2) is not a predictor of the more frequent use of strategies used during the actual act of communication (LS4, LS5 and SS3). Similarly, the planning and assessment components in one language skill are not significantly tied to the same components in another skill, as there are no statistical correlations between groups of strategies LS1, LS2, LS3, on the one side, and SS1 and SS2 on the other. This once more points to an underdeveloped metacognitive awareness among the respondents, who do not view the process of learning as a unified whole with segments that have meaningful interrelations.

In order to test the relationship between strategy use and the proficiency in the speaking skill, we conducted a series of bivariate correlations with the results yielding a small number of statistically significant coefficients. The research question enquired into whether there is a relationship between the students' proficiency in the interaction skills and their use of speaking, listening and vocabulary learning strategies. Based on the results, the success the students achieved in interaction is tied to strategies they use in order to prepare to listen to conversations in the target language, strategies they use when they do not understand some or most of what someone says in the target language and strategies for practicing speaking, with only speaking strategies revealing a statistical relationship with interaction proficiency.

Previous research indicates that certain groups of strategies are connected with specific language skills, so that speaking in a foreign language benefits from strategies such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, risk-taking, and monitoring and evaluating one's progress, whereas foreign language listening comprehension is aided by strategies of elaboration,

inferencing, selective attention, and self-monitoring (Chamot & Kupper 1989). Using appropriate language learning strategies may lead to an improved proficiency in specific skill areas (Cohen 1998; Oxford et al. 1993). The results of this research offer a partial confirmation of previous findings. With respect to the listening skill it was found that within the group of strategies for preparing to listen to a conversation successful listeners use selective attention (e.g. strategy *I pay special attention to specific aspects of the language*), whereas within the group of strategies for repairing comprehension breakdowns they use self-monitoring, as they are aware that they do not understand the speaker, inferencing (e.g. strategies *I draw on my general background knowledge to get the main idea* and *I make educated guesses*) and social strategies (e.g. strategy *I ask for clarification if I do not understand*). With respect to the speaking skill, the results of this research do not fall in line with previous findings, as the most important strategy that was identified was the strategy of rehearsing. One of the possible explanations for the difference between the results of this and previous studies may be the students' overall underdeveloped strategic competence. Furthermore, since the regression model only accounts for roughly 20% of the variance in the results, it is quite possible that factors other than the investigated groups of strategies can account for the speaking proficiency scores.

In connection with possible other factors influencing both the speaking proficiency and the students' strategic competence, it is necessary to consider in future research the learners' underlying cognitive and perceptual learning styles, as well as other factors of individual differences, including anxiety, self-efficacy and self-concept (Cohen 1996). Oxford and Cohen (1992) further suggest viewing learning styles and learning strategies in the context of general personality factors including, for instance, introversion/extroversion, venturesomeness, field independence/dependence, self-confidence and motivation.

## Conclusion

The main goal of the present study was to investigate the relationship between listening, speaking and vocabulary strategies that students at the B2 level use when they are engaged in the act of communication in the English language. Based on previous research results, it was hypothesized that these three sets of strategies would be important in the process of interaction in the target language, as learners need to be able to cope with meaning-based input and meaning-based output in the foreign language

quickly and simultaneously in order to ensure that there are no breakdowns in communication.

Based on the results of the research it is possible to conclude that, overall, students have a limited strategic repertoire and that they use strategies infrequently and inadequately. It is, therefore, of crucial importance to raise the students' level of metacognitive awareness which would ultimately aid them in the process of foreign language acquisition. In light of this, the students would benefit from the development in their awareness of different strategies (declarative knowledge), their knowledge of the mechanisms in which a strategy is useful (procedural knowledge) and their awareness of the context in which a certain strategy might be useful (conditional knowledge).

Low average scores on the interaction measure also attest to the low frequency of strategy use. We believe that with the development of the strategic repertoire it is highly likely that the students would also improve their interaction skills.

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# LEXICAL GUESSING IN CONTEXT DURING READING COMPREHENSION: A CASE STUDY OF EFL LEARNERS

BRIKENA XHAFERI

## Outline

Lexical guessing refers to the use of context to discover the meaning of unknown words while reading. Successful guessing occurs when the learner knows a large portion of the words in the reading text. Bensoussan and Laufer (1984) claimed that learners need to reach 95% coverage to adequately comprehend texts. They further stated that “unknown words might not impede the overall understanding of the text, but if too many words, or the most essential ones, are unknown, then comprehension will suffer” (Bensoussan & Laufer 1984, 17). Therefore, developing this strategy in EFL learners is very important because it will give students a chance to become independent and skillful at guessing from the context.

The present study investigates the use of the inferencing strategies that EFL learners use while guessing the unknown words from the context, as well as the students’ attitudes towards vocabulary learning. There are 40 participants included in this study, all at the intermediate level of English proficiency. The participants were given a reading text on education and they were instructed to guess the meaning of the unknown words from the context. Additionally, think-aloud interviews were used to verbalize their cognitive processes while inferring the meaning of the target words.

The results of the think-aloud interviews showed that the participants made successful guessing using: contextual clues, word features, general word knowledge and intrinsic clues. It was also shown that the study participants have positive attitudes towards vocabulary learning and that they use different strategies to learn new words they encounter.

**Keywords:** vocabulary acquisition, lexical guessing, reading skill, university students.

## Introduction

Vocabulary learning is one of the most challenging processes for EFL speakers because the vocabulary of English is growing rapidly (Mehring 2005). Vocabulary is central to English language learning/teaching and without a sufficient vocabulary students cannot express their ideas when they communicate in English. Research in the field of vocabulary acquisition has shown that “learning strategies” play a significant role in increasing vocabulary; therefore, using a variety of strategies enhances lexical competence. Additionally, “incidental learning is a process often associated with learning vocabulary through reading: indeed many people believe that vocabulary is enlarged mostly while we read different texts and unconsciously learn new words that we meet inadvertently” (Xhaferi 2009, 15). However, Nation (1982) is of the opinion that vocabulary learning should not be left to incidental learning.

Despite this claim, reading can greatly facilitate vocabulary learning. A “good reader can guess the meanings of some unfamiliar words in a text, and there is a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension” (Paribakht & Wesche 1999, cited in İstifçi 2005, 1). Similarly, Laufer (2003) conducted three experiments with the aim to investigate whether or not reading is one of the best sources of vocabulary learning. The results of these experiments showed that most vocabulary in a non-native language is acquired incidentally from reading (Laufer 2003, cited in Xhaferi 2009).

Many researchers came to the conclusion that “reading comprehension is complex and involves several processes interacting with each other” (Bernhardt 1991; Grabe & Stoller 2001, cited in Prichard & Matsumoto 2011, 208). It is further stated that “factors other than vocabulary that have been shown to influence reading include: prior knowledge, syntax, text structure, strategy use, and metacognition. Most of these factors are influenced by learners’ overall proficiency, especially vocabulary knowledge” (Prichard & Matsumoto 2011, 208).

While reading texts, students often try to guess the meaning of unknown words which they encounter for the first time. Guessing from the context or lexical guessing is a discovery strategy that students use to discover the meaning of unknown words. Successful guessing occurs when the learner knows a large portion of words in the text. A study conducted by Laufer (1989) concluded that learners need to reach 95% coverage to comprehend the reading text. This shows that vocabulary knowledge has a strong influence on reading comprehension. Nevertheless, if vocabulary knowledge is limited it will affect the acquisition negatively.

Nation (2001, 232) believes that there are five factors that should be taken into consideration when this strategy is used, and they are: learners' vocabulary size; the actual vocabulary knowledge; learner skills; the fact that learners must be given a credit even for partial guesses; and, finally, distinguishing between guessing from natural context and deliberate learning.

Haastrup (1991, cited in Xhaferi 2009, 30) points out that “guessing the meaning of unknown words or lexical inferencing requires the use of all available linguistic cues in combination with learners' word knowledge, their awareness of the context and the relevant linguistic knowledge”. Haastrup based his classification on Cartoon's (1971) categorization; however, he made some modifications. He defines the following contextual cues:

- Interlingual; cues based on L1, loan words in L1 or knowledge of other languages
- Intralingual; cues based on knowledge of English
- Contextual; cues based on the text or informants' knowledge of the world (Haastrup 1991).

EFL teachers should help students in developing their guessing ability by choosing appropriate reading texts always taking into account students' level of proficiency. Above all, students should be encouraged to read a lot and in this way they can become fluent readers with good reading comprehension skills.

## **Research methodology**

The aim of the study was to investigate the lexical inferencing strategies that EFL learners use to discover the meaning of unknown words while reading in English as well students' attitude towards vocabulary learning. The number of unknown words in one text might not impede the overall understanding, but it definitively poses difficulties for learners. Therefore, this study will be an important contribution in a context where English is taught as a foreign language.

### ***Research questions***

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the students feel about vocabulary learning?

2. What inferencing strategies do the EFL learners use when they attempt to guess the meaning of unknown words while reading?
3. Which inferencing strategies seem to be more effective in guessing the meaning of unknown words?

### *Instruments*

The first research instrument was a semi-structured interview (Appendix 4) which contained 6 questions. It was developed by Gu in 1996 and asked the participants about their attitudes towards vocabulary learning. The second instrument was a 704-word article entitled “Teaching methods must be changed” (Appendix 2), which was selected from the field of education, and used to elicit the participants’ lexical inferencing behavior. Thirdly, the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS, Appendix 3) was used to measure the number of unknown words after the students have read the text and numbered them from 1-5 on the scale. The VKS was developed by Paribahkt and Wesche in 1997. It is an instrument used to measure different levels of lexical knowledge of the specific target words that learners learn in reading classes. It is a five-level scale.

### *Procedure*

The study was conducted during the academic year 2015/2016 at the Department of English Language and Literature, at SEEU. There were 40 students who participated in the study, both male and female. Their age ranged from 19 to 22 years, and all of them had an intermediate level of the English proficiency.

First, the participants were introduced to the strategies of vocabulary learning and the purpose of the study. The strategies presented to the students were the ones taken from Schmitt’s Taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies developed in 1997. They included: Strategies for the discovery of a new word’s meaning, Social strategies, Memory strategies and Consolidation strategies. This procedure lasted one week and the students were informed about the purpose of the study and the procedure.

Then, the researcher randomly selected 12 students from the total sample of 40 and they were interviewed individually. They expressed their opinions regarding the vocabulary learning, its role, the time they spend reading in English, and how often they use guessing from the context while reading. This procedure lasted for three weeks and it took place at the Language Center of SEEU.

In phase two, they were trained how to do the think-aloud tasks and verbalize their thinking processes. They were given an unfamiliar authentic text in English and they were instructed to read the text

spontaneously out loud. While reading, the participants marked down the unknown words using items 1 and 2 of the VKS. In phase three, they were instructed to verbalize their thoughts while inferring the meaning of the unknown word. The participants were asked to retrospect on the process of lexical inferencing in the think-aloud tasks. They were prompted by questions like: “What are you thinking now?”, “How do you know that?”, “How did you come to that conclusion?”, etc.

## Results

### *Interview Results*

The semi-structured interview was designed to survey the students’ opinions about the importance of vocabulary and the strategies they use when they encounter an unknown word in English language learning. The interviews took place at the Language Center of SEEU.

**R=Researcher**

**P=Participant**

#### *Excerpt 1:*

R (Q1): How important do you think vocabulary learning is in English?

P1: I think that learning vocabulary is very important for us learners because we cannot communicate without words.

P2: It is very important and I try to different ways to learn new words.

#### *Excerpts 2:*

R(Q2): What do you do when you encounter a new word?

P3: Well... I usually try to understand the meaning of the word by using an online dictionary downloaded on my cell phone.

P4: I try to understand it from the context especially when I read book in English. It is very difficult to check out the meaning for all words I do not know.

#### *Excerpt 3:*

R (Q3): What do you do to study and learn a new word?

P4: I work with my sister because we both study English and this helps us a lot.

P6: Well... I usually try to guess the meaning from the context, I read the text more times until I understand the unknown word.

P8: Context helps me a lot especially if it is related to our field of study... but I also use my online dictionary.

**Excerpt 4:**

R(Q4): Do you plan your vocabulary learning? How?

P7: No in fact I do not plan it, but I study the words when we are given assignments at the University.

P9: When I was a beginner level student I used to plan it... but not now. Nevertheless, we often have vocabulary activities so we learn many new words.

**Excerpt 5:**

R(Q5): How much time do you spend on vocabulary learning?

P10: Uh... I cannot say for sure that but I learn the words continuously.

P11: Maybe 3 hours a week, plus additional vocabulary activities that teachers give us.

**Excerpt 6:**

R(Q6): What is your difficulty in learning specific words?

P12: I have to practice a lot at home because we do not use them often.

P13: Well... these are words from other fields of study therefore we have to spend more time learning them.

Based on the interviews, the tool for learning words, as reported by some participants, is the online dictionary. The online dictionary helps students find definitions of the unknown words, examples of usage, and the students become familiar with multiple word meanings, which are frequent in English. Additionally, three participants reported on using guessing from context when they encounter the unknown words. This shows that there is an attempt among students to understand the word using the context but this requires more than just familiarity with its meaning and form. Generally, the students consider vocabulary to be very important for them because words enable them to communicate in English.

***Lexical guessing/ inferencing***

The results of the think-aloud interviews indicated that lexical inferencing was used successfully in most cases for the words indicated for the participants. The data drawn from the protocol showed that the study participants made successful guesses using contextual clues, word features, general word knowledge and intrinsic clues. Based on the VKS there were 35 unknown words identified (Appendix 1). The participants had either never seen them before or they had seen them but could not remember the meaning. As Haastrup (1987, cited in Parel 2004, 88) emphasized, "contextual guessing is defined as an important strategy in the absence of dictionaries or human assistance and it entails guessing the

meaning of target word based on interpretation of its immediate context with or without reference to knowledge of the world”.

As it can be seen from Table 1, there were around 18 correct guesses using contextual clues, 10 partially-correct guesses using word features, 11 correct guesses using general word knowledge, 10 correct guesses using intrinsic clues and the participants asked the teacher for help for 8 words. This shows that students are generally good guessers, and that of course the knowledge of other running words in sentences was helpful.

**Table 1:** Contextual cues used by the participants

| Types of cues                | Correct guesses  | Partially correct guesses | Incorrect guesses | Total number of unknown words for all 12 participants |
|------------------------------|--|---------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Contextual clues             | 18   | 10                        | 7                 | 35  |
| Word features                | 14   | 10                        | 11                | 35  |
| General word knowledge       | 12   | 11                        | 12                | 35  |
| Intrinsic clues (rely on L1) | 10   | 10                        | 15                | 35  |
| Asking the teacher           | The participants asked the teacher for help for 8 words. |                           |                   |   |

Regarding the partially-correct guesses, there were 10 of them using the contextual clues, 10 other partially-correct guesses were made using word features and 10 using intrinsic clues. It seems that the students could provide some clues for the words but not the correct guess for the words: *cater*, *scope* and *suffice*.

Finally, there were several attempts to guess the meaning of unknown words such as: *nurturing*, *consecutive* and *presumed* but the participants were unable to do so. In 7 cases they attempted to use contextual clues, in 11 cases words features, in 12 cases general word features, and in 15 cases they tried to rely on their L1 using intrinsic clues without success.

The following excerpts are taken from the transcripts were the learners made correct guesses for different words.

**Excerpt 1: unknown word–INDICATION**

P1: I will read the sentence and try to guess the meaning... (particular pause) *he said that there was no INDICATION of such a decline... This word... hm... no idea what it means but I know that it is a noun because it*



*ends in -TION which expresses an action or condition. Let me think... aha, this word is also used in Albanian and it means të theksoj dicka (point something out).*

It is obvious that P1 made a correct guess by using the Interlingual cues based on his L1, Albanian, and knowledge of other languages while dots in the interviews represent a particular pause made by the participants.

### **Excerpt 2: unknown word–FLUCTUATIONS**

*P3: This is to cater for any fluctuations that might occur in case questions in a particular year turn out to be particularly difficult, or easy. It is also believed that there is no **significant** difference in the abilities or performance of students in any two consecutive years... Ok, I read the sentence and I am focusing on context cues now... I know that cater means to provide maybe food or something else... what might occur?... Aha, yes... probably changes might occur in a particular way. Yes, fluctuations definitely means changes.*

Participant 3 made a successful guess using the word cater as a contextual cue and figured out the meaning very quickly.

### **Excerpt 3: unknown word–MAINTAINED**

*P5: I will read the sentence now... A closer look at the contents of the examination papers and the ways marks are awarded again suggests that Mr. Lam might not be quite right in insisting that standards are being maintained: It is almost **invariably** the case that questions require only very short answers... Aha, yes this is easy because many schools try to maintain or keep the standards... (isn't this right)? So, maintained means keep something but the sentence is in passive voice.*

It is clear that Participant 5 used his General word knowledge to make a successful guess for the word “Maintained”.

### **Excerpt 4: unknown word–IMPROPER**

*P6: So, the sentence is... (he reads it slowly). How well a student uses the language in presenting an answer is not taken into account in awarding a mark. Indeed in markers' meetings, it has always been emphasized that mistakes in language, for example, grammar or spelling mistakes, or improper choice of words, should not be penalized in an otherwise "correct answer". Hm... improper???? let me think... if I am not wrong, properly means something right but the prefix im- has a meaning of something negative like not appropriate. Yes, this means not appropriate.*

Participant 6 analyzed the word and its prefix to make the correct guess.

**Excerpt 7: Unknown word–BACKWASH EFFECT**

*P7: So, the sentence is...It would be **naive** to think that teachers and students will pay much attention to this two per cent and the backwash effect is obvious; teachers and students will concentrate their efforts in scoring the other 98 per cent of the marks. Backwash effect... let me try to guess it... Hm???... uh, Backwash effect... I have no idea what it means because I have never seen it before. Can I ask you for the meaning??*

It is clear that this participant relied on the teacher because he could not make a correct guess for the unknown word. He turned to me and I said the “backwash effect” means consequence. This was not the only participant who relied on the teacher, which is a result of their previous background education, teacher-centered education in Macedonia.

Based on the verbalization process, it can be seen that the participants used the context a lot to guess correctly the unknown words they encounter while reading. Guessing is a strategy used by advanced students and they should be encouraged to use it more often. In addition, there are 8 cases where the students turned to the teacher for help, which shows that they still rely on their teacher. There was also the case where the participant analyzed the word prefix to make the correct guess, which can also be very useful when the learner has an excellent knowledge of linguistics.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to identify students’ impressions of vocabulary learning and the context cues that EFL learners use to guess the meaning of unknown words from the context while reading in English. Forty participants (intermediate level of English) were able to identify 35 unknown words from the text using the VKS, where they indicated if they had seen the words before, they had never seen them, they had seen them and could provide a synonym, they could provide an L1 equivalent, and could use them in a sentence. This procedure allowed the participants to indicate how well they knew items of vocabulary.

The semi-structured interviews showed that students found vocabulary very important while learning English. They reported that they often used context to guess the meaning of unknown words while reading in English. Nevertheless, it was also reported that the online dictionary served them as a tool to help them in this process, but they did not comment on different types of those dictionaries. In the era of technology, the students carry mobile phones instead of dictionaries; therefore, they use them for learning purposes as well. Concerning the vocabulary learning planning, it

seems that the participants do not plan it but learn the words they are required to, and they do it spontaneously.

The think-aloud protocol showed the intermediate EFL learners are generally good guessers. They used contextual clues to discover the meaning of the unknown words in about half cases (18 correct guesses). The rich context obviously helped the learners to make correct guesses. As Paribakht (2005, cited in Çetinavci 2013, 2674) points out, “when language learners encounter lexical gaps while reading, the sentence is the primary source of cues that they rely on”. Additionally, word features were proven to be very helpful for the study participants in 14 cases, as well as general word knowledge. Nation (2001, cited in Xhaferi 2009, 245) points out “real world knowledge can play a vital part in guessing especially when it provides the schema or background knowledge for readers”. The results of this study match Nation’s statement. Intrinsic clues were also used for 10 unknown words, which shows that the participants did not rely on their L1 a lot. This is due to the fact that students’ L1, the Albanian language, does not belong to the same family of languages as English but is an independent branch of the Indo-European family of languages. There were also other attempts to guess the meaning of unknown words but there were partial guesses made, for example, for the words *cater*, *scope* and *suffice*, and incorrect guesses for some other words such as *nurturing*, *consecutive* and *presumed*. This was due to the fact the other running words in sentences were not familiar for the students, therefore they failed. The teachers should provide the students with the list of vocabulary learning strategies and expose them to the variety in order to equip them with new ways of discovering the meaning of unknown words.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that EFL teachers encourage students to use combined cues to guess the meaning of unknown words while reading a text in English. It is impossible for learners to understand all words in an academic text, but they should be taught the ways to be more effective guessers. Strategy instruction should be an integrated part of all classroom activities when it comes to vocabulary learning because this is a very complex process which never ends.

## Appendix 1—Target words

### 35 words identified by all participants

| Words        | Words          |
|--------------|----------------|
| Response     | Consecutive    |
| Efforts      | Scope          |
| Indication   | Maintain       |
| Ignorant     | Presumed       |
| Decline      | Performed      |
| Arrogant     | Awarded        |
| Set aside    | Insisting      |
| Cater        | Maintained     |
| Counted      | Invariably     |
| Backwash     | Suffice        |
| Obvious      | Emphasized     |
| Release      | Penalized      |
| Perspective  | Implementation |
| Vital        | Encourages     |
| Misled       | Inquiry        |
| Ensures      | Nurturing      |
| Cater        | Competence     |
| Fluctuations |                |
| Occur        |                |

## Appendix 2

### Teaching Methods must be changed

In response to criticism that the English standard of Hong Kong students is falling, the Director of Education, Mr. Lam Woon-kwong, said that there was no indication of such a decline. He made these comments after the release of this year's Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) results. Mr. Lam Woon-kwong is perfectly correct, if one simply looks at the passing percentages in the English Language examinations. However, these marks have no bearing on the issue at all. The mechanism of the grading system for HKCEE subjects ensures that the passing percentages in each subject are more or less the same as those in the previous year.

This is to cater for any fluctuations that might occur in case questions in a particular year turn out to be particularly difficult, or easy. It is also believed that there is no **significant** difference in the abilities or performance of students in any two consecutive years. Students' performance is presumed to be stable.

Another feature of the grading system is that a certain grade of a subject does not actually reflect what or how much a student has learned, but only how well he has performed in comparison to other students in that subject. A closer look at the contents of the examination papers and the ways marks are awarded again suggests that Mr. Lam might not be quite right in insisting that standards are being maintained: It is almost **invariably** the case that questions require only very short answers.

In many cases, a short phrase or even a single word will **suffice**. How well a student uses the language in presenting an answer is not taken into account in awarding a mark. Indeed in markers' meetings, it has always been emphasized that mistakes in language, for example, grammar or spelling mistakes, or improper choice of words, should not be penalised in an otherwise "correct answer".

Although four marks are now set aside in most subjects to cater for how well an answer is presented, it is usually counted in only one question or section of the subject papers and amounts to about two per cent of the total mark. **It** would be **naive** to think that teachers and students will pay much attention to this two per cent and the backwash effect is obvious; teachers and students will concentrate their efforts in scoring the other 98 per cent of the marks.

**Indeed**, I would be surprised to see any script that has been awarded a grade E (that is, a passing grade) containing even one well -written sentence. It would be ignorant, and arrogant, to maintain that students' English standards are not falling. The importance of language skills necessary for Form Five students to further their studies (or for work) has never been put into proper perspective. They are vital.

Having said that, Mr. Lam should not be held responsible. On the contrary, his department is introducing the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC) which emphasizes, among other things, that students be taught the communicative skills necessary to explain concepts and knowledge that they learn at school. The introduction is limited to Primary One in the coming year and only in the subjects of Chinese, English and mathematics. Many schools are opposed to its introduction

but I think they are **misled** by its “**complexity**”. TOC is the right approach if we want our students to develop independent minds and have the ability to relate to others what is in their heads.

The objection I have to its introduction is the limited scope of its implementation. Students should not be learning Chinese, English and mathematics in a way which encourages inquiry, problem solving, communication, etc. and the rest of the subjects in ways which are very different. What will students think of this inconsistency? How will teachers of other subjects explain to them why they are teaching their subjects differently (we have to bear in mind that TOC is a better approach)?

It is high time that all teachers be more aware of the important role that they could and should play in **nurturing** students’ language competence. Education is team work and language standards cannot be dealt with by language teachers alone.

(Adapted from the South China Morning Post, 31.08.95,  
[http://web.warwick.ac.uk/CELTE/tr/EF4/U7/test/index\\_e.http](http://web.warwick.ac.uk/CELTE/tr/EF4/U7/test/index_e.http))

## Appendix 3

### Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS)

|  |   |
|--|---|
| I. I HAVE NEVER SEEN THE WORD BEFORE.....                            | 1 |
| II. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS WORD MEANS.....                           | 2 |
| III. I KNOW WHAT THIS WORD MEANS. IT MEANS<br>_____ (SYNONYM) .....  | 3 |
| IV. I CAN TRANSLATE THIS WORD INTO MY NATIVE<br>LANGUAGE _____ ..... | 4 |
| V. I CAN USE THIS WORD IN A GOOD EXAMPLE SENTENCE<br>_____ .....     | 5 |

(The Vocabulary Knowledge Scale developed by Paribakht & Wesche 1997)

## **Appendix 4**

### **Interview Questions**

1. How important is vocabulary learning in learning English?
2. What do you do when you encounter a new word?
3. What do you do to study and learn new word?
4. Do you plan your vocabulary learning? How?
5. How much time do you spend on vocabulary learning?
6. What is your difficulty in learning specific words?

(Modified from Gu and Johnson, 1996)



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# A COMPARISON OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH READING INSTRUCTION AND BEST PRACTICE IN NORWEGIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS USING DIFFERENT READING APPROACHES

REBECCA CHARBONEAU STUVLAND

## Outline

The Norwegian EFL reading competence aims have increased in difficulty and expectations have moved to younger ages in Norwegian primary schools in the last decade since the implementation of the *Knowledge Promotion curriculum (LK06)*. However, there has been a lack of research on the implementation of these curricular aims and a lack of training for primary school EFL teachers (Charboneau 2012, 2016). Additionally, research has shown that teacher beliefs about practices and language learning are an important aspect of the contextual factors of language learning (Borg 2006). Teacher beliefs significantly influence the way in which the characteristics of a classroom approach are interpreted and implemented by teachers.

The data for the current study was collected during individual interviews with teachers as a part of a larger case study research conducted over a six-month period at the five primary schools with teachers teaching English in grades four and five. Each teacher participated in 1 or 2 formal interviews in addition to 1 to 4 follow-up interviews or emails (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). In this research, teachers at five primary schools using different approaches to reading instruction were interviewed about their use of materials, reading practices, grouping methods, learning aims, and views on reading instruction. The interviews also addressed teachers' perspectives on reading development and how their practices helped promote their students' reading development.

The current research will discuss the teachers' perceptions of the English reading instruction and best practice in light of theory on teacher cognition, reading skills and strategy instruction, and consider contextual and instructional factors, and differentiation of EFL reading instruction in Norwegian primary schools.

**Key words:** EFL reading instruction, primary schools, teacher cognition, teacher practices, reading materials, differentiation.

## Introduction

This research explores teachers' perceptions of the English reading instruction and best practice in fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms in Norwegian primary schools. In this research a total of seven teachers using different approaches to reading instruction discuss the use of materials, reading practices, grouping methods, learning aims, and views in reading instruction. The data was collected during individual interviews with teachers at five primary schools as a part of a larger case study research at the five primary schools where teachers taught English in grades four and five. The research question for this study is: How do teachers' perceptions of English reading instruction and best practice compare in primary schools using different reading approaches?

English as a foreign language (EFL) has an important position in Norwegian schools: the starting age for English is grade 1 (age 6) and is compulsory until grade 11; it is the only required foreign language; and English is one of three subjects that can be tested in the final oral exam in grade 10. Additionally, the EFL reading competence aims have increased in difficulty as expectations have increased for younger students with the implementation of the Norwegian national curriculum, the *Knowledge Promotion curriculum (LK06)* in 2006. In the fourth and fifth grades (the levels used for this research), the students have two hours of English instruction per week.

In *LK06*, reading is specified as one of the five basic skills in all subjects (the others are oral skills, writing, digital skills, and numeracy). This is further explained in the *Framework for Basic Skills* (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2012), which describes each of the five skills and breaks down their progression into subcategories of skills (for example, for reading they are understand, find, interpret, and reflect and assess) at five different levels. Within the *LK06*, the English subject curriculum (2013) contains competence aims to be achieved by the completion of grades 2, 4, 7, 10, and 11, related to four main areas: language learning; oral communication; written communication; and

culture, society, and literature. Reading-related competence aims are specified under written communication at each of the levels, for example in the aims to be achieved by the end of grade 4: “use simple reading and writing strategies” and “understand the main content of simple texts about familiar topics”.

Some research in Norway has questioned whether Norwegian students have adequate skills in English to succeed in higher education given the current English demands (Hellekjær 2005; Kunnskapsdepartementet 2007a), especially English reading skills of upper secondary school students (Hellekjær 2005, 2007). Given the new expected learning outcomes and contextual changes in the teaching of English in Norwegian classes, there has been a need for research on English reading instruction in the early grades (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2007a). This has been addressed in Charboneau (2016), some of which is presented in this article.

## Background

This research addresses teachers’ perceptions of EFL reading instruction focusing on the topics of teacher beliefs, reading purposes, reading skills and strategy instruction, differentiation, and reading materials.

### *Teacher beliefs*

Teacher beliefs about practices and language learning are an important aspect of the contextual factors of language learning (Borg 2006). The way in which the characteristics of a classroom approach are interpreted and implemented by teachers often interacts with their own beliefs. In one research study on teacher cognition and reading, Collie Graden (1996) found that reading instructional goals were often not the most influential factors due to the need to accommodate students’ reading levels and motivational needs. The teachers expressed “a frustrated awareness of the inconsistencies between their stated beliefs and what they actually did in the classroom” (Graden 1996: 393). According to Borg, teachers’ cognition (knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs), becomes evident in teachers’ decisions about classroom practices and their choice of materials.

Both Borg (2003, 2006) and Richards (1998) have argued for the role of teacher education in providing teacher trainees with the cognitive tools (e.g., knowledge of concepts) to understand and process their cognition. A large percentage of primary school EFL teachers in Norway do not have formal qualifications to teach English. Following these arguments on the

role of teacher cognition in the conscious and reflective processing of teachers' practices, it could be argued that many teachers base their reading instruction on intuition, impulse, or routine. Furthermore, given the strong position of the textbook in EFL instruction (Charboneau 2016; Drew 2004), a focus on intensive reading of texts, and a lack of focus on reading skills (Charboneau 2016; Hellekjær 2007), it is possible that many teachers may have established practices that could be resistant to change.

It has also been suggested that teachers' classroom decisions about teaching reading are most influenced by pressures in the instructional context and to a lesser extent their theoretical orientations (Borg 2006). Borg (2003) suggests that teachers faced with contextual challenges may be reluctant to experiment with new teaching methods. The instructional context, such as time and resources, could be relevant factors in EFL teachers' decisions regarding reading approaches, which are aspects addressed in the interviews. However, the interview did not aim specifically to explain teachers' beliefs regarding these issues, and in this sense only superficially addresses the issue of teacher cognition.

### ***Reading strategies, skills, and purposes***

Reading strategies are featured prominently in the *LK06*. Research has found that reading strategies can be taught effectively, strategy instruction can improve reading comprehension, and that strategy instruction should be a central component in reading comprehension instruction (Grabe 2009; Koda 2004; Macaro & Erler 2008). Goldenberg (2011) found that teaching reading strategies in the students' L1 and helping them apply them to their L2 is an effective instructional practice. Additionally, awareness of the reading purpose (for example, reading to search for information, to integrate information, or general comprehension) and the reading aim is central to strategy use and good reading (Grabe 2009; Pressley 2006). There is also a large body of research on reading instruction which emphasizes the importance of having more active students, both reading and involved in reading-related experiences, to support reading development (Charboneau 2013; Pressley 2006; Taylor et al. 2002).

### ***Differentiation***

Adapted education is an educational principle in Norway that aims to teach individual students at their ability levels (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2007b). Differentiation, in an educational context, is a broad term that refers to adaptations or changes made to instruction or teaching experiences for groups or individual students, and can thus be considered the implementation of the adapted education principle. In Norway, the current perspective on differentiation has been to focus on high-quality

and varied teaching, from which the majority of the students will receive adequate benefits (Jenssen & Lillejord 2010). In the current article, grouping, materials, and types of activities are the aspects of differentiation discussed.

### ***Reading materials***

Teaching in Norwegian schools is often textbook-based (Kverndokken 2013), especially in English teaching (Charboneau 2012; Drew 2004). However, it has been argued that in order to develop good adaptive education within an inclusive class-culture, a greater selection of texts and materials is necessary (Kverndokken 2013). Due to the many contextual challenges of EFL instruction, including limited class hours and extensive curricula, it is important to have a principled selection of input materials, including reading texts. Research on EFL reading materials often focuses on the use of authentic materials versus simplified materials (Crossley et al. 2007; Day & Bamford 1998; Tomlinson 1998). A secondary issue is whether the simplified materials, such as graded readers, are written for L1 or L2 learners (Claridge 2012; Gillis-Furutaka 2015; Hill 2013). Both issues are related to the importance of comprehensible input for language learners (Krashen 2004). In addition to materials selection, teachers must select the process or purpose of reading done with these materials, often defined as either intensive or extensive reading (Day & Bamford 1998). Extensive reading is reading many books quickly with a focus on content, whereas intensive reading focuses on intensive work on the language of the text (Day & Bamford 1998: 5). A large body of research has shown the benefits of extensive reading for developing language skills (Cunningham & Stanovich 2001), often through the use of graded readers (Elley 1991; Tanaka & Stapleton 2007).

## **Methods**

Teachers' perceptions of the reading approach they use were addressed in the interviews with case study teachers. The interviews also addressed teachers' perspectives on reading development and how their practices helped promote their students' reading development. Teachers' responses about their beliefs may more accurately reflect what they think should happen in reading instruction rather than their actual practice (Borg 2006). Although this can be a concern in interview data collection, it was nevertheless considered important to gain insight into teachers' perspectives in order to understand their thinking and actions in the classroom.



During the case study period, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers at five schools. Two formal interviews with each of the fourth- and fifth-grade English teachers (14 in total; on average 30 minutes each) were based on the classroom observations; teachers were asked to comment on and elaborate on aspects of their teaching. Although an interview guide was used, semi-structured interviews were selected in order to allow the researcher to adapt the questions based on the input provided by the teachers and for further exploration of their answers (Dörnyei 2007). These interviews were conducted in Norwegian so that they would be in the teacher's native language. The interviews took place individually in person with the teachers and were recorded to allow for later review.

The teachers were asked questions about the reading approach they used, materials used, how materials were used, types of assessment, and their opinion regarding certain language policies, such as the starting age for English. For example, the teachers were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of the reading approach they used, and if they had enough reading materials to meet the different learning needs and levels of the students.

Occasionally, teachers were sent follow-up questions by e-mail to seek clarification. Additionally, several spontaneous unstructured interviews with teachers took place to review lessons and clarify observations. The length and number of these unstructured interviews varied from teacher to teacher depending on what additional clarification was needed (from two to ten minutes each).

The interview data was processed using qualitative content analysis. This method is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). The researcher transcribed and reviewed the interviews. During this process, content categories were created related to the topics covered in the interviews (e.g., materials and differentiation). The following categories were identified: materials, teaching practices, teachers' perceptions of differentiation and reading levels, Norwegian and English reading abilities, reading assessment, curriculum aims and the national tests, the effect of pre- and in-service training, and the strengths of the reading approaches. The interviews were coded and summarized within the categories. The researcher reviewed the interviews for any inconsistencies in the teachers' statements, addressing reliability. Finally, the summaries were reviewed against the transcripts and original categories for consistency.

### *Participants*

The teachers were selected to fit into one of four categories of reading approaches. For the purposes of this research, I have defined a reading approach as the core materials used by the teachers, their practices related to the development of reading ability, and the practice of reading-related activities. Reading approaches were categorized based on the reading materials most frequently used: textbook-based; a combination of textbook-based and graded readers; exclusive use of graded readers and children's literature; an approach adapted from an Australian/New Zealand literacy program, for example, the Early Years Literacy Program (EYLP). Teachers from one school using each approach were selected, as well as a second school for the combination approach. This was due to larger variation in how this approach was implemented than in the other categories.

The participants were selected through various methods. They were invited to participate in a national questionnaire on EFL reading practices, and asked to participate in follow-up interviews; invited to participate in a case study of reading practices; or asked by a colleague who had already volunteered for the project. Thus, the following schools were selected:

**Table 1:** Overview of schools, participants, and demographic data

|   |          |                         |   |
|---|----------|-------------------------|---|
| Textbook based  | School 1 | One teacher both grades | Qualified EFL; six years of experience                      |
| Combination approach                                      | School 2 | Grade 4 teacher         | Currently taking in-service training; five years experience |
|   |          | Grade 5 teacher         | Qualified EFL; nine years experience                        |
|   | School 3 | One teacher both grades | Qualified EFL; twenty-five years experience                 |
| EYLP program  | School 4 | Grade 4 teacher         | Unqualified EFL; five years experience                      |
|   |          | Grade 5 teacher A       | Unqualified EFL; first year teaching                        |
|   |          | Grade 5 teacher B       | Qualified EFL; five years experience                        |
| Exclusive use of graded readers and children's literature | School 5 | Grade 4 teacher         | Qualified EFL; two years experience                         |

The backgrounds and experience of the teachers varied. The teachers ranged in age from early twenties to late fifties. They had between 1 and more than 20 years teaching experience. Five of the eight teachers had English teaching qualifications, which is higher than the national average for primary school teachers<sup>1</sup> (Charboneau 2012; Lagerström 2007).

### ***EYLP and guided reading***

Shared and guided reading are part of a model of reading progression developed by researchers in New Zealand (Clay, 1991; Smith & Elley, 1997). During guided reading, the learner and the teacher engage in a pre-reading discussion about the book, including discussing the title, looking at pictures, and making predictions about the story. The teacher aims to entice the students, and through the guided introduction gradually transitions control to the students as they prepare to read the small-group text, while focusing on reading independently (without support), problem solving, and creating their own understanding of the texts. The teacher then supports the students as they read aloud and supports a discussion of the text with the students. This usually occurs in small groups.

This model of reading has been incorporated in the Early Years Literacy Program (EYLP) first developed in Australia (P.W. Hill & Crevola 1999), then brought to Norway as a program for both L1 and L2 literacy development (Drew 2004). The program focuses on teaching using long literacy blocks, beginning with a whole-class session, followed by work in small groups at different stations, and finally completing the lesson as a whole class. Two stations in particular were the areas of focus in this research, namely the reading station where students were engaged in independent extensive reading and the teacher station where the teacher led small level-differentiated groups in intensive guided reading. Research on the use of the EYLP program has shown the program to be effective in promoting student activity during lessons since they are working at stations (Charboneau 2013, 2016; Drew 2004; Drew 2009b; P.W. Hill & Crevola 1999). However, some research has found that working at stations without teacher support may not be effective for lower-performing students (Palm & Stokke 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> Lagerström (2007) found 69% of teachers in grades 1–4, and 52% in grades 5–7 were unqualified; Charboneau (2012) found nearly half of respondents in grades 4 and 5 had fewer than 30 ETCS of English, which is the minimum level to qualify to teach in Norwegian primary school.

## Results and discussion

### *Reading materials*

The teachers in the study were chosen partially based on the reading materials they used. This was also based on the assumption that they may use different teaching practices according to the different materials. One teacher used primarily the *Stairs* textbooks (S1), three teachers used a combination of a textbook (*Stairs* or *Scoop*<sup>2</sup>) and different reading materials (graded readers and children's literature), and three teachers used primarily or exclusively graded readers and other children's literature.

Overall, the teachers who used textbooks had mixed impressions of them. On the positive side, they commented that the textbook series appeared to follow the curriculum aims, and that the textbook series and their support materials were structured and easy to follow. For example, the textbooks had units that incorporated the *LK06* learning aims and all the language skills, followed the same layout for the chapters, and were supplemented with further resources that were connected to each chapter. In contrast, the teachers had mixed impressions of how the students reacted to the texts. The fourth-grade teacher at S2 commented:

*I noticed that they [the students] think it is more fun to read the small books [graded readers] than to read their textbook, so this is something I feel I just need to get through [the textbook], because they are also disappointed if I skip a chapter. Even though they are not as motivated to read the textbook, if I had skipped a chapter they would complain about that, too. I have tried to do a little of each to promote their reading enjoyment.*

This perspective reinforces the view that the textbooks are an institution in Norway, from the perspective of teachers, students, and parents, and may limit a teacher's ability to make choices supporting their beliefs when they are sometimes in conflict with the norm (Borg, 2006; Charboneau 2013; Collie Graden 1996; Drew 2004). Thus, realistically, the discussion about reading materials should be about finding balance and an approach based on teaching principles for reading development and foreign language learning, rather than whether to use the textbook. Other

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<sup>2</sup> Both textbook series are created by Norwegian authors for the Norwegian school system. *Stairs* is published by Cappellen Damm, and *Scoop* is published by Det Norske Samlaget.

teachers had a similar perspective about having a selective approach to texts and materials (see teaching practices below).

Among the interviewed teachers, experiences connected to buying and having access to materials varied significantly from school to school. At S3 the teacher had large quantities of reading materials as the school had made significant investments in additional reading materials and teaching resources for English. In contrast, teachers at S2 pointed out that they did not have enough books for independent reading or graded readers for guided reading in small groups. The teachers commented on there being little money available from the school to purchase more reading materials, and that one teacher had even bought books herself for her class. Even those who had access to other materials often felt they had insufficient variety to meet students' needs and to be used for different purposes (for example, sending texts home for fluency practice, and in schools reading books in small groups, and reading individually). The need to invest in materials is one of the common arguments against the use of extensive reading (Day & Bamford 1998; Krashen 2004). What the teachers reported may be a reflection of actual insufficient funds at the school where they worked or it may reflect the priorities of their principals. However, it is unfortunate that teachers felt the need to use their own money to purchase more reading materials for their classes. It should, in principle, be the responsibility of the school to provide adequately differentiated and varied materials for the student. Since all of the teachers interviewed believed that one of the biggest challenges in English teaching was mixed-ability levels among the students, having appropriately levelled materials and a variety of materials is likely to be one way of meeting this challenge. Thus, there appears to be a need for schools to invest in a wider variety of reading materials that satisfy different levels and interests (c.f. Day & Bamford 1998; Elley 1991; Krashen 2004; Waring & Takaki 2003).

Although nearly all of the teachers agreed that the students would benefit from reading texts at their ability level, the teachers used level-differentiated texts in different ways and to varying degrees (with varying frequency) (addressed further below in teaching practices). Providing texts at the appropriate reading level is a key to providing comprehensible input; promoting reading comprehension, vocabulary learning, and motivation; and developing reading ability (cf. Day & Bamford 1998; Nation & Wang 1999). This point is particularly important for improving EFL reading instruction, but it is also complex. Providing appropriate-levelled texts combines the need for appropriate reading materials, teacher knowledge of how to assess students' reading ability and to select appropriate materials, and how to differentiate and scaffold the methods of

working with texts to support students' reading skills development (the skills they need at a particular stage).

An important additional factor is the potential discrepancy between teachers' reported priorities when teaching (for example, selecting texts based on the learners' reading levels), and their actual practices. In Norwegian schools there is a strong focus on differentiation in the current and previous national curricula, which appears to be reflected in the perspectives of the interviewed teachers. Even so, some teachers find the practical implementation of these beliefs challenging. For example, the teacher at S1 expressed a lack of time to work outside of the textbook, despite acknowledging that it could be beneficial or even necessary. This illustrates that teachers' practices may be greatly influenced by contextual demands (e.g., time, material resources, and school conventions). At the same time, they may maintain their attitudes and beliefs about how reading instruction should ideally be practiced (Borg 2003, 2006). Thus, according to Borg, there may be discrepancies between teachers' practices and beliefs.

### ***Teaching practices***

Although there are many important aspects to teaching practices, three aspects will be addressed: reading purpose, independent reading, and reading time. Related to reading purpose, when the interviewed teachers explained their approach to working with texts, the greatest differences appeared to be in which way and for how long they worked with texts. For example, the textbook-based approach teachers (S1) chose to spend less time with the texts, focusing instead on vocabulary, reading, and retelling in the L1 without any real discussion of the text, which she explained was due to the quantity and length of the texts in the textbook. In contrast, one of the combination approach teachers (S3) chose to prioritize working for longer periods of time with fewer texts, sometimes over the course of days or weeks. The teacher at S3 preferred to work in depth with fewer texts. She remarked that this was fun because *"it is being able to empty a text, work so intensively with it that when they are finished with it, they know so much about it. Not just hopping from one place to another."* She usually used this approach with one or two longer stories each year. However, even though some teachers were aware of the reading purpose for a particular activity (for example, at S2 reading for general comprehension or pleasure when reading aloud a picture book), none mentioned explaining this to the students (although this was on two occasions observed during teaching). Making their students aware of reading purpose is an important part of strategy use and good reading skills (Grabe 2009; Pressley 2006).

Although all of the teachers in the interviews, with the exception of the textbook-based approach teacher (S1), stressed the importance of giving students individual reading time, as supported by research on effective reading instruction (Pressley 2006; Taylor et al. 2002), the way in which this was incorporated into the teaching varied. The EYLP approach teachers (S4), one of the combination approach teachers (S2), and the extensive reading approach teacher (S5) gave students free reading time, allowing them to read books of their choice extensively. The teacher at S3 allowed students to read texts at their level, but they worked with them more intensively, where they answered comprehension questions and wrote summaries about the texts. This was similar to S4, where students worked with level-differentiated texts intensively in small groups at the teacher station. However, in contrast to the individual intensive reading at S3, at S4 the students were supported by the teacher through guided reading. The teachers at S4 found the guided reading to be especially effective for supporting reading development.

Overall, the views of many of the teachers in the case study schools showed a promising trend, as several of them had incorporated various types of reading activities into their teaching and seemed to perceive individual reading time, especially reading at the students' reading level, as a priority to improve reading skills. Thus, even though teachers may recognize the importance of individual silent reading for reader development, it remains to be seen how this practice can be implemented in more schools more frequently, given the contextual issues, such as lack of time and reading materials.

### ***Teachers' perceptions of differentiation and reading levels***

All of the teachers in the case study schools, irrespective of reading approach, commented on the variation in reading abilities among their students. For example, the S3 teacher said, "*The gap in the classroom [...] seems to be wider when it comes to learning, whatever I do to minimize the gap*", referring to an opportunity gap created by higher-performing students also having more resources and support at home. However, they had different ways of addressing the students' different needs. The fourth-grade teacher at S2 and the teacher at S1 both pointed out that lower-ability students were unable to comprehend the texts in the textbook and thus struggled to participate in class. Many of the differentiation strategies mentioned by the teachers in their interviews were primarily focused on making content easier or supporting students who were struggling.

In contrast, across the reading approaches, the fifth-grade teachers at all of the schools using textbooks often referred to the need for more difficult materials to challenge the most capable readers in their classes.

More difficult reading materials could be made available if teachers went beyond the textbook (such as using graded readers and authentic texts). The issue seems to be how to create challenges for students while at the same time supporting struggling students when using the same texts and doing similar activities. Thus, there is a case for the merits of using separate texts, and differentiated activities, learning aims, and interactions with the teacher, instead of all students working with the same texts (as also argued in Kverdokken 2013 and Charboneau 2013, 2016).

The EYLP approach (S4) incorporates differentiation in materials, their use, teaching practices, teacher-student interaction, and expectations of students' interaction while discussing texts, all of which the teachers reported in the interviews. One teacher (5A) reported that it was difficult and time-consuming to design differentiated tasks at all of the stations. However, she felt that if teachers were more familiar and experienced with the program, it would be easier to do so. She also felt that the extent of differentiation in teaching and activities was an advantage in the EYLP program, especially for the high achievers. One fifth-grade teacher (5B) explained:

*The advantage is that one has better contact with the students. It is easier to follow up with them. One is more secure in one's ability to differentiate instruction to a greater degree. I feel that the students have a better outcome of the sessions than when they have instruction in full classes because then you have full focus on the group and you can work with exactly what that specific group needs to work on.*

Thus, the EYLP approach seems to enable teachers to differentiate not only for lower-level, but also for higher-level learners, an area where the teachers using the other approaches felt their approach may have been lacking. Although the teacher at school 5 was able to do this without a structured program, the differentiation was less systematic.

In all of the case study schools, the teachers appeared to be concerned about differentiating instruction in their classes. Generally, they appeared to be most aware of differentiation in terms of appropriate text difficulty (despite the fact that this was not always applied in their teaching, but more often to homework assignments); they also occasionally used pairs or small groups to have supportive conversations before whole-class discussion.

For example, the teacher at S5 said this about using level-differentiated groups:

*[it was] good for the more capable students to challenge themselves, and not just carry the weight of the other students [helping the others], and that*



*those who are less capable need to do the work themselves as well and not just receive the answer.*

Overall, the teachers reported that they focused insufficiently on differentiating teacher-student interactions. They also seemed to focus more on supporting the struggling readers than on encouraging the strong readers. It is unfortunate if the stronger readers are taken for granted or neglected at the expense of helping the struggling readers. Both should be given attention (although it is understandable that with the demands of differentiating for many different levels within the class, it may take time for teachers to develop differentiated lessons for higher-performing students). Teacher-student interaction is an area in which especially whole-class reading instruction could be improved and where additional professional development could be focused to give teachers the additional support they need to meet the needs of all students.

### ***The strengths of different reading approaches***

Among the interviewed teachers, those who expressed the most satisfaction with their reading approach appeared to be those practicing the combination approach (S2 & S3), and one of the EYLP approach teachers (S4), and to a certain extent the teacher using exclusively graded readers and children's literature (S5). The combination approach teachers all expressed satisfaction at being able to choose from both the textbook and from other reading materials. However, they related their interest in using different materials to teaching experience and confidence in their choices or, as one teacher put it, "daring" to go away from the textbook. As the teacher at S5 explained, the disadvantage of not using the textbook is the uncertainty. She explained further that:

*you know you have colleagues who are following the book, and it is so easy, you just start on page one, and continue through and the lesson plan is there. And thereby the [national] curriculum [LK06] is achieved. And [because] the aims are set, [...] you have the safety of following the book, but the advantage of not doing it is that you, for better or for worse, are free. You are freer to try more practical things.*

She remarks on the challenge of going against the current. She is the only teacher at her school who chose to not use the textbook (the others were not interested), and mentioned that she missed having a team to work with. This is one advantage of the EYLP approach, which is a whole-school approach, thus teachers can collaborate to a great extent. The fact that it is considered daring to go way from the textbook suggests there is also a general impression among teachers that the textbook is safe or the norm, and one is going against tradition and expectations when using other

materials or approaches (Mellegård & Pettersen 2012). In contrast, the textbook-based approach teacher mentioned both the quality of the texts in the textbook and the fact that the publishers state they have planned the textbook according to the curriculum aims as strengths of the textbook-based approach.

A contextual issue, a paucity of instruction hours was considered an important factor when planning reading instruction for four of the case study teachers. Additionally, it influenced their decisions regarding reading approach although this lack of time related to different issues, including both teaching- and planning-related issues (Mellegård & Pettersen 2012). For example, the textbook-based approach teacher (S1) remarked on the high quantity of the textbook texts and thus felt there was insufficient time to work with all of the texts. In contrast, one of the combination approach (S3) teachers mentioned that there was insufficient time to adequately address all of the language skills, with writing especially receiving less attention. One EYLP approach teacher (S4) referred to the challenge of finding time to plan differentiated materials adequately for students working at the different stations. However, as she was a new teacher, and it was her first year working with the EYLP program, she suggested it may become easier in the future.

The EYLP approach teachers mentioned how they perceived that the primary strengths of the program (namely, that they could have more teacher-student interaction with individual students at the teacher station), provided them with the opportunity to engage with the students in greater depth. This was partially accomplished through the use of small groups at stations, which allowed for greater differentiation, such as working with the specific needs of the different groups of students. Although the teachers in the EYLP approach school generally felt that their students were learning more actively than they would have done if the teaching had been primarily whole-class instruction, one remarked that the teacher could not directly monitor all of the students at the other stations at all times. Thus, more responsibility was placed on the students for autonomous learning and teachers needed to accept having less control (Mercer 2000). Overall, although the teachers using the combination and EYLP approaches appeared to be more satisfied with their reading approach, the teachers from all four approaches in the case study saw room for improvement.

### ***Challenges with this type of research***

Long-term case study research in schools poses certain challenges. The one most evident in this study was the possible influence the researcher's presence, through interviews and classroom observation, may have had on

the teachers' practices. For example, following an interview focusing on materials, the teacher at S5 decided to buy more books; likewise, after discussing the role of the national tests in her teaching, she decided to have more focus on the national tests and preparation for them. One teacher at S2, currently enrolled in a professional development course, was influenced by the course she was taking. However, this factor provided a positive additional feature, which allowed the research to focus more on the influence of these courses on this teacher throughout the year. At S1, the teacher began to view her teaching differently throughout the year; for example, she appeared to be looking for justification for why she had not been using books other than the textbook in her teaching when there were other materials available at her school. In other words, she was questioning the relationship between her practices and beliefs (Borg 2009). She had also requested feedback from the researcher at various points during the year, which the researcher did not provide. Finally, this ultimately led to a shift in her intended practices for the following year, namely, considered using other class sets of books, which indicates she was influenced by her reflections throughout the interviews.

## Conclusion

This study researched how teacher' perceptions of English reading instruction and best practice compare in primary schools using different reading approaches. In some areas, the teachers in this study were varied in their perspectives, especially related to their focus of reading instruction in English. Some teachers appeared to be aware of applying different reading purposes during instruction, whereas the use of reading strategies received less attention, an area which has been shown to contribute to effective L2/FL reading (Goldenberg 2011; Grabe 2009). Additionally, although all teachers felt some pressure related to the teaching of English reading skills, these pressures varied. However, there were some similarities in their perspectives, including that all teachers felt that time and resources were limiting contextual variables. This fits with Borg's findings that teachers are unwilling to experiment when resources are tight (e.g., time, energy, money, materials); thus, both in this study and in Borg's research, there is a persistent trend towards more traditional teaching approaches such as whole class work with textbooks. However, there appears to be an interest among some teachers, when the contextual factors support it, to incorporate additional reading materials, such as level-differentiated materials, and other teaching practices, such as small group and individual reading.

These results echo previous findings in EFL research, and rather than creating a new picture, they show that despite many changes in primary level English in Norway, many of the challenges remain the same. There is still a need to address contextual issues, such as lack of materials and lack of time, as well as a need for greater and various types of differentiation, including teaching practices and teacher-student interaction styles to address the increasing opportunity gap.

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**PART III –  
ICC**





# FOSTERING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE THROUGH PROCESS DRAMA IN EFL TEACHER EDUCATION

SILJE NORMAND AND MILICA SAVIĆ

## Outline

The present small-scale exploratory case study investigates the affordances of process drama to foster intercultural competence (IC) in pre-service EFL teachers in a primary and lower secondary teacher education programme at a university in Norway. More specifically, it focuses on two components of IC: having empathy and multiperspectivity. Following an 8-hour process drama project based on Alexie's semi-autobiographical novel *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*, sixteen students' reflection notes were collected and analysed thematically. The analysis revealed evidence of empathy with the Native American protagonist as well as of the ability to decentre and see multiple points of view following the embodied experience encouraged by Boal's Image Theatre. The participants regarded the influence of the dramatic embodiment of the protagonist's experiences with oppression, as well as their own, valuable for stimulating both affective responses to the novel and deeper reflection about the perspectives and feelings of others.

**Key words:** intercultural competence (IC), empathy, multiperspectivity, process drama, Boal's Image Theatre, EFL teacher education.

## Introduction

The importance of developing intercultural competence (IC) in the foreign language classroom has been widely recognized and discussed extensively. Numerous theoretical contributions to this field have been accompanied by attempts to provide specific techniques (for a review, see Lazarević 2015) and educational tools (e.g. Byram, Barrett, Iprgrave,

Jackson & Méndez García 2009a; Barrett, Byram, Ipgrave & Seurrat 2013a) to support learners' IC development. The conceptualization of IC underlying the current study has been largely informed by the view of IC taken by Byram et al. (2009b), who regard IC as consisting of a range of cognitive, affective and behavioural competences. The process drama project addressed two components of IC: having empathy and multiperspectivity. In line with Byram et al. (2009b, 24), empathy is defined as "the ability to project oneself into another person's perspective and their opinions, motives, ways of thinking and feelings". As for multiperspectivity, it can be defined as the ability to "take the other person's perspective, and accept [...] that their ways also seem 'natural' to them" (p. 23). Together with the ability "to 'decentre' from one's own culture, that is, become aware of what is usually unconscious", multiperspectivity is considered part of a competence termed respect for otherness (p. 23).

In the Norwegian higher education context, in which the current study has been conducted, the development of IC is an integral part of the National Guidelines for Teacher Education for the subject English (Rammeplanutvalget 2010a, 37-41; Rammeplanutvalget 2010b, 38-42). While discussion of the conceptualization of IC in this document is beyond the scope of this paper, the knowledge and skills pre-service teachers are required to acquire as part of IC include knowledge about society, history and culture in English-speaking countries in a comparative perspective and cultural conventions for language use, all of which can be readily used to assist pupils' IC development. More broadly, the guidelines emphasise the importance of the ability to teach in the multicultural classroom, which, in turn, presupposes a high degree of IC. Such learning outcomes align with the aims set for Norwegian EFL learners, who are expected to "develop knowledge about, understanding of and respect for the lives and cultures of other people" (ENG1-03, 2013, 4). Particular focus within the English curriculum is directed towards raising students' awareness of indigenous cultures, with competence aims including the ability to describe and reflect on the situation of indigenous peoples in English-speaking countries.

Given this focus within the English curriculum, the current calls for the development of teachers' IC in Norway (Dypedahl & Eschenbach 2014; Lund 2008) and the documented benefits of drama for promoting IC (e.g. Byram & Fleming 1998; Choi 2003; Chen 2013; DICE Consortium 2010; Piazzoli 2013), the present study aims to explore the affordances of process drama to facilitate the development of IC in pre-service EFL teachers in a primary and lower secondary teacher education programme at

a university in Norway. Since an awareness of indigenous cultures is an important focus within the English subject curriculum, the project centres on the intercultural experiences of a Native American teenager and addresses the following research questions:

1. Did the process drama project foster empathy and multiperspectivity as components of IC in the participants? If so, how were these expressed in the responses?
2. What were the participants' perceptions of the influence of drama on fostering empathy and multiperspectivity?

Before the methodology and results of the study are presented, the theoretical background is provided, specifically focusing on the potential of process drama in general, and Boal's Image Theatre in particular, to foster IC development in the foreign language classroom.

### **Theoretical background: Process drama and IC in the language classroom**

Process drama (O'Neill 1995), as its name suggests, emphasises not the final product or performance, but the meaning-making process that occurs within the classroom. It includes everyone in the classroom and is characterised by cycles of action and reflection. O'Neill's (1995) three-part framework for process drama includes a pre-text, the process drama itself and a post-text. The pre-text can be text-, image- or sound-based and serves as a source or impulse for the ensuing process drama. Process drama includes the use of a variety of different drama conventions and rituals. The process drama sequence concludes with a post-text activity that can take the form of discussions, diary response, logs or self-assessment. During process drama, participants act both verbally and non-verbally during repeated cycles of preparation, re-enactment and reflection.

In line with the 'intercultural turn' in language teaching, a number of studies have focused on the affordances of drama to encourage the development of IC (see studies in Bräuer 2002 and Byram & Fleming 1998; Choi 2003; Chen 2013; Cunico 2005; DICE Consortium 2010; Fleming 2003; Piazzoli 2010, 2013; Rothwell 2011). Fleming (1998) explored the potential of specific drama techniques (including still images, role-play, small group improvisation and 'play within a play') to engage learners in the process of defamiliarisation and to challenge the learners' perceptions of familiar behaviours and customs, thus providing "the type of alternative perspectives essential to the objective of developing cultural

awareness” (1998, 157). Upon conducting a participatory action research study, Piazzoli (2010) reported on the intercultural learning resulting from six process drama workshops. Through the manipulation of aesthetic distance, allowing learners to experience decentring and empathising, and through communicative forums, the author facilitated the learners’ “intercultural growth consisting of (1) decentring from cultural codes, (2) experiencing otherness and (3) enhancing intercultural awareness” (2010, 400). Engaging in drama can bring personal beliefs, feelings and cultural knowledge to the forefront, allowing students to become aware not only of the culture(s) they are studying, but of their own invisible culture. Bournot-Trites et al. (2007) employed a mixed-methods approach to examine the effect of drama pedagogy on the development of intercultural sensitivity, motivation and literacy in second language learners, while Chen (2013) documented the affordances of process drama for developing critical cultural awareness. Rothwell (2011) also explored using process drama to stimulate both language and intercultural learning at a beginning level of language learning and concluded that “process drama has begun to open students’ imaginations to the complexity of communication in its socio-cultural context” (p. 592).

The performative aspects of the present process drama project drew on individual still images and group tableaux, informed by Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), and more specifically his Image Theatre (Boal 1979, 1995, 2002). Developed in response to military dictatorships in Brazil, TO “turn[s] the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions” (Boal 1995, 15). There is a growing body of research on the use of Boal’s TO in schools and in teacher education. A number of studies have explored the affordances of Boal’s theatre approaches for encouraging perspective-taking and developing empathy. Bhukhanwala (2014) observed how engaging in perspective-taking and empathy through Boalian theatre practices enabled middle-school students in an after-school programme to address issues of bullying. An earlier study demonstrated the potential of TO to enable bilingual immigrant teachers to make sense of difference through the practices of empathic reflection and perspective-taking in the context of the multicultural classroom (Bhukhanwala & Allexsaht-Snyder 2012). Similarly, using TO to encourage multicultural education practices in a teacher education programme, Placier et al. (2006) observed changes in attitudes and multicultural understandings of teacher education students over time, despite their initial resistance to TO. In Norway, Boal’s theatre methods, including Image Theatre and Forum Theatre, have been shown to

encourage intercultural understanding between pre-service teachers and recent immigrants (Songe-Møller & Bjerkestrand 2012).

The drama convention of still image or tableau (Neelands & Goode 2015, 28), integral to Boal's Image Theatre, involves a group of participants drawing on an event or a text to create an embodied three-dimensional image of a frozen moment in time that can be "navigated and interpreted by others" (Branscombe & Schneider 2013, 96). Once tableaux are formed, they can be 'dynamised' through participants voicing the thoughts or phrases their embodied character might express at this particular frozen moment in time. Such dynamisation can be prompted through a technique known as 'tap-on-shoulder', whereby the teacher's or another student's tapping provides the impulse for the participant to express their thoughts or phrases. In a further development of the tableau activity, other participants can choose to replace a character in the same position and offer their interpretation of thoughts and emotions. The tableau work is at once individual and collaborative, and meaning is negotiated and re-negotiated during the process. Articulated words or thoughts allow participants to collectively explore characters' motivation and perspectives by both embodying and observing different interpretations. By being prompted to express the thoughts or words of their character in that frozen moment, the participants are able to explore character motivation and perspective. At the same time, the participants retain their own emotional reactions and perspectives. Boal terms this state of co-existence 'metaxis' and describes it as "the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image" (Boal 1995, 43). The strength of process drama lies in this multiperspectivity, which contributes to the raising of self-awareness and awareness of others integral to IC. As Tschurtschenthaler (2013, 31) explains:

At this moment the real and the fictitious are simultaneously present and provide a frame within which learners are confronted with how they themselves feel and act and how others might feel and act as well. While they are actively engaged in a make-belief situation, their emotional involvement is real and makes this experience an authentic one.

The use of tableaux to encourage reflection has been explored both with regards to teacher education and within the primary and secondary language classroom. Schneider and Jackson (2000, 50) examined the ways in which process drama, including tableaux, enabled students to incorporate multiple perspectives in their writing while others have explored the potential of tableaux for embodying ideas from literary (Tortello 2004; Wilson 2003) and informational texts (Branscombe 2015).

Tableaux, Branscombe argues, can serve as ‘embodied text’ and ‘comprehension in action’ (Branscombe 2015, 321-322). Rozansky and Santos (2014, 66) found that the use of gestures and body positioning enhanced students’ critical responses to texts, contributing to both their own understanding and interpretations and those of the spectators.

As many studies exploring the influence of drama on IC development have been qualitative and action-research based, researchers have called for more longitudinal and empirically-based studies on drama and IC (Bellevue & Kim 2013; Kao & O’Neill 1998; Schewe 2013; Stinson & Winston 2011). One such study is the 2010 cross-cultural quantitative research study *Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competences in Education (DICE)*, which investigated the effects of educational theatre and drama on five of the eight Lisbon Key Competences. This EU-funded two-year longitudinal project was conducted with twelve partner countries (including Norway) and near five thousand students aged 13-16. It concluded that educational theatre and drama provided positive outcomes for all five sets of competences, one of which includes interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, as well as civic competence. The study found that in comparison to the control group, students who regularly engaged in educational theatre and drama activities were more empathic, showed concern for others, were better able to change their perspective and were significantly more tolerant towards both minorities and foreigners. Significant differences were found in the scales for empathic perspective-taking, empathic concern, social acceptance of out-group (most antipathic ethnicity, minority or nation) and social acceptance of an unknown nation (Cziboly 2015; DICE Consortium 2010).

In their policy paper recommendations, the DICE consortium encouraged the incorporation of educational theatre and drama into all teacher education programmes, as well as the integration of theatre and drama methods into the teaching of other subjects (DICE Consortium 2010). The importance of teacher artistry and knowledge of dramatic methods has been emphasised by researchers (Dunn & Stinson 2011; Piazzoli 2013); however, Norwegian studies of educational drama point to teacher inexperience with drama structures and techniques and the consequent reluctance of many teachers to employ process drama in their classrooms (Sæbø 2009). The aim of the present process drama project was therefore twofold; first, to introduce pre-service teachers to educational drama methods through experiential learning, and second, to explore the affordances of process drama (O’Neill 1995), and more specifically Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal 1979, 1995, 2002), to foster empathy and multiperspectivity as components of IC. The classroom

project was conceived in terms of loop input: “a specific type of experiential teacher training process that involves an alignment of the process and content of learning” (Woodward 2003, 301). Through the “self-descriptivity and recursion” of loop input (Woodward 2003, 303), the project aimed at fostering the participants’ IC through process drama while simultaneously allowing them to learn about drama methods for use in the EFL classroom.

## Methodology

The process drama project took place within an EFL teacher-training course for pre-service teachers in a Norwegian university over two classroom sessions of three hours and five hours respectively. This section details the materials and activities employed in the case study, specifically focusing on the drama activities chosen, and then provides information about the data collection and data analysis procedures.

The selected pre-text for the process drama project was Alexie’s *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*, along with a number of multimodal sources of information about Native American culture and heritage. The novel, which all the students had read prior to the first session, recounts a Native American teenage boy’s struggles with identity, stereotyping and exclusion. The text is filled with intercultural encounters, instances of ethnic and racial stereotyping and the narrator’s teenage questioning of identity. As a multimodal text interspersed with lists, emails and various types of graphic drawings, *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian* is an eminently suitable pre-text for a process drama that aims to use Image Theatre to explore questions of identity, exclusion, and intercultural encounters. Additionally, videos, interviews, opinion pieces and visual images, such as Native American mascots and picture book representations, were used as prompts for different classroom activities. These included personal reflections and group discussions on stereotypes and belonging, pair discussions about oppression techniques drawing on Ås’s master-suppression techniques (1978), individual and group exploration of the main themes and traumatic events in the novel, and drama activities. The post-text activities included individual reflections based on questions drawn from the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media (AIEVM) (Barrett et al. 2013a) and a whole-class discussion. The last part of the 5-hour session was a lecture focusing on the concept of IC and its complexity in English language teaching.



The main purpose of the process drama was to foster empathy and multiperspectivity through embodied experience. The drama work formed the core of the second, 5-hour session. It was introduced after studying the various multimodal texts and was interspersed with individual and group reflection activities. After a series of short warm-up drama exercises drawn from Boal's *Games for actors and non-actors* (2002), the students were invited to engage more deeply in self-exploration and draw parallels between the studied materials and their own experiences. Following the discussion about their own experiences with being mistreated and/or oppressed, they were invited to individually form still images of an oppressor they had been mistreated by, of themselves as the oppressed in a specific situation they could recall and of themselves being freed from oppression, and then perform the sequence of images to music ('The image of transition', Boal 1995). The next step was to form group tableaux based on the traumatic experiences of the Native American teenager, the main character in the novel, but at the same time informed by their own personal experiences previously explored in the still images. The groups were asked to prepare a second tableau portraying an idealised version of the traumatic event. As they had done with the individual still images, the participants performed for each other the transition from oppression to liberation. Using the 'tap-on-shoulder' technique, the tableaux were subsequently dynamised through verbalisation of thoughts and dialogue and character intervention to provide alternative interpretations.

Finally, the participants were asked to reflect individually on a tableau they had observed and/or created in class or a chosen image from the novel, using a set of questions provided by the researchers to guide their reflections. The anonymous reflection notes served as the primary source of data for the study. The last stage of the session involved a whole class discussion of the tableaux, the responses they evoked in the participants and observers, the complexity of the IC concept, and the ways in which process drama can be used in EFL teaching, especially to foster IC development. In order to avoid influencing the participants' responses, the reflection notes were completed before the discussion of drama and IC in the EFL classroom.

The reflection questions were taken or slightly adapted from the *Images of Others: An Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media (AIEVM)* (Barrett et al. 2013a). The AIEVM focuses on visually mediated intercultural encounters and aims to foster a range of attitudinal, cognitive and behavioural competences. As Barrett et al. (2013b, 6) explicitly discuss intercultural competences underpinning each section, the questions from the sections focusing on empathy and respect

for otherness (*Your feelings* and *The feelings of other people*) were included as prompts for the participants' reflections. These components of IC were selected based on the IC-related competence aims for Norwegian EFL learners as well as on the findings of previous research providing evidence for the potential of drama to promote empathy and perspective-taking (e.g. DICE Consortium 2010). The last two questions, not based on the AIEVM, addressed the participants' perceptions of the influence of the drama activities on their ability to relate to the events recounted in the book and to relate to marginalised groups more generally (for the complete list of questions, see Appendix).

Out of the seventeen students present in the second session, when the reflection notes were written and collected, sixteen submitted their reflections. All the participants, sixteen female and one male<sup>1</sup>, were in their early twenties and studying to become English teachers in primary or lower secondary school. Twelve students were of Norwegian origin and five were international exchange students. They had all known one another for at least a semester and were comfortable interacting and cooperating during class sessions. All of the Norwegian students had had an obligatory drama methods course as part of their teacher education. However, as the international students had had varying experience with drama, no pre-knowledge of drama methods was assumed during the project.

The participants' reflections were analysed using thematic analysis (Savin-Baden & Major 2013, 439-440). The responses were first analysed by question to generate initial codes. Afterwards, emergent themes were preliminarily identified, reviewed and defined across the questions.

## Results and discussion

A number of interrelated themes emerged from the respondents' reflection notes. The ones regarded as the most relevant to answer the research questions included: emotional engagement, drawing on one's own experiences, the experience of being both the oppressor and oppressed, empathy, embodiment, multiperspectivity, and reflection. As these themes proved to be highly interrelated, often co-occurring in the respondents' reflections in a single sentence, they are not examined separately in this section. Rather, the section is structured around the two

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the ratio of female and male students, 'she' will be used as the generic pronoun.

research questions and draws on all these themes to some extent in the presentation and discussion of the results. The section on the evidence of empathy and multiperspectivity specifically examines the respondents' emotional engagement with the protagonist's experiences, while the one on the respondents' perceptions of the affordances of drama focuses on the relevance of embodied experience for affective engagement and for cognitive understanding.

### ***Evidence of empathy and multiperspectivity***

The data provided abundant evidence of the respondents' affective engagement with the protagonist's experiences from the novel when viewing or participating in the tableaux. Their responses to the question about how they had felt regarding their chosen image ranged from 'sad', 'hopeless', 'angry', 'surprised', 'worried', to 'small', 'put on the spot', and 'alone'. The reflections were strongly associated with the affective: within the reflections, there are 127 occurrences of the terms 'feel', 'feelings' and their derivatives. This is a natural consequence of questions asking the respondents to reflect on feelings; however, the trend is also noticeable in the reflections on the role of drama. The respondents' ability to relate to Arnold's experiences appeared to be strongly influenced by the emotions conjured in and through the drama tableaux, which will be further discussed in relation to the second research question.

The respondents' attempts to "project [themselves] into another person's perspective and their opinions, motives, ways of thinking and feelings" (Byram et al. 2009b, 24) were evident in their reflections. For instance, respondent 14 indicated that she could "feel what he [Arnold]'s feeling" (14.1)<sup>2</sup> while respondent 3 wrote that she felt "empathy for Arnold" (3.1). In their reflections, several related their own emotional reactions to how Arnold might have felt, indicating that the drama experiences had encouraged them to consider the other's perspective. Respondent 9 noted that "I tried putting myself in Arnolds positions"<sup>3</sup> (9.2) while respondent 11 commented that her emotional engagement was caused by the fact that "you feel as if you are the protagonist, Arnold. You go into his place" (11.2). These responses provide evidence of empathic perspective-taking, also evidenced in the students participating in the large-scale DICE (2010) study.

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<sup>2</sup> 14.1 is used to indicate Respondent 14's answer to Question 1.

<sup>3</sup> Language mistakes in the responses have not been corrected.

One of the tableaux that the students chose to pay particular attention to, both during the drama session and in their guided reflections, revolved around the shooting of Arnold's dog, Oscar. In the novel, Arnold's father is forced to shoot Oscar, Arnold's best friend, as he cannot afford to take him to the veterinarian. After the initial showing of the Image Theatre sequence, the tableau was dynamised with the characters' thoughts and utterances, and several students chose to replace the father and son characters in order to express their own thoughts and reflections inspired by the tableau.

Remembering her reaction to the tableau depicting the shooting of Oscar, respondent 13 indicated that she had felt "sad, sorrowful, hopeless, worried, horrified, heartbroken..." (13.1). She highlighted that she believed that such feelings were caused by empathising with the father and son characters and that she had "imagined the same situation with [her] father, [herself] or [her] brother, so [she] was trying to empathise with the feelings the characters may feel" (13.2). The respondent drew similarities between her own emotional reaction to such an event and the characters' emotions, concluding that "that's why [her] feelings are probably quite the same as Arnold's feelings or his dad's feelings" (13.2). Respondent 1 similarly commented that drama had influenced her ability to relate to Arnold's experiences, making her "feel it in a deeper way" and "relate to the emotions of the events better" (1.9). Such responses provide further support to the findings of previous research studies demonstrating that Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed encourages developing empathy and perspective-taking in teacher education (Bhukhanwala & Alleksaht-Snyder 2012; Placier et al. 2006).

While the respondents' reflections provide evidence of empathy, their central focus on feelings appears to be reductive in relation to the complexity of the concept of empathy as "the ability to project oneself into another person's perspective and their opinions, motives, ways of thinking and feelings" (Byram et al. 2009b, 24). On the one hand, the extensive use of 'feel' and its derivatives may be a result of the respondents writing in a second language and lacking the linguistic means for more complex expression. The respondents simply may not have been equipped with the vocabulary necessary to discuss their experiences in a more nuanced manner<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, the embodiment through drama may have had the most powerful impact on the affective level and not the other aspects

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<sup>4</sup> For the complexities of expressing emotions in a foreign language, see Valetopoulos (this volume, pp. 63-79).

of empathy, the use of vocabulary only reflecting this. Yet another reason for the affective being foregrounded may be the wording of the AIEVM questions themselves, with feelings clearly emphasised over the other aspects, despite the much broader definition of empathy adopted in the document. The respondents' understanding of the concept of empathy through a follow-up discussion would have provided their reasoning behind the primary focus on feelings, which would be an interesting avenue for further research.

If the concepts of empathy and multiperspectivity as components of IC had been introduced before the process drama cycle, this might have affected the focus and the wording of the responses. Being acquainted with the complexity of these concepts and their multi-faceted nature before completing the questionnaire would probably have contributed to diversifying and adding complexity to the responses. However, the decision was made not to discuss IC explicitly before the process drama cycle in order not to disclose the focus of the project to the participants. Their responses can thus be argued to reveal the most salient features in their experience prior to a thorough reflection on IC, which may reflect the situation in language classrooms more closely.

In addition to the focus on the affective, several respondents' reflections also provided evidence of experiencing decentring, i.e. "a willingness to suspend belief in one's own meanings and behaviours, and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging" (Byram 1997, 34), which is a necessary step in developing empathy and respect for otherness (Byram et al. 2009b, 23). According to Fleming (2004, 119), "decentring is a key implicit element in all drama because we are invited to look at familiar situations in new light". Following the process drama sequence, respondent 14 concluded:

I would like to meet Junior and Rowdy. This way I could talk with both of them and I would see what they think about this situation. It would be really enriching because of the fact I could see both points of view. (14.5)

Similarly, respondent 15 felt that getting acquainted with Arnold's mother's perspective would advance her understanding of the mother's seemingly passive behaviour, as shown in the following quotation:

I think we can see/understand quite good how these characters might be feeling. But I think that having more information about the family's situation (we know it's bad, but that's pretty much it). Also getting to know the mum a little bit more, because she is kind of in the shadow all the time. That maybe would help us understand the reason why she doesn't do anything about it. (15.5)

As in Piazzoli's (2010) study, different students benefitted from the process drama cycle to different degrees and in different ways. While the above quotations testify to an understanding of the value of seeing other perspectives, supporting Piazzoli's (2010) conclusion that process drama can indeed lead some students through the process of decentring and ultimately contribute to their intercultural growth, respondent 16's responses were more ambiguous. When asked whether she would like to meet the people in her chosen tableau in real life, she responded:

Yes. I could then talk to them, calm them down. From my neutral point of view it's easier to get an overview. I understand both sides which would put me in the position of a 'referee'. (Better described as the moderator, helper...) (16.5)

Here respondent 16 suggests that her 'point of view' is 'neutral', thus failing to demonstrate the ability to decentre and recognise that all points of view are informed by overt or covert beliefs and values.<sup>5</sup> However, later on in her reflection on the role of drama, she comments on the importance of empathy, i.e. "really try[ing] to FEEL like them" (16.9) and multiperspectivity, i.e. putting "[herself] in other shoes first before [she] judge[s]" (16.10), thus providing a different view from the one expressed in 16.5 above. Unfortunately, the short-term nature of this project and anonymous reflection notes as the main source of data do not make it possible to further explore the tension between these responses.

Despite a relative lack of language nuance, and a tendency to focus mostly on the affective aspect of empathy, the participants' responses provided clear evidence of empathic perspective-taking with regards to the Native American protagonist. Participants indicated both an awareness of the perspectives of others and a willingness to project themselves into the thoughts and feelings of the embodied characters.

### ***Perceptions of the affordances of drama for developing empathy and multiperspectivity: Affective and cognitive levels***

When asked to consider whether partaking in drama had influenced their ability to relate to the experiences recounted in the book, thirteen of the sixteen respondents replied by the affirmative. Of the three remaining respondents, one replied that she felt the drama activities had not been

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<sup>5</sup> This statement appears to reflect the Minimization stage from Bennett's (2013) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, in which "elements of one's own cultural worldview are experienced as universal" (2013, 91).

strongly enough related to the novel, but that she still appreciated the experience of learning about process drama (2.9). The other two, Respondents 6 and 8, felt that reading the pre-texts, a stage of the process drama sequence preceding the drama activities themselves (O'Neill 1995), contributed more to their ability to relate to Arnold's experiences. Respondent 6 stated that for her, "reading literature is one of the best ways of understanding people and situations" (6.9), while respondent 8 highlighted that her experience of listening to the novel on audiobook had already made her feel "like [she] could hear his feelings when [she] read the book" (8.9).

The thematic analysis of the guided reflections revealed a number of themes relating to the respondents' perceptions of the affordances of drama for developing empathy and multiperspectivity. These will be presented and discussed as they relate to the relevance of embodied experience for affective engagement and for cognitive understanding.

A number of respondents indicated that their emotional engagement with Arnold's experiences and their ability to empathise with him were a result of observing the dramatic embodiment of Arnold's experiences, stating that their feelings were caused by: "the body and face expressions" (1.2), "all the facial expression and how it was presented" (5.2), "the emotions in the scene" (8.2), "the expression on 'Arnold's' face" (9.2). These comments provide evidence of the sources of emotional engagement for the tableau viewers. However, the tableaux also generated affective involvement with Arnold's experiences for the students participating in them.

Several of the respondents indicated that the discussion about and embodiment of their own oppression(s) had informed their understanding of the protagonist's experiences with marginalisation and oppression: "I can relate more to him and what he has experienced because we looked at our own experiences with oppression" (13.9). Furthermore, respondent 1 noted that drama had influenced her ability to relate to Arnold's experiences, making her "feel it in a deeper way" (1.9). The process drama exercises had enabled participant 13 "to become more aware of the amount of different situations from the book that [she] could relate to daily live situations" which had "helped [her] to be more empathic". (13.9). The importance of embodiment was also highlighted by respondent 7: "drama can help you feel more connected to the situation(s). And also when you use your body you can relate to the feelings" (7.9), as well as by respondent 11, who concluded that "when creating images you go into the role. You become vulnerable" (11.9). In a similar vein, respondent 5 indicated that drama had improved her relational ability because "it gives

you an opportunity to enter a role and experience and feel how the situation make you feel” (5.9). All these quotes lend support to the positive findings of the studies on the use of Theatre of the Oppressed in teacher education to encourage empathy and multiperspectivity (Bhukhanwala & Alleksaht-Snider 2012; Placier et al. 2006).

In addition to contributing to a deeper affective engagement, embodiment was also perceived as relevant for generating understanding on the cognitive level. In line with earlier findings regarding the affordances of tableau to foster reflection and understanding (Branscombe 2015; Branscombe & Schneider 2013; Rozansky & Aagesen 2009; Rozansky & Santos 2010, 2014; Schneider & Jackson 2000; Tortello 2004; Wilson 2003), the participants highlighted drama’s influence on their ability to reflect. Respondent 4 pointed out that drama “makes us think about the context and emotions in the story. I got a stronger understanding of the book and Arnold’s feelings” (4.9), while respondent 10 indicated that “it got [her] to reflect on how the situation is on the real life and how the feelings are” (10.9). The recursive and embodied nature of the drama activities was seen to encourage in-depth thinking:

Yes, I think it is very interesting to go a little bit deeper into the story and get to put yourself in the characters’ shoes. Doing drama activities helps with that, as in order to do them you have to reflect yourself and there can also be a group reflection led by the teacher. (15.9)

For respondent 12, reflection was linked to multiperspectivity: “it got me to reflect and see it from different characters view” (12.9). Engaging in the process drama had led respondent 16 to consider Arnold’s situation, but also alternative actions for the protagonist: “What would I do in this position? How could he have reacted differently?” She acknowledged the protagonist’s difficult situation in her selected tableau and emphasised how the drama activities had influenced her ability to relate to his experiences: “Just reading about it is one thing, but if you really try to FEEL like them, it puts you in a different mind-set” (16.9). Indeed, during the Image Theatre sequences, both those drawing on personal experiences with oppression and those based on Arnold’s experiences in the novel, the participants were invited to embody and reflect upon the thoughts and feelings of both the oppressor and the oppressed. Such activities encouraged them to decentre and consider the perspectives of others. Respondent 14 indicated that the multiperspectivity of the Image Theatre work had strongly influenced her ability to relate to marginalised groups:

Yes it has totally influenced on that. Doing drama activities playing in the roles of both sides (bullied and the one who bully) is a way to understand it deeply and try to feel what people in this situation can feel. (14.10).



As suggested by Boal (1995, 43) and Tschurtschenthaler (2013, 31), dynamisations of the tableaux through the participants' voicing of the thoughts and feelings of their embodied characters while at the same time retaining their own reactions and perspectives was perceived as a major strength of process drama. The multiperspectivity encouraged through drama was reported to have contributed to the raising of self-awareness and awareness of others, integral to IC development.

The last guided reflection question for the respondents was whether drama activities had influenced their ability to relate to marginalised groups, and if so, in which ways. This question aimed to prompt the respondents to think about the extent to which they thought they could empathise with other marginalised groups as a result of having felt empathy for the Native American protagonist. The responses to this question were more diverse than the ones to the question about the influence of drama on their ability to relate to Arnold's experiences. For instance, some respondents felt that the drama activities had helped them empathise with marginalised groups, as shown in the following quotations:

Yes. You get to put yourself in their position and their view of how it feel to be opprest and feeling sad. You also get to connect this to your own experiences of life. (5.10)

It helps to be more empathic. To think him more as a person and not so much as a character [...] putting myself in his situation helped me understand the cruelty that takes place when marginalising children for their appearance or ethnia. (15.9).

Other respondents, such as respondent 12 quoted below, highlighted a better understanding of the themes in the book:

Maybe, a little when it comes to feelings and different views. It has activated me to think more in depth and look at the themes in different way. (12.10).

Finally, there was one response that highlighted that the pre-texts for the drama work, i.e. various multimodal sources of information providing different perspectives on Native American culture and heritage, rather than the drama activities, were more relevant for her ability to relate to marginalised groups. The drama activities, on the other hand, were perceived as relevant for exploring the feelings of oppressors and oppressed:

Not necessarily the drama, but the lectures. Learning about them and reading the book made me relate more. The drama was more about my feelings and feelings belonging to bullys and victims. (11.10).

In sum, while two respondents felt that the various pre-texts rather than the embodiment itself contributed more to their ability to relate to Arnold and marginalised groups more generally, many of the respondents highlighted the affordances of embodied experience for both affective engagement and reflection. Embodiment through process drama was reported to have contributed to developing empathy as well as considering other perspectives. Affective and cognitive engagement was also encouraged by the repeated cycles of embodiment and reflection inherent in the process drama. Such reported benefits are worth investigating further, especially in light of repeated calls for developing teachers' intercultural competence both in Norway (e.g. Dypedahl & Eschenbach 2014; Lund 2008; Rammeplanutvalget 2010a; Rammeplanutvalget 2010b) and internationally (e.g. Cushner & Mahon 2009), and for incorporating drama methods within teacher education (DICE Consortium 2010).

## Conclusion

This study set out to explore the affordances of an 8-hour process drama project for fostering IC in pre-service EFL teachers as well as the participants' perceptions of the influence of drama on empathy and multiperspectivity as two components of IC. The findings revealed substantial evidence of empathy with the Native American protagonist as well as evidence of the ability to decentre and see multiple points of view following the embodied process drama experience. The participants regarded the influence of the dramatic embodiment of the protagonist's experiences with oppression, as well as their own, valuable for stimulating both affective responses to the novel and deeper reflection about their own and other people's feelings and perspectives. Both embodying and observing characters' experiences, as well as relating them to their own, were perceived as powerful classroom tools for encouraging the empathic perspective-taking integral to developing IC.

These results need to be interpreted with caution due to the limitations of this study. To begin with, this was a small-scale case study, involving only sixteen participants, which does not allow for any generalisations. Secondly, the participants wrote their reflections in English. While they were all pre-service English teachers, their responses at times revealed a less than perfect command of English, which may have led to a less nuanced expression. This was especially noticeable in their discussion of emotions, where they might have resorted to more complex vocabulary in their mother tongue. However, since this was a group consisting of both Norwegian and international students, it was impossible to collect and

analyse the data in multiple languages. Finally, audio or video recordings of group and class discussions would have provided more substantial data and allowed for a more in-depth analysis of certain issues (for example, the opposing views expressed by respondent 16 in two of the responses). However, aware that the recording of the sessions might influence the behaviour of at least some of the students while trying out drama activities new to them, anonymous reflection notes were selected as the data source.

This exploratory study opens a number of avenues for future research on the affordances of drama in EFL teacher education. To begin with, this project focused on only two components of IC and mostly explored them in relation to the project participants' feelings and understanding of the traumatic experiences of the Native American protagonist of the novel. While the study has found evidence of empathy, decentring and multiperspectivity, the extent to which these components, fostered through process drama, would transfer to the participants' real-life intercultural encounters is unknown. Therefore, this would be a fascinating area for further research. Additionally, the longitudinal effects of incorporating process drama in EFL teacher education could also be investigated with a view to the teachers' teaching practices, i.e. the role of drama in their classrooms once they have been familiarised with its educational potential for EFL teaching.

## Appendix

### Reflection questions

Please respond to the questions below. All the questions are related to the image you select: either the first image from the two-part tableaux or the image from *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian* on the PowerPoint. Please do not put your name on the questionnaire.

#### Your feelings

1. How did you feel when you saw the image?
2. What do you think caused these feelings?
3. If you were the main person in the image, would you like people to feel this way about you? Please give your reasons.
4. Would you like to have an image made of you which looked like this? Please give your reasons.
5. Would like to meet the person/people shown in the image in real life? Please give your reasons.

#### The feelings of other people

6. Do you think the person/people shown in the image would be pleased with this image of themselves? Please give your reasons.
7. Do you think they would have preferred to be shown differently? Please explain your answer.
8. How do you think other people from the same group or culture as the main person would feel about the image?

#### About drama

9. Has partaking in drama activities influenced your ability to relate to the experiences recounted in the book? If so, how?
10. Has partaking in drama activities influenced your ability to relate to marginalised groups? If so, how?

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# FOSTERING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: CULTURAL RESOURCES IN “PÅ VEI” – TEXTBOOK FOR LEARNING NORWEGIAN

SOFIJA CHRISTENSEN

## Outline

This paper describes and analyzes cultural resources incorporated in the textbook for learning Norwegian as a second language “På vei” (2012). The aim of the paper is to gain a deeper understanding of the content of the cultural resources in a second language (L2, SL) textbook as well as the nature of its mediation as elements in the promotion of the learners’ intercultural competence. The textbook “På vei” targets beginner-level adult learners (A1-A2). The subtitle further specifies that the book teaches “Norwegian language and civics to adult immigrants”. Rather than examining which aspects of the Norwegian society, lifestyles and values are selected and presented in the textbook, more attention is brought to the discussion of the textbook’s method of promoting the learner’s intercultural competence. The contents and the (inter)cultural resources of the textbook are discussed in relation to the Norwegian national curriculum for teaching and learning the Norwegian language and civics: *Læreplan i norsk og samfunnskunnskap for voksne innvandrere*, which is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

**Key words:** second language (L2, SL) learning, intercultural competence (ICC), textbook analysis, Norwegian as a second language.

## Introduction

Beginner-level textbooks for learning a second or a foreign language often concentrate primarily on the target language itself (Henriksen 2008, 67). They focus, for example, on pronunciation, word formation, grammatical forms and sentence structure. In most cases, the goal of presenting different aspects of the language is not to expand the learner’s

knowledge about a language, but to make her a competent user of it. However, without the acknowledgment of the cultural dimension of language the SL or FL learner is in danger of becoming what Milton J. Bennett humorously termed a “fluent fool”. According to Bennett, this is a person who “speaks a foreign language well but doesn’t understand the social or philosophical content of that language” (1997, 16). The interrelatedness of language and culture has been the subject of many studies (Brown 2007; Dema & Moeller 2012; Kramsch 1993; Pavlenko & Lantolf 2000), and acknowledged as the fundamental part of the second language learning process. Consequently, even the most basic texts in beginner-level textbooks are not mere language samples. The texts and illustrations are carefully selected cultural products. As Michael W. Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith point out, both the content and the language of textbooks are edited and adapted: “[textbooks] signify—through their content *and* form—particular constructions of reality, particular ways of selecting and organizing that vast universe of possible knowledge” (1991, 3). Textbooks are “produced within a cultural context for consumption by others and are imbued with the cultural positioning, identities, assumptions, and worldviews of their creators and their intended audiences” (Liddicoat & Scarino 2013, 83).

Taking as a starting point the notion that learning a language is inextricably bonded to learning culture even in beginner-level L2 textbooks, this paper investigates the cultural resources in the textbook for learning Norwegian on a basic level: “På vei; norsk og samfunnskunnskap for voksne innvandrere”—“På vei; Norwegian language and civics for adult immigrants”. The paper aims to investigate how the textbook addresses the goal of making the learner of Norwegian as a second language able to interact appropriately and effectively with other users of Norwegian. The paper will, therefore, analyze how the different aspects of the Norwegian society are treated in the textbook, and how the book, rather than promoting a monolithic Norwegian culture, promotes the intercultural competence of its users.

The ensuing discussion of the intercultural resources in the textbook will take into account the textbook’s educational context and the cultural background of the learners. Consequently, the paper will first introduce some key points in the National curriculum in the Norwegian language and social studies for adult immigrants (*Læreplan i norsk og samfunnskunnskap for voksne innvandrere* from now on: *Norwegian national curriculum*). This official document provides guidelines for learning, teaching, assessing and describing achievements of the learners of Norwegian as a foreign or second language, and is based on the

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Subsequently, the article will briefly address the current education policy on the teaching of Norwegian as a second language. The policy partly regulates the Norwegian program for immigrant integration and presents the legal framework of the textbook. The article will then discuss the cultural diversity of the target users of the textbook “På vei”, basic-level adult learners of Norwegian as a second language. As the article is primarily concerned with the qualitative analysis of textual and visual material in the textbook, it does not account for the actual use of the textbook’s resources in practical teaching situations.

### **Cultural diversity of the learners of Norwegian as a second language**

Norway is situated at the periphery of Europe and lacks both the colonial legacy and the large-scale industrial expansion accounting for some of the key driving forces behind the immigration to many other European countries. Norway is often qualified as a latecomer to the European post-war immigration scene (Garthus-Niegel, Oppedal & Vike 2016, 53). The first larger group of immigrants from non-Scandinavian countries arrived to Norway in the beginning of 1970s<sup>1</sup>. The immigrants were mostly temporary industrial labor-seekers from Pakistan, India, Turkey, and Morocco and were not expected to take up permanent residence in Norway (Tjelmeland et al. 2003).

According to the data collected by Statistics Norway, by the end of 1970s the total number of immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents was around 100 000. As of January 2016, around 848 000 persons residing in Norway are either immigrants (699 000) or born in Norway to two immigrant parents (150 000). These two groups have a background from 223 different countries and independent regions. As in most of Western Europe, Norway’s immigrant origin population was growing steadily through the 1990s, becoming increasingly multigenerational and

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<sup>1</sup> Agreement concerning a common Nordic labor market has been in place since 1954 (Fischer & Straubhaar 1996). The agreement establishes that the right to freely take up employment and settle in another Nordic country is a fundamental right for nationals of the Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. As a result of this agreement and other bonds between the countries, citizens of one Nordic country are only formally considered as immigrants in another.

heterogeneous (Garthus-Niegel et al. 2016). Immigrants account for 13.4 per cent of the total population in Norway today (Norway, 2016). In 2012, which is the publication year of the current edition of “På vei”, Luxembourg was the only European country with a higher population growth rate than Norway (Andreassen, Dzamarija & Slaastad 2013). Today, the two biggest immigrant groups come from Poland and Lithuania.

Diversification of the Norwegian population, along with historical reconfigurations of the welfare state, influenced the national policies regarding immigrant acculturation. The “work-for-your-welfare” model has replaced the idea of state as a “welfare service” to its citizens. Acquiring language and intercultural skills is no longer seen primarily as a means and measure of equality. Civic participation has a pragmatic purpose as well. In their analysis of the semantics of a 2013 integration policy white paper, Garthus-Niegel, Oppedal and Vike conclude that: “the purpose of the total education system [is]: equipping immigrant pupils (as much as other pupils) with the instrumental capabilities seen necessary to become functional workfare citizens” (2016, 64). In a future comparative analysis it would be interesting to explore the impact of the diversification of the textbook’s target users and the changing policies regarding immigration and immigrant education on the different editions of the textbook “På vei” (from 1999, 2003 and 2012).

## **Intercultural competence in the Norwegian national curriculum and CEFR**

The current edition of the textbook “På vei” follows the *Norwegian national curriculum* from 2012. In turn, the *Norwegian national curriculum* is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and the competence objectives are described for 5 proficiencies up to the level B2 in accordance with CEFR. The *Norwegian national curriculum* also includes a separate curriculum concerning 50 hours of social studies in a language that the student can understand, and thus not necessarily Norwegian. On the other hand, *Norwegian national curriculum* is regulated by the official document: “The Act on an introduction program and Norwegian language training for newly arrived immigrants (the Introduction Act)”. The Introduction Act prescribes training in language and civics in order to help “increase the possibility of newly arrived immigrants [to participate] in working and social life and to increase their financial independence” (“The Introduction Act,” p. 2). The Norwegian Government Agency for Lifelong Learning: “Vox” is in charge

of curricular and pedagogical issues related to the teaching of Norwegian and socio-cultural orientation to adult immigrants.

The social-studies curriculum outlines seven topics which aim at familiarizing the person attending the social-studies course with her rights, obligations and possibilities in the Norwegian society, as well as to introduce the society's central values (*Læreplan i norsk og samfunnskunnskap for voksne innvandrere*, 2013, 4). The seven topics in question are also discussed in "På vei": (1) new immigrant in Norway, (2) history, geography and lifestyle, (3) children and family, (4) health, (5) education and skills, (6) working life and (7) democracy and welfare state.

Rather than summarizing the content of these thematic areas, we shall analyze how the textbook presents and discusses the abundance of cultural references classified into the named topics, or themes. In doing so, we shall concentrate on a limited number of the aspects of Norwegian culture which the textbook assumes to be new, interesting, or worth discussing with the learners. As this study is concerned with how intercultural competence is fostered in "På vei", we will inquire into the textbook's strategies in relating these excerpts of the "world of the target community" to the learners' own "world of origin". Based on three examples of such "cultural meetings" presented in the textbook, this paper will specifically analyze how the cultures carried by the learner's first and second language are placed in a dialogue, and how various intercultural skills are promoted in the process.

The learner is, of course, in the center of these cultural meetings. Consequently, CEFR suggests that the authors of L2 textbooks make special considerations of the book's "target learner" and her expected cultural background. In order to address the goal of promoting learners' intercultural competence, CEFR advises the authors to take into account the "prior sociocultural experience and knowledge the learner is assumed/required to have" both in relation to his native culture(s) and the new one (CEFR, 104-105). With this consideration as our starting point, we begin the analysis of the strategies for promoting intercultural competence used in "På vei" by defining the textbook's ideal user.

### **Target users of "På vei"**

Several concerns have been raised regarding the way language learning textbooks present and teach culture. Research indicates that textbooks often fail to facilitate an intercultural openness in learners and promote their capacity to experience cultural otherness. Textbooks are, for instance, not always adapted to the needs of particular learners and are thus "not

able to respond to local needs or provide locally relevant content” (Liddicoat & Scarino 2013, 84). Kramsch, for example, argues that while they are expected to serve a fundamentally intercultural educational goal, textbooks are used in an essentially monocultural educational frame (1988). In her comparative study of three Spanish-learning textbooks (2001), Elissondo demonstrates that Latino cultures are represented with a homogenous image of a middle-class, light-skinned group engaged in stereotypical activities showing little of the complexities of people’s lives in the ethnically diverse Latino world. In general, textbooks often seem to be “designed to provide a comfortable encounter with a language rather than a nuanced encounter with a culture” (Liddicoat & Scarino 2013, 85).

Local culture of the learners may dominate the textbook especially in the case of FL textbooks, which are targeting one linguistic community. As a consequence, English language textbooks in China often project particular images of the Chinese culture rather than engaging with the cultures from the English-speaking world (Lui 2005). Second language learning textbooks like “På vei”, however, do not face this problem, as they address a miscellaneous community of learners, in this case, primarily adult immigrants.

As indicated previously, immigrants come to Norway from many parts of the world and have different needs, attitudes, backgrounds and resources when starting to learn Norwegian, one of the two official languages of their new country of residence. In the foreword of “På vei”, the authors briefly address the profile of its target user. It is stated that the book is part of an introductory course in Norwegian language (levels A1 and A2) tailored for learners with good writing and reading skills in at least one language, learners on “Spor 2” and “Spor 3” (Ellingsen & Mac Donald 2012, 3). With age, and the ability to read and write as the least common denominators of the target user, the content and method applied in the book needed to be specifically adapted. The authors had a challenging task to make learners with diverse competencies, levels of education and characteristics equally comfortable and stimulated to learn.

Another trait shared by the intended users of the textbook is their assumed first-hand experience with the Norwegian language and society. As we mentioned earlier, “På vei” is designed in accordance with the regulations from the Introduction Act. According to this act, the “newly arrived immigrant” with “the right and obligation to participate in the introduction program” (and thus likely to use this textbook in her language learning classroom), is a person “who has been resident in a [Norwegian] municipality for less than two years when the administrative decision regarding participation in an introduction program has been made” (“The

Introduction Act," 2). Consequently, we can assume that another important task of "På vei" is to systematize and help the target learners make sense of the fragmentary and disconnected knowledge about the Norwegian language, society and culture obtained prior to their first encounter with the textbook.

### **Short presentation of "På vei" (2012)**

In relation to the two previous editions of "På vei" from 1999 and 2002, the one from 2012 presents a thoroughly revised version of the book. The authors of the textbook and the adjoining material (workbook, CD, internet platform, teachers' book, etc.) are Elisabeth Ellingsen and Kirsti Mac Donald. The texts are written in everyday language, and consist of many dialogues and suggested ideas for further discussions in the class. New information concerning grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation is presented in boxes on the sides of the text. Boxes with specific content are distinctly colored. Literary texts are introduced in the same manner. Practical socio-cultural information is separated from the body of the text, and can either be found in boxes entitled "Good to know" ("Godt å vite"), or accompanying a photograph.

The book has one volume and is the first part of the three-course program for learning Norwegian by the same authors. The material that builds on "På vei" are the course books "Stein på stein" (CEFR level B1-B2) and "Her på berget" (CEFR level B2-C1). "På vei" has 16 chapters. After the first 8 chapters, the learner is expected to reach the A1-level of language proficiency. Language activities in the first half of the book are predominantly contextualized within the personal domains of language use. The topics from the personal domain gradually give way to the public, occupational and educational domains, which are favored in the second part of the book. Each chapter has a title summarizing the thematic category in its focus, which can be linked to the seven topics from the adjoining social-studies curriculum.

Original literary texts are introduced in chapter 4 and appear in almost every subsequent chapter of the A1 part of the book. In the second part of the book, literary texts give way to other authentic examples of the language in use. Those are, for instance, excerpts from newspapers, brochures and Internet forums. Graphs and charts appear first in the second half of the book. The textbook is illustrated with a combination of drawings and photographs. The choice of visual representations is tied to the subject-matter illustrations seek to visualize. When seeking to clearly present, or practice a lexical or grammatical unit, the textbook favors



drawings. Photographs appear more frequently when it is called for the learner's subjective understanding or identification with a situation or state. Questions and tasks appear in special boxes. These invite students to either give individual oral answers or engage in group discussions.

### **From intercultural sensitivity to competence**

It has been established that language education is a process addressing the learner's whole personality and sense of identity (CEFR, 1). When she enters the Norwegian language classroom and opens the textbook "På vei", the language learner exhibits nothing less than the willingness to reconfigure her view of the world. The authors of CEFR point out that the learner of a second language and culture, here: Norwegian, does not cease to be competent in his or her mother tongue and the associated culture. Nor is the new competence kept entirely separate from the old. We claim that the authors of "På vei" rely fully on the fact that language learning represents a meeting between cultures.

For instance, the textbook is not presenting a superficial, simplified or monolithic image of the Norwegian society and its culture. Rather, it seems to embrace and make most of the learners' fragmented and unclear understanding of the Norwegian way of life. Second, instead of stressing factual information about Norwegian cultural practices, the textbook addresses the questions that might not yet be formulated in the minds of the learners who became exposed to a culture different than their own. Unlike the Spanish-language learning textbooks analyzed by Elissondo (2001), "På vei" retains an intercultural focus as it encourages the students to participate and critically think both about the Norwegian culture and their native culture. In the following chapters we shall analyze the textbook's strategies for fostering the students' acquisition of "a complex of abilities needed to perform *effectively* and *appropriately* when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself", which is one way of defining intercultural competence (Fantini & Tirmizi 2006, 12).

In order to facilitate the development of the learner's intercultural abilities, "På vei" alternates between content that principally seeks to provide insight into Norwegian culture, and content that stimulates a dialogue between the learner's native culture and the target culture. Research often discerns these two abilities as (1) the person's "ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences" – her *intercultural sensitivity*, and (2) her *intercultural competence*, "the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways" (Hammer, Bennett &


Wiseman 2003, 422). The distinction between these two abilities can sometimes be detected in the textbook. If such a distinction is made, the content which promotes intercultural sensitivity often precedes the content addressing the learner's intercultural competence. Taking the way the phenomenon of "matpakke" —Norwegian packed lunch—is treated in the textbook as an example, we will now analyze how the textbook progressively fosters first the learner's intercultural sensitivity and then her intercultural competence.

The fourth chapter of the textbook is entitled "Familieliv"—"Family life"—and it presents domestic activities of the family Bugge Dahl on a regular workday. Family Bugge Dahl has a cat and two small children: Emma and Jonas. The chapter follows the family's busy morning from the moment that they gather to eat breakfast until they all leave the house. It ends as the family reunites in the evening. The first dialogue in the chapter reveals that their mornings are hectic. Things get misplaced as the family rushes to leave from home. The family succeeds in locating the daughter's packed lunch, her schoolbag and apple, but not the comb. When finally at the door, the parents realize that their one-year old son Jonas is also nowhere to be found. The chapter clearly focuses on the expansion of vocabulary related to family, home and food, as well as on the practice of prepositions of place. However, the authors also managed to draw the learner's attention to some distinct aspects of Norwegian cultural practices. This includes the phenomenon of packed lunch—"matpakke".

On page 48 (Figure 1), the learner is presented with a picture of the edge of the kitchen-table and the little Jonas hiding behind the door and with his sister's misplaced comb in his hand (Ellingsen & Mac Donald 2012, 48). The learner is, thus, offered to assume the privileged position of a detective. She is invited to help the family solve the mystery of the missing boy and the comb, and explain to her class what really happened with the two. The text on the side of the picture helps the learner fully grasp the meaning of the prepositions "på" (on), "under", "mellom" (between), as it encourages her to relate the text to the placement of the objects and living beings in the picture (Figure 1). The word "matpakke" (packed lunch) was introduced earlier in the chapter, on page 46, as one of the objects on the table. Now the word is repeated and defined in more detail. The learner gains confidence that "matpakke" is in fact the grey bundle on the table, between the glass and the cup.

Figure 1 – Textbook example 1

Kapittel 4 - Familieliv



**Hvor ...?** 36

Matpakke til Emma ligger **på** bordet. Den ligger **mellom** koppen og glasset. Skolesekken står **under** bordet. Eplet ligger **på** gulvet **under** bordet. Det er melk i glasset. Jonas står **bak** døra.

- Se på tegningen på side 45.
- Hvor er tingene?

**godt å vite**

**Frokost**

Mange spiser brød med pålegg til frokost. Pålegget er for eksempel ost, skinke, syltetøy, egg eller leverpostei. Mange spiser også havregrot eller kornblandinger med frukt og melk eller yoghurt. Det er vanlig å drikke jus, melk og kaffe eller te.

**Lunsj**

Det er ganske vanlig å ha **matpakke** med på jobben eller på skolen. I matpakke er det noen skiver brød med pålegg. Matpakke spiser man til lunsj. Mange har også med frukt – et eple, en banan eller en appelsin. På mange skoler og arbeidsplasser er det **kantine**, og man kan kjøpe smørbrød, varm mat eller salat til lunsj.

48

Figure 1 shows a Norwegian lunch pack as it is characteristically made. Assuming that packing lunch in this particular manner might be unfamiliar or interesting to the SL learner, the textbox at the bottom of the page further clarifies what “matpakke” is, how and when it is consumed and that it usually consists of sandwiches. Here the textbook promotes the SL learner’s intercultural sensitivity regarding this particular aspect of the Norwegian everyday life and culture.



metaphorically invites the learner to consider herself sitting at this table. The products in the picture are in their recognizable Norwegian packaging, and as a whole, the table looks like a representative table set for a Norwegian family breakfast. The learner is presented with a realistic portrayal of a segment of Norwegian cultural practices, and is invited to compare those practices to her own. It is worth mentioning that the textbook's visual material transitions here from drawing to photograph. This choice signalizes the authors' intention to stimulate a more realistic meeting between the student's habits and practices with the habits and practices of the target culture. It is important to remember that the user of "På vei", the "newly arrived immigrant", encounters the same groceries as the ones rendered on the picture, while shopping in any grocery store in Norway. However, the book allows her now to experience these groceries in a realistic Norwegian setting.

The transition from drawing to photograph also marks the shift in the textbook's focus from promoting one intercultural ability to another. Namely, the textbook progresses here from the focus on SL learner's intercultural sensitivity – where she becomes acquainted with an aspect of Norwegian culture: the custom of packing lunch, to a step toward a higher degree of intercultural competence. She is exposed to a picture of what is appropriate to eat in Norway and what a sandwich from a packed lunch might look like, and is given the opportunity to engage, or think critically about preparing lunch as a cultural practice. If she were to invite a Norwegian person for breakfast, what would he expect to eat? Or, in the unlikely event of a Norwegian person offering to share his packed lunch with her, what could she expect to eat?

Unlike some language learning textbooks which tend to treat culture "as a factual information and [...] position the learner as an external observer of cultural facts rather than as someone who is invited to interpret cultural practices as relevant to his/her communicative repertoire as a language user" (Liddicoat & Scarino 2013, 89), "På vei" manages to involve and engage the learner. Metaphorically placing the language learner at a Norwegian breakfast table, "På vei" invites her to initiate a dialogue between several cultural practices. A dialogue with the learner is also promoted by questions in the activity box above the photograph in Figure 2. The activity box offers several topics for oral discussion and an abundance of food-related words, equaling the abundance of food on the table. The picture and the selected nouns aim at inspiring the learner to engage in a discussion of her breakfast habits with the other students in the class, but, implicitly, with the textbook as well. By inviting the learner to answer three questions: "What do you want for breakfast?", "What do you

usually eat and drink?”, or “What *don't* you want for breakfast?”, and offering her to choose from an assortment of Norwegian breakfast-items from the picture, the textbook opens up for an exchange and interaction between the Norwegian and the learner’s native culture.

The learner might not recognize it as part of her cultural practice to eat sardines for breakfast, or a piece of bread with one slice of cucumber on it, which a Norwegian sandwich often consists of. However, the discussion of this simple sandwich may point back to aspects of the Norwegian culture already introduced in the book (the contents of a packed lunch), and prompt a reflection about the learner’s own cultural practices (her way of making and packing sandwiches) now observed in relation to another culture. The promoted discussion can also contribute to a better understanding of other aspects of the Norwegian culture, some of which appear later in the textbook: in the song on page 54 or in the texts from chapter 5. Most importantly, however, the textbook brings the learner’s culture of origin and the foreign culture in relation with each other, and gives the learner a possibility to expand her awareness of culturally appropriate behavior, her intercultural competence.

## **Dialogue as a strategy fostering intercultural competence**

Questions such as the ones mentioned above (Figure 2) belong to what the Norwegian pedagogue Olga Dysthe calls “open, or authentic questions” (1995). According to Dysthe, these questions are the ones that do not ask for a reproduction of information that can be found in the textbook. The answer to these questions is not given in advance. “Open questions” stimulate the student to look for an answer outside of the text, and Dysthe observes that these open questions accentuate the importance of the learner in a teaching situation (1995, 214). In the context of the intercultural aspects of SL learning textbooks, these are the questions that do not refer to information about a culture found in the text, but encourage the learner to re-evaluate her understanding of a cultural practice or behavior, either familiar or new.

Although many questions in “På vei” are more concerned with the technical aspects of the language-learning process, aiming at practicing vocabulary, the speed of reading or correct pronunciation, the book promotes open questions that motivate the student to make real communication with specific aspects of the Norwegian culture, as we have shown in the previous example. Establishing a dialogue between the content of the textbook and the learner is one of the principal strategies used by the authors of “På vei”. Questions or tasks that the students are

invited to respond to are not the only dialogic resources in the textbook which help develop intercultural competences and skills of the learners. Namely, texts often implicitly promote an exchange, or interaction with the learner. We shall clarify this by analyzing two texts that offer an implicit intercultural dialogue with the user of “På vei”.

**Figure 3** – Textbook examples 3a, 3b

## B Velkommen til bords! 22

Haifa er invitert til venninna si, Torunn, og mannen hennes, Per.

Per: Velkommen, Haifa. Og god jul!  
Hyggelig å se deg.

Haifa: Takk skal du ha. Og takk for innbydelsen.  
Vær så god. Jeg har med noen blomster til dere.

Torunn: Tusen takk. De er nydelige. Og takk for sist.  
Det var så hyggelig å treffe familien din.

Haifa: De likte deg også.

Torunn: Jeg henger kåpa di her.

Haifa: Takk.

Per: Kom og sett dere. Maten er ferdig.

Haifa: Det lukter godt.

Torunn: Per lager maten. Han er pinnekjøttesperten.

Haifa: Pinnekjøtt? Det ser spennende ut. Er det lam?

Per: Ja, det er tørket og saltet lammekjøtt.  
Du kan sitte her, Haifa.  
Nå må dere forsyne dere.

Haifa: Takk.

Per: Kålrabistappe?

Haifa: Gjerne. Det ser godt ut.

Per: Det er godt med øl til. Vil du ha et glass?

Haifa: Nei takk, bare vann til meg.

\*\*\*

Haifa: Mmm. Det smaker nydelig.


Per: Vil du ha litt mer kjøtt?

Haifa: Ja takk. Du er en flink kokk, Per.


Per (*Jer*): Synes du det? Det synes jeg også!

Torunn: Per er fra Vestlandet. Der er pinnekjøtt vanlig julemat.  
Jeg er fra Østlandet, og der pleier vi å spise ribbe på julaften.

Kapittel 9 - Høytider og seremonier



Torunn får blomster av Haifa.



Pinnekjøtt med poteter og kålrabistappe.

103

**Kapittel 9 - Høytider og seremonier**

Per: Ribbe er svinekjøtt med masse fett på.  
 Torunn: Men det smaker godt!  
 Haifa: Jeg støtter Vestlandet!  
 Jeg spiser ikke svinekjøtt, men dette er veldig godt.  
 Per: Hyggelig å høre. Vær så god. Ta litt til!  
 Haifa: Nei takk. Det smakte deilig, men nå er jeg mett.  
 Torunn: Er alle forsynt? Da henter jeg desserten.  
 Det er multekrem.  
 Og etterpå er det kaffe og julekaker!

**godt å vite**


**Jul og nyttår**

I jula feirer man at Jesus ble født. Det er vanlig å vaske og pynte hjemme til jul. Mange har ei julestjerne som lyser i vinduet. De fleste har også et juletre i stua. Det lyser hele jula.

På julaften (24. desember) er det tradisjon for mange å gå i kirken og å syngre religiøse julesanger. Om kvelden får barn og voksne gaver som ligger under juletreet. Noen steder kommer julenissen med julegaver. Familien spiser tradisjonell julemat, og til kaffen har de spesielle julekaker. Også i førkristen tid var det vanlig med en slik stor fest med mye mat og drikke midt på vinteren.

Den 31. desember er nyttårsaften. Klokketolv om natta takker man for det gamle året og ønsker hverandre godt nytt år. Mange steder er det fyrverkeri for å ønske det nye året velkommen.

Skoleelevene har ferie fra ca. 23. desember til ca. 2. januar. 1. og 2. juledag og 1. nyttårsdag (25. og 26. desember og 1. januar) er helligdager. På julaften stenger butikkene og kontorene tidlig.



104

- Fortell om tradisjonell festmat i andre land. Hva spiser dere? Hva drikker dere?
- Fortell om å gå på besøk i ulike land. Må dere ha invitasjon først? Har dere med en gave? Hva spiser dere? Spiller dere musikk? Hvor lenge blir dere? Osv.
- Hva pleier man å snakke om når man er på besøk, og hva snakker man *ikke* om? (For eksempel: været, familien, religion, sykdom, penger, mat, politikk, kultur, jobben ...)

Figure 3 is taken from chapter 9 of the textbook. This chapter prepares the learner for the second section of the book (A2 level), and is entitled “Høytider og seremonier”—“Holidays and ceremonies”. The aim of the chapter is to build up the confidence of the learner when talking about traditions and festivities, or when discussing her outlook on life and her beliefs. The texts in this chapter also present the learner with vocabulary related to visiting friends and polite expressions exchanged during a meal (Ellingsen & Mac Donald 2012, 7). All those learning goals can be recognized in the dialogue in Figure 3 (Ellingsen & Mac Donald 2012,



103-104). The book renders a conversation between a guest and her hosts. The guest is Haifa, and she has been invited for dinner by her Norwegian friend Torunn and her husband Per. It is around Christmas, and Per has prepared traditional Norwegian Christmas dishes. Haifa is a character already familiar to the users of “På vei”. Her character was introduced in the first chapter when a fictive Norwegian-learning class is presented. She is a young girl from Iraq, and the book loosely follows herself and her fictive classmates through several chapters. She is Muslim, but this is not explicitly mentioned in the dialogue in Figure 3.

The dialogue in Figure 3 may seem somewhat unnatural. Like most dialogues in beginner-level SL textbooks, this one is adapted in terms of vocabulary, selection of topics and visuals, but also in terms of knowledge or competences the textbook seeks to convey (Apple & Christian-Smith 1991; Selander & Skjelbred 2004, 38). The replicas exchanged by the interlocutors condense a considerable number of politeness phrases exchanged during a friendly visit and a meal. The learner is introduced to ways of thanking for an invitation and the gifts, she is given the vocabulary needed to adequately and appropriately praise the food, and kindly offer, refuse or ask for more food. The learner will likely identify with the character of Haifa who visits a Norwegian family and needs to clarify the ingredients of different dishes. Norwegian traditional Christmas food is explained to her alternatively by Torunn and Per, who prepared the food.

Such a setting in a language learning textbook can easily take a purely cultural turn, where a student is simply expected to “learn about a culture”, and is presented with facts about traditions and festivities of the target culture. Elissondo argues that textbooks often encourage “students [to] passively consume factual information about natural wonders, prominent architecture, regional food and dances” (p. 92), without being engaged in the culture. This is supported by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), who note that

where textbooks do present the culture of the target community [...], they present a static view of the culture in a body of factual knowledge about a country, and this is done uncritically and with limited engagement between the learner and the culture being presented for learning (Liddicoat and Scarino 2013, 86).

“På vei” manages to prevent that the dialogue in Figure 3 turns into a lecture about appropriate Norwegian customs, by including the notion that Christmas traditions in Norway are not uniform and monolithic, but variable and adaptable. The traditional Christmas dish with lamb, “pinnekjøtt”, that Per has served to Haifa and Torunn, is, namely,

contrasted by the introduction of yet another traditional Christmas dish. This one is based on pork ribs: “ribbe”. The learner reads that Torunn’s side of the family traditionally eats ribs for Christmas, whereas Per and his family eat lamb. This difference in customs is explained by the cultural differences between the geographical regions the two are originally from. Per teases Torunn about the greasiness of her traditional Christmas dish. This is followed by Haifa, who states that she takes the side of the part of Norway where Per is from. Continuing the cordial tone of the conversation, Per retorts: “It was nice to hear that”. It is important to mark the progression of the dialogue. After opening up to the idea of cultural variability in the target culture, the textbook simulates how a learner of Norwegian, the character of Haifa, could confidently comment on an aspect of the target culture.

As a consequence, we can conclude that the concerns that textbooks tend to express an uncritical representation of the target culture do not hold true for the textbook “På vei”. The dialogue about geographically rooted dissimilarities in Christmas traditions shows the inherent variability in the target, Norwegian, culture instead of offering simplistic “ready-mades devoid of real connection with specific geographies and historical processes” (Elisondo 2001, 97). Norwegians from one part of the country prefer to eat one dish for Christmas, whereas other Norwegians favor something else. Comparison of traditional foods consumed during important holidays within the target culture explicitly encourages the learner to critically think about and consider potentially relating not to one, but several cultures carried by the language she is studying.

By presenting Norwegian culture as multifaceted and non-essential, this textbook shows at least one other benefit for the development of the learner’s intercultural competence. Namely, at the same time as the textbook presents a nuanced image of the target culture, it breaks the asymmetry between the participants of the dialogue. When Haifa, an immigrant from Iraq studying the Norwegian language, jovially exclaims that she prefers Per’s tradition: “Jeg støtter Vestlandet!” – “I support/cheer for Western Norway!”, and receives positive feedback from Per, the cultural differences between the target culture and the SL learners’ culture diminish. Haifa establishes a bond with Per, by expressing a similar taste in food, and immediately breaks the hitherto asymmetric relationship between a newcomer, in minority, and her hosts, who are the majority at the table. In other words, the participants of the conversation show an appreciation of cultural differences while establishing cross-cultural bonds.

The dialogue in Figure 3 serves, on the one hand, as an example of a successful interaction between interculturally competent individuals (Sinicrope, Norris & Watanabe 2007, 1). On the other hand, when allowing the asymmetry between the participants of the dialogue in Figure 3 to be broken, the textbook opens up its contents to the critical and conscious mind of the reader. Thus, the learner is given an opportunity to inquire into the heterogeneous nature of Norwegian traditions and relate its aspects to her own culture. The textbook promotes the idea that her culture can be seen as yet another equally valid cultural practice among many other cultural practices in Norway.

The text in Figure 3 is an example of texts in language learning textbooks which implicitly establish a dialogue with the learner. The textbook invites the learner to participate in a topic without directly asking questions. This testifies to the inclusive character of the textbook, because it delivers its initially new or unfamiliar content (Norwegian Christmas traditions) in a way that seems neither alien nor authoritative. The SL learner is often given an “alter ego”, in this case the character of Haifa, who helps her practice the intercultural ability of stepping beyond her culture and functioning appropriately with other individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds. A character serving as an exponent of the SL learner’s voice is an approach systematically employed in the textbook “På vei”. In what follows, we shall look into the textbook’s strategy to give the learner an “alter ego”, and we present the final example of the dialogic method, which the textbook insistently uses to foster the intercultural competence of its users.

Haifa is, as previously mentioned, one of the fictitious beginner-level learners of Norwegian. The textbook follows her character’s progression in acquiring language and intercultural competence. In the chapter 12 (Ellingsen & Mac Donald 2012, 135), entitled “Litt om Norge”—“A little bit about Norway”, under the subtitle “Typisk norsk?”—“Typically Norwegian?”, the book renders personal impressions on the subject by another student of Norwegian (Figure 4). The text is possibly an authentic example of SL students’ writing. Ebow Anan presents himself as a young man from Ghana who has been living in Norway for four years. The text in Figure 4 is Ebow’s description of his culture shock upon visiting the holiday cabin of his “typical Norwegian family”. Ebow’s greatest surprise was to see that the cabin lacked running water, electricity and many other modern commodities.

Figure 4 – Textbook example 4

## C Typisk norsk?

Det er typisk norsk å spise hvalkjøtt, sier Pablo til Haifa. Andre vil si at det er typisk norsk å spise vafler, drikke mye melk eller gå på tur i allslags vær.

Her forteller Ebow Annan fra Ghana hva *ban* mener er typisk norsk:

Jeg heter Ebow Annan, er 24 år gammel og kommer fra Ghana. Jeg har bodd i Norge i fire år. For tre år siden møtte jeg en hyggelig, norsk familie, og de inviterte meg på hyttetur på fjellet. Jeg ble veldig glad og tok på meg pene klær og sko. Det var helt feil! Vi gikk i en halv time fra parkeringsplassen og til hytta. Det var ikke vei til hytta, og skoene mine ble våte og skitne. Og hytta? Den var lita og hadde ikke strøm eller vann. Familien hentet vann fra ei elv i nærheten. Men det var ikke det verste. Hytta hadde ikke WC, men et lite hus, en «utedo» ti meter fra hytta. Det luktet *ikke* godt der! Familien var ganske rik, men de elsket hytta si og reiste ofte dit.

I dag vet jeg at mange norske hytter har strøm og vann, men jeg tror likevel at «min» familie er typisk norsk. De liker at hytta er lita og primitiv og ligger langt fra andre folk. Det synes jeg er litt rart.



- Hvor lenge har Ebow Annan bodd i Norge?
- Når dro han på hyttetur?
- Hvorfor ble skoene hans våte og skitne?
- Hva er en utedo?
- Har du vært på hyttetur her i landet?

Kapittel 12 - Litt om



13

Ebow's concluding comment on this aspect of Norwegian culture functions as a summary of his openness to new cultural experiences, and can be translated like this: "Today I know that many Norwegian cabins have electricity and water, but I still think that 'my' family is typically Norwegian. They like the fact that their cabin is small and primitive, and that it is situated far away from other people. I find this to be a bit odd". This excerpt from the textbook, as well as the other examples discussed

earlier, illustrates the stance towards diversity promoted throughout the book. Cultural diversity is treated as a positive and enriching aspect of a community. The textbook systematically avoids treating target culture as a set of facts, and rather than setting her aside as an external observer, it seeks to engage the learner. By promoting dialogue, the textbook invites learners to interpret Norwegian cultural practices as manifold and on some levels comparable to their own habits and preferences. The book raises the users' awareness of their culturally based activities as it prompts them to formulate their understanding of cultural practices in Norway and in their home countries.

## Conclusion

Textbooks are essential resources for formal intercultural language learning, but have been criticized for providing “material that is often of limited use in developing the sorts of intercultural understanding that an interculturally oriented stance in language teaching aims for” (Liddicoat & Scarino 2013, 91). Previous research has shown that language-learning textbooks often invoke a particular value system implicit in the ways they represent the relationship between the cultures of the SL learner and the culture of the target community (Kramsch 1988). The textbook for learning Norwegian “På vei” is an exception to that. It presents cultural diversity as a natural element of human reality by facilitating dialogues between the cultural practices of the different members of the Norwegian society.

The textbook is designed for a heterogeneous group of learners with very different cultural, educational and professional backgrounds. An informal and fragmented experience of the Norwegian language and culture is one of the few shared characteristics of the target users of “På vei”. The projected learner is a person who moved to Norway for a set of reasons and had already resided in the country for a shorter period of time. The absence of a monocultural educational frame may be one of the decisive factors for the textbook's method, selection of texts, choice of vocabulary sections and suggested oral activities, which present complex possibilities for intercultural learning.

“På vei” closely relates its material to the topics defined by the CEFR and the *Norwegian national curriculum*. However, the textbook does not provide the learner with a set of facts about the Norwegian society and way of life which she is supposed to memorize or abide by. On the contrary, the textbook helps the learner acquire the skills and dispositions that will help her function with other individuals in the Norwegian society.

The textbook builds up on the unstructured experiences that the learner presumably possesses as a “newly arrived immigrant” to Norway, and expands these impressions into a heightened intercultural sensitivity and competence. Making the text an inclusive dialogue between equally culturally diverse interlocutors, rather than providing the students with an exclusive set of facts, is a strategy which encourages the users to comfortably ask questions, reflect on cultural practices and mediate between one or several cultures. The textbook “På vei” provides the learner with good examples of how to do so, progressively making her more comfortable with her growing intercultural skills.

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**PART IV –**  
**ESP**



# TUNING-IN: RE-THINKING AN ESP METHODOLOGY COURSE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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## Outline

The focus of the research is on conceiving a new ESP methodology course under the influence of the most fundamental changes that were introduced into the modern society by the advent of the Digital Age. Viewing UNESCO *Sustainable Development Goals by 2030* as the main landmark for understanding contemporary language pedagogy in higher education, the author scrutinizes the concept of quality in education against the main learning aim of preparing learners for a successful future life. The paper maintains that in the light of new goals and implications of the Digital Age, the ESP teachers should more actively employ digital tools not only in the very educational process but to design it and assess its efficiency. Another field of concern in the context of re-thinking this methodology course is the area of linguistic standards for English as the lingua franca in the context of professional communication and the new approaches to the very concept of linguistic norms within intercultural communication environments. The paper also dwells on the lifelong learning paradigm, which has necessitated redefining the axiology of skills in education and language education as its part. The author maintains that teaching transferrable skills in the Digital Age is becoming the main education value, and considers the notion of cross-professional skills presented by *Atlas of Emerging Jobs* as more relevant for ESP methodology.

**Key words:** ESP methodology, digital tools, intercultural communication, lifelong learning, transferrable skills.

## **Introduction**

The research was conducted with the purpose to develop a new course on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Methodology for the Masters' studies program "The Theory of Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages and Intercultural Communication", which would be future-oriented and most relevant for those EFL teachers who are supposed to teach English to all the many professionals developing their careers in the Digital Age.

The study required the sociolinguistic approach to the investigation, namely considering the context of the Digital Age and its implications. The latter, while not being defined in a restricted academic sense, has, however, become the framework for modern research in social sciences and implies the ubiquitous penetration of information and communication technologies in all spheres of life including education, and is often referred to as the Information age. However, there is still a discrepancy in the spread of technologies around the world, and a certain degree of resistance to using them in everyday practices, which makes it safer to define the period we live in as transitional.

Although in a stricter sense, the term "digital" means those technologies that are accessible only through the Internet, it has been widely used as the concept embracing all changes brought to social, economic and academic spheres by the advent of information and technologies. It is in this understanding that we use the term throughout the paper.

## **Theoretical background of ESP methodology development**

### **Global need for innovation in education**

The Digital Age has introduced such changes in all patterns of life that have immediately become omnipotent and irreversible. While economy was the first area to respond to new challenges and opportunities brought by information and communication technologies (ICTs), this created an impulse to initiate the changes in the language of communication which consequently shaped an understanding for changing the content and instruments for teaching the language. Therefore, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) methodology was prone to imbibe and reflect the changes in this development as one of the areas of academic concern.

Given the educational value of teaching ESP is straightforwardly linked to social and economic development, there is an urgent need to update this methodology-tapping potential.

Statistics show the rapid growth of tendencies that prove a more intensive use of ICTs and major tendencies towards transition to Information Society. For instance, according to statistics provided by High School of Economics, The Russian Federation, the Internet use in some economic sectors such as Healthcare, Culture and Sport, Governance and Social Security has almost doubled, which within the context of this research means the need for a new set of skills and new communication praxis (See Figure 1). The second column of Fig. 1 provides an extremely indicative proof to confirm that written communication has also changed. As it can be inferred from the HSE statistics, economic sectors have recognized the need to speak to the local and global professional community by means of the communication through the web tools. The data show that from 2 to even 6 times more companies created web-sites in different industries during the decade from 2005 to 2015 (Abdrakhmanova et al. 2016, 69. See Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** The tendencies of changing practices in economics (The RF Case)<sup>1</sup>  
(the round off percentage from total amount of organizations)

| Economic Sectors                  | Internet Use |      | Personal Web-sites |      |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|------|--------------------|------|
|                                   | 2005         | 2015 | 2005               | 2015 |
| All                               | 53           | 88   | 14                 | 42   |
| Business                          | 59           | 85   | 18                 | 41   |
| Academic research and development | 85           | 94   | 41                 | 66   |
| Higher Education                  | 91           | 96   | 50                 | 78   |
| Healthcare                        | 47           | 96   | 7                  | 59   |
| Culture and Sport                 | 39           | 80   | 11                 | 32   |
| Finance                           | 83           | 92   | 38                 | 61   |
| Governance and Social Security    | 41           | 93   | 8                  | 40   |

These and similar trends in more intensive use of ICT practices at work all around the world have become characteristic for global social progress and laid the ground for a number of investigations initiated by the UN specialized agencies. According to these, in 2015 the humankind entered a new period of history. This became the reason for declaring new

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of illustration, trends are presented roughly, without tenths of a percentage point.

sustainable development goals that commemorated the commencement of the new stage in the development of the global international community. One of these goals has been formulated as “inclusive and equitable quality education” and emphasized the role of education for global progress (See SDG Compass. Goal 4).

In most general terms, the concept of quality is based on understanding the standards to be met. Therefore, to grasp what quality of education is one should comprehend the overarching goal of education, which, if we distinguish the most important one, will be “preparing learners for their future life” and its fulfillment. Thus, thinking about quality education for future life, we mean life in a digital society and, consequently, we can assure quality education only if it “fits the purpose” and meets the goals of education in a digital age (Bates 2016, 372).

This understanding promotes the process of re-thinking major educational concepts which can be observed all over the world (McKnight et al. 2016; Rossi 2016). In May 2015, at the World Education Forum in Incheon, South Korea, the progressive community adopted a declaration “Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all”. In this document the authors stated their commitment to promote “quality lifelong learning opportunities for all, in all settings and at all levels of education”. At the same time this determination to “...ensure that teachers and educators are empowered, adequately recruited, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated” demonstrated the recognition of the high responsibility of teachers and their role in securing this quality (Incheon Declaration 2015, 7-8).

Similar ideology and working guidelines are stipulated in the Qingdao Declaration on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education. It also emphasizes the role of lifelong learning as “the guiding principle to enhance individuals’ knowledge, skills and competences for work and life”, but is more concentrated on the role of ICT for the future of quality education. The authors emphasize “a need to redefine learning outcomes and the way in which we organize and assess learning if we want our education systems to prepare lifelong learners [...] to thrive in networked knowledge societies and succeed in economies that are increasingly reliant on technology”. This statement was made with perfect understanding of the fact that this would entail “[...] re-thinking the role of teachers and reforming their preparation and professional development” (Qingdao Declaration 2015, 2).

Language education within these transformation trends is one of the first priorities as it is language that serves as the mightiest communication tool adding the value to all walks of human activities. This is especially

true of teaching and learning English as the main language of international communication and in the ESP context it is more than just important, because professionally oriented English language competence ensures greater efficiency for partnership and cooperation in the networked knowledge based society. ESP methodology within this context is the area where all the tendencies of global social and economic development are to be considered and accounted for, since this methodology is necessary for the instructors to help learners master the language, affording them to join professional intercultural communication, i.e. to process, interiorize and produce the language which will help them become the full-right representatives of their global professional communities in the digital job market.

All in all, during the transitional period of the Digital Age, the rapid social and economic changes necessitate the move from a traditional to an absolutely new axiology and possibly a new architecture of language education. This turns the research of the narrow area of ESP teaching methodology into a matter of the first priority.

### **Current state of ESP methodology research**

According to T. Rodgers (2001), language teaching methodology has various definitions and often signifies the merge of theory and practice. The scholar relates the theory of language learning to design features and claims that these features include “stated objectives, syllabus specifications, types of activities, roles of teachers, learners, materials and so forth” (Rodgers 2001, 3). Further on, Rodgers suggests that future is always uncertain and that this is also true for “anticipating the methodological directions in second language teaching” (*ibid.*, 4).

Re-thinking any language teaching methodology one cannot but analyze what has been done before the turning point, so as to decide whether it makes sense to completely restructure and redesign the sphere or there might be some moderate prudent alterations, so as to accommodate the needs for change. Thus, in the context of transition, any reasonable tuning-in first requires taking stock of up-to-date achievements carefully, and only then analyzing them against the background of the call for change in language education brought to life by ubiquitous ICTs.

There has been a great deal of research into both ESP language and methodology. Harding (2007) maintains that there has been observed a noticeable growth of learners’ interest in ESP, and claims that the demand for studying ESP within the system of higher education has significantly increased. He believes this could be explained by: “the higher initial



language performance level of the enrolled students, their viewing ESP as a key to [a] successful career, [and] more major subject delivered in English (CLIL)” (Harding 2007, 3). Since this understanding has become obvious, it has become an impetus for investigation and research which remains relevant to teaching ESP in the Digital Age as well. The total amount of this research has reached the meaningful point now, thus promising to have some cumulative effect on teacher training in the ESP area. Therefore, the objectives of this investigation presume the analysis of the whole bulk of field-determined investigations.

The integrated approach to the papers focused on ESP research provides the opportunity to distinguish the concepts and attitudes laying the ground for the methodological approach to this ELT area. One of the first researchers who analyzed the accumulated ESP investigations was Hewings (2002). He processed the volumes of the ESP Journal for the period 1980-2001, and presented some valuable observations regarding the geographic origins of papers, major topics and most prolific authors of these papers (Hewings 2002).

Paltridge and Starfield (2013), who generally seem to have taken a more practical approach in their *Handbook of English for Specific Purposes*, offered some periodization of the ESP research. They have subdivided it into: the Early years (1962-1981), the Past (1981-1990), The Modern Era (1990-2011) and The Future (2011 onward). Grounding their observations, as well as Hewings, predominantly on the articles in the ESP Journal (ESPJ), the authors presented the ESP research picture for each of the above-indicated periods. The period of the Early Years is presented as a shift from the dominance of ESP for science and technology in the academic context (e.g., Trimble; Swales) towards the study of rhetoric devices, establishing correspondence between the “purpose and device” (Paltridge & Starfield 2013, 7-8). The Past is associated with the move to “expand horizons” with a variety of topics, such as: needs assessment, linguistic devices and their rhetorical purposes, technology of the time with focused computer-mediated instruction etc. Although the authors characterize the period as the one with publications on miscellaneous topics of general EFL/ESL concern, they maintain that the emergence of such a concept as genre analysis should be related to this period, since papers comparing and contrasting written works of different genres prevailed over the field-determined academic discourse of the time (Paltridge & Starfield 2013, 9-11). The Modern Age is characterized by the surge of new international ESP journals, the dominant use of corpus research, adding an intercultural focus to traditional contrastive discourse

analysis, and strengthening the position of genre analysis as the central concept of ESP research (Paltridge & Starfield 2013, 12-18).

Both Hewings' and Paltridge and Starfield's approaches to the evolution of ESP theory offer a certain value for the further development of its methodology for the teachers and learners in the Digital Age. The most significant for this paper is the reference to the undertaken attempts to harness technologies for ESP teaching. Paltridge & Starfield (2013) discern the early plantlets of the nascent relationship between ESP teaching and technologies, which, according to them, is reflected in incorporating the "corpus linguistics approaches to text" (Paltridge & Starfield 2013, 19).

Laborda and Litzler's (2015) scope of analysis embraced a longer period of research (from 1964 to 2009) and the researchers suggested some other grounds for the systematization of the content of the papers preceding the current ESP academic discourse. The academics divided all ESP scholars into two main groups. The first one included those who mainly focused on the difference between ESP and English for general purposes (EGP), where investigations were into sub-divisions of English. According to the paper, this group of scientists brought to life more job-specific research, mostly in the field of English for Professional Purposes (EPP), such as English for Aviation, English for Maritime and the like. The second group, meanwhile, comprised the papers centered upon four major areas of ESP methodology concern, or the "four perspectives of ESP": 1) needs and language analysis, 2) materials, 3) methods, and 4) focus", the fourth understood as the emphasized categories of learning (Laborda & Litzler 2015, 40-41). This approach appears to be more concordant with the subject of this paper, as it is more concerned with the praxis of ESP methodology and, within a competence-based approach, more corresponding to the goal of designing a new up-to-date course of instruction for the new generation of EFL teachers. This context has determined the selection of the methodological areas of ESP that should be embraced by a renewed ESP methodology course in the light of the growing impact of ICT in language education.

It should be noted that the concept of four ESP perspectives was accepted as the starting point for defining major ESP methodology concepts, with due reference to the time and authorship they should be related to. However, the findings of current research include more concepts, e.g. the integral practice of assessment in ESP, and the genesis of ESP research is presented in the chronological order to see the trends (See Figure 2 below).

These concepts have established a framework for the present study, serving as the background motif for tuning-in an ESP methodology course of the Digital Age in such contexts as: 1) classroom education (teaching and learning dichotomy); 2) English as the main language for intercultural communication, and 3) lifelong learning.

**Figure 2:** Major ESP Methodology concepts and their researchers (chronological order)

|   | <b>ESP Methodology Concepts</b> | <b>Contributors</b>             | <b>The Years of Most Relevant Papers</b> |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 1 | register, discourse             | D. Carver                       | 1983                                     |
| 2 | hard-core and soft-core ESP     | G. Latorre,<br>M.A. Kaulen      | 1985                                     |
| 3 | co-studying of ESP and EAP      | T. Hutchison,<br>A. Waters      | 1987                                     |
| 4 | case studies and project work   | T. Dudley–Evans,<br>M. St. John | 1998                                     |
| 5 | assessing LSP                   | D. Douglas                      | 2000                                     |
| 6 | course design                   | H. Basturkmen                   | 2010                                     |

## **Re-thinking major aspects of transformation**

### **ESP within the context of ELT classroom education**

Being a part of EFL instruction, ESP methodology is to take into account the educational dichotomy of *teaching/learning* in the chosen area, in our case – gaining proficiency in the English Language for Specific Purposes. But the wider context of the Digital Age, as the broadest-ever spread of digital technologies in all spheres of life, motivates a detailed analysis of all the possible implications of this phenomenon for the grass-root ESP, i.e. the classroom methodology in a digitally rich educational environment built into the educational institution curriculum or an intensive in-company training course. Today, this environment offers to the classroom level ESP methodology a number of downloadable digital tools and services for teaching and learning, which can be used to increase the efficiency of education and customize it.

The major area that requires re-thinking in the existing ESP methodology is the theoretical ground for teachers' and learners' actions, i.e. a systematic approach to the application of digital tools for ESP

teaching: the theoretically-grounded advice and a practical ready-to-use digital toolkit for an ESP instructor.

The roots of the problem are multiple and have their implications. One of them is the unreliability of digital technologies in the classroom (Balchin & Wild 2015, 10) and thus the need to prepare a “plan B”, i.e. one more lesson plan. This obviously involves some extra workload for teachers, who are already overburdened, and often leads to teachers’ unwillingness to use them and rejecting the very idea of innovation.

However, the efficiency of and the need for mindful teaching with the help of ICT has been recognized at the highest levels of concern (e.g. Quindao Declaration, 2015). This promotes the idea of the necessity of renewed skills and instruments required for an ESP trainer in the Digital Age. McKnight et al. (2016) maintain that digital tools accelerate the “mechanics of teaching” and allow for more efficiency. Moreover, learners who often use some digital tools on their own might feel disadvantaged if the tools applicable to learning are not used in the classroom (McKnight et al. 2016). All this confirms the need to instruct ESP teachers on teaching by means of digital tools, and to have a number of well-mastered software or mobile applications (a toolkit) which an ESP instructor can use to achieve the established learning aims.

For their professional use, future ESP instructors are to select those services and applications that will help them conduct needs analysis, select the most relevant linguistic input as the professional discourse for their course, and administer assessment procedures. This means that within the context of the research, the ESP methodology is to take this into account, and offer a range of these tools for a trial.

As the range of the digital tool market is expanding, it would be methodologically correct not to focus on particular names of services or applications but to introduce some contemporary samples, with the emphasis on the nature of the service and its functional options, and to define the benefits of these digital tools for an ESP instructor (See Figure 3).

But the most transformed area of ESP instruction appears to be classroom management. The Digital Age has brought learning management systems (LMS) or virtual learning environments (VLE) (Dudeny 2007) to this field and completely changed the existing practices in this sphere. Moreover, the most recent trend has been the one of integrating social networks such as Facebook or VK into English language teaching by creating closed special-interests groups of learners under the teacher’s guidance (Loseva 2013). These practices appear to be extremely beneficial, and renewed ESP methodology focused on the classroom level

is to instruct prospective ESP teachers on the efficiency of these practices, which are numerous. First, these practices provide an opportunity for creating a closed professional on-line community, which facilitates instant communication and sharing materials for studies. Moreover, such teaching/learning explicitly promotes eco-friendly behaviour, as all materials become sharable without printing them on paper. Thirdly, networking is extremely dynamic and provides opportunities for practicing English in a multicultural professional or professionally-oriented community, and, according to Evans (2016), “this dynamic might help to scaffold the evolution of increased cultural complexity and cooperation in a learning environment” (Evans 2016, vi-vii). Some other forms of ESP practices, existing apart from networks but also providing for fostering authenticity of communication, are videoconferencing (Háhn & Podlášková 2016) and teletandem learning (Hauck & Youngs 2008; O’Dowd 2016).

**Figure 3:** The use of digital tools in the classroom mode of ESP teaching

| <b>ESP Methodology Concepts</b>  | <b>Categories</b>                                      | <b>Examples</b>   | <b>Benefits</b>   |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| <b>1) needs analysis</b>         | on-line surveys and poll apps                          | <a href="http://www.apappeal.com/apps/polling">http://www.apappeal.com/apps/polling</a>   | better understanding of learning aims, sustainable motivation   |
| <b>2) professional discourse</b> | corpora linguistics tools                              | <a href="http://www.corpora4learning.net/resources/materials.html">http://www.corpora4learning.net/resources/materials.html</a><br>BNC corpora<br><a href="http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/">http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/</a> | more relevant input – more efficient use of cognitive resources |
| <b>3) course design</b>          | search engines for text-image-audio-video and mash-ups | Google services   | more learning autonomy, more creativity for both parties        |
| <b>4) assessing and testing</b>  | e-portfolios and e-testing                             | <a href="http://www.bristol.ac.uk/tel/support/tools/e-assessment/">http://www.bristol.ac.uk/tel/support/tools/e-assessment/</a>   | better understanding of own progress, sustainable motivation    |

Within the same context of teaching ESP in the Digital Age, there are some considerations regarding new ICT-based teaching modes. While the

discourse of traditional ESP teaching centered upon such established contexts as: 1) hard-core vs. soft-core ESP (EPP, EAP, EOP); 2) higher educational establishment (HEI) vs. in-company training; 3) high- vs. low-level of language performance (Cutting 2012; Spence & Liu 2013) and 4) mixed ability classes (Tomlison 2001), the Digital Age brought a new area of concern – a teaching mode. The Digital Age ESP methodology appears to embrace new modes of teaching, considering that besides overwhelmingly practiced face-to-face teaching there have emerged such modes as hybrid or blended teaching, on-line teaching, and open education (Bates 2016, 380). Therefore, the variation of teaching modes should definitely be given due consideration in a renewed course on ESP methodology.

Viewed within the overall classroom approach, the renewed course on ESP methodology is to foresee the probability of global career paths of ESP teachers-to be, therefore, it cannot fail to instruct the future professionals on what is vaguely defined as a “West-East divide”, based on the divergence of education values in teaching styles, with a teacher seen as an authority in the countries of Asia and as a teacher-facilitator in the West. This difference involves not only teaching style problems, but also the problem of students’ multiculturalism and the local understanding of various professionally important issues.

However, the learner as a future professional is the only focus in a new ESP classroom, and the main concern of methodology. The personality of an individual creates the specificity of ESP language education in the Digital Age. This means that the designers of a concordant ESP methodology course should take a careful stock of characteristics typical of the so called *net generation* or *digital natives* (Tapscott 1998; Prensky 2001), and proper reservations should be made regarding the issue of the “digital native/ digital immigrant conflict” in educational practices (Kopylovskaya 2014). Although the necessity to take into account new learners’ characteristics has been heavily debated (Bennett et al. 2008) it cannot be neglected. This is more and more true against the background of the prevailing recognition of the wide range of advantages for an individual secured by the use of technologies in foreign language learning. Not only are these learners to live in a technology-rich environment, but the ESP course is to ensure gaining the competences needed for their personal development. Evans (2009) believes that the main advantage of technologies is that ICTs support overall learners’ autonomy and help to bridge the language proficiency gap in low-level performance and mixed ability classrooms, as the independent use of such services as My Grammarlab or Quizlet might help students to gain automaticity in their

grammar and vocabulary areas of deficiency. For the ESP context, it is important that digital technologies help learners to boost their capacities in finding authentic output (Fisher et al. 2006). Another argument in favor of sticking to digital practices for the new generation of ESP learners is the fact that digital tools are supportive to creativity, since they simplify the production of images, music, videos, etc. (Zosh et al. 2017), which has recently become seen as a desirable employee's quality (Atlas of Emerging Jobs 2015). This is particularly important for ESP methodology, because developing creativity through learning English for professional purposes and by means of digital tools is a way to increase the chances for employment for future specialist in the job market. The range of creative digital tools such as Windows MovieMaker or iMovies allows them to use their English-language proficiency to create professionally oriented content and provides opportunities for developing the needed creativity, which is especially valued within the constructivist approach (Batey & Furnham 2006; Tarnopolsky 2012; Živković 2014).

In spite of the fact that most new ICT-based classroom practices have already entered the ESP teaching, they still need verification; therefore, the ESP methodology should be able to provide a theoretical background for employing technologies more actively, and to prepare teachers-to-be for new instructing and learning patterns.

### **ESP as part of language education**

Re-thinking ESP methodology in the Digital Age is also necessitated by the globalization processes, and first and foremost by the globalization of English, encouraged and facilitated by the very digital technologies as well. While considering ESP as a part of language education, one is to consider the issue in the contexts of ESP as a *language system* and ESP as *an instrument for communication*. As the Digital Age brought new patterns of communication and a new extent of its intensity, it is crucial to dwell on the issue of the somewhat privileged position of the English language among other languages for specific purposes in intercultural communication, and to consider a corresponding teaching methodology.

As a *language system*, English as the main international language is being constantly transformed by the L1 of the speakers who use it for intercultural communication, as it is displayed by Braj Kachru's three circles of English. This reflects on distorting language standards and norms. The updated language system raises the problems of general accuracy necessary for mutual understanding and explains the need for preparing teachers to teach International English (Matsuda 2017).

Teaching English as an International Language involves not only a recognition of it as a *lingua franca* but also the implications of this recognition for teaching various language aspects. One of the new areas of grave concern for an ESP methodology course in the Digital Age is the necessity to adopt a new approach to teaching pronunciation in this intercultural professional context, i.e., for the need of communicating messages clearly to representatives of other cultures (Hinnenkamp 2009). Within the well-established view determined by the communicative method of teaching foreign languages, that teaching pronunciation should target intelligibility not idiomaticity, there is still “room for much further work”. Paunović (2015) maintains that “being much more aware of and sensitive to [...] cultural contexts of communication”, the teachers of English ought to be mindful of the cultural specificity of their learners, and help them to overcome interlanguage interference and adjust to diversity of accents at the same time (Paunović 2015, 233-234). This suggests that pronunciation teaching methodology should focus on special awareness-raising and sensitivity-training activities that will then help learners to manage culture-specific professional communication in their future.

Viewing English as *an instrument of communication*, a renewed ESP methodology course is to concentrate on two major areas of intercultural communication of ESP learners: 1) the one that takes place in class, among the international studentship, and 2) the focused ESP communication for the chosen occupation. The first communication type shows natural patterns of communication and allows to tap the potential of psycholinguistic mechanisms of interaction between individuals who are “to become global citizens by living and studying in another cultural environment” (Živanović 2015, 16). In this context, prospective ESP teachers should be instructed on what problems informal communication might involve, and, for a greater professional efficiency, to consider some important aspects of such communication, such as: 1) the problem of the influence of the learners’ L1 on their English language proficiency; 2) the specificity of bilateral vs. multilateral communication patterns; 3) learners’ strategies to overcome communication breakdowns. Consequently, a new ESP methodology course will recommend a closer attention to the issue of the balance between the linguistic standards of Oxbridge dictionaries and English as a tool of communication in learning, fostering compensation competence, and practicing polylogues. Not less important are the changes that happen in the professional discourse – the ESP for a chosen occupation. Here, digital technologies are changing the operational side of production, introducing new instruments and procedures and thus the language, as well.



Coupled with making use of international students' English, a focus on occupational international English entails a whole string of methodological concerns centered upon fostering intercultural competence (ICC). First, we should not forget that any verbal dialogue in real communication involves non-verbal behavior. The language systems and body language systems are coexisting and mutually contributing. Thus, the lack of attention to the body language in ESP methodology is fraught with an intercultural conflict, because while the acquired English language linguistic norms are approximately the same, the body language of the cultures is different. Moreover, until recently, ESP mostly used to belong to monocultural classes, and there was a sensed lack of practicing intercultural communication skills, and intercultural competence was neglected. When intercultural communication became a regular pattern, the need to practice body language turned out to be urgent. Marković (2015) shows a perfect way how to create the situation of a culture shock and make pre-service teachers experience real-life-like intercultural encounters through the use of a card game (Marković 2015, 33). During the game called Barnga students are divided into several 5-6 member groups and every group is given a modified deck of cards and a sheet of rules. The values for every deck differ: in one deck the ace has the highest and in another the lowest value. The participants should communicate these rules to each other in non-verbal communication and play the game. The decks superficially seem the same, as people do, but, like in human cultures, there is a difference in axiology. The focus of research obliges to emphasize the value of this practice, since its being future-focused and useful for students reflects the gamification tendency gaining ground in ELT (e.g. Hanus & Fox 2015), which is as important for ESP.

This way, being a part of language education, the ESP methodology in the Digital Age is transformed under the influence of the globalization of English. This involves introducing methods that make use of international students' language for contrasting norms and deviations, more close attention to the changes introduced to ESPs in various professional language systems, and the view of methodology as preparing teachers to deliver ESP required for efficient intercultural communication.

### **From traditional to new axiology: ESP as a part of the global concept of the lifelong learning paradigm**

While one could hardly say that the idea of lifelong learning has been dominating the pedagogical discourse until relatively recently, it has a 50-year history and dates back to post-war time, when, at the 5<sup>th</sup> General

Conference in Florence in June 1950, it was decided to create the UNESCO Institute of Education (UIE). Initially focused on Europe, in the 1980s the UIE extended its activities globally and concentrated on issues of continuing education. Only after the publication of the Faure Report – the book “Learning to Be” – has it become a narrow part of the pedagogical discourse (Faure 1972).<sup>2</sup>

Later, the idea of learning throughout life was transformed by Stewart Hase and Chris Kenyon into the concept of heutagogy and gave birth to a new vector of research. The concept of heutagogy merged the existing awareness of the impact of ICT on education with the understanding of the need to provide for learners “a more self-directed and self-determined approach” where “educators teach learners how to teach themselves” (Blaschke 2012, 56). However, heutagogy is often seen as the pedagogy generated by Web 2.0 and is sometimes referred to as “a net-centric theory”, because it capitalizes on the benefits brought into education by the Internet and focuses on the “digital age teaching and learning” (Anderson 2010, 33; Blaschke 2012). The context of the Digital Age, therefore, obliges an ESP course designer to contrast both for the up-to-date ESP methodology course. This opposition, presumably, should embrace linguistic matters of the contemporary fluid world and the benefits of digital technologies for learners’ autonomy.

In the light of lifelong digitally facilitated learning, the ESP instruction is to reflect local and global trends of economic development relevant to the individuals whose careers will develop in the XXI century. In the Digital Age, the methodology of such teaching can be approached locally and globally.

Locally it is to involve an intensive use of available authentic professional discourse, e.g. the web-sites of the head-liners of the industries. At the same time, the *locality* of this approach will be in targeting a particular professional community in the context of local culture. This local approach to ESP is viewed here as the one whose major goal is to prepare an English-speaking professional capable of handling the problems of local or country-specific economy within the context of its cooperation with a partner using English as a *lingua franca*. Within this approach it is seen as necessary to customize materials, even those presented in the form of ready-to-use open education resources, for particular purposes, for different teaching modes, and with a focus on the

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCO Institute for Life Long learning. History of the Institute. URL: <http://www.uil.unesco.org/unesco-institute/history>.

job-market oriented ESP classes, and the local and global market (See Figure 4).

**Figure 4:** Local approach to ESP instruction

|                       | <b>Teaching Modes</b>    | <b>Examples</b>   |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Local approach</b> | 1.1. face-to-face (TELL) | 1.1. profession-oriented web-sites and web-pages for creating materials<br><b>classroom-tailored materials</b>  |
|                       | 1.2. blended learning    | 1.1.; 1.2 profession-oriented and educational web-sites and open educational resources (Sigalov & Skuratov 2012)<br><b>local job market- tailored materials</b> |
|                       | 1.3. open education      | 1.3 OER: Coursera, edX, OpenLearn, etc.<br><b>global job market tailored materials</b>  |

Globally, within the lifelong learning paradigm, the new ESP methodology course should embrace the concept of the so called *soft* or *transferrable skills* as a part of preparing learners for a new model of a career path predicted by sociologists. The central idea of the model is that, within the world where information changes the patterns of life more often than before, an individual gets qualifications more easily, and might start a new career in a sphere different from their first qualifications. The main value of sustainable education, then, appears to be the fact that these skills are important for most industries and fields of occupation, i.e. are transferrable.

Transferable skills are often viewed within the hard skills/ soft skills dichotomy. While hard skills are narrowly-professionally oriented, soft skills are not unique to any particular profession, but evidently facilitate efficiency in many career paths, so the latter can be cited as interdisciplinary ones (Bridges 1993; Fallows & Steven 2000; Pellegrino & Hilton 2013). However, in the considered context, transferrable skills seem to have a definite relevance for studying a language for specific purposes. As a matter of clarity, a course in ESP methodology will have to define those skills that could be fostered, because the concept has undergone significant transformations since it first entered the higher education discourse. First the European Parliament introduced soft skills as *8 key competences* (Recommendations of EP 2006), then they were halved and morphed into *transversal skills* (Transversal Competences 2015), and, finally, in 2015 the Skoltech Lucksha's team defined a set of

*cross-professional skills* and presented them in the Atlas of Emerging Jobs (Atlas of Emerging Jobs 2015, 15) (See Figure 5).

**Figure 5:** The evolution of transferable skills in (2000-2015)

| <b>Transferrable Skills</b>  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Key Competences</b>   | <b>Transversal Competences</b>  | <b>Cross-Professional Skills</b>  |
| <p>1) communication in the mother tongue;</p> <p>2) communication in foreign languages;</p> <p>3) mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;</p> <p>4) digital competence;</p> <p>5) learning to learn;</p> <p>6) social and civic competences;</p> <p>7) sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;</p> <p>8) cultural awareness and expression.</p> | <p>1) critical and innovative thinking;</p> <p>2) inter-personal skills;</p> <p>3) intra-personal skills</p> <p>4) global citizenship</p> | <p>1) system thinking</p> <p>2) intersector communication</p> <p>3) project management</p> <p>4) lean production</p> <p>5) programming/robotics</p> <p>6) /artificial intelligence</p> <p>7) client focus</p> <p>8) multilingual and multicultural abilities</p> <p>9) interpersonal skills</p> <p>10) ability to work under uncertainty</p> <p>11) artistic skills</p> <p>12) environmentally conscious thinking</p> |

It is seen from Figure 5 that initially the Reference Framework set out eight key competences important for all learners in the context of the New Millennium Goals embracing a 15-year period. However, in 2013 the concept of *key competences* transformed into the term *transversal competences*, seemingly with the aim to facilitate their management, fostering major competences embracing minor ones. UNESCO defined only four major transversal competences: 1) critical and innovative thinking; 2) inter-personal skills; 3) intra-personal skills; and 4) global citizenship. The deeper analysis of the document allows one to discern a globally recognized greater focus on communication and creativity (Transversal Competencies, 2015).

The analysis above determines the principle in ESP teaching for future career paths, while the specificity of each and every ESP branch, be it English for Aviation, English for Medical or Legal Purposes or the like,

can be dealt with more precisely through the concept of cross-professional skills of the Atlas of Emerging Jobs (AEJ). The term *cross-professional skills* could be considered as terminology duplication unless demanded by the salient business attitude and the dominant focus on the predicted job market. Atlas is a product of education foresight, and it presents future professions in 25 economic sectors (industries) and offers 25 charts which indicate relevant cross-professional competences for each industry respectively (Atlas of Emerging Jobs 2015, 20-28). In the light of de Saussure's understanding of language as a system of mutually interrelated signs, and its development in Haliday's social semiotics, for a redesigned ESP methodology course this means that in the newly-emerging discourse linguistic corpora are likely to embrace the new concepts. Consequently, ESP methodology will have to consider the completely or partially new lexis in the anticipated communicative situations of future economies.

Although attempts to predict future professions have already been made, e.g. by Alex Ayad in "Vision.10 years Education Foresight" (Ayad 2014), the "industry charts" of the ASI & Skolkovo project Atlas of Emerging Jobs are definitely more feasible for a course design, being more embracing and systematic. For ESP methodology, they present an invaluable resource, providing content and linguistic input for almost any professional discourse, and allowing one to project for the future. Not only does the system make the document useful for up-dating an ESP methodology course, but it also provides materials for future-oriented case studies.

The findings of this section of this paper suggest that new education values for ESP are to be seen within the lifelong learning paradigm and education foresight. Competences relevant for several professions and their development, however the relevant concepts may have been transformed, help articulate the learning goals and objectives for a particular ESP course.

## Conclusion

The overview presented in this paper shows that the economic and social changes that have been brought to life by the overwhelming spread of ICTs are irreversible, and that they necessitate updating ESP methodology with due regard to these changes.

The situational analysis revealed that while the core concepts of ESP methodology still remain relevant to the existing teaching practices, the latter should be augmented with the active engagement of existing technologies capable of providing for more autonomous learning and more

efficient teaching. Moreover, the active use of technologies corresponds with the dominant learning style of digital natives, who presumably are to dominate the XXI century learners' audience. The classroom management theory should subsequently be transformed, since the face-to-face mode should no longer be viewed as the only possible one in ESP methodology.

The research also showed that the paradigm of English as the main language of intercultural communication predetermines specific characteristics of communicative competence and linguistic competence as its fundamental component – English for Specific Purposes becomes International English for Specific Purposes, since it predominantly promotes communication between professionals for whom English is not the mother tongue.

The third major component of the new approach to ESP methodology is embracing the lifelong learning concept and the necessity to prepare new ESP instructors to deal with transferrable skills. Thus, the methodology should be provided for them, showing them how to integrate these skills into the process of language education, and how to use such learning activities that would target both language learning and fostering transferrable skills.

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# ERROR ANALYSIS: ITS USEFULNESS TO STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

JELICA TOŠIĆ

## Outline

Students' errors are inevitable in the process of learning a foreign language as a temporary phase towards mastering the language. Sometimes they arise out of the difficulty inherent in the point that is being learned, sometimes they result from the interference of the mother tongue. Whatever their source, they are informative in multiple ways and teachers can learn a lot by analyzing them with the ultimate purpose of minimizing or even eliminating them and in this way improving their students' performance. This paper is going to attempt an analysis of the errors found in the Faculty of Occupational Safety students' tests during the 2015/2016 academic year.

**Key words:** error analysis, foreign language learning, foreign language teaching, students' performance

## Introduction

When you are engaged in learning or teaching a foreign language, you have to deal with two linguistic systems and a process of learning. The process of learning involves the learner of the language i.e. the learner is not only indispensable but also central to the process. At the same time, being an element of the process of teaching, the learner can also be taken as a system himself/herself. In other words, no teaching can take place without the learner being considered absolutely essential for success—what goes on in his brain and what he has to deal with is extremely important for the outcome of learning and, by implication, of teaching. Teaching, although a process itself, is at the same time a system making up the fourth system comprising the three systems mentioned:

1. L2 system    2. L1 system    3. L2 learning

## 4. L2 teaching

The notion of the system involves complex attributes: “[e]very system is formed for a particular purpose, that is, it is meant to fulfill certain aims. The quality of the system is an indicator of its compatibility with the aim” (Savić & Stanković 2012, 4). Not questioning the quality of the L1 and L2 systems, the learning and the teaching systems, as conceived in institutional settings, bear the burden of their compatibility with the aim. In the case of teaching, just as in the case of learning a foreign language, the inputs should be compatible with the outputs. The outputs or the outcomes are supposed to be the same for both the teacher and the learner whereas their inputs are different. Teachers invest their professionalism in the process, their knowledge and their work. Learners, on the other hand, are supposed to invest only their work; previous learning may act doublefold: it can make learning easier, but it can also hinder the expected outcome in various ways and for various reasons.

The functioning of the systems, linguistic or teaching/learning systems, just as technical or technological ones, is secured to provide smooth running with the desired aims achieved. However, they entail some risk, more or less manageable. As systems, linguistic systems of the mother and foreign language are pretty stable<sup>1</sup>, but foreign language learning/teaching systems at schools inevitably involve some uncertainty or risk as to the expected outcomes which justify their existence. Another determinant involves a set of associations existing within the systems but also those that connect apparently separate systems. Associations with the external environment are also important. During the processes of learning or teaching a foreign language, both the learner and the teacher establish the relations with the outside world—the teacher has to rely on his updated knowledge of the language and pedagogical considerations, which supposedly contribute to the success of his mission or job. The learner, on the other hand, does not rely only on the institutional system that is to produce the desired outcome of language learning, but is also exposed to his individual, unstructured and chaotic relations established on the basis

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<sup>1</sup> Diane Larsen-Freeman’s (2009, 2014) concept of language as a Complex Dynamic System adds another dimension to the complexity of learning/teaching processes. The paper “Language is a complex adaptive system” by Clay Beckner et al. (2009) holds the same position.

of mostly informal communication with his peers (Internet, travels). These relations certainly affect the attitude learners assume when involved in institutional settings learning.

If institutional-setting teaching is viewed as a structured system, it must be assumed that orderly and organized activities of the participants contribute to the system's functioning and realization of its goals. The participants in the case of institutional foreign language learning are the learner and the teacher. Their work and responsibilities, measured against the desired outcomes, are not equal although they are mutually dependent. Institutional networks start from the assumption that teaching is a powerful force that is able to deal with the learners' difficulties in coping with the foreign language. Teachers therefore should be equipped with sufficient theoretical and practical knowledge to help the learners' development. In the beginning, the learner's knowledge provides information to the attentive teacher about the past experiences and contributions to the learner's performance, predicting with a reasonable certainty further development or future achievement. Development within the institutional framework refers to the course the learner has to pass before leaving the framework and it is usually assumed that it has an upward direction in terms of the quality desired or its compatibility with the final aim. As a directed or guided process, teaching is to provide, with a high degree of predictability, qualitative and irreversible changes in the learner's knowledge of the foreign language – the invested input is to guarantee the realization of the central objective. Learners, however, are not that predictable – they are individuals who have their own pace, often not complying with the institution's supposed course. Their development is, more often than not, not smooth. Their errors are not contained in the curriculum. In spite of that, it must be admitted that errors are a constituent part of the process of foreign language learning. They can also be said to be inevitable and indispensable to the process and, as such, they might serve as indicators of the validity of the school's initial assumptions, and bases for the potential adaptation or reorganization of the teaching system goals.

From the point of view of the learner, the process of learning a foreign language is not straightforward. Manipulating the foreign language system is quite a demanding task, in adult learners complicated by the hidden presence of the awareness of their mother tongue system. For various reasons, the mother tongue influence can be positive (transfer), but it can also hinder the expected development of the learner (interference). As foreign language learning involves complex cognitive activities during which errors are made as inevitable by-products, it might be more

productive to talk about success analysis instead of error analysis. While it is widely maintained that the teacher's input differs from the learner's intake, it is a fact that the learner has to cope with the unknown, or uncertainty, in dealing with the foreign language system. Knowing that "[m]anaging uncertainty is a complex cognitive activity" (Savić et al. 2014, 186) teachers are faced with a dynamic force that, as a rule, also affects what goes on in the classroom.

## Foreign language learning and errors

If goals are important, and L2 competence is the expected goal of foreign language learning, behavioral outcomes are important whereas the very process of learning seems to be relatively unimportant. However, Hommel et al. (2002) are aware of the importance of complex cognitive activities, which can also be applied to the predicament in which foreign language learners find themselves—they

must be able to configure and re-configure their cognitive system in a way that task-relevant information is picked up, maintained and stored efficiently, and that appropriate actions are prepared, planned, and then executed in the light of the available information (Hommel et al. 2002, 215).

The key word here is *efficiently*, which draws attention to the desired outcome—enabling the learners to put into practice what they have been instructed to do—to perform successfully in their further contacts with the texts and individuals expressing themselves in the foreign language. The implicit presence of two linguistic systems in the minds of the learners, however, does not mean that the learning of the foreign language will always be problematic—some learners keep these systems apart but a lot of them confuse them. In the latter case, the job of the language teacher becomes more difficult if the presupposed task or outcome is to be achieved. He or she has to analyze what goes on in the language classroom, which also includes qualitative analysis of the errors, their description and explanation. Being L2 speakers themselves in most classrooms, teachers are able to recognize the L1 influence. In a way, they can succeed in predicting the errors and hopefully in avoiding them, so that the final outcome to “get it right in the end” (Lightbown-Spada 2013) can be reached. The proposed objective, which stubbornly persists in the curriculum, is, of course, complicated by each individual learner's pace of development. This factor is mostly not possible to change by instruction – waiting for the maturation of the cognitive processes involved in the learning is often the most productive action. In this case, errors are

considered to be developmental or transitional—a natural part of the process of learning. The classroom is, however, an inappropriate place for this because it has to function in the forward direction according to the curriculum. In this view, teachers do achieve the preset goals; they end up producing successful language learners no matter what their number is. Some learners are confident because of their knowledge but some others remain confused. There is hope, however, that they will soon overcome the difficulties if they are exposed to more of the language.

Within the classroom, on the other hand, it is not easy to deal with the students' errors adequately and timely even though language teachers are mostly aware of the considerations that influence the process of L2 learning. If not firmly guided by specific language tasks, students often tend to avoid the structures that they are not well familiar with, leaving the false impression that they are keeping up. Some other students act as venturers—they make errors and, if not penalized immediately, they often learn by them. In this context, errors are even desirable – they make teaching more effective and the gain dearer. Venturers actually “manage uncertainty”, which is a highly complex cognitive activity. Choosing the best option out of the several ones in their minds is mostly not easy and alternatives offer an opportunity for comparison and evaluation. At the same time, “[e]rrors and mistakes”, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (p. 155), “are evidence of the learner’s willingness to communicate despite risks”. Risk is therefore an inevitable part not only of human life, but also of human thought and success.

### **Errors and mistakes. Error correction and error discovery**

Errors can be classified according to the domains in which they appear: phonology/graphology, morphology, lexis, syntax and discourse. Within each of these domains other divisions can also be made. Seeing the breadth of the problem as the distinctive factor, Burt and Kiparsky (Burt 1975) divide the errors into local and global ones. Local errors are supposed not to interfere with understanding whereas global errors impede communication. When English is concerned, wrong word order can seriously affect the conveying of the message. Interestingly, notorious grammar errors can be global, but they mostly belong to local errors, i.e. they do not stand in the way of understanding the message.

“Errors [...] are everything that mistakes are not: they are of significance; they do not reflect knowledge; they are not self-correctable;



and only learners of an L2 make them” (James 1998, 79). This can be said to be a brief definition of errors, particularly in the context of distinguishing them from mistakes. Errors, therefore, are made as a result of and are indicators of the systematic imperfection. The system that produces them is in some sense deficient, which is considered to be its serious flaw. On the other hand, mistakes are thought to be random products of L2 learner’s performance. They are made out of the student’s carelessness and are thus relatively easily corrected by the student himself/herself if their attention is drawn to the falsities. Therefore, if adequate effort is made, undesirable consequences can be eliminated.

However, “no technique, even giving the learner the correct form, is effective unless the student can perceive the difference between the recast and what he or she has just said” (Larsen-Freeman 2009, 532). Error correction, which can also be termed the feedback, calls for the job to be done by the teacher. The teacher is aware that correction is absolutely necessary to prevent permanent engraving of errors or fossilization in the mind of the learner. “[O]nce learners have obtained sufficient L2 knowledge to meet their communicative and emotional needs, they may stop learning” (Ellis 1985, 11). Therefore, teachers know that learners often reach a steady state, which bars the way to further advancement in mastering L2. Even when “there seems to be no apparent reason for the discontinuation of L2 learning to occur: [...] fossilization can take place despite the continued availability of favourable conditions for learning” (Moskovsky & Ratcheva 2014, 10).

The question of error correction raises two other important questions. First, when and to what extent to make error corrections is a very subtle dilemma. Communication is marred if the correction is too intrusive and a lot of students get distracted in getting their point across. This practice also discourages the students’ ventures and indirectly suggests avoidance or playing safe with L2 use. One of the shortcomings of the audiolingual method was the assumption that, because of all the consequences they might lead to, errors should be corrected without delay. Another important difficulty for teachers to decide on in the ‘error correction perspective’ is what reliable tool they have at their disposal to establish the reaching of the steady state in L2 learning, i.e. the learners’ retention of the knowledge.

The other option mentioned in the title of this section, error discovery, puts particular emphasis on the role of learners—learners are to discover the errors themselves. Although this inevitably makes the process of learning longer, which is not always acceptable in the conditions of institutional learning, modern theoretical works opt for this alternative as a

more acceptable one from the point of view of the effectiveness to be achieved. If the learner is made to have an active role in learning a foreign language, the ultimate success seems to be more palpable. In other words,

“[s]imple provision of the correct form may not always be the only, or indeed the most effective, form of correction since it bars the way to the learner *testing* alternative hypotheses. Making a learner *try to discover* the right form could often be more instructive to both learner and teacher” (Corder 1967, 168, italics mine).

In a 1988 study, Ann Raimes found “that the number of errors students made per T-unit decreased by 20% on a second draft” (Raimes 1991, 57) if they were allowed to edit and rewrite their papers themselves. By doing that, they also become certain that their ideas and their thoughts are not misunderstood by the teacher’s line of thinking. In any case, both error correction and error discovery are present in every classroom – what the teacher wants to focus on, when and to what extent, makes the classes and teachers different.

### **Student’s individuality and achievement**

According to the theories that emphasize the biological pace of the learners or the natural acquisition process, errors can be defined as developmental, reflecting the student’s transitional competence or interlanguage position leading to L2 system acquisition. The emphasis here is therefore placed on the learning process. In the triangle or the path comprising two linguistic systems and the process of learning, the linguistic systems are constants denoting the starting and the end point of L2 learning, but the very process of learning is burdened with uncertainty. Theoreticians who advocate this stance allow for the individual differences between learners – it is the process they focus on, but the process is marked with different routes and different rates specific for each individual learner. When this line of thinking is applied to the classroom, it also involves the differences in the ultimate success achieved by the learners. Classroom teaching and assessment of a foreign language is therefore crucified between the achievement reached and the process leading to it. The formal achievement is cruelly measurable whereas, in the learning process going on, each developmental stage towards curriculum-defined goal is considered to be an achievement.

Taking the role of knowers, they pay attention to the rules and thus lead students to attempt the same role. The rules or correctness or grammaticality of the utterances is to be achieved. If the mechanism to block the student’s advance existed, it would not allow him or her to

progress without correcting the errors. These actions are present in every computer game. However, language does not always function in this way. More often, it does develop in communication or performance, both horizontally and individually – communication goes on even when it is faulty, and participants in the communication learn by communicating and making errors. “The learner’s output serves as input to his own language processing mechanisms” (Sharwood-Smith, cited in Ellis 1985, 138). This knowledge could likewise inform the atmosphere in the language classroom. Language teachers could thus focus on the acceptability of the students’ utterances (or the degree to which ‘strangeness’ can be taken as non-impeding), and, to assess the students as users in particular contexts, assume the role of users themselves. Users of the language do not block communication; instead, they promote it by accepting the language that carries understandable messages. Both young and adult learners are also familiar with the sliding flow of communication in the Internet communication. Each succeeding step in communication is therefore the language users’ achievement. In this context, the achievement is not to be punished; quite the opposite. This, however, raises serious questions in the artificial communicating environment like the classroom, beginning from teaching, through practice and virtual (fake) communication, to the expected final outcome.

### **Grammar in the classroom**

“Of course, there is more to language than grammar – this is not disputed – but the point is that grammar exists as a significant and autonomous phenomenon which must be studied in its own right” (Ellis 1995, 76). Grammar remains as a skeleton around which the whole system of language is built. It is thanks to this part that language also remains a highly constant system in spite of the changes that can daily be noticed in it. This abstract system standing behind the language, or informing it, acts as a structural force that holds other linguistic blocks together. Grammar, according to a general dictionary definition, refers to “the rules in a language for changing the form of words and joining them into sentences”. (OALD 2015). Therefore, the adjective “grammatical” has the meaning of locating, as in “a grammatical error”, but also the meaning of conforming to the rules of grammar, as in “a grammatical sentence”. The latter example means that grammar rules have successfully been applied.

Assessing grammar means assessing accuracy and one of the primary goals of classroom instruction is concerned with its achievement. Whatever type of exercise is used to that purpose, it is to test the

grammaticality of the utterances. Therefore, insisting on grammaticality of the utterances means insisting on quality or keeping of the standards that pertain to the language. Newer trends in this area, however, present the possibility of applying different standards in the assessment of someone's grammaticality. In the same vein, the division of English into native speaker (NS) English and the English used for wider international communication of non-native speakers (English as a Lingua Franca) brings about the change in two aspects. Barbara Seidlhofer, a devoted researcher of ELF, is working on the possibility that "ungrammatical, [...] but generally unproblematic" (Seidlhofer 2001, 147) constructions be accepted by teachers as a bridge to successful communication. On the other hand, people in the countries where English is a second language do not need, because they are not exposed to it, and do not want the 'correct' NS English. For them, acceptable and unproblematic constructions also seem allowable.

This criterion, however, is not enough for "normal exchanges" with native speakers of English. Explaining the term "nativelike selection", Pawley and Syder state that some sentences might be questioned in spite of their formal correctness in terms of grammar. "The trouble is that native speakers just do not say things that way" (Pawley & Syder 1983, 195). In the light of this fact, learning the grammar of a language is quite a task involving other considerations apart from the knowledge of rules. Larsen-Freeman (2014) shows the complexity in saying that "[g]rammatical structures not only have (morphosyntactic) form, they are also used to express meaning (semantics) in context-appropriate use (pragmatics)" (Larsen-Freeman 2014, 252). In spite of this, classroom language teaching has few alternatives but to focus on grammatical structures pointed in the curriculum. However, it is necessary to point out the difference between the process of teaching grammar and the process of learning grammar (the distinction pointed out by Thornbury 2001).

## Present study

This research, having in mind all the cons, was undertaken to test the accuracy or grammaticality of the sentences. It was led by the idea that, as long as it is possible, students should not be allowed to believe that mere communication taking place justifies inaccuracy and allows them to stop developing towards some indisputable linguistic standards. The technique of Serbian-English (SE) translation that was chosen for this research is a highly guided exercise supposed here to test the students' knowledge of the most characteristic uses (related to some characteristic adverbs) of five English tenses (Present Simple, Present Continuous, Past Continuous, Past

Simple and Present Perfect Tense) in their active voice. This aim was pursued on the use of English for Specific Purpose vocabulary in occupational and environmental safety – which additionally served as a useful guide because of the restrictions of ESP itself. The translated sentences should, according to a translation axiom, be equivalent to the source language sentences. However, because “the nature of this equivalence is not formal but contextual” (Halliday et al. 1964, 123), it is necessary that teachers allow for a certain degree of freedom in assessing the students’ sentences. This particularly so as in the translation test, as conceived here, there are actually very few possibilities for students to eschew the desirably elicited structures. Our research was directed towards the classification of errors identified beforehand, their description and provision of the plausible explanations of errors. The total number of the papers examined was 290, although this number was relatively irrelevant for the qualitative analysis that was the aim of this research. Qualitative analysis seemed more important for the purpose of our research, to demonstrate what kind of errors students make and what problems teachers face when the errors, with the exception of the orthographic ones, are made within the classroom. Although wrong tenses in different respects were not the only errors found in the students’ tests, they were the focus of our attention. To that purpose, these errors were neglected although they certainly complicate the teachers’ job when they are made in the classroom. The results of the analysis are presented within each of the tenses tested in incomplete sentences so that the errors could be highlighted. The obviously confused tenses, which can be attributed to insufficient learning effort, were not subject of our analysis. This problem, however, presents additional challenge to be dealt with in the classroom.

### ***Present Simple Tense***

Students made the fewest errors with this tense. With the exception of the use of nouns, instead of verbs, that actually made a wrong starting point for the application of the tense formation rule, this tense does not seem to be too difficult to learn.

- *wrong verbs*

a) (might be attributed to imprecise orthography as well)

\*Your company sometimes sails (sells)

b) (adding the right suffix to the wrong base)

\*This company sometimes products/productions

\*Your factory pollutions our atmosphere

- *singular-plural*

a) (*s* omission)

\*He always buy

\*Your friend sometimes sell

\*She usually work

\*Nuclear waste always destroy

b) (*s* addition)

\*Hunters usually kills

\*Human activities causes

### **Present Continuous Tense**

- *orthography*

\*Deforestation is causing

\*Useful compounds are encreaseing (increasing)

\*They are liveing here now

- *wrong verbs*

a) no auxiliary

b) (adding the right suffix to the wrong base)

\*Many companies are realizing (releasing) toxic waste

\*Toxic compounds are endangerousing (endangering)

\*Many factories are broking the law

\*The scientists are developmenting

*singular-plural*

\*Scientists is studying

\*Our company are using

- *some knowledge present:*

\*Many factories are-----ing

The most serious errors again are the errors that show different aspects of the problem: the addition of the right suffix to the wrong base illustrates the errors in the students' choice – a noun is thought to be a verb, the form of the irregular verb is wrong. The form “endangerousing” shows the student's confusion in several respects: the verb to be used was “endanger” but the student made a non-existent adjective “endangerous”, making an analogy with “dangerous”: the adjective formed in this way was used as a verb to which the –ing suffix was added.

Another attempt on the part of the students – to show the knowledge of the rule without knowing the verb required – makes both the student and the teacher think about further work on vocabulary.

### ***Past Continuous Tense***

- *orthography*

\*While we were studing

\*While they were using

- *wrong verbs*

a) (no auxiliary) \*While we studying

(wrong auxiliary) \*While we have studying

b) (wrong base) \*My friend was producing

- *singular-plural*

\*While you was producing

- *L1 (Serbian) interference in word order*

\*While were you producing

\*While were scientists studying

- *some knowledge present:*

\*While we were-----, you were-----

This tense was tested only in its use for two actions continuing at the same time. As with the two previous tenses, the students used nouns to add verbal suffixes to. Another noticeable error is an obvious L1 interference: some students applied the Serbian sentence word order.

***Past Simple Tense***

- *orthography*

\*This company bough (bought)

- *wrong verbs*

a) (wrong base)

\*Industry development harmfuled

b) (irregular verbs)

\* This company builded

\*Many species becomed extinct

\*You breaked the law

\*Scientists finded

\*We gived

c) (double past)

\*Scientists founded a new chemical element

\*Industry development broked many habitats

\*They builted a new factory

- *SE interference*

\*That company is build

\*Many species are become extinct

\*We are spent a lot of money

\*That species is disappeared

This tense was often confused with the Present Perfect Tense, but also with the Past Simple passive. In the sentence \**“The hunter was killed.”* (instead of *“The hunter killed”*), the resulting misunderstanding might also be attributed to L1 interference in the sense that the Serbian past tense requires the auxiliary *be*.



***Present Perfect Tense****- orthography*

\*Acid rains have already destroyed

*- wrong verbs*

## a) (no auxiliary)

\*These people never given

## b) (irregular verbs)

\*These people have never gaved

\*These people have never gave

## c) (wrong base)

\*The scientists have already developedment

*- SE interference (double negation)*

\*His factory never not produced

\*That species never not lived here

\*Our students didn't never seen

\*They never haven't bought

*- singular-plural*

\*These chemicals has already killed

\*Our students has just cleaned

\*Acid rains has already destroyed

\*That student have just founded

As with other tenses, wrong bases were also a noticeable sign of the need for further work on vocabulary. Grammar rules are certainly important but they cannot be realized in the language without the words required. Verbs particularly are to be stressed, i.e. the importance of whether they are regular or irregular. Being unaware of this distinction, students often form sentences that sound strange.

## Conclusion

Studies of errors appearing in foreign language learning generally are intended to 1) demonstrate L2 learners' learning problems, and 2) indicate the level of learners' L2 proficiency. Both things are important for teachers and for the remedial actions to be taken on the basis of the findings. Error analysis is primarily based on the target language and the learners' individual pace is neglected. Just like Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Interlanguage (IL), Error Analysis (EA) aspires to examine or analyze L2 learners' errors with the ultimate objective to provide the effective methods for both teaching and assessment. It is hoped that the errors, identified during learning and testing, could be anticipated and, by wise handling, prevented or eliminated. The stance which emphasizes the natural route and rate of L2 learning can serve as a contributory explanation of the learning difficulties, but they are difficult to cope with in institutional environments like classrooms because the students' right to their own route and pace inevitably slows down the progress towards the preset goals of the curriculum. In this context, the students' natural "discovery" of L2 structures seems to be ineffective—it gives sails to the learner's individuality which, unfortunately, cannot fully be achieved in regular classes.

However, a dilemma remains in practice – to award knowers or users, to focus on rules or contexts. In a unified whole as a classroom, the treatment of students' errors has to do with these distinctions, and, in view of newer findings, a question could be asked over and over again: why should successful users learn the correct form, or why should knowers listen to what users do not know? In any case, what is indisputable is that "a recurring type of error" should certainly be drawn attention to.

L1 interference errors, although appearing sporadically, mostly do not cause problems. Villanueva maintains that "the number of transfer errors...is so small that not much attention should be paid to them" (Villanueva 1989, 75). Their recognition, however, is possible and thus their mending is easier. When it comes to developmental errors, they are more time-consuming to deal with. But, whichever their source, errors remain noticeable. In the classroom, it is a *sine qua non* that development or progress, whatever their meanings, should be the outcome. Both "rule formers" and "data gatherers" (distinction pointed out by Hatch, cited in Byram and Hu 2013, 408) should reach some point forward: the former should be led to improve their fluency even at some cost of accuracy; the latter, on the other hand, should be led to improve their accuracy even at some cost of fluency. Neither group of the learners must be discouraged.

And, the finding that is important to the teaching profession as a whole, “[f]ormal instruction can have a powerful delayed effect” (Ellis 1985, 16). In ESP, this is even more significant.

The analysis of students’ errors is actually a tool in the language teacher’s hands which is useful for both learners and teachers. Different *re-s* appear in the process: teachers are made to rethink their practices but students are also made to reconceptualize and restructure the target language system in their minds. This stance attributes an active role to the participants, be they teachers or learners. It enhances the exploratory practices and creative solutions or strategies.

Consequently, error analysis can be seen as being beneficial to:

- 1) teachers, for whom errors serve as guides towards the desired outcome. They are indicators of what the problems are and what remains to be learnt or relearnt. They are also an indication of how far the students have progressed towards the goal or outcome. They finally indicate the level of L2 proficiency;
- 2) learners, who can see errors as mirrors into how they perform but also of what they have to correct in order to perform more successfully; and
- 3) researchers, who get the basis for scientific generalizations of the way a foreign language is learnt or taught and what strategies learners use in learning the language.

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# DEVELOPING LEXICAL COMPETENCE IN ESP THROUGH EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

MAJA STANOJEVIĆ GOCIĆ

## Outline

Developing lexical competence poses a specific challenge for ESP teachers who are interested in exploring means of effective vocabulary teaching and learning. The respondents in the research are students studying at College of Applied Vocational Studies in Vranje. The participants were divided in two groups of equal size. The first group received explicit vocabulary instruction through translation equivalents of unknown words presented directly by an ESP teacher, while the second group was exposed to indirect vocabulary instruction. Students in the second group were provided with glosses that would help them guess the meaning of unknown words. In addition, a questionnaire with five-point Likert scale for rating responses was administered in order to find out about the vocabulary learning strategies students employ. The vocabulary gains were tested and the results were compared in order to establish correlations. The first group achieved better test scores on the short-term vocabulary retention test, while the second group outscored the first one on the long-term vocabulary retention test. The results emphasize the importance of implicit vocabulary instruction in ESP education.

**Key words:** lexical competence, ESP, vocabulary instruction, vocabulary learning strategies.

## Introduction

Developing lexical competence, which refers to vocabulary knowledge and its use<sup>1</sup>, is of utmost importance in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as a specific language variety. It also has a key role in the theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

ESP instruction is organized in accordance with learners' needs, i.e. on the basis of needs analysis, assuming that ESP students have already mastered grammar rules and that their primary need is to build up specific vocabulary. Vocabulary instruction, which is aimed at developing effective methods and techniques for expanding vocabulary knowledge as a key factor for verbal and written communication, plays a prominent role in an ESP course. Accordingly, lexical competence is essential in ESP instruction since specific vocabulary differentiates ESP from general English.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that both explicit and implicit instruction should be included in ESP education. Effective vocabulary teaching and learning methods as a combination of both explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction, as well as vocabulary learning strategies, are exploited as practical implications of this paper.

Students studying at College of Applied Professional Studies in Vranje were the participants in the research. They were divided in two groups of equal size, which received either explicit or implicit vocabulary instruction. The students were tested afterwards, and vocabulary gains were measured. The success students achieved with regard to vocabulary gains was compared with their reported strategy use. In that respect, a questionnaire gave an insight into strategies students employed in order to discover the meaning of unfamiliar words in the text. The research was aimed at establishing possible correlations between strategy use and vocabulary gains.

## Dimensions of vocabulary knowledge

Vocabulary knowledge (lexical knowledge), as included in the definition of lexical competence, has both productive and receptive dimensions, as well as quantitative and qualitative dimensions. For a long time vocabulary knowledge has been regarded as active and passive.

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<sup>1</sup> *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Council for Cultural Cooperation (2001, 110). Available at <http://culture.coe.int/portfolio>.

However, the initial dichotomy was replaced by productive and receptive vocabulary knowledge, depending on whether the given word is used productively in speech or writing, or receptively, through recognition of its form and comprehension of its meaning while listening or reading. Thus, while receptive vocabulary knowledge implies word recognition, productive vocabulary knowledge implies its appropriate use in a sentence. In that respect, Gass and Selinker (2008, 451-452) emphasize that receptive lexical knowledge includes recognition of a word in speech or writing, knowing its general and specific meaning in the context, knowing its parts, negative connotations, collocations and antonyms. On the other hand, productive lexical knowledge comprises correct pronunciation and spelling, knowledge of different meanings in various contexts and word grammar. Although receptive vocabulary knowledge is larger than the productive one at all phases of language learning, the role of the teacher is to make sure that students start using their receptive vocabulary productively and develop their productive vocabulary through various classroom activities or language tasks.

Vocabulary knowledge is also discussed in terms of its breadth and depth, which are two dimensions of equal importance. Breadth of vocabulary knowledge is a quantitative dimension that refers to vocabulary size, or how many words a learner knows. Likewise, a qualitative dimension of lexical knowledge, or the depth of vocabulary knowledge, implies what it means to know a word. In that respect, Nation (2001, 27) claims that knowing a word means knowing its form, meaning and use, which are different for receptive and productive vocabulary. Word form can be spoken or written, and it comprises knowing word pronunciation and spelling. Meaning consists of three types: (a) form and meaning (i.e. knowing the meaning of a word form), (b) concept and referents of a particular word, and (c) associations. Use includes grammatical functions, collocations (the words that occur with it), and constrains on use, such as registers.

## **Vocabulary instruction**

The communicative value of words was realized with the emergence of the communicative approach, which is now seen as a contemporary method in English Language Teaching (ELT), language pedagogy and didactics. The importance of vocabulary for achieving communicative competence, which became the ultimate goal in SLA, was also recognized. As a result, vocabulary secured its place in language instruction. Hence, due to the shift of interest from linguistic or grammatical competence



towards communicative competence (Meara 1996), vocabulary was studied and explored in order to find out the best methods and techniques of vocabulary acquisition, following the tendency to develop students' communicative competence as the ultimate goal of language instruction and promoting the learning of lexical chunks, i.e. learning collocations and phrases as groups of words that are commonly found together as a whole.

## Explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction

Explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction are generally regarded as complementary activities that make an integral part of a well-balanced curriculum (Nation 2013), such as the one that includes Nation's *four strands*, which comprise: (a) meaning-focused listening and reading, (b) meaning-focused speaking and writing, (c) language-focused instruction, and (d) fluency-development activities. These are both direct and indirect activity types of a balanced language course. In addition, Nation (2008) asserts the teacher should spend one quarter of a time dedicated to vocabulary instruction on each *strand*.

Explicit language learning refers to conscious effort invested in input processing in order to figure out its underlying rules, while implicit language learning takes place subconsciously, when the learners are not aware of the input processing procedure. Hence, explicit learning is "input processing with the conscious intention to find out whether the input information contains regularities and, if so, to work out the concepts and rules with which these regularities can be captured", while implicit learning is "input processing without such an intention, taking place unconsciously" (Hulstijn 2005, 131).

The definition of *implicit (indirect) vocabulary learning* partially overlaps with the definition of *incidental vocabulary learning*, which is a type of learning that takes place as a by-product of another activity, such as listening or reading for comprehension, when learners' attention is not focused on determining the meaning of individual words, but on comprehending the overall text message. As the opposite of incidental vocabulary learning is *intentional vocabulary learning*, explicit (direct) vocabulary learning is thus associated with deliberate or intentional vocabulary learning. Moreover, *incidental vocabulary learning* is defined through a lack of intention to learn on the part of the learner.

Implicit vocabulary learning seems to be more efficient if most of the words in the text are known to the readers, as comprehensible input enables vocabulary learning through reading, also known as contextual learning (Nation 2001, 2013). According to Krashen (1989), comprehensible

input is little above the learner's language proficiency level. It can be found in cases where lexical density of unknown words is 5%, i.e. when up to 92% (Hirsh & Nation 1992) or even 95% (Liu & Nation 1985) of words are already known to the reader.

Both incidental and implicit vocabulary learning take place by means of *meaning-focused learning* or *message-focused learning* (Nation 2013), while explicit and intentional vocabulary learning is *form-focused*. Namely, form-focused instruction is a hypothesis testing process in search for formal language rules.

Explicit and implicit vocabulary learning are theoretical constructs of the SLA theory that refer to conscious and unconscious vocabulary acquisition, respectively (Hulstijn 2013), although the very concept of consciousness is ambiguous. Therefore, Ender (2016) claims that incidental vocabulary learning through reading (such as the one that occurs by means of lexical inferencing) includes both explicit and implicit processing of information, while implicit or subconscious learning takes place in cases of ignoring or skipping unknown words while reading. On the other hand, Rieder (2003, 37) claims that "incidental learning of meaning aspects appears to be characterized by explicit learning, whereas form learning may occur through implicit learning with simple attention to input only."

On the basis of explicit and implicit learning dichotomy, implicit and explicit vocabulary instruction is carried out in the classroom. Explicit vocabulary instruction draws learners' attention to form-meaning word pairs, and can be either contextualized or decontextualized. It also implies subsequent consolidation of word form and meaning(s) in terms of their retention and storage in long-term memory, which is also viewed as integration of new lexical items in the learner's mental lexicon.

Nation (2008, 2013) is thereby a proponent of explicit (direct) vocabulary learning as the fastest and most efficient manner of learning a vast amount of vocabulary in a short period of time. Conversely, incidental vocabulary acquisition through reading takes place slowly, requiring multiple encounters with the given word in various contexts over a period of time. It implies not only reading a vast amount of materials so that cumulative effects of vocabulary learning can be visible, but also acquiring different word meanings in a number of different contexts. Therefore, if the learning aim is to build up basic receptive vocabulary as quickly as possible, direct or formal vocabulary instruction is necessary. *Extensive reading*, which refers to reading large amounts of comprehensive materials that interest the reader, used for vocabulary expansion and sometimes regarded as reading for pleasure, should follow afterwards.

Likewise, lexical competence can be built not only by explicitly memorizing lexis, but evidence also suggests that students can upgrade their vocabulary knowledge implicitly, i.e. through listening or reading for comprehension (Fraser 1999), also known as *focus on meaning*.

Accordingly, overreliance on explicit vocabulary learning can be counterproductive for vocabulary expansion, as reading can be crucial for vocabulary gains. The reader not only discovers new words through reading, but also acquires new information on already known words. But since learning a language through natural contexts is not enough either, formal instruction or *focus on form* should provide necessary explanations, which means there should be a good balance of explicit and implicit instruction, utilized as complementary activities (Nation 2013), as well as a combination of efficient strategies used for both direct and indirect vocabulary learning.

### Vocabulary learning strategies

Vocabulary learning strategies are believed to improve or facilitate vocabulary learning. These are specific steps, forms of behaviour or actions employed by the students in order to find out the meaning of new words and consolidate them in long-term memory.

Nation (2013, 330) emphasizes that learning unfamiliar words begins with finding information about unknown vocabulary that includes both analysing word parts and using (a) context, (b) a reference source (especially a dictionary), or (c) parallels with other languages, which are also procedures regarded as vocabulary learning strategies. He further claims that word part analysis is important because being familiar with the common word parts can contribute to the process of discovering connections between related words, strengthening word-form connections, checking guesses from context or working out the meaning of a word. When learners analyse word parts, they rely on their linguistic knowledge (providing the basis for analysing the morphological structure of a word) or extralinguistic (non-linguistic) knowledge (Oxford 1990). Furthermore, word part analysis is also associated with raising students' morphological awareness.

Accordingly, lexical inferencing, which is also known as contextual guessing (Nation 2013), is an example of an implicit vocabulary learning strategy, whereas dictionary use exemplifies a strategy for explicit vocabulary learning. The most commonly used dictionaries are bilingual dictionaries, known as translation dictionaries. They are primarily used for translating words into another language and providing their translation

equivalents; thereby they do not reveal the concept of a given word or its conceptual meaning, such as monolingual dictionaries, which describe and define words, providing sentences that illustrate word usage in contexts. However, the popularity of bilingual dictionaries shows that learning words through their translation equivalents is one of the easiest ways of learning.

In her well-known study, Fraser (1999) investigated the lexical processing strategies (ignore, consult and infer) used by L2 learners whenever they encountered unfamiliar vocabulary while reading and the impact of these strategies on vocabulary learning. Word-learning scores show that when participants consulted or inferred alone, they recalled the word meaning 30% and 31% of the time, respectively. It demonstrates that lexical inferencing and dictionary use are equally efficient strategies for vocabulary acquisition. However, the combination of inferring and consulting a dictionary, that is, when the participants inferred word meaning first and checked it in a dictionary afterwards, is the most efficient, since their recall increased to 50% of vocabulary gains.

In a research conducted by Hulstijn (1992), learners had greater chances of memorizing word form and meaning if they discovered the meaning through lexical inferencing (contextual guessing strategy), which involves cognitive effort invested in determining new word meaning, than when word meaning was given to them in advance. In his research, students who used glosses that served as clues for discovering word meanings were more successful in memorizing them than students who acquired word meanings through synonyms or translation equivalents. Therefore, some language theorists tend to replace learning vocabulary through translation with learning vocabulary through the use of context (Prince 1996).

Dictionaries are primarily used for intentional vocabulary learning (Fraser, 1999). In their influential studies, Luppescu and Day (1993) and Knight (1994) compared two groups of learners: the one that read a text without using a dictionary, and the other that read the same text with the possibility of looking up word meaning in a dictionary. In both studies, vocabulary gains were in favour of dictionary use. Moreover, Laufer and Girsai (2008, 696) suggest that previous studies show form-focused instruction is beneficial to vocabulary learning as demonstrated by various vocabulary studies that “employ a variety of means to focus on the words targeted for learning: glosses, dictionary use, negotiation of meaning, vocabulary exercises involving comprehension or production of words, and computer assisted learning devices (hypertexts, concordances, on-line dictionaries).”

## Methodology

The participants in the research are students studying at College of Applied Professional Studies in Vranje, Serbia. The total of 100 students (56% of them male), aged 19-21 (AM= 20, 26) were divided in two groups (A and B) with 50 members each. The respondents received explicit vocabulary instruction (group A) and implicit vocabulary instruction (group B) during a two-month period. The first group received explicit vocabulary instruction through translation equivalents of unknown words presented directly by an ESP teacher or found in a dictionary by ESP students. The second group was exposed to indirect vocabulary instruction, since respondents in the second group were provided with glosses that could help them guess the meaning of unknown words. In addition, glosses are sometimes regarded as a tool for form-focused teaching and learning (Laufer & Girsai 2008, 696), so the mixture of explicit and implicit processing of information is demonstrated in the second group.

The initial hypothesis is that students can learn vocabulary implicitly as effectively as they can learn it from the explicit vocabulary instruction. Thus, the research is set out to measure how effective these two types of instruction are. Effective vocabulary teaching and learning methods as a combination of both explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction and vocabulary learning strategies are exploited as practical implications of this research.

Tests, which are referred to as vocabulary test 1 and vocabulary test 2, are the same tests administered in different periods. They were administered to each group after the instruction was completed. The tests were designed as a combination of translation test (translating word meaning from English to Serbian) and a multiple-choice test.

Vocabulary test 1 was administered one week after completing the given instruction in order to measure short-term vocabulary retention, while vocabulary test 2 measured long-term retention of word meanings that participants discovered through each type of instruction one month after the given instruction ended.

After the termination of the instruction period, a questionnaire taken from Qian (2004) was also administered to the respondents. The aim was to find out about the vocabulary learning strategies the students employ when they meet unknown words in the text written in English. Therefore, the questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale for rating responses was used to examine which vocabulary learning strategies students would employ in order to discover the meanings of unfamiliar terms they encounter while reading.

Vocabulary gains are compared with the frequency of strategy use (or students' strategic behavior, determined by virtue of answering the questions from the questionnaire) in order to establish correlations. The initial hypothesis is that reported strategy use can be related to students' vocabulary acquisition achievement.

The strategy of dictionary use and the strategy of lexical inferencing (or guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context) were of particular interest. Namely, dictionary use is usually identified as an explicit vocabulary learning strategy, whereas contextual learning is considered to be an implicit vocabulary learning strategy.

## Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics, Mann–Whitney U test, Wilcoxon rank-sum test, rank-correlations and factor analysis were applied to determine relations between the frequency of strategy use and vocabulary tests.

The arithmetic mean (AM) in Table 1 shows that “look for clues to meaning in the word itself” and “guess the meaning of the word from the context” are the most frequently used strategies, while “look up the word in an English-only dictionary” and “ignore the word or skip it” are the least frequently used strategies.

The biggest discrepancy in the participants' answers exists within “make a note of the word” ( $SD=1.37$ ), whereas the smallest dispersion is within “guess the meaning of the word from the context” ( $SD=1.05$ ).

The analysis of percentages indicates that 20.8% of the students *always* “look for clues to meaning in the word itself”. The total of 24.8% of the sample reported that they would *very often* “look for clues to meaning in the word itself”, while 5% indicated that they would *never* use this strategy. The participants also reported that in 14.9% of situations they *always* “guess the meaning of the word from the context” and in 28.7% of situations they *often* use this strategy. Only 3% of the students reported that they *never* “guess the meaning of the word from the context”. The students also commonly “make a note of the word” which they encounter in the text. The total of 21.8% indicated they would *always* “make a note of the word”, and 26.7% noted that they would *very often* “make a note of the word”. On the other hand, 14.9% of the respondents argued that they *never* used this procedure with unknown words.

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics and percentages of the strategies employed when the students encountered the unknown word in the texts

| <i>Strategies</i>                                 | <i>AM</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>never</i><br>% | <i>sometimes</i><br>% | <i>often</i><br>% | <i>very often</i> | <i>always</i><br>% |
|---|-----------|-----------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Look for clues to meaning in the word itself      | 3.48      | 1.08      | 5                 | 8.9                   | 39.6              | 24.8              | 20.8               |
| Guess the meaning of the word from the context    | 3.34      | 1.05      | 3                 | 18.8                  | 33.7              | 28.7              | 14.9               |
| Make a note of the word (i.e. write it down)      | 3.25      | 1.37      | 14.9              | 15.8                  | 19.8              | 26.7              | 21.8               |
| Ask a friend for assistance                       | 3.24      | 1.3       | 10.9              | 20.8                  | 21.8              | 24.8              | 20.8               |
| Ask the teacher for assistance                    | 3.19      | 1.29      | 8.9               | 25.7                  | 23.8              | 18.8              | 21.8               |
| Look up the word in an English-Serbian dictionary | 2.93      | 1.23      | 13.9              | 23.8                  | 28.7              | 20.8              | 11.9               |
| Look up the word in an English-only dictionary    | 2.73      | 1.27      | 19.8              | 24.8                  | 28.7              | 13.9              | 11.9               |
| Ignore the word or skip it                        | 2.49      | 1.25      | 24.8              | 32.7                  | 17.8              | 15.8              | 7.9                |

The social strategies, which signify cooperation with others, are “ask the teacher for assistance” and “ask a friend for assistance”. They are moderately employed. About 21% of the students indicate that they *always* “ask the teacher for assistance”, while 20.8% of the students claim that they *always* “ask a friend for assistance”. Furthermore, 18.8% of the participants *very often* “ask the teacher for assistance”, while 24.8% *very often* “ask a friend for assistance”. In total, 8.9% of the sample reported that they would *never* “ask the teacher for assistance”, and 10.9% of the sample indicated that they would *never* “ask a friend for assistance” when they encountered an unfamiliar term.

With regard to both bilingual and monolingual dictionary use, 11.9% of the students indicated that they *always* consulted an English-Serbian dictionary. About 21% of the sample acknowledged having used bilingual dictionary *very often* in order to find the meaning of a new word. This strategy was *never* applied by 13.9% of the students. About 12% of the sample reported that they *always* used a monolingual English dictionary when they encountered an unknown word in the text written in English.

The total of 13.9% of the students reported employing this strategy *very often*. Using a monolingual English dictionary would never be an option for 19.8% of the students.

The least employed strategy is “ignore the word or skip it”, as 7.9% of the participants claim that they *always* implement this particular strategy. In addition, about 15.8% of the sample indicate that they *very often* skip or ignore unknown word, while 24.8% of the sample indicate that they *never* use this strategic option.

Group A achieved better scores on the short-term vocabulary retention test, while group B outscored group A on the long-term vocabulary retention vocabulary test. A Mann–Whitney U test was applied in order to determine the influence of both explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction on the results of the vocabulary tests. It was established that the students from group A (who were exposed to explicit vocabulary instruction) had better scores on the vocabulary test 1 (the short-term vocabulary retention test) ( $M=6.32$ ,  $SD=1.93$ ) than the students from group B (who were exposed to implicit vocabulary instruction) ( $M=1.4$ ,  $SD=1.7$ ;  $U=103.5$ ,  $Z=-7.983$ ,  $p<0.00$ ). On the other hand, no such difference was established between the groups' results on the vocabulary test 2 (the long-term vocabulary retention test) ( $Ma=1.68$ ,  $SD=1.85$ ,  $Mb=2.04$ ,  $SD=1.96$ ), although students from the group B had higher scores on the vocabulary test 2. Additionally, the Wilcoxon rank-sum test showed that the students attained better scores on the short-term vocabulary retention test than on the long-term vocabulary retention test ( $Z=-5.138$ ,  $p<0.00$ ).

These results emphasize the importance of implicit vocabulary instruction, which is also related to mental effort, as it is believed that the more cognitive effort is invested in determining word meaning, the better retention would subsequently be achieved.

The Spearman's rank correlation was applied in order to examine the relations between the strategies the students employed. The results indicate that the students who ask the teacher for assistance would rather ask a friend for assistance ( $r=.368$ ,  $p<0.00$ ). Furthermore, the students who ask the teacher for assistance would also more often use a bilingual ( $r=.243$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and monolingual dictionary ( $r=.224$ ,  $p<.05$ ). In addition, a positive correlation was established between asking the teacher for assistance and looking for clues to meaning in the word itself ( $r=.199$ ,  $p<.05$ ), as well as asking the teacher for assistance and making a note of the word ( $r=.302$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The participants who are less likely to skip the words and continue reading will make a note of the word more often ( $r=-.210$ ,  $p<.05$ ). A strong positive correlation was established between using monolingual and



bilingual dictionaries ( $r=.472$ ,  $p<.00$ ). Also, the students who reported using a bilingual dictionary make a note of the word more often ( $r=.269$ ,  $p<.01$ ), as well as the students who use a monolingual dictionary ( $r=.251$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The participants who are looking for clues to meaning in the word itself reported guessing the meaning of the word from the context more often ( $r=.413$ ,  $p<.00$ ). Finally, the students who claim that they guess the meaning of the word from the context also make a note of the word more often ( $r=.310$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

Factor loadings are presented in Table 2. Factor analysis with Promax rotation revealed three components within the strategies which are employed when students come across a new word in the texts. The Keiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sample adequacy is 0.547, and Bartlett's test of sphericity is highly significant ( $p<.000$ ). The first component explained 23.8% of variance, the second component explained 17.57% of variance and the third component explained 14.21% of variance. The first factor was called *dictionary consultation*, the second factor was named *the use of context*, and third factor was named *social strategies*.

**Table 2:** Factor loadings of strategies students employed

| <i>Strategies</i>          | <i>dictionary consultation</i> | <i>the use of context</i> | <i>social strategies</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| English-Serbian dictionary | .790                           |                           |                          |
| English-only dictionary    | .656                           |                           |                          |
| Make a note                | .590                           |                           |                          |
| Ignore the word            | -.478                          | .430                      |                          |
| Look for clues             |                                | .801                      |                          |
| Using context              |                                | .773                      |                          |
| Ask a friend               |                                |                           | .830                     |
| Ask a teacher              |                                |                           | .761                     |

The Wilcoxon rank-sum test indicated that the students used the context more than relying on dictionaries ( $Z=-3.649$ ,  $p<.00$ ). Also, the participants would rather use social strategies than they would rely on dictionaries ( $Z=-2.188$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

The Spearman's rank correlation revealed that the participants who skipped the word less often had higher scores on the long-term memory

test ( $r = -.200$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In addition, another positive correlation was established between looking for clues to meaning in the word itself and the short-term memory test ( $r = .211$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This finding implies that word-part analysis was the most efficient strategy that positively correlated with vocabulary gains in this study, since other correlations were not established. Hereby the initial hypothesis that the frequency of strategy use is related to the students' achievements in terms of vocabulary acquisition was confirmed.

## **Conclusion and pedagogical implications**

The research reported on in the paper has shown positive effects of both explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction on word retention. However, the positive effects of implicit vocabulary instruction on word retention are very significant for ESP education, as this research confirmed that explicit vocabulary instruction and implicit vocabulary instruction should be combined as complementary activities in an ESP course. Although direct vocabulary learning in the ESP context is the best way of memorizing a large amount of vocabulary, it is still insufficient for specific vocabulary enlargement. When the students rely solely on translation equivalents as a strategy for vocabulary learning, they assumingly quickly forget the words they have acquired. However, when the students acquire new words implicitly (or learn words from the context through reading or listening), the learning effects are seen in the long run, because contextual learning is perceived as more effective than decontextualized learning. In that respect, indirect vocabulary instruction as a part of ESP instruction should be based on attaining vocabulary gains through reading, including both intensive reading activities and extensive reading of a large amount of written materials.

Since analysing word parts positively correlated with the students' success, raising the students' morphological awareness emerged as a practical implication of the research, which should be integrated in practical tasks included in the ESP curriculum.

The integration of both vocabulary instruction and strategic instruction in ESP instruction is another important pedagogical implication of the research. Also known as strategic training or strategies-based instruction, strategic instruction takes place through strategic input or strategic intervention carried out by the ESP teacher in order to explicitly teach a particular strategy.

The research thus stresses the importance of implicit vocabulary instruction in ESP courses and confirms that ESP instruction should not be

based solely on explicit vocabulary teaching and learning. After students leave the classroom, they will generally resort to autonomous learning and the use of vocabulary learning strategies. And since reading is seen as a powerful source of vocabulary acquisition, the use of vocabulary learning strategies while reading can be beneficial. They include ignoring the vocabulary that is considered of minor importance for reading comprehension, inferring word meaning from context, word-part analysis, and searching for the meaning of words that are essential for text comprehension in a dictionary or other knowledge sources. Finally, making intelligent decisions regarding the use of the above mentioned lexical processing strategies constitutes students' metacognitive knowledge as a significant aspect of vocabulary learning.

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# READING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: STUDENTS' EVALUATION OF EFL CLASSROOM READING ACTIVITIES IN A HIGHER EDUCATION SETTING

MILEVICA BOJOVIĆ

## Outline

Reading in a foreign language is a receptive language skill referring to the comprehension of the written text, information analysis, and integration of what is learned from the written materials with prior knowledge. The study examines the university students' evaluation of classroom reading tasks in English as a foreign language and potential impacts of the frequency of testing and gender on students' perception of foreign language classroom reading practice. The obtained results showed that the biotechnology engineering students considered the foreign language classroom reading activities and reading comprehension testing as highly effective practices in developing foreign language reading skills. Significant gender differences were identified in the students' evaluation of their former experience in reading and testing reading comprehension in primary and secondary education settings. The frequency of testing foreign language reading skills appeared to have effects on the students' self-confidence in reading performance.

**Key words:** classroom activities, English as a foreign language (EFL), evaluation, higher education, reading.

## 1. Introduction

Reading, besides writing, mathematics, communication, analytical and critical thinking, and computer skills, is considered a basic academic competency vital for the development of professional competencies in various occupations (Engineering Competency Model 2015, Web). It is a

complex activity which can be defined in various ways.

*The Cambridge Dictionary Online* (Cambridge Dictionary Online: *Reading*, Web) gives five entries for the word *reading*: 1. the skill or activity of getting information from books; 2. an occasion when something written, especially a work of literature, is spoken to an audience; 3. the way in which you understand something; 4. the number or amount that a piece of measuring equipment shows; and 5. a reading of a new law in parliament is one of the stages of discussion before it is approved. None of these entries we mentioned match precisely the definition of reading. The entry 1 does not explain the nature of reading activity or skill; the entry 2 refers to reading aloud; the entry 3 seems to focus on the use of the verb *interpret*, which is an important aspect of text reading; the entries 4 and 5 refer to specific situations where the act and skill of reading is needed without explaining the nature of the skill. Similarly, *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* (Sinclair 1990, 1195) gives four entries for the word *reading*: 1. reading is the activity of looking at written or printed symbols and understanding them; 2. a text that is read aloud to an audience or a reading aloud of a play by actors when they are beginning to rehearse a new play; 3. reading of a word, text, or situation is the way in which it is understood or interpreted; and 4. if something is good reading, difficult reading, boring reading, etc., it means that it is good, difficult boring. The first entry for the word *reading* in *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* probably matches with the process of reading more precisely than the other entries from the same source or the entries from *The Cambridge Dictionary Online* (Cambridge Dictionary Online: *Reading*, Web). It is considered appropriate to refer to *reading* hieroglyphics, or Braille or Morse; however, we usually do not use the term to refer to reading of music, or maps or mathematical symbols (Urquhart, Alexander & Weir 1998, 14).

This shows that defining reading is not an easy task. Various linguists, in the fields of mother tongue acquisition and foreign language learning/second language acquisition, have given their contribution to defining the process of reading. Reading is defined as a psycholinguistic process as it uses language to get to the meaning (Goodman 1973, 3-14) and as the process of constructing the meaning in response to the text requires an interactive use of graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cues to construct meaning (Goodman 1981, 477-478). It is also defined as extracting the information from the text (Gibson & Levin 1975, 5), decoding as the skill of transforming printed words into spoken words (Perfetti 1985), or the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print (Urquhart & Weir 1998, 22).

## Theoretical background

Reading is probably the most extensively studied language skill (Bachman 2000, x-xi). Research on reading in a foreign/second language began with the article written by Kenneth Goodman (Goodman 1967). Since then many studies have been conducted with a number of findings (Brown 2000). The literature on reading, both in mother tongue and foreign/second language, has the tendency to discuss the process of reading in terms of bottom-up and top-down reading models.

The bottom-up model of reading refers to exact identification of letters, words, and sentences while moving the eyes across the page and building comprehension from letter to words to phrase to sentence. This identification approach slows the readers down so that the information cannot be held in short-term memory long enough to make sense of whole sentences or larger pieces of discourse (Eskey 1986).

On the other hand, the top-down model refers to the choice of the fewest and most productive elements from a text in order to make sense of it. In this process the reader uses available minimal language cues to make hypotheses about the meaning of the text, these hypotheses being then confirmed, rejected, or refined as reading progresses (Goodman 1967, 126-127). This means that efficient reading is not word-by-word identification. Readers read for meaning and comprehension by relating new information to background and world knowledge. The way in which background knowledge is organized in the brain of human beings in the form of units is called *schemata* (Rumelhart 1980; Rumelhart & Otroy 1977). Efficient readers use their existing schemata to make predictions about what is coming next in the text and about how some new piece of information relates to the prior knowledge.

During 1980s an alternative model of reading was presented that combines the two views, bottom-up and top-down models. The resulting model is called an interactive model of reading (Rumelhart 1977; Stanovich 1980). Interactive theory acknowledges the role of prior knowledge and prediction and, simultaneously, reaffirms the importance of fast and accurate processing of the words in the text. In interactive model of reading the bottom-up skills (word recognition and grammar structures necessary to decode the text) are considered as playing an important role in reading in a foreign language. These skills become so proficient in efficient readers that they become automatic in their interaction with top-down skills, which focus primarily on meaning rather than on form but also include cultural knowledge. Although top-down skills play an important role in reading, the readers still need simple



bottom-up processing skills (Eskey 1987, 189-192)—they still must decode the graphic forms and syntactic structures which provide textual relationships. Interactive model has been adopted by many foreign/second language researchers (Eskey 1986).

The ultimate purpose of reading is text comprehension, the identification of the intended meaning of written communication (Richards & Schmidt 2010, 108). Authentic reading in a foreign language, whether it is a foreign language for general purposes or for specific purposes, involves readers' interaction with the text in order to gain information and reduce uncertainty (Hudson 1989, 143-170). This interaction involves the tasks the foreign language (FL) readers are to perform and their reading strategies. The reading tasks are important in authentic FL reading in that they direct the points of instruction to language and rhetorical structures, vocabulary or reading skills and strategies. In this way instruction is more attentive to the processes and strategies the students should learn than to mastery of individual language products such as a particular grammar structure (Hudson 1989, 145). An earlier study (Bojović 2010), exploring the effects of the extent and intensity of EFL reading instruction on the university students' EFL reading comprehension, indicated that the higher frequency of testing itself and in combination with the EFL instruction focused on developing students' reading skills may improve the students' level of EFL reading comprehension. A later study (Bojović 2015a, 31) revealed that the frequency of applying reading comprehension tests can affect the level of students' reading comprehension: the higher frequency of testing indicates the students' higher scores on the final EFL reading comprehension test.

Reading tasks and activities in the FL classroom can be grouped as follows (Dubin & Bycina 1991, 195-215; Hood, Solomon, & Burns 1996, 72-92; Urquhart & Weir 1998, 184-188):

1. pre-reading activities, which are preparatory activities usually taken in order to awaken interest and include previewing or text surveys, predicting, word association, introducing key vocabulary, discussions;
2. while-reading activities involve reading strategies which are employed during the process of reading a particular text: reading for the main ideas, reading in detail; clarifying, questioning or interrogating text (Nuttall 1996, 37), monitoring one's own comprehension; work on text structure and organization; and,
3. post-reading activities refer to a) the review of the content—exercises can be focused on grammar points, on new vocabulary in

context, word roots, discourse markers; and b) consolidation of what has been read by relating the new information to the students' knowledge by means of discussions and debates, role-plays, project work, or showing interests and expressing opinions through a writing assignment.

Each of these three stages in reading has own aims (Dubin & Bycina 1991, 202-205). The goals of the pre-reading phase are to activate or build the students' knowledge of the subject, to provide language preparation possibly needed for coping with the text, and to motivate the students to read the text. The aims of the while-reading phase are to understand the specific content and to perceive the structure of the text as well as to promote active engagement with the text and develop reading skills. The last stage is intended to review the content, to work on bottom-up concerns such as grammar, vocabulary, and discourse features, and to consolidate what has been read by linking the newly obtained information with the students' prior knowledge and interests.

Although reading is a basic academic competency and versatile reading activities and tasks are essential in authentic FL reading, it does not necessarily mean that FL classes and reading tasks are conducted in an efficient manner or that the students are improving or are aware of improving their reading skills. The students' evaluation of the teaching techniques implemented by a FL teacher is important – the students' positive perception means that the FL instruction meets the students' needs (Ekaningrum & Prabandari 2015). Evaluation is the systematic gathering of information for purposes of decision making; it may use quantitative methods such as tests, qualitative methods such as observations or ratings (e.g. rating scales), and value judgments (Richards & Schmidt 2010, 2016). It tries to ensure quality assurance and enhancement and creates a dialogue within programs for ongoing improvement of learning opportunities (Kiely 2009). Evaluation can contribute to understanding and improving language teaching practices and programs (Norris 2009). Evaluative studies in the field of language teaching and learning were rather focused on the following issues:

- foreign language teacher education programs (Peacock 2009, 259-278);
- programs of foreign language learning and teaching (Kiely 2009, 99-116; Llosa & Slayton 2009, 35-54; Norris 2009, 7-13); and
- the teachers' perception of heterogeneous classes and the self-perception of successful and unsuccessful learners (Millrood 2002, 128-136).

Although a number of studies are focused on reading skills (Gibson & Levin 1975; Goodman 1967; 1973; Rumelhart 1980; Stanovich 1980) and reading in a foreign language (Block, 1986, 1992; Carrell & Eisterhold 1983; Grabe 1991), there is a paucity of research that considers students' evaluation of foreign language classroom reading activities (Ekaningrum & Prabandari 2015). However, some recent studies deal with students' evaluation of FL classroom practices, though the focus of their evaluation is on FL classroom speaking practices. One of these studies suggests that students' perceptions of EFL classroom speaking practices are related to their levels of foreign language anxiety (FLA), where lower levels of FLA indicate students' affirmative evaluation of EFL speaking practices (Bojović 2014). Another study by the same author points out the relationships between students' perception of EFL classroom speaking practices and their use of EFL speaking strategies in that a positive perception of EFL classroom speaking activities indicates the students' more frequent use of speaking strategies (Bojović 2015b).

The role of gender in FL reading and the relationships between readers' gender and FL reading comprehension are in the focus of several studies (Brantmeier 2003; Young & Oxford 1997; Swalander & Taube 2007). The lack of gender differences in overall reading comprehension was recorded in two of these studies (Brantmeier 2003; Young & Oxford 1997). Furthermore, it has been found that females show a more positive attitude to reading and more positive verbal self-concept, whereas males have a higher academic self-concept (not domain-specific), self-efficacy, control expectation; boys also reported significantly more goal oriented strategies with more memorizing, elaboration, and instrumental motivation (Swalander & Taube 2007). Gender has also been found to be an important factor in the students' perception of reading practices such as the use of FL reading strategies in the university educational setting (Akarsu & Harputlu 2014; Ghezlou et al. 2014). In other words, gender may affect learners' perceptions of effective reading strategies and, accordingly, gender should be taken into consideration when teaching reading and other language skills (Akarsu & Harputlu 2014).

This study points out the importance of students' perception of foreign language reading activities in an instructional setting at the level of higher education. The factors which are particularly in focus are as follows: how often students have the opportunity to practice FL reading activities and testing reading at different education levels, the potential impact of reading activities and testing reading comprehension in the classroom context on the students' FL reading skills, the level of their own self-confidence in performing FL reading tasks in an instructional context, and

how difficult these tasks are. Training in metacognition is relatively new in FL teaching of reading but it seems to have a potential value for carrying over to future reading experiences (Urquhart & Weir 1998, 187).

### **Purpose of the study**

The study examines the undergraduate biotechnology engineering students' evaluation of the classroom reading activities and tasks in English as a foreign language (EFL). The aim of this study is to determine the levels of evaluated parameters of students' EFL classroom reading activities and the potential effects of the frequency of testing and gender on students' evaluation of FL classroom reading practice.

The hypotheses in the study are that the students' perception of FL classroom reading activities is affected by the gender of the participants and frequency of testing students' reading comprehension.

### **Research methodology**

#### ***Participants***

The sample involved 59 undergraduate students (41 females and 18 males) in the field of biotechnical sciences (agriculture and food technology). They were junior and senior students in the four-year biotechnology bachelor program at the University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Agronomy in Čačak, Serbia, learning EFL, more precisely English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

#### ***Variables***

The following variables are used in the study:

- 1) the students' evaluation of the EFL classroom reading tasks including: the frequency of reading activities in the classroom; the effects of reading activities and testing on students' reading comprehension in a foreign language; the difficulty of reading exercises and reading test tasks; the students' previous experience in reading activities and testing reading comprehension in primary and secondary education context; and the students' self-confidence in foreign language reading comprehension;
- 2) the participants' gender – 41 female and 18 male undergraduate students; and

- 3) the frequency of testing students' levels of reading comprehension—two and three times during the semester: junior students were tested twice and seniors were tested three times.

### ***Instrument***

The research instrument is the *Students' foreign language reading activity evaluation scale* (SFLRAES) which was created for this study to measure the students' perception of FL classroom reading practice—in this case, the EFL classroom reading practice; this is the pilot phase of implementation. This self-assessment scale consists of 8 items measuring the following: the frequency of reading activities in the academic context; whether reading exercises help students understand the texts better; the difficulty of reading exercises; the frequency of reading activities at the levels of primary and secondary education; whether testing reading comprehension helps students understand the texts better; the difficulty of reading comprehension test tasks; the frequency of testing reading at the levels of primary and secondary education; and the degree of students' self-confidence in successful reading performance. It is a five-point Likert-type scale, with choices ranging from “never or almost never true of me” (1) to “always or almost always true of me” (5). In other words, the low end indicates the low frequency of reading activities in the foreign language classroom, the negative effects of FL reading activities and testing on students' reading comprehension, and the low level of students' self-confidence in reading comprehension. The exceptions are two items regarding the difficulty of reading exercises and the difficulty of reading comprehension test tasks; the response options for these two items range from “very difficult” (1) to “very easy” (5).

### ***Procedures***

The instrument used for data collection in the study was administered to the participants by their English language teacher during their regular lectures at the end of the semester lasting 15 working weeks. The EFL classes were focused on developing the students' foreign language reading skills for academic and specific purposes, involving a range of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities and followed by the reading comprehension tests. The pre-reading activities practiced in the EFL classroom included previewing, predicting, word associations and brainstorming, work on key vocabulary. Work on text structure and organization, reading to find main ideas in the text, reading for details, clarifying what is unclear when reading the text were the while-reading activities applied in the classroom. The post-reading activities practiced

involved grammar exercises, meaning of words in context, finding out synonyms or antonyms, finding out word roots, exercises focused on discourse markers; also, discussions and debates, role-plays, project work, or expressing opinions through a writing assignment were the additional EFL classroom post-reading activities.

The measures of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), descriptive statistics (frequency analysis, mean values and standard deviation), and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used for data processing. The obtained data were analyzed using *SPSS 20.00 Package for Windows*.

For the Likert-scaled items of the SFLRAES, the following key may help to interpret the means: mean values from 3.51 to 5.0 indicate the high frequency of FL reading activities or testing reading comprehension, high degree of efficiency of reading activities and testing reading comprehension on the development of FL reading skills, low levels of difficulty of FL reading tasks or high level of students' self confidence in FL reading skills; mean values from 2.51 to 3.5 indicate all these factors being at the medium level; finally, mean values from 1.0 to 2.5 indicate the high levels of difficulty of FL reading/testing tasks and low levels of other previously mentioned factors.

## Results

The analysis carried out in this study indicates that the index of reliability and internal consistency for the SFLRAES instrument (Cronbach's alpha) is  $r=0.70$ , which is considered as adequate (Deković, Janssens & Gerris 1991; Holden, Fekken & Cotton 1991). It is not uncommon for contemporary researchers to characterize reliabilities in the 0.60s and 0.70s as good or adequate.

### *Students' perception of EFL classroom reading activities*

The results obtained by frequency analysis reveal that more than a half of the participants (50.8%) considered the overall EFL classroom reading activities as highly frequent and important for building their reading skills and self-confidence in successful reading performance, while only 1.7% of the students disagreed with such perception. The rest of the participants (47.5% of them) perceived the overall EFL classroom reading activities as frequent and moderately important for developing their reading skills and self-confidence.

**Table 1:** Students' evaluation of EFL classroom reading activities – SFLRAES items

| <b>EFL classroom reading activities – SFLRAES items</b>                    | Possible scores | M    | SD    |
|--|-----------------|------|-------|
| Frequency of EFL reading activities  | 1-5             | 3.95 | .936  |
| How helpful classroom reading practice is for better text understanding    | 1-5             | 4.08 | 1.005 |
| Difficulty of EFL reading exercises  | 1-5             | 3.08 | .535  |
| Frequency of EFL reading practice – former experience                      | 1-5             | 3.59 | 1.205 |
| How helpful testing reading comprehension is for better text understanding | 1-5             | 4.15 | .867  |
| Difficulty of reading comprehension test tasks                             | 1-5             | 3.07 | .553  |
| Frequency of testing EFL reading – former experience                       | 1-5             | 3.12 | 1.176 |
| Self-confidence in successful EFL reading performance                      | 1-5             | 3.34 | .958  |
| Overall EFL classroom reading activities                                   | 1-5             | 3.55 | .524  |
| <b>N = 59</b>  |                 |      |       |

EFL – English as a foreign language, M – mean value, SD – standard deviation, N – number of participants

The results obtained by the measures of descriptive statistics (mean values and standard deviation) indicate that the students generally had a positive perception of EFL classroom reading activities since the mean value for the overall perceived EFL reading activities was  $M=3.55$  (Table 1). The more detailed analysis of the parameters of evaluated EFL classroom reading activities shows that (Table 1):

- the perceived frequency of EFL classroom reading activities in a higher education setting was high ( $M=3.95$ );
- the practice of reading in the EFL classroom had highly positive effects on students' reading comprehension in EFL ( $M=4.08$ );
- the difficulty of reading exercises in English language classes was moderate ( $M=3.08$ );
- the students perceived the practice of reading in EFL to be less frequent ( $M=3.59$ ) at the primary and secondary education levels compared to the tertiary level of education ( $M=3.95$ );

- the practice of testing students' reading comprehension had positive effects on EFL students' reading comprehension ( $M=4.15$ );
- the difficulty of reading comprehension test tasks was perceived as moderate by the participants ( $M=3.07$ );
- in primary and secondary education the frequency of testing reading comprehension was perceived to be at a moderate level ( $M=3.12$ ); and
- the students perceived themselves as moderately self-confident in successful EFL reading performance in the classroom context ( $M=3.34$ ).

### *Students' perception of EFL classroom reading activities*

As mentioned previously, 41 female and 18 male university undergraduate biotechnology students participated in the research. The results obtained by ANOVA analysis indicate, as shown in Table 2, that males and females generally held similar views about EFL classroom reading activities since significant differences were not recorded ( $p > 0.05$ ). However, there are two parameters of students' evaluation of speaking activities in the EFL classroom on which responses of males and females significantly differed (Table 2, Figure 1): the frequency of their EFL reading practice and frequency of testing EFL reading comprehension, both in primary and secondary school.

Regarding the frequency of EFL reading practice in primary and secondary school, the female students experienced more frequent reading activities than their male peers, the mean difference being significant at the 0.05 level ( $F=6.916$ ,  $p=0.011$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The female students perceived EFL classroom reading activities as frequent ( $M=3.85$ ), while the male students perceived them as moderately frequent ( $M=3.00$ ) (Figure 1).

Considering the evaluated frequency of testing EFL reading comprehension at primary and secondary education levels, the female students experienced more frequent testing practices of their reading skills than their male peers. The female participants estimated their former experience in EFL classroom testing of their reading skills as moderately frequent ( $M=3.34$ ), while their male counterparts perceived them as moderately frequent with the tendency toward the low frequency of testing reading skills ( $M=2.61$ ), the mean difference being significant at the 0.05 level ( $F=5.175$ ,  $p=0.027$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This is illustrated in Figure 1.

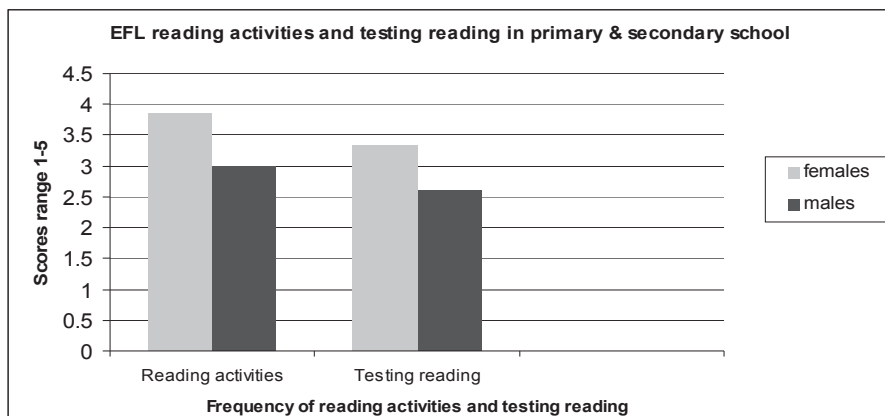


**Table 2:** Students' evaluation of EFL classroom reading activities and gender

| EFL classroom reading activities   | females (M) | males (M) | p             |
|--|-------------|-----------|---------------|
| Frequency of EFL reading activities  | 3.90        | 4.06      | 0.568         |
| How helpful classroom reading practice is for better text understanding    | 4.10        | 4.06      | 0.884         |
| Difficulty of EFL reading exercises  | 3.12        | 3.00      | 0.425         |
| Frequency of EFL reading practice – former experience                      | 3.85        | 3.00      | <b>0.011*</b> |
| How helpful testing reading comprehension is for better text understanding | 4.22        | 4.00      | 0.375         |
| Difficulty of reading comprehension test tasks                             | 3.10        | 3.00      | 0.537         |
| Frequency of testing EFL reading – former experience                       | 3.34        | 2.61      | <b>0.027*</b> |
| Self-confidence in successful EFL reading performance                      | 3.29        | 3.44      | 0.580         |
| Overall EFL classroom reading activities                                   | 3.62        | 3.40      | 0.138         |

**N = 59 \*p < 0.05**

EFL – English as a foreign language, M – mean value, N – number of participants; p – statistical significance

**Figure 1:** Gender differences in students' evaluation of EFL reading activities

***The effects of the frequency of testing reading in academic context on students' evaluation of EFL classroom reading practice***

According to ANOVA analysis, it seems that the frequency of testing students' EFL reading comprehension affects the students' perception of the overall EFL classroom reading activities, the frequency of testing students' reading skills in primary and secondary educational settings, and their level of self-confidence in the successful performance of the EFL classroom reading tasks (Table 3, Figure 2).

**Table 3:** Frequency of testing EFL reading and evaluation of EFL reading activities

| EFL classroom reading activities   | Frequency of testing (M) |      | p              |
|--|--------------------------|------|----------------|
|  | 3                        | 2    |                |
| Frequency of EFL reading activities  | 3.98                     | 3.88 | 0.714          |
| How helpful classroom reading practice is for better text understanding    | 4.14                     | 3.94 | 0.497          |
| Difficulty of EFL reading exercises  | 3.12                     | 3.00 | 0.462          |
| Frequency of EFL reading practice, former experience                       | 3.77                     | 3.13 | 0.068          |
| How helpful testing reading comprehension is for better text understanding | 4.23                     | 3.94 | 0.249          |
| Difficulty of reading comprehension test tasks                             | 3.09                     | 3.00 | 0.570          |
| Frequency of testing EFL reading, former experience                        | 3.33                     | 2.56 | <b>0.025*</b>  |
| Self-confidence in successful EFL reading performance                      | 3.56                     | 2.75 | <b>0.003**</b> |
| Overall EFL classroom reading activities                                   | 3.65                     | 3.27 | <b>0.012*</b>  |

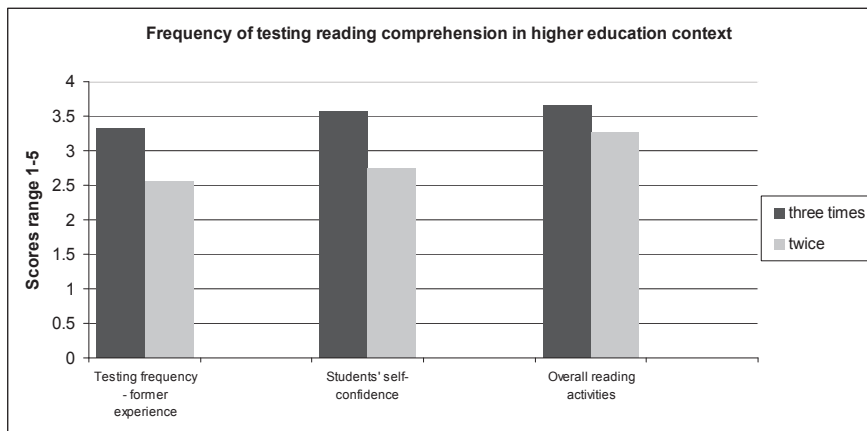
**N = 59 \*p < 0.05 \*\*p < 0.01**

EFL – English as a foreign language, M – mean value, N – number of participants; p – statistical significance

It appeared that the students who were tested three times in academic context were also tested more frequently in primary and secondary education setting (M=3.33) than their colleagues tested twice in higher education setting (M=2.56); the mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level (F=5.274, p=0.025, p < 0.05). Moreover, the students who were tested three times showed higher level of self-confidence (M=3.56)

comparing to their peers tested twice, who showed a moderate level of self-confidence ( $M=2.75$ ), the mean difference being significant at the 0.01 level ( $F=6.916$ ,  $p=0.003$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Also, the students who were tested three times perceived the overall EFL classroom reading activities as highly positive ( $M=3.65$ ) compared to the students tested two times during the semester, whose perception of the classroom reading activities is moderately positive ( $M=3.27$ ); the mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level ( $F=6.658$ ,  $p=0.012$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). All these results are illustrated in Table 3 and Figure 2.

**Figure 2:** The effects of the frequency of testing reading on perceived EFL reading practice



## Discussion

The findings in this study revealed that the reliability and internal consistency of the instrument *Students' foreign language reading activities evaluation scale* (SFLRAES) is adequate (Deković, Janssens & Gerris 1991; Holden, Fekken & Cotton 1991). It is possible that the instrument applied on a larger sample would show a higher level of reliability and internal consistency. The results obtained by employing this instrument indicate that the biotechnology engineering students generally had positive overall perception of EFL classroom reading activities in a higher education setting. In the students' opinion, the EFL classroom reading activities and exercises, as well as reading comprehension testing in the educational context, are highly influential on their own EFL reading

abilities. Also, the reading activities in EFL are seen as more frequent in the academic learning context than in the primary or secondary education setting. There is evidence that students' opportunities to actively engage in instructional tasks and apply newly learned skills in practice are relevant factors in learning (Greenwood, Delquadri & Hall 1989; Greenwood et al. 1992). Also, increasing both the frequency of reading activities and the length of the instructional sessions allows students to receive targeted instruction and increased opportunities to practice reading skills (Waughn et al. 2012). Moreover, the tasks in the academic EFL classroom are more demanding than the ones in primary or secondary schools: the text selections for reading belong to a specific scientific discipline, they are longer and their structure is more complex; the vocabulary is less familiar, frequently presenting complex concepts through multiple modalities (e.g. graphs, diagrams, lab write-ups) and requiring students to synthesize a range of information. Furthermore, the EFL teacher requirements usually involve reading tasks, which are usually done outside the classroom, e.g. for homework, and which can also demand deep reading due to the texts complexity and length, in a specific discipline domain as a part of writing assignments, preparation for a debate, role-play or project. There are many benefits of such reading tasks: they enhance language competence, help improve writing, create and sustain motivation to read more (Nation 1997), and help develop general world knowledge and learn new vocabulary in context (Welch 1997). In the classroom environment where the students' regular reading exercises are in the focus, the students may become more self-confident in their reading skills. In addition, they think that reading exercises and reading test tasks are not particularly difficult.

The obtained results showed that the gender of the participants obviously had some effects on their perception of the frequency of EFL reading practice and the frequency of testing EFL reading comprehension in the primary and secondary classroom. Female students perceived themselves as being exposed to both practices considerably more frequently than their male peers. Such a perception may be explained by the girls' deeper involvement in the primary and secondary EFL classroom reading activities. The present study findings fall in line with the results obtained in the study which revealed that females showed a more positive perception of reading and reading classroom activities than males (Swalander & Taube 2007). However, there is a study which records the males' more positive perception of reading practices and the use of metacognitive reading strategies (Ghezlou, Kordi & Nasrabady 2014).

The findings also revealed that the frequency of applying EFL reading comprehension tests in the higher education context can affect the

students' perception of the overall EFL reading activities and their level of self-confidence in successful reading performance. The students who experienced the EFL reading comprehension testing three times during the semester had a more positive perception of the EFL classroom reading activities than those students who were tested twice. Also, the students who were tested three times appeared to be considerably more self-confident in their EFL reading skills than their peers who were tested twice. It seems important to point out that just one test more or less can produce significant differences in the levels of students' self-confidence in their EFL reading skills in such a short period (one semester, 15 working weeks). These results are in line with the findings which reveal that the higher frequency of EFL reading comprehension testing (Bojović 2015a, 31) and the higher frequency of EFL reading comprehension testing, in combination with the EFL instruction focused on developing students' reading skills, may increase the students' scores in EFL reading comprehension tests (Bojović 2010).

## Conclusion

The aim of the study was to investigate the undergraduate biotechnology students' perception of reading activities in the EFL classroom at the university education level as well as the effects of gender and frequency of testing reading comprehension on their perception.

The obtained results revealed that the undergraduate biotechnology engineering students' attitude toward EFL classroom reading activities was generally positive. They considered EFL classroom reading activities and reading comprehension testing as remarkably effective practices for developing foreign language reading skills. Moreover, the students' self-confidence in reading performance was at a moderate level. Female and male students differed in their evaluation of their former experience in reading and testing reading comprehension in primary and secondary education settings – female students perceived that they experienced more frequent reading activities and testing reading than their male peers. Additionally, a higher frequency of testing raises the students' self-confidence in performing reading tasks in an adequate manner and gives rise to students' affirmative perception of classroom reading practices.

Evaluation of the classroom procedures done by the students is a valuable post-reading activity (Nuttall 1996, 167, 188-9) as it gives students the opportunity to become aware of the FL classroom procedures. It can also help students to become aware of the opportunity to practice reading and of their own level of reading comprehension in EFL.

Evaluation can contribute not only to the learning process but also to teacher change and development. As Harris points out (Harris 2009, 55–76), evaluation can generate debate and effective remedial action and contribute to critical decisions on language policy and educational practice.

Furthermore, foreign language teachers should attempt to make the students practice and produce the knowledge. It is during reading in a foreign language that the FL reading techniques and strategies are activated; this leads to acquiring reading skills. The foreign language teachers can offer various reading tasks so that the students could be enabled to put the foreign language into actual use. Introducing and applying reading comprehension tests during regular foreign language classes will serve students' learning experience and their positive judgment of themselves and their own reading abilities.

As the instrument in the study created to measure the students' perception of EFL reading activities in the university classroom context was used for the first time, it would be wise to apply the instrument with larger samples, across different populations, and with the students learning other foreign languages except English. The present study is a step towards validating the students' evaluation practices considering reading activities in EFL/ ESP instruction. Further studies could investigate how the studied parameters correlate with the students' levels of reading comprehension and their use of reading strategies, and search for other potential factors which can affect the students' evaluation of foreign language reading activities in instructional settings.

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**PART V –**  
**DIFFERENT LANGUAGES,**  
**DIFFERENT CONTEXTS**



# SLAVIC L1 VS. FINNO-UGRIC L2

EDIT G. BOGÁR

## Outline

As a teacher of Hungarian and Finnish with experiences in Russia, Slovakia and Serbia, I have faced many difficulties agglutinative Finno-Ugric (FU) languages may cause for the speakers of inflected (fusional) languages. Besides language typology, phonetics/phonology and lexicon can also be rather problematic for those who study these languages. In this paper I try to summarize the main differences between Indo-European, especially Slavic, and Finno-Ugric languages, display what the most difficult parts to teach and study are, and how a teacher can help his/her students to understand, exercise and use these very specific phenomena of Hungarian and Finnish. Examples are given from all levels of language: pronunciation (e.g. stress, short and long vowels and consonants, intonation), lexicon (incl. old FU words, word formation with its rules, and compounds), morphology (esp. case system, possessive suffixes, and verb paradigms) and syntax (incl. word order, use of postpositions, etc.).

**Key words:** Hungarian L2, Finnish L2, language typology, agglutinative languages, teaching pronunciation, teaching morphology, teaching syntax, teaching lexicon.

## Introduction

Teaching a foreign language is always a difficult task both for the teacher and the student. This is especially true in the case of teaching a language for those whose mother tongue belongs to another language family, and the foreign language has no or few similar features with the students' mother tongue.

Hungarian and Finnish belong to the Uralic (Finno-Ugric) language family. Most of the Uralic languages are spoken in Russia; the number of native speakers is usually rather small: many Uralic languages are seriously endangered, or almost extinct. The bigger Uralic languages, Hungarian,

Finnish and Estonian, are stable; they are official languages of their countries and, consequently, those of the European Union. This also means that these three languages are studied and taught abroad as foreign languages.

The mother tongue of the author is Hungarian but she speaks Finnish as well; she works as a translator from and to Finnish, and has taught Finnish to both Hungarian and Russian students. She has worked as a lecturer of Hungarian in St. Petersburg, Russia, in Bratislava, Slovakia, and is now working in Belgrade at the Department of Hungarian Language and Literature. She has seen many problems in the teaching/learning process an agglutinative language<sup>1</sup> may cause for the speakers of different Slavic languages. The author decided to share some of them here. This paper summarises the most characteristic features of Hungarian and Finnish that are usually unknown in Indo-European languages and thus may seem very difficult for non-native speakers. At the same time some exercises developed by the author will be displayed.

As this paper is mainly about the author's own experiences, there are no references in the text but at the end there are the most important grammars and some course books listed, in which one can find grammatical descriptions and exercises.

## Phonology and phonetics

There are two vowels both in Finnish (FI) and Hungarian (HU) which are unknown in Slavic languages. Hungarian and Finnish vowels [ö] and [ü] are difficult for those Slavic speakers who have not studied French or German before. These two sounds are missing from all Slavic languages, and it is not easy to learn them at the beginning. But, as I have noticed, most students can pronounce them after some months.

The situation is more complicated in the case of HU *a*, which, in contrast with other languages, is not a bilabial but a labial one. Foreign speakers often say it as *o*, however, there is strict phonological difference between them, e.g. *olt* 'to slake' ~ *alt* 'alto', *hol* 'where?' ~ *hal* 'fish', *bolt* 'shop' ~ *balt* 'left one' (Acc.), etc. When exercising this sound, I usually

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<sup>1</sup>Agglutinative Finno-Ugric languages, unlike inflected Indo-European ones, use several affixes 'glued' to the stems, each affix having only one grammatical function, e.g. dative plural is marked with two suffixes, the first one referring to plural, the second one to dative (while the same dative ending is used in singular forms). Thus, these languages can create very long words by adding suffixes.

ask students to pronounce word pairs so that they can feel the difference; later, I give them single words containing both vowels, and finally they have to say words containing only *a*. (NB, after having learnt labial *a*, the students sometimes pronounce [a] instead of [o], e.g. \**szaba* vs. *szoba* ‘room’.)

The length of sounds has phonological meaning in our target languages. It means that almost all vowels and consonants can be short or long, and there is a big difference between the meanings of words containing these sounds.

Additionally, stress does not depend on vowel length, i.e. a short stressed syllable can be followed by a long unstressed one. Both in HU and FI, it is always the first syllable that is stressed, just like in music. E.g. HU *madár* ‘bird’, *halál* ‘death’, *apám* ‘my father’, *bogár* ‘beetle’, FI *tilaa* ‘order’ (ImpSg2), *vapaa* ‘free’, *lentää* ‘to fly’, *munaa* ‘egg’ (PartitSg), etc.

Vowel length itself is not very difficult, whilst unstressed long syllables are not easy at all, especially for Russian speakers, because in their mother-tongue the stress can fall on any syllable, and, while all stressed syllables are long, the vowels in unstressed ones are shortened. Consequently, they say my family name *Bogár* as [‘bögər] or [bə’gār] instead of [‘bogār]. In order to accustom students to this phonotactic structure, I ask them to nod when pronouncing the first syllable. Physiology and anatomy help us reach our aims: if your head falls down with pronouncing the first syllable, it is then almost impossible to stress the second one. For Slovak speakers this phenomenon is not new as they have borrowed the same system from their neighbours; they mark long vowels with a diacritical mark, e.g. *hornatý* ‘hilly’. My Serbian students have to exercise it a lot but they are usually more successful in it than Russian speakers.

**Table 1:** Vowel and consonant length

| Language  | Short vowel/ consonant           | Long vowel/ consonant                       |
|-----------|----------------------------------|---|
| Hungarian | <i>épen</i> ‘hurtlessly, unhurt’ | <i>éppen</i> ‘just’                         |
|           | <i>agy</i> ‘brain’               | <i>ágy</i> ‘bed’                            |
|           | <i>megy</i> ‘s/he goes’          | <i>meggy</i> ‘sour cherry’                  |
|           | <i>irat</i> ‘document’           | <i>írat</i> ‘make/have sy write sg’         |
| Finnish   | <i>mato</i> ‘worm’               | <i>matto</i> ‘carpet’                       |
|           | <i>tapaan</i> ‘I meet’           | <i>tapan</i> ‘I kill’                       |
|           | <i>tuli</i> ‘s/he came; fire’    | <i>tulli</i> ‘customs’; <i>tuuli</i> ‘wind’ |
|           | <i>katso</i> ‘look’ (ImpS2)      | <i>katsoo</i> ‘s/he looks’                  |



Finnish has just a small number of consonants and they do not cause any problems when standing alone; it is only length that is sometimes difficult for foreign speakers. In Hungarian, there are more consonants but none of them are unknown for Slavic speakers. The main problem with consonants occurs when teaching Hungarian or Finnish to Russian students. In Russian, before [i] all consonants are palatalized, i.e. they cannot say Hu *menni* ‘to go’ [menni], they pronounce it as [meñni]. But in Hungarian we also have a word *mennyi* ‘how much/many’ [meñni]. I tried to ask my Russian students to say *menni* as if there was an *ы* at the end of the word (it does not palatalize the previous consonant and the fact that it is a back vowel is irrelevant for Hungarians because we do not have back *i* in our language) but only few of them could realize it in their pronunciation. We practised it a lot; still it was one of my failures in teaching pronunciation.

Consonant length is another problem: in Slavic languages it is not very frequent (Russian has some long consonants, esp. in adjective or participle forms, e.g. *писменный* ‘written’, *длинный* ‘long’). Long spirants or nasals (*n, m, l, s*, etc.) are easy to pronounce but difficult to remember, while long plosive consonants are a big challenge for learners of either Hungarian or Finnish. When exercising long *pp, tt, kk*, I first ask my students to stop at the given consonant and then go on with the word – later they should remember where the stop was but pronounce the whole word as one unit. E.g. HU *kattan* ‘to click’ is first said as [kat (pause) an], or FI *tyttö* ‘girl’ as [tüt (pause) ö]. In spite of these exercises, students often pronounce long consonants as short, and sometimes this may lead to funny utterances, e.g. FI *Sinulla on kaunismato* ‘You have a nice worm’ instead of *Sinulla on kaunismatto* ‘You have a nice carpet’.

## Morphology

Both Finnish and Hungarian are agglutinative languages, and each grammatical function has its own ending which is added separately to the stem, in a strict order. The main types are formative suffix (*képző/johdin*), mark (*jel/tunnus*) and case or personal ending (*rag/pääte*). There can be several formative suffixes and marks but just one case/personal ending in the same word. As the amount of formative suffixes is unlimited, extremely long words can be formed, e.g.:

HU *megszentségteleníthetetleneskedéseitekért* ‘because of the fact that you cannot repeatedly be unhallowed’<sup>2</sup> or

FI *epäjärjestelmällisyttämättömyydellänsäkään* ‘not even with his/her ability not to make a thing unsystematic’<sup>3</sup>

Of course, these two words are just for fun but, as all grammatical functions are separately marked, even frequently used forms can become rather long. This phenomenon is often difficult for students in the inflected mother tongue(s), in which the functions expressed with suffixes in Hungarian and Finnish are marked either by just one ending referring to all functions or by a separate word, e.g. a preposition, an auxiliary verb etc. HU *ház|a|i|m|ban*, FI *talo|i|ssa|ni* ‘in my houses’ or HU *ad|ná|nk* FI *anta|isi|mme* ‘we would give’ are among the simplest and very often used forms.

### Verbs

In Hungarian, we have two conjugations depending on the definitiveness of the object, while in Finnish there are four moods (indicative, conditional, imperative and potential).

The two conjugations are the most critical point for Hungarian L2 speakers. There are strict rules of how to use them but, in practice, it is almost impossible to remember all of them – in addition, they do not always seem logical. The main rule is that, if the object of the sentence is indefinite (e.g. “the students are reading a book”), we use the indefinite (or general) verb form: *a diákokegykönyvetolvassnak*, while in the case of a definite object (“the students are reading the/this book”), we must use the definite form: *a diákokolvassák (ezt) a könyvet*. Definiteness of the object is, nevertheless, not always so clear: how would one ever think that ‘me’

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<sup>2</sup> *Meg* [verbal prefix for completed action] + *szent* ‘holy’ + *ság* [suffix creating an abstract noun] + *telen* [privative suffix] + *ít* [denominal suffix creating verb] + *het* [deverbal suffix meaning ‘possible’] + *ellen* [privative suffix] + *eskedés* [denominal frequentative suffix] + *és* [deverbal suffix creating a noun] + *e* [possessive mark] + *i* [plural mark] + *tek* [possessive mark PI2] + *ért* [causal case ending].

<sup>3</sup> *epä* [privative prefix] + *järje* ‘mind, rationality’ + *st* + *el* [deverbal verb suffixes] + *mä* [deverbal suffix creating a noun] + *syyt* [denominative suffix creating an abstract noun] + *tä* [abessive case ending] + *mä* [suffix of 3<sup>rd</sup> infinitive] + *ttöm* [privative suffix] + *yyde* [suffix creating an abstract noun] + *llä* [adessive case ending] + *nsä* [possessive suffix Sg/PI3] + *kään* ‘not even’.

as an object is indefinite (e.g. *Látszengem?* ‘Can you see me’)? Or, why is an object expressed with an infinitive always indefinite (e.g. *szeretekolvasni* ‘I like to read’)? These rules, of which we have a great amount, are almost impossible to recall all the time a foreigner is speaking Hungarian; consequently, they must be exercised a lot – and, in spite of exercising, even the best foreign speakers can fail in choosing the correct forms.

Besides use, the forms themselves are also rather complicated:

**Table 2:** Indicative present

| Definite (back vowel verbs): <i>ad</i> ‘to give’ | Indefinite (back vowel verbs): <i>ad</i> ‘to give’ | Definite (front vowel verbs): <i>kér</i> ‘to ask’ | Indefinite (front vowel verbs): <i>kér</i> ‘to ask’ |
|--|--|---|---|
| ad-ok  | ad-om  | kér-ek  | kér-em  |
| ad-sz  | ad-od  | kér-sz  | kér-ed  |
| ad-ø   | ad-ja  | kér- ø  | kér-i   |
| ad-unk   | ad-juk   | kér-ünk   | kér-jük   |
| ad-tok   | ad-játok   | kér-tek   | kér-itek  |
| ad-nak   | ad-ják   | kér-nek   | kér-ik  |

**Table 3:** Imperative (j+ personal endings)

| Definite (back vowel verbs): <i>ad</i> ‘to give’ | Indefinite (back vowel verbs): <i>ad</i> ‘to give’ | Definite (front vowel verbs): <i>kér</i> ‘to ask’ | Indefinite (front vowel verbs): <i>kér</i> ‘to ask’ |
|--|--|---|---|
| ad-jak   | ad-jam   | kér-jek   | kér-jem   |
| ad-j   | ad-jad ~ ad-d                                      | kér-j   | kér-jed ~ kér-d                                     |
| ad-jon   | ad-ja  | kér-jen   | kér-je  |
| ad-junk  | ad-juk   | kér-jük   | kér-jük   |
| ad-jatok   | ad-játok   | kér-jetek   | kér-jétek   |
| ad-janak   | ad-ják   | kér-jenek   | kér-jék   |

Morphologically, i.e. considering the phonological alteration of the stem before a given ending, there are more difficult stems as well, e.g. those ending with *s*, *sz*, *t* etc., and the above mentioned imperative forms may undergo some changes in the stems: *tanít* ‘to teach’ + *j* > *taníts-*, *mos* ‘to wash’ + *j* > *moss-*, *lát* ‘to see’ + *j* > *láss-*.

In Finnish, there is only one conjugation but 4 or 5 types, depending on the form of the verb stem. The situation is made more complicated by some phonematic changes, the so-called consonant gradation. It means that the consonants *p*, *t*, *k* and/or consonant groups containing these sounds can change into other forms depending on whether they historically stood before an open or a closed syllable. Thus, e.g. while the infinitive and Sg3 is *antaa* ‘to give’, Sg1 is *anna-n*, Sg2 *anna-t*, etc. In some more complicated types one cannot even recognize the base form when facing them in a text. Perhaps one of the most difficult yet totally regular verbs is *maata* ‘to lie (down)’:

| Present affirmative | Past (imperfect) affirmative |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>makaa-n</i>      | <i>makas-i-n</i>             |
| <i>makaa-t</i>      | <i>makas-i-t</i>             |
| <i>makaa-ø</i>      | <i>makas-i-ø</i>             |
| <i>makaa-mme</i>    | <i>makas-i-mme</i>           |
| <i>makaa-tte</i>    | <i>makas-i-tte</i>           |
| <i>makaa-vat</i>    | <i>makas-i-vat</i>           |

In Finnish, there is no general negative word ‘no’, only a finite verb meaning ‘do(es) not’. With this negative auxiliary verb, the main verb is in a form which is not conjugated. This form is the so-called dependent stem in the present, and the active past participle (put into the plural in plural forms) in the past tenses, e.g.:

| Present negative  | Past (imperfect) negative |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>enmakaa</i>    | <i>enmaannut</i>          |
| <i>et makaa</i>   | <i>et maannut</i>         |
| <i>eimakaa</i>    | <i>eimaannut</i>          |
| <i>emmemakaa</i>  | <i>emmemaanneet</i>       |
| <i>ettemakaa</i>  | <i>ettemaanneet</i>       |
| <i>eivätmakaa</i> | <i>eivätmaanneet</i>      |

In the case of the perfect and plusquamperfect tenses, they combine these forms with the auxiliary verb ‘to be’:

| Perfect affirmative   | Plusquamperfect affirmative |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>olenmaannut</i>    | <i>olinmaannut</i>          |
| <i>oletmaannut</i>    | <i>olitmaannut</i>          |
| <i>on maannut</i>     | <i>olimaannut</i>           |
| <i>olemmemaanneet</i> | <i>olimmemaanneet</i>       |
| <i>olettemaanneet</i> | <i>olittemaanneet</i>       |
| <i>ovatmaanneet</i>   | <i>olivatmaanneet</i>       |

|                           |                            |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Perfect negative          | Plusquamperfect negative   |
| <i>en ole maannut</i>     | <i>enollutmaannut</i>      |
| <i>et ole maannut</i>     | <i>et ollutmaannut</i>     |
| <i>ei ole maannut</i>     | <i>eiollutmaannut</i>      |
| <i>emme ole maanneet</i>  | <i>emmeolleetmaanneet</i>  |
| <i>ette ole maanneet</i>  | <i>etteolleetmaanneet</i>  |
| <i>eivät ole maanneet</i> | <i>eivätolleetmaanneet</i> |

The whole system is like a puzzle: one must only remember how to put the elements into the required order. The situation is the same with conditional and imperative forms; however, in imperative the auxiliary verb is not *ei* but *älä*: *älä mene* ‘don’t go (you, singular)’, *älkөөnmenkө* ‘does not (must not/should not) go (he/she)’, *älkөөmmemenkө* ‘don’t go (we)’, *älkөөmenkө* ‘don’t go (you, plural)’, *älkөөtmenkө* ‘don’t go (they)’. The rules of this puzzle are, in my opinion, rather transparent and that is why they are not too difficult even for foreign speakers. But, as there are many rules, they must be practiced. These exercises, however, can be done quickly and are usually well remembered. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that in these forms Finnish also uses analytical forms like most Indo-European languages, i.e. the grammatical functions are expressed by separate words. Consequently, learners must just recall which words are needed for a given function.

### ***Nouns***

Both Hungarian and Finnish have many cases with case endings. Most of these cases are expressed with prepositional or other analytical structures in Slavic languages, and this can cause problems both in formation and usage.

As for the forms, there are regular, sometimes also irregular, sporadic or alternative changes in the stems to which endings are added. These morphonematic changes in Finnish are perhaps more complicated than in Hungarian but there are no exceptions, while in Hungarian there are a lot of irregular and/or alternative forms as well.

In Hungarian, excluding nominative (dictionary form), we have 17 genuine cases (9 of them are locative ones), and 9 pseudo-cases:

Nominative: *pohár* ‘glass’

Genuine cases:

| Case name                 | Form  |
|---------------------------|---|
| accusative                | <i>pohár-at</i>   |
| dative                    | <i>pohár-nak</i>  |
| instrumentalis-comitative | <i>pohár-ral</i>  |
| causalis                  | <i>pohár-ért</i>  |
| translative               | <i>pohár-rá</i>   |
| inessive                  | <i>pohár-ban</i>  |
| superessive               | <i>pohár-on</i>   |
| adessive                  | <i>pohár-nál</i>  |
| illative                  | <i>pohár-ba</i>   |
| sublative                 | <i>pohár-ra</i>   |
| allative                  | <i>pohár-hoz</i>  |
| elative                   | <i>pohár-ból</i>  |
| delative                  | <i>pohár-ról</i>  |
| ablative                  | <i>pohár-tól</i>  |
| terminative               | <i>pohár-ig</i>   |
| essive 1                  | <i>pohár-ként</i>   |
| essive 2                  | <i>*pohár-ul</i> (but: <i>szerb-ül</i> ‘in Serbian (language)’) |

## Pseudo-cases:

| Case name               | Form   |
|-------------------------|--|
| genitive                | <i>pohár-nak</i> ( <i>a ...</i> )                        |
| distributive            | <i>pohár-anként</i>                                      |
| distributive-temporalis | <i>*pohár-anta</i> (but: <i>nap-onta</i> ‘daily’)        |
| formalis                | <i>pohár-képpen</i>                                      |
| sociative               | <i>pohár-astul</i>                                       |
| locative                | <i>*pohár-ott</i> (but: <i>Vác-ott</i> ‘in Vác (city)’)  |
| temporalis              | <i>*pohár-kor</i> (but: <i>három-kor</i> ‘at 3 o’clock’) |
| modalis-essive          | <i>*pohár-an</i> (but: <i>gyors-an</i> ‘quick-ly’)       |
| multiplicative          | <i>*pohár-szor</i> (but: <i>három-szor</i> ‘3 times’)    |

In Finnish, there are 11 frequently used cases (6 locative + 5 “grammatical”) and 3 cases used rarely and limitedly:

Nominative: *tyttö* ‘girl’

Grammatical cases: genitive: *tyttö-n*, accusative: *tyttö-n*, partitive: *tyttö-ä*, essive: *tyttö-nä*, translative: *tyttö-ksi*

Locative cases: elative: *tyttö-stä*, inessive: *tyttö-ssä*, illative: *tyttö-ön*, ablative: *tyttö-ltä*, adessive: *tyttö-llä*, allative: *tyttö-lle*

Rarely used cases: abessive: \**tytö-tön* (but: *raha-ton* ‘without money’), comitative (only Pl+Poss): *tyttö-i-ne-en*, instrumental: \**tyttö-in* (but: *käs-in* ‘with hand’)

Both our target languages use possessive suffixes instead of Slavic (and other Indo-European) possessive pronouns, but while in Hungarian these suffixes are compulsory, in Finnish they can be omitted in case a possessive pronoun is used. This difference is due to the fact that the possessive ending is put right after the stem in Hungarian, but only after the case ending in Finnish, i.e. it stands at the absolute end of the noun.

Possessive suffix structures and those combined with case endings in the two languages are as follows:

| <b>Hungarian</b>        |                            | <b>Finnish</b>          |                            |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| ‘my/your etc.<br>house’ | ‘in my/your etc.<br>house’ | ‘my/your etc.<br>house’ | ‘in my/your etc.<br>house’ |
| <i>ház-am</i>           | <i>ház-am-ban</i>          | <i>talo-ni</i>          | <i>talo-ssa-ni</i>         |
| <i>ház-ad</i>           | <i>ház-ad-ban</i>          | <i>talo-si</i>          | <i>talo-ssa-si</i>         |
| <i>ház-a</i>            | <i>ház-a-ban</i>           | <i>talo-nsa</i>         | <i>talo-ssa-nsa</i>        |
| <i>ház-unk</i>          | <i>ház-unk-ban</i>         | <i>talo-mme</i>         | <i>talo-ssa-mme</i>        |
| <i>ház-atok</i>         | <i>ház-atok-ban</i>        | <i>talo-nne</i>         | <i>talo-ssa-nne</i>        |
| <i>ház-uk</i>           | <i>ház-uk-ban</i>          | <i>talo-nsa</i>         | <i>talo-ssa-nsa</i>        |

The above-mentioned structures, suffixes and forms are only a part of the very rich morphological systems of our agglutinative languages. What can a teacher do with so many endings and stem types? The textbooks usually introduce the endings step by step, so we can follow the order the books use. Or, if our learners are curious and motivated enough, we can develop our own order, by importance, thematic coherence, aims and the competence of students. My own experience has shown that teaching all locative cases together is almost always effective, while other cases are more appropriate to cover one by one. Thus, for example, I teach Finnish partitive, which is a very important case (it can express the subject or the object; this is often the form of the predicative adjective; it is used with numbers and words expressing any kind of amount, etc.) well before possessive suffixes and even locative cases or plural forms.

## Syntax

It is characteristic of Finno-Ugric languages that syntactic functions are expressed by inflected forms (suffixes) or postpositions; there is no verb ‘to have’; the basic word order is SOV (except for Finnic languages); there is no congruence between the adjective and the noun (again, except for

Finnic languages) and, consequently, the word order of the adjective is strictly bound, and verbless sentences are possible. These features are often very strange for L2 learners. In this part of the paper some of these structures will be displayed.

*Possessive structures.* As there is no *habeo* verb in these languages, possession is expressed by the verb ‘to be’, the possessor is put into a case other than nominative, and the possessed object is in nominative, with or without possessive suffixes, for example:

FI *Annalla on auto* ‘Anna has a car’: *Anna* (adessive) + ‘is’ + ‘car’  
 HU *Annának van autó-ja* ‘Anna has a car’: *Anna* (dative) + ‘is’ + ‘car’ (PxSg3)

This construction is usually so strange for Slovak and Serbian students that even after several years of studying they make mistakes, while it is well known to Russian learners, as their mother tongue uses almost the same structure, e.g.: *У Анны есть машина* ‘Anna has a car’: *у* (preposition) ‘at/by’ + *Анны* (genitive) + ‘is’ + ‘car’. The difference is only the preposition, which, on the other hand, correlates with the Finnish and Hungarian case forms. Thus, expressing possession in FU languages is one of the simplest tasks for Russian learners. For other L1 speakers learning Finnish and/ or Hungarian, this structure is rather unusual but very important, so it must be practiced a lot through transformation of sentences, reading, and listening to authentic FI/HU texts, as well as by compiling their own sentences until it becomes natural for them.

*Verbless sentences.* Verblessness has a limited usage: it can only occur in the present indicative 3<sup>rd</sup> person, in Finnish additionally only in archaic texts (proverbs, folk poetry, etc.). Here are some examples:

HU *Anna tanár* ‘Anna is a teacher’: *Anna* + ‘teacher’ (no verb) (but: *Anna tanárlesz* ‘Anna is going to be a teacher’: *Anna* + ‘teacher’ + ‘will/is going to be’, *Anna tanár lenne* ‘Anna would be a teacher’: *Anna* + ‘teacher’ + ‘would be’, *tetánárvagy* ‘you are a teacher’: ‘you’ + ‘teacher’ + ‘are’, etc.)

FI *omamaamansikka, muumaamustikka* ‘own land is strawberry, other land is blueberry ~ there is no place like home’ (proverb): ‘own’ + ‘land’ + ‘strawberry’, ‘other’ + ‘land’ + ‘blueberry’ (no verb) (but: *Anna on opettaja* ‘Anna is a teacher’: *Anna* + ‘is’ + ‘teacher’. etc.)



Again, the structure is strange for Slovak and Serbian learners but well known to Russian students, as in Russian the verb 'to be' is omitted even in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> persons, e.g.: *я преподаватель* 'I am a teacher', *ты преподаватель* 'you are a teacher', *он преподаватель* 'he is a teacher', *мы преподаватели* 'we are teachers', *вы преподаватели* 'you are teachers', *они преподаватели* 'they are teachers' (no verbs in any of the sentences).

## Summary

To sum up, we can say that Finnish and Hungarian phonetics and pronunciation are very different from those of Slavic languages. Because of the many suffixes and stem alterations, both languages are rather complicated for all Slavic learners. Syntactically, Finnish and Hungarian are easy for Russian students but difficult for other Slavic speakers. Thus, when teaching Finnish or Hungarian to Slavic learners, the teacher must pay attention to the differences between the inflected mother tongue(s) and the agglutinative target language(s). These differences can effectively be displayed and explained through comparing several languages, and authentic Finnish and Hungarian examples, but also through games and funny examples. The result, however, also depends on students' motivation, i.e. how much our students are interested in learning and how able the teacher is to motivate them.

## Appendix

### Exercise 1: Using accusative in Hungarian.

Problem: students often omit accusative ending while in other cases they use it when nominative would be needed. No grammars or course books explain the rule which I formulated and which does not sound very complicated: each sentence must contain a noun in nominative but only one nominative is possible in a normal Hungarian sentence, each and every other noun must be put into another case. In the following sentences students must decide whether to use nominative or accusative:

- Mára nem volt \_\_\_\_\_ (házi feladat).  
 Sok \_\_\_\_\_ (tanulnivaló) kaptunk holnapra.  
 Lacinak új \_\_\_\_\_ (telefon) kell.  
 Ma Gábornak kell megfőznie a \_\_\_\_\_ (vacsora).  
 Érdekel a \_\_\_\_\_ (vízilabda)?  
 Szerintem az \_\_\_\_\_ (opera) nem érdekes  
 Úgy láttam, Péternek nagyon tetszik \_\_\_\_\_ (Panni).  
 Eljössz velem megnézni az új \_\_\_\_\_ (film)?  
 Nehezen bírom a \_\_\_\_\_ (hideg).  
 Mutasd az új \_\_\_\_\_ (frizurád)!  
 Milyen lett az új \_\_\_\_\_ (frizurád)?  
 Tényleg meg kell tanulni az összes író \_\_\_\_\_ (életrajz)?  
 Kellene nekem egy jó \_\_\_\_\_ (könyv). Tudsz ajánlani  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (egy)?  
 Szeretnék olvasni \_\_\_\_\_ (valami izgalmas).  
 Ideadnád a \_\_\_\_\_ (cukor és tej)?  
 Mikor hívtad fel a \_\_\_\_\_ (titkárnő)?  
 Fel kell hívni a \_\_\_\_\_ (tanszék).  
 Nem tudod, hol van a \_\_\_\_\_ (buszjegyem)?  
 Nem láttátok a \_\_\_\_\_ (szemüvegem)?  
 Láttad, \_\_\_\_\_ milyen (kocsi) vettek  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Kovácsék)?  
 Tedd a \_\_\_\_\_ (pohár) a tányér mellé, alá pedig a  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (szalvétá)!  
 Még soha nem festettem kékre a \_\_\_\_\_ (körmöm).  
 – Milyen lakkot tegyek a körmömre? – \_\_\_\_\_  
 (kék).  
 Buborékos \_\_\_\_\_ (ásványvíz) hozhatok önnek vagy  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (mentes)?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (95) vagy \_\_\_\_\_ (98)  
 szoktál tankolni?  
 Elmentünk megnézni egy \_\_\_\_\_ (előadás), de nem tetszett a  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (rendezés).  
 Láttuk \_\_\_\_\_ (Balázs) a kocsmában, pedig \_\_\_\_\_ (az) mondta,  
 fáj a \_\_\_\_\_ (fej).

\_\_\_\_\_ (ez a regény) nem érdemes elolvasni.  
 Nem értem, miért nem jönnek el a vizsgára \_\_\_\_\_ (azok), \_\_\_\_\_  
 (akik) jelentkeznek.  
 Akinek nem sikerül az \_\_\_\_\_ (írásbeli), \_\_\_\_\_ (az) nem engedik  
 szóbelizni.

**Exercise 2:** Difference between the pronunciation of *a* and *á* in Hungarian  
 Problem: the length of vowels that makes difference in meaning, additionally short  
*a* must be pronounced labial (i.e. between *a* and *o*). The word pairs focus on the  
 difference between the two vowels, the sentences are popular tongue-twisters  
 containing short labial *a* or long illabial *á*:

agy – ágy; agya – ágya; agyán – ágyán; agyában – ágyában; agyának – ágyának;  
 agyával – ágyával; agyon – ágyon; agyak – ágyak  
 lát – lát; látja – látja; látom – látom; latnak – látanak  
 latolgat – látogat – latolgotó - látogató

Nem minden fajta szarka farka tarka, csak a tarka fajta szarka farka tarka.

Ádám bátyám pávát látván, száját látván, lábát rántván pávává vált.

**Exercise 3:** Finding Finnish vocabulary forms.

Problem: In Finnish, due to the stem alterations, inflected forms may differ  
 from the base forms and it makes finding words in dictionary very  
 complicated. The situation is the same for nouns, adjectives and verbs. I  
 usually begin Finnish lessons with 5 nouns/adjectives and 5 verbs. Often  
 the simplest forms cause the biggest problems because students do not  
 want to believe that there are words without complicated stem alterations  
 in Finnish.

The student/group who/which finds the correct form from *rukiissa* (*ruis*)  
 and *makaatte* (*maata*), are dispensed from further exercising. (So far, it has  
 happened only once.) In brackets I give the vocabulary forms as well in  
 order to demonstrate how difficult this exercise can be. The inflected  
 nouns and adjectives are in genitive while verbs in Sg1 but I usually give  
 students other forms as well. NB, all forms are regular.

**Nouns and adjectives:** *oikea* (*oikea*), *vinkin* (*vinkki*), *kynnen* (*kynsi*),  
*lätäkön* (*lätäkkö*), *luun* (*luu*), *kullan* (*kulta*), *kaasun* (*kaasu*), *niemen*  
*(niemi)*, *varkauden* (*varkaus*), *joen* (*joki*), *lipun* (*lippu*), *veren veri*), *ruoan*  
*(ruoka)*, *pankin* (*pankki*), *koron* (*korke*), *ajan* (*aika*), *kyynelen* (*kyynel*),  
*tytön* (*tyttö*), *keltaisen* (*keltainen*), *langan* (*lanka*), *kirkon* (*kirkko*), *teltan*  
*(telttä)*, *kodan* (*kota*), *rannan* (*ranta*), *raon* (*rako*), *rakon* (*rakko*), *maton*  
*(mato)*, *madon* (*mato*), *rakkaan* (*rakas*), *rukiin* (*ruis*), *pavun* (*papu*),  
*merkityksen* (*merkitys*), *rukouksen* (*rukous*), *runouden* (*runous*), *rungon*

(runko), sillan (silta), liikkeen (liike), hampaan (hammas), suvun (suku), öljyn (öljy), varren (varsi), navetan (navetta)

**Verbs:** valikoin (valikoida), opiskelen (opiskella), menen (mennä), pyyhin (pyyhkiä), printtaan (printata), tulostan (tulostaa), lopetan (lopettaa), annan (antaa), makaan (maata), harjoitan (harjoittaa), tarvitsen (tarvita), uskon (uskoa), odotan (odottaa), lyön (lyödä), käytän (käyttää), jään (jäädä), jätän (jättää), herään (herätä), herätän (herättää), tapan (tappaa), tapaan (tavata), näyn (näkyä), valitan (valittaa), valitsen (valita)

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# THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ARGUMENTATION THEORY TO THE TEACHING OF SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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## Outline

The Argumentation Theory developed by Anscombe and Ducrot has become a very influential semantic theory since the 1980s. The most relevant turn of this theory is that it claims to be a non-referential, non-cognitive and non-truth-conditional theory. In contrast to other models, Anscombe and Ducrot support the thesis that language is primarily argumentative and all utterances in the discourse may be used as premise-conclusion in order to construct an argument. In accordance with this understanding, the argumentative component of every utterance represents an important aspect of its meaning. This paper reviews briefly the fundamental aspects of the Argumentation Theory in order to present a few examples which may be useful for a methodology employed in foreign language teaching, in this specific case, in the teaching of Spanish as a Foreign Language (E/LE). Through the explanation of some examples, the article points out the uses and the contributions of some aspects of the theory in the foreign language classroom by taking up some important concepts such as topoi, modifiers and connectors, through which the students will be able to understand and use the new language in order to get into effective communication. At the end of the article, we present some examples of the application of these concepts to the usage of online translation as a relevant learning tool in second language acquisition.

**Key words:** Argumentation Theory, Discourse Analysis, Spanish as a foreign language, connectors, online translation.

## Introduction: The Argumentation Theory

Argumentation is a complex process that has been part of humankind since the emergence of verbal communication. From a logical point of view, argumentation is a mechanism by which a range of premises and data relate to each other in order to obtain a new element usually called “conclusion”. From a rhetorical framework, argumentation is considered as a discursive strategy to get the people’s attention and persuade them to embrace the speaker’s points of view. Thus, within the classic rhetoric this process has been understood as *ars bene dicendi*, which reflects the speaker’s expertise to use the language when it comes to getting the audience’s attention. Nowadays, the pragmatic approaches to argumentation have defined it as a communicative act and have emphasized that there are more elements to be analyzed within the argumentative process. Since pragmatics includes essential notions such as speech act, conversational implicature, interaction and language behavior (Calvo Pérez 1994; Reyes 1990), it represents a considerable advance in the studies of both argumentation and communication (Cuenca 1995).

In this paper we will focus on the Argumentation Theory (TAL), developed by Oswald Ducrot together with his disciple Jean Claude Anscombre. They have shown that some language components that have been ignored by most of the orthodox linguists are in fact crucial in communication, which is essentially an argumentative procedure; these elements are the so-called discursive connectives and operators (Tordesillas 1993). Until recently, the importance of discursive markers in verbal language had been overlooked by those referentialist linguists who focused solely and exclusively on the language components which refer to certain things or ideas from the real world. On the contrary, Anscombre and Ducrot began to study very carefully the use of French connectives and modifiers such as *mais*, *même*, *peu* and *un peu* (but, even, little, a little). According to José Portolés (1988, 72), from then on, these elements are no longer considered as simple links between sentences, but they are regarded as units of meaning which provide argumentative instructions that enable the semantic relation between the connected sentence.

In *L’argumentation dans la langue*, first published in 1983, Anscombre and Ducrot defend a structuralist analysis which considers the language as part of an argumentative operation. To quote José Portolés (1988, 73), Anscombre and Ducrot claim that the speakers do not argue “with” the language, but “within” the language activity, and thus the discursive dynamic is conditioned by linguistic components:

The general thesis of the TAL is that the argumentative function of a discourse segment is at least partly determined by its linguistic structure, whether the segment in question is an utterance or a segment of an utterance [...] The argumentative function of discourse segments consists in their representing enunciators whose points of view have an argumentative orientation (Ducrot 2009, 50).

However, this approach has been rarely implemented for case studies in related fields such as literary criticism, comparative linguistics and second language acquisition. Under these premises we will try to show how the theoretical principles of the theory of argumentation are very useful to syllabus design and interesting classroom exercises intended to facilitate language learning. For this reason, it is necessary to present the theoretical fundamentals of Anscombe and Ducrot's proposal.

The Argumentation Theory has been developed at different moments which the authors themselves have divided in four stages. In the early phase, argumentation is seen as an entity separated from language. The authors focus mainly on the description of words that are essentially argumentative. Also, they claim that the most relevant language function is to mark the existence of argumentative concatenations conducted by connectives (Anscombe & Ducrot 1994, 195), for example:

- a. The boy studied very hard, *therefore*, [he] passed the exam.
- b. The boy studied very hard, *nevertheless*, [he] didn't pass the exam.
- c. The boy studied very hard, nevertheless, [he] passed the exam.

In the examples above, connectives have a decisive role in the utterances that lead the discourse to an intended conclusion: In (a) the use of the connective *therefore* guides the phrase to a positive conclusion about the situation (the boy passed the exam), but in (b) the connective *nevertheless* leads the chaining to the opposite conclusion: (he didn't pass the exam). However, the third example (c) conveys illogical information. It provides evidence of the main role of connectives in the language, because it is unlikely that such a chaining could be used by a "normal" speaker in a regular speech. Based on these findings, the authors labelled this scheme as an A→B type and according to them, the operating instructions of argumentative language usage are contained within the language itself (Anscombe & Ducrot 1994, 196). Hence, in this first stage, it is essential to study how these language components behave within the sentence as well as predict the type of conclusions that they will produce. The argumentative function of language lies at the core of the



phrase and is related to the capacity to describe the reality according to discursive rules.

At the second stage of TAL, the meaning of the utterances is primarily determined by the argumentative concatenations. It can be said that there are only a few differences of nuance between these two first phases. In comparison to the first stage of the theory, they added a description of the contents that may be used as argumentative ones, for example, the connective *but*:

I think that the function of *but* is to bring out the argumentative potential of discourse segments [...] It seems to me therefore that *but* for the same reason as *so* can bring out the argumentative function of discourse segments, that is to say the argumentative orientation of the points of view which a stretch of discourse represents. I don't think it can be described otherwise (Ducrot 2009, 52).

An interesting example also mentioned by Ducrot is the use of the operator *even*:

For my part, I say that when one links, when one connects two discourse segments with *even*, one represents the two segments as being orientated towards a same conclusion, that I arbitrarily call R, the second segment being a more forceful argument than the first relatively to that conclusion (Ducrot 2009, 53):

d. Tomorrow is going to be *even* hotter than today.

In (d), the usage of the operator *even* shows how this element can strengthen the argumentation. This argumentative operator leads the chaining to a conclusion like "Ok. Let's go for a swim tomorrow", that is to say, the phrases force their segments to be used in an argumentative way in order to move towards a certain direction. Therefore, argumentation is defined as a constituent element of meaning, and focuses on the functions of the argumentative operators, whose usage is decisive in the argumentative activity.

The third stage of TAL emphasizes that argumentation and semantics are two features integrated in language and this is the reason why Anscombe and Ducrot propose a framework based on an integrated pragmatics:

They called 'pragmatics' because it is concerned with the sort of meaning that can't be captured in terms of traditional truth-conditional semantics. What they mean by 'integrated' is that the non-truth-conditional aspects of the meaning [...] are, nevertheless, aspects of its encoded meaning and do not depend on the recovery of some prior truth-conditional semantic meaning [...] (Iten 1999, 43).

The fourth and most relevant phase is the *radical argumentativism*. This is both a review and a restructuring of the theory based on its initial findings and postulates. The distinguishing feature of radical argumentativism is the notion of *topos*, which is considered as an argumentative warrant of discourse. Generally speaking, the authors consider that the move of an argumentative utterance towards a conclusion is only possible thanks to general principles called *topoi* (Anscombe & Ducrot 1994, 207): “That principle, which ensures the validity or the legitimacy of the move from A to C is what, using the Aristotelian term, I will call a *topos*” (Ducrot 2009, 64). This notion is the basis of *topoi* theory, in which the argumentative functions of discourse segments are linked by connectives and operators; however, these elements are only the instructions to be followed in the discourse to refer to the *topos*, which enables the relation between an argumentative utterance (A) and a conclusion (C). Thus, radical argumentativism may be considered as a structuralist approach, in which each of its elements makes sense only when they relate to one another. In addition, this perspective underlines the argumentative function of language, which is not related to the context, but instead, it is written into the language itself since meanings are permanently constructed in utterances.

For the purposes of this article, it is important to explain in detail the fundamental concepts of TAL, which we believe are worthwhile to incorporate into second language acquisition:

*Argumentative connectives*: These elements connect two segments of an utterance. There are many types of them and they play an important role in the sequence of the discourse. Anscombe and Ducrot have studied extensively the French connective *mais* (but), which corresponds to two different words in the Spanish language: *pero*, which is an adversative connective, and *sino*, which performs as a contrasting connective. Here are some examples:

e. I bought a house, *but* I do not live in it.

Compré una casa, *pero* no vivo en ella.

f. My son does not want a fish as a pet, but a dog.

Mi hijo no quiere un pez como mascota, *sino* un perro.

*Argumentative operator*: It is a linguistic particle whose role is either to guide, strengthen or diminish the sufficiency of an argument—such as *even*, *almost*, *little*, *a little* (Fuentes & Alcaide 2007, 64). The distinctive feature of these morphemes lies in the fact that they provide certain

argumentative possibilities. One of the most helpful examples provided by Ansombre and Ducrot is the study of the operators *little* and *a little*, which do not represent quantity but instead they operate in the argumentative function of the utterance. Something similar happens with *almost* and *barely*, which do not represent temporal measures but instead they express different positions within the discourse:

g. The music is so loud that I can *barely* hear my voice.

La música es tan fuerte que apenas puedo oír mi voz.

h. My son is almost six years old.

Mi hijo tiene *casi* seis años.

In both (g) and (h) the argumentative operators direct the discourse to certain conclusions. In (g) the usage of *barely* has the role to reduce the semantic force of the verb *to hear*; in this situation the utterance could lead to a conclusion like “Let’s go out of here”. In (h) *almost* affects the semantic sufficiency of the age of six, so the utterance may bring a conclusion like “He is still a little boy”. Thus, these elements influence the sequence of the discourse and create certain types of conclusions. In fact, the operators affect the direction of the discourse in such a way that they have become a relevant subject of study in pragmatic studies.

*Argumentative orientation.* There are many language components that set the course of the argumentations to the intended direction and create a certain orientation of the phrases. Co-oriented segments are those that support an identical conclusion, just like in the following example:

i. Lydia is a very good cook. The dinner was delicious.

j. Lydia is a very good cook, that’s why the dinner was delicious.

Both in (i) and (j), the first segments are co-oriented to mean that the guests were delighted with a delicious homemade dinner. The first segments, thus, are used to reaffirm the conclusion “The dinner was delicious”. Particularly in (j) the connective *that’s why* bolsters the direction of the chaining. Conversely, anti-oriented segments present a disjunction between them in order to support the opposing segment that appears after the first part of the argument:

k. Lydia is not a very good cook but that dinner was delicious.

l. Lydia studied to be a chef; however, that dinner was tasteless.

In both examples, the connectives *but* and *however* connect anti-orientated segments which have an effect on the subsequent discourse as well as on the conclusions that may be assumed. In (k) the first segment is presented as an argument opposed to Lydia's cooking skills, in this case, the connective *but* guides the discourse to the other extreme "That dinner was delicious" and allows us to adopt a conclusion in favour of Lydia's fast learning skills. In (l), the connective *however* brings out a conclusion that opposes the first segment of the utterance which claims that Lydia is a professional cook. The second segment is argumentatively stronger so it justifies the conclusions against Lydia's cooking skills.

Argumentative orientation is a clear example of what Anscombe and Ducrot intended to demonstrate when they stated that one argues within the language, so in their theory every sentence predetermines the discourse dynamic precisely because this argumentative feature is inherent to every linguistic meaning (Portolés 2004, 234). In short, the co-oriented segments perform justification, confirmation, reinforcement and agreement functions. Instead, the anti-orientated ones express dialogical disagreement, replication, conferment, etc. (Fuentes & Alcaide 2007, 26).

*Argumentative strength and scales:* The TAL shows that two discourse segments that head to a conclusion may assemble in regard to their argumentative strength. The segments may increase or decrease their argumentative potential in order to guide the sentence to the intended conclusion. The higher the position of the argument in the scale, the stronger the segment is. The lower the position of the argument, the lower the strength is. For example:

- m. Alicia has eaten too much. She will gain weight. (+++)
- n. Alicia has eaten a lot. She will gain weight. (++)
- o. Alicia has not eaten much. She will gain weight. (+)
- p. Alicia has eaten little. She will gain weight. (-)

The examples (m) and (n) are situated in the same range of the argumentative scale: too much (+++), a lot (++) . Therefore, they are directed to the same conclusion "She will gain weight". On the contrary, (o) is situated at the lower point of the argumentative scale: not much (+), and (p) is already situated at the opposite end of the scale: little (-). Therefore, the arguments are not strong enough to get the conclusion "She will gain weight". Conversely, the segments lead the discourse to the conclusion "she won't gain weight" or even to the conclusion "she might

lose weight”. The main characteristic of argumentative scales is that what varies in them is the intensity of the argument. One can also say:

q. Well, Alicia has not eaten little. She will gain weight.

Argumentative scales can take several forms. Language quantifiers—some pronouns, adverbs and adjectives—can create a scale from a specific linguistic element which actually quantifies (Portolés 2004, 259).

*Realising and De-realising modifiers.* According to Ducrot’s realising (MR) and de-realising (MD) modifiers are also relevant elements in discourse. Their main function is to have an impact on the argumentative strength. Discursive operators and connectives may perform as modifiers within the sentences. The modifiers are orientation and strength elements that perform in relation to other elements such as adjectives and adverbs whose meanings vary when coupled with (MR) or (MD). The (MR) increase the argumentative strength of an adjective/adverb, and the (MD) decrease the argumentative power that adjectives and adverbs already have:

r. The food in this restaurant is quite good. (MR)

s. The student has shown considerable improvement this year (MR)

t. I felt a little bit tired after the journey. (MD)

u. There has been a slight drop in oil prices. (MD)

In (r) and (s) both *quite* and *considerable* play a role as realising modifiers inasmuch as they provide force to both the adjective *good* and the substantive *improvement*. In contrast, in examples (t) and (u) *a little bit* and *slight* are reducing the argumentative force of the second segments of the chaining.

## The Topoi Theory

According to Manuel Martí’s definition (2003, 7), discursive markers are a varied group of words whose function must be observed in relation to the circumstances in which an utterance appears. The markers have a double role: On the one hand, they are the connection between two sentences; on the other hand, markers are the key guiding principles to say what one means. Taking into account the relevance of the discursive makers, Ansombre and Ducrot noticed that there is a third important component to be described in the discourse sequence:

The first idea that I want to bring out is that when you have an argumentative string of the type argument-conclusion, there is always a reference to a third term which is distinct from both the argument and the conclusion, and which allows you to bridge the gap from one to the other. S.E. Toulmin called that third term, the *warrant*. When I say A, so C, I am supposing that there is something, a warrant, which allows me to bridge the gap from A to B (Ducrot 2009, 65).

The main contribution of the notion of *topos*, as mentioned above, is that it considers the intervention of a semantic element which warrants the argumentative links between the segments of concatenations. With this theory the authors set TAL as part of integrated pragmatics, since argumentation is not only a rhetorical phenomenon but a pragmatic and semantic outcome (Anscombe 1995; Bruxelles & De Chanay 1998). The argumentative activity cannot be only described as a relation between arguments and conclusions but has to be considered as a meaning-making activity. The relevance of the notion of *topos* is that it contains knowledge and beliefs that are socially accepted which allow the relation between arguments and conclusions (Fuentes & Alcaide 2007, 36). Ducrot tries to demonstrate this by using the following example:

It's warm, let's go for a walk,

in which the existing *topos* is: The warmer the climate is, the more pleasant the walk is.

In that regard, Van Eemeren and Grootendorst suggest the following explanation:

The use of argumentative operators can have the same effect. Compare the sentence "The ring costs only one hundred dollars" with the sentence "The ring costs no less than one hundred dollars". In a certain context, the first sentence can point to the conclusion "Buy the ring" and the second "Do not buy the ring". In the first sentence the argumentative operator only activates the *topos* "The cheaper the ring is, the more reason there is to buy it"; in the second sentence, the argumentative operator *no less than* activates the *topos* "The more expensive a ring is, the more reason there is not to buy it". (1996, 17)

Because the TAL establishes that gradualness is a key feature in language, *topoi* may come out in different forms, which are called *topic forms*: Topic forms (+P, +Q) or (-P, -Q) and topic forms (+P, -Q) or (-P, +Q):

T1 (+warm, +pleasant)(-warm, -pleasant)

For example: It's warm, let's go for a walk.

T2 (+warm, -pleasant)(-warm, +pleasant)

For example: It isn't warm, let's go for a walk.

Thus, the integration of the concept of *topical forms* will allow the implementation of linguistic description in the strict sense of the term, as the description of morphemes and structures whose combination represents the phrases of the language (Tordesillas 1992, 63). In addition, Anscombe and Ducrot claim that two types of topoi can be distinguished: *intrinsic topoi*, which are closely related to the lexical value of the words and *extrinsic topoi*, which acquire significance within the usage context.

To sum up, it is relevant to say that the topoi theory is very helpful to describe not only semantic features but also the discursive functions that operate in any utterance, in other words: arguing means to take action within the utterance in order to obtain certain conclusions. Argumentative segments are an integral part of any utterance, and furthermore, set up the meaning of the utterance itself (Tordesillas 1992, 53).

Another distinctive feature of Ducrot and Anscombe's Radical Argumentativity is that is not aimed at developing norms and criteria for the evaluation of argumentation. Its aim is exclusively descriptive: providing a description of the syntactic and semantic elements that play a role in the argumentative interpretation of sentences. (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1996, 17)

Based on the foregoing, both theoretical frameworks may lead to practical applications not only in the research of second language acquisition but also in some activities in the classroom.

## **Practical applications of TAL in teaching Spanish as a second language (E/LE)**

### *Discursive markers and communicative competence*

The current trends in the field of teaching Spanish as a foreign language are based on the notion of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which attempts to combine the traditional grammar approach with a more modern communicative focus with the aim of introducing the students to the new language through diverse communicative situations of everyday life:

A theory of language as communication lies at the very core of the CLT. Hymes (1972) advanced the notions of “competence” and “performance” introduced by Chomsky in the 1960s and stated that the goal of language teaching was to develop “communicative competence”, which implied acquiring both an ability and knowledge to use language. In other words, communicative competence considers language as a tool used for communication (Basta 2011, 126).

It is then fundamental that the students are able to comprehend the relevance of discursive markers when they are willing to communicate in a foreign language; therefore, the teacher is required to emphasize the argumentative nature of language during this process. However, this task has not been so easy to carry out. As M. A. Martín Zorraquino (2004, 55) has stated, the classification of these linguistic elements is still a complex task when considering the heterogeneity of discursive markers, their instructional features and their meaning processing character. Furthermore, the author claims that the lexicographic usage of discursive markers is not an easy issue to delimit, and therefore, the guidance that teachers should provide to the students of Spanish as foreign language represents also a complex matter (Martín Zorraquino 2004, 55). This complexity lies in the fact that the discursive markers do not have specific denotative meanings – unlike the structured lexicon – because these discursive particles mark the speaker’s position in relation to the message that the speaker himself emits, or even, in relation to the connection that the speaker establishes between the content sequences that appear within the discourse (Martín Zorraquino 2004, 54). In short, there is no fixed classification of discursive markers so far, and this is the reason why it has been presented as a difficult issue to clarify to the students.

We do not doubt, on our part, that the TAL may be very helpful to reinforce the communicative competences of E/LE students since it provides an approach which can lead them to better understand the argumentative qualities of the effective usage of discursive markers. By these means, the need of permanent classifications of discursive particles, which most of the time can result in confusing issues to the students, would no longer represent a fundamental problem. Let us explain this in detail by using some frequency markers as an example:

- a. *Siempre* uso la misma marca de jabón. Nunca pruebo otros.

(I *always* use the same brand of soap. I never try another one.)



- b. La *educación* básica será gratuita. Los niños de Bolivia estarán *siempre* agradecidos.

(Basic education will be free. The children in Bolivia will *always* be grateful.)

In both of these examples, the first segments of the utterances are marked with a particle that indicates frequency. These particles may also be replaced by other similar markers which have the same, or at least similar argumentative effects. In (a) *siempre* can be replaced by *diariamente* because it keeps the same orientation intended to connect with the conclusion “No me gusta probar otros”.

*Diariamente* uso la misma marca de jabón. No me gusta probar otros.

(I use the same brand of soap *every day*. I never try another one.)

Conversely, the use of markers such as *eternamente* (*eternally*) do not fit within the sentence since the argumentative scale used in (a) is “The better the quality of something, the more you use it”. Here, the topos that appears in the utterance is “The more satisfaction in using something, the less desire to change it”, therefore, this topos does not admit that one can use the same soap *eternally*, since this morpheme refers to an imperishable asset. In (b), the situation is different, because in this utterance it is possible to replace *siempre* by *eternamente*; the two segments of the utterance agree with the topos “The less expensive the education is, the more benefits for the children”. Since education represents a big value in occidental societies, this can be assessed as an intangible value which has a positive impact on people’s lives and therefore, on the future generations of Bolivian students:

La *educación* básica será gratuita. Los niños de Bolivia estarán *eternamente* agradecidos.

(Basic education will be free. The children in Bolivia will be eternally grateful.)

In order to convey the same message, it is possible to use the markers *por siempre* or *para siempre* as well. Once again, these two examples emphasize the gradualness of the language, and show that even though we are dealing with different types of markers (*eternamente* features usually as a modal marker while *siempre* features as a frequency one), the functional characteristics of both may vary depending on the argumentative purposes of the utterance and in regard to the topos that is

being evoked. We could go even further and request our students to find a suitable connective to link the two segments of the utterance:

c. Siempre uso la misma marca de jabón, *por eso* nunca compro otros.  
(I always use the same brand of soap, *that's why* I never buy any other ones.)

d. La educación básica será gratuita, por lo tanto los niños de Bolivia estarán *siempre* agradecidos.

(Basic education will be free, *and hence* the children in Bolivia will *always* be grateful.)

This is exactly the reason why we claim that it is more helpful to motivate the students to explore the argumentative values of each marker rather than confusing them with a lot of categorizations. In order to achieve this goal, we could propose and design classroom activities that combine both vocabulary and communicative aspects which will allow the students to discover these argumentative features. We propose the following example:

*Relaciona la noticia con la reacción más adecuada*

He llegado tarde a la estación y *casi* pierdo mi tren a Madrid.

¡Vaya que eres afortunado!

Estoy feliz *porque* he terminado mis estudios.

¡Qué buena noticia...ya era hora!

No me gusta mi trabajo *por eso* buscaré otro.

¡Qué suerte has tenido!

Después de muchos años, *por fin* nos casaremos.

¡Enhorabuena!

Mi jefe es muy exigente *pero* es un jefe justo.

Pues ¡mucho suerte!

In this exercise the students should match the expression that better continues the discourse. The teacher should underline the discursive markers as a key factor to find the right solution. For example:

e. He llegado tarde a la estación y *casi* pierdo mi tren a Madrid.

This utterance can be matched with the expression ¡Qué suerte has tenido! (You were lucky!), because the modifier *casi* (almost) states that the action was about to happen but happily it did not. A different expression like ¡Vaya que eres afortunado! (You are so fortunate!) is in this case a viable option, unless otherwise the utterance is stated in the present tense. The next example may be explained in the following terms:

f. Después de muchos años, por fin nos casaremos.

In (f), the marker *por fin* (finally) reinforces the second segment of the utterance. It is widely accepted that after many years of waiting, it is good news when someone is getting married, so in this case *por fin* leads the discourse to the conclusion “¡Ya era hora!” (It was time to do this!) which does not only reinforce the argument, but also conveys an agreement about the information that has been said. One can observe this behavior also in the last phrase of the exercise:

g. Mi jefe es muy exigente pero es un jefe justo.

As mentioned above, the adversative connective *pero* reinforces the second segment of the chaining, and in this specific case, it privileges the good characteristic of the person over the bad aspects. Even though the utterance contrasts two aspects (negative and positive), it is common to prefer a fair and strict boss, to having an unfair and strict boss. Thanks to the topoi “The more fair the boss is, the better he is” this utterance, can lead most probably to a conclusion like “¡Vaya que eres afortunado!” and less probably to a conclusion like “Pues ¡Mucha suerte!”

In short, such exercises provide the students with better tools to develop their communicative competences, by being aware of the argumentative features of the discursive markers. In this way, we attempt to overcome the model in which markers are mere parallel elements of the language and, therefore, to make the students understand that discursive markers are essential elements to achieve an adequate command of the Spanish language.

## Online translators as learning tools

The use of translation tools is very important for the students during the second language learning process. Until recently, bilingual dictionaries were the main instrument for the resolution of lexical doubts or queries. Since the emergence of the Internet, the use of online translation tools has become increasingly popular among E/LE students and many times it represents an important instrument in the development of communicative competences. Unlike the traditional dictionaries, online translators

presented a unique innovation: the possibility to translate complete sentences and texts. However, it has not taken us too much time to realize that there is something that is still missing in this kind of computer applications, and it is indeed that they are not able to translate the sense of what an utterance is intended to mean.

Very often, it does happen that the students come to teachers to ask if the translation obtained from a certain translator really expresses what they are trying to convey, and in many cases, it does not correspond to the student's communicative aim. In terms of the TAL, the answer to this question seems to be clear: because of the argumentative nature of the language, meanings are constructed within the discursive dynamic, and therefore, online translators cannot capture the meaning of utterances. Let us mention the most common example: Google Translator. Whereas it is undeniable that such kinds of instruments are useful to translate words and short phrases, Google translator works, unfortunately, only at the lexical level of the sentence, which means that in the majority of cases, it translates the exact meaning of the words by following certain syntactic parameters. In short, Google translator cannot translate arguments. The lecturers and language trainers should advise the students about this limitation. Instead, we recommend tools such as Linguee.com, which is a free-online translation tool that presents itself as a new and easy tool to discover foreign languages and cultures. In our opinion, Linguee.com may be considered as a pragmatic dictionary since it offers a lot of possible argumentative uses of the words and sentences requested by the students. For example, the translation into Spanish of the operator *quite a few*<sup>1</sup>:

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However, encryption technology is still in its infancy, and there are quite a few barriers to the export of civil encryption systems.  
*euoparl.europa.eu*

Las técnicas de codificación están aún en pañales y existen muchas trabas para la exportación de sistemas civiles de codificación.  
*euoparl.europa.eu*

In my view, quite a few options are still left open.  
*euoparl.europa.eu*

En mi opinión, aún existen numerosas opciones en este terreno.  
*euoparl.europa.eu*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.linguee.mx/ingles-espanol/traduccion/quite+a+few.html>, retrieved 9.11.2016.

Quite a few Cuban-Americans are already thinking of encouraging a punishment vote.  
*cubasocialista.cu*

No pocos cubano-americanos están pensando ya en promover un voto de castigo.  
*cubasocialista.cu*

As can be seen in the examples above, Linguee dictionary shows not only the lexical meaning of *quite* and *few*, but it also shows the construction *quite a few* (adverb) as an argumentative operator. Thus, the students can get a wide range of translations, and by doing so, they will have a better insight into the different argumentative uses of this adverb in different kinds of contexts. To show one more case, we can try to obtain possible translations into English of the Spanish connective *pues*<sup>2</sup>:

Podemos hacernos mejores practicando a menudo y regularmente, pues la práctica hace al maestro.  
*urantia-uai.org*

We can become better by practicing often and regularly for practice makes perfect.  
*urantia-uai.org*

Esto es beneficioso para el superior interés del niño en cuestión, puesa corta el tiempo que tendrá que esperar una familia.  
*hcch.net*

It is in the best interest of that specific child, as it shortens the time he / she will have to wait for a family.  
*hcch.net*

In both cases, *pues* may be translated into any morpheme that performs as a causal connector (*for*, *because*, *since*), provided that it accomplishes the causal relation that the sentence is intended to convey. In other cases, the Spanish adverb *pues* marks a logical consequence in the discourse, and may be translated into the English adverbs *thus*, *hence* or *therefore*<sup>3</sup>:

Los cristianos eran, pues, considerados también por Tácito como gente despreciable, capaz de crímenes horrendos.  
*catacombe.roma.it*

Thus the Christians were believed by Tacitus as well to be a despicable people, capable of horrendous crimes.  
*catacombe.roma.it*

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.linguee.mx/espanol-ingles/traduccion/pues.html>, retrieved 9.11.2016.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.linguee.mx/espanol-ingles/traduccion/pues.html>, retrieved 16.6.2017.

And, finally, *pues* may also perform conversational features, just like in (h) where *pues* has the equivalent argumentative functions as the English interjection *well*:

h. *Pues* es hora de empezar la reunión.

(Well, it is time to start the meeting)

We have presented the examples above with the aim of showing how Linguee.com can be a very effective tool for the students when it comes to learning the diverse characteristics and functions of some discursive markers. In this connection, we conclude that online translation tools might be very useful tools for the students as long as they are aware of their advantages and disadvantages, especially in regard of the argumentative features, not only of discursive markers but also of every word they use. As an overall conclusion, we reaffirm our initial claim that the theory of argumentation implemented in the foreign language teaching activities fosters the development of the communicative competences of the students. In this regard, the TAL is also helpful for lecturers and language trainers in explaining the functions of diverse discursive markers without falling into the trap of complex and confusing classifications.

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# REINVENTING SOUTH SLAVIC PHILOLOGY? BORDER STUDIES AND THE BALKANS IN BERLIN

CHRISTIAN VOSS

## Introduction

The following paper will present Slavic studies at the Humboldt University as a future partner for cooperation with the University of Niš, starting with a contract in the “*ERASMUS+ Western Balkans*” framework in summer 2017. I will therefore present my Department and describe ongoing research projects. This is why the paper has a narrative character and will forgo bibliography or footnotes.

## Slavic studies abroad

Slavic studies are seen as a “small discipline”, what is known in Germany as an “orchid discipline“, but should in reality be classified as a “big small discipline” (if you compare it with archaeology or Celtic studies). The best source of information on the discipline is the voice of the German professional association, the annual “*Bulletin of German Slavic Studies*” published by Otto Sagner Publishers which is also available online. In the annually updated “*Who’s Where*” of Slavic studies, 32 university locations with at least one Slavonic professorship can be counted today.

The reduction of department chairs within the so-called “small disciplines” at German universities has reached between 10-20% in the last twenty years. When we talk about the development of these small disciplines in this period, we must consider that this time is significantly influenced by the political turn of 1989, German reunification, the breakup of Yugoslavia and the expansion of the European Union, which is a one-sided eastern and partly south-eastern enlargement.

Why did Slavic studies fail since the 1990s to achieve to take over the dominant position that it might be entitled to because of its socio-political



importance? Slavic studies is by its very nature an eastward-oriented science that has been represented already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at German-speaking universities by scholars who spoke a Slavic mother tongue. Prominent chairs for Slavic studies were located in the central and eastern Europe—for example in cities like Königsberg, Breslau or Leipzig—and thus in regions that ceased being German after 1918, after 1945 or were separated from Western scholarly traditions due to the German partition after 1945.

### Slavic studies in West Germany after 1945

The West German Slavic studies tradition thus experienced the post-war period much more intensely as a “*zero hour*” or as a *tabula rasa* than Romance studies or German studies and began anew with very few locations, like in Cologne, Göttingen or the Free University Berlin. In the course of the education reform of the 1970s under the social democratic governments of Willy Brandt and later Helmut Schmidt, something occurred that is referred to as mushrooming by the Americans, where politically motivated chairs and professorships for Slavic studies sprang up like mushrooms.

Western German Slavic Studies was not particularly political and did not conduct intentionally political research; nevertheless, it seemed to be a *Feindwissenschaft*, in the broadest sense an attempt to “know and control your enemy.” Experts with knowledge of the Russian language and the East were urgently needed. From my personal point of view I would even suggest this resulted in a problem of quality among Slavists, when a small field like ours suddenly has more demand than supply for junior staff. When, in a short time, ten academic departments expanded to thirty departments with at least two professorships each, one can easily imagine regular appointment process norms being invalidated; even an image problem for Slavist studies may have emerged.

Because of the lack of personal continuity in Slavic studies, the discipline did not confront its past during the Nazi period, as was common in other fields, like political sciences and especially ethnology, at the latest since the student movement of the late 1960s. The occasional comment that there had never been a “brown Slavic studies” cannot explain this sufficiently. Scholars like Maximilian Braun, Wolfgang Gesemann or Alois Schmaus – all three with very close ties to Serbia – would have been challenged more rigorously in other fields than in Western German Slavic studies, which chose another path to dealing with the sins of their fathers:

they professionalized themselves through depoliticization and a thorough withdrawal from the diachrony.

Scholars like Reinhold Olesch or Hans Rothe could hardly be defined as practicing either linguistics or literary studies and covered the intellectual history of the whole Slavic world including early Slavic settlement history and Dostoevskij in their lectures and publications. Since the 1970s, on the other hand, the various Slavonic studies presented themselves as a narrowly defined discipline. A paradigmatic model could be seen in the “Circle of Konstanz” (*Konstanzer Kreis*), which, since the early 1970s until today, has been publishing an annual anthology titled “Slavonic Linguistics”. The main goal of this loose association is tying Slavic studies to the current theoretical discussion in general linguistics.

This process certainly correlates with the restructuring of universities at that time, that is, the strengthening of the faculties and the gradual growth of network research funding by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Consequently, today a Slavonic linguist has more discussion topics in common with a colleague in the English linguistics or German philology than with a colleague in Slavonic literary studies. The radical peak of this development can be seen at the University of Konstanz, where this separation has been institutionalized in the university administration.

In this process of professionalization during the 1970s and 1980s, a period I like to call the era of “undirected, apolitical *Feindwissenschaft*“, Slavic studies abandon core competencies in cultural history that were urgently needed in the 1990s and after, to accompany, legitimize and interpret the eastward expansion of the European Union as a science of neighborliness or even friendship (*Freundeswissenschaft*).

I summarize: Slavic studies retired into an ivory tower in the 1970-1980s to become highly intellectual, methodical and theoretical at the peak of its time, but without historical or intercultural competencies. It thus failed in the 1990s to meet the challenges of a modern, politically relevant eastern-European area studies.

### **South Slavic studies in Germany today**

South Slavic studies are the weakest branch of Slavonic studies and in a very defensive position. Not only has the department of South Slavic studies in Tübingen been closed, this will be the fate of the discipline in Leipzig with the retirement of Uwe Hinrichs and presumably in Halle with the retirement of Angela Richter. What remains are the South Slavic chairs in Berlin and Jena (the latter held by Gabriella Schubert until 2008)—two eastern German universities.

I want to explain this development on two levels that certainly intertwine. The Yugoslav wars of the 1990s initially led to a hierarchization of Eastern Europe in public discourse: today there exists an EU-compatible and civilizable Eastern Central Europe that quickly found its way in the European Union. This is contrasted with the deeply seated negative stereotype of the Balkans as a site of endless hatred and pointless violence that was apparently confirmed by the Yugoslav wars. The effects of this perception of the European southeast on the structural development of Slavonic studies should not be underestimated. In western Germany, Slavonic Studies Institutes exist as a “*Containerslawistik*”, in which the respective professor tries to cover the whole Slavic world of languages more or less equally. Russian has of course always been and continues to be the strongest pillar.

During the 1990s—apart from some well-equipped institutions in eastern regions like Leipzig, Jena or Berlin—South Slavic studies departments in the remainder of Germany were gradually devolved. The federal higher education reforms that gave universities more autonomy increased the pressure to increasingly pass on budget cuts to ever lower levels, that is, the faculty and even the institute level. Here the loss of prestige of the south-eastern European countries during the Yugoslav wars had an effect.

The other side of the coin is the strong upgrading of West Slavic Studies, also as a result of the EU enlargement in 2004. Polish was emancipated as a Slavonic language that is at least as much in demand as Russian, and federal states like Saxony and Brandenburg discovered their economic interest in Western Slavic countries. While professorships were often advertised as being in “Slavic studies” 20 to 30 years ago, “competencies in Russian and Polish” often limit the scope of such appointments in more recent years. That said, German Academic Exchange Service DAAD programs like, for example, the ERASMUS+ specialization “Western Balkan”, which is financially extremely well-equipped, counterbalance this development.

### **New competitiveness in German academia: The Excellence Initiative**

The structural context that has most significantly shaped research planning in Germany for over 10 years is the so-called Excellence Initiative. It is the result of the political desire to diversify the—quite homogenous—German university landscape and establish one or two German Oxfords and Harvards. As a result, domestic competition for

additional federal financing was introduced in two rounds in 2007 and 2012; the third round has been announced for 2019.

Since the Excellence Initiative requires universities to specialize on profile sectors, it directly threatens the comprehensive university model (in the sense of *universitas*) and in particular the small disciplines. Overall, the social costs of the division of universities in over-financed areas of excellence and, on the other side, areas that have to finance this division are, in the long term, very high.

The rules of the Excellence Initiative can be circumscribed as a “*triathlon*”: The status of a ‘university of excellence’ can only be achieved by those institutions evaluated positively by the German Research Foundation in all three disciplines (the so-called “three pillars”)—first: graduate school, second: cluster, third: future concept.

The third pillar is irrelevant in terms of research content, it instead focuses on the overall concept of university presidents written in the future tense, focussing on political spheres like internationalization, governance, diversity or gender equality.

Besides the well-known graduate school concept (the first pillar), the cluster format (the second pillar) is most interesting; it is to some extent an exponentiation of the existing format of the collaborative research centre (in German “Sonderforschungsbereich”, SFB) that explores major issues for a period of nine to twelve years, with ideally ca. 15 sub-projects and annual budgets of ca. 2 million Euros. I myself completed much of my academic qualification in such a collaborative research centre in the cultural sciences: “Identities and alterities” in Freiburg in the Black Forest.

The clusters, which are ideally three to five times the size of a collaborative research centre and where about 200 researchers work together or side-by-side, will ideally continue as permanent institutions beyond the funding period of the Excellence Initiative. This format clearly has its origins in the natural sciences, where the convergence of physics and chemistry or the new life sciences is urgently needed. For us in the humanities, the cluster format is highly questionable.

The question is whether Slavic Studies can at all participate in such very broad research programs or even co-design them. My diagnosis is clearly: no. As a regional science that could have developed a pioneering methodical role based on the particularities of its subject matter (post-communist transition), Slavic studies failed – after the fall of the Berlin Wall, our field should have experienced its hour of glory. It missed the opportunity.

## South Slavic linguistics and Cultural studies in Berlin

I was appointed professor at the Humboldt University (HU) in 2006 based among other things on my habilitation work completed in 2004 on political and linguistic borders in the Balkans. In the following, I want to present how, focusing on this case study, I have tried to develop additional projects at the interface of sociolinguistics, history and ethnology and in turn to establish border and South-East Europe research institutionally at my university. This is not that easy considering that the HU currently rates among the five best universities in Germany and clearly occupies second place in research ranking in the area of the humanities (behind, as chance would have it, the other Berlin University, the Free University).

### Macedonia as the first case study

In my habilitation in 2004 I described the Macedonian standard-dialect continuum. An extreme divergence can be identified since 1913 and especially since 1944: north of the border a linguistically supported *nation-building* in the Tito-Yugoslav context took place while in the south, the dialects were repressively assimilated. Already its conceptualisation as a standard-dialect continuum reveals a problem, because this continuum is Macedonian from the point of view of Skopje and Bulgarian from that of Sofia.

In addition to the description parameters of vitality and intercomprehension, the aspect of identity gains in importance, which is often virulent and overwhelms minority groups when the time comes to permit a minority variety as a written school language.

Has the border-related divergence been sufficient to develop a linguistically resilient special identity and a resource for mobilization? Can we find a “*dialectal renaissance*” in South-Eastern Europe as we have in Western Europe? If so, then it should be seen in the context of *glocalization* but also as an “*unexpected rebellion*”, so William Beer, who wrote on France, that is, a regionalist, ecological, anti-centralist movement since the 1970s. Or will dialectal loyalty be limited to the subversive appeal of *covert prestige* and simply hold the same value of masculinity as the smoking of filterless cigarettes? Is identification with the possible *kin state* beyond the border enough for the group to also identify linguistically?

This is especially exciting in the case of Aegean Macedonia because of the four Slavic nationalisms raising territorial *claims* extending to Thessaloniki itself based on the Slavic population there in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Bulgaria, Serbia, then Yugoslavia and, today, Macedonia. The historical

region of Macedonia is even today dialectically divided – with the border somewhere in between Thessaloniki and Serres. To some extent it mirrors the Macedonian-Bulgarian divergence on the standard level. It would be highly informative (and so far, not implemented systematically, at least not by me) to create dialectal *mental maps* and trace the perception of mutual comprehension in the village population. These are, of course, generalisations of chats on the street that informants held on short trips to Macedonia and/or Bulgaria, but at the same time a condensed expression of ethnic self-positioning, and highly subjective and contradictory.

There exists, for example, a study conducted by Angel Angelov in 2001 on the Macedonian-Bulgarian border region, where Bulgarian informants throughout claimed to understand Macedonian but did not know the numerous Serbian loans, whereas on the other hand the Macedonian informants, who strongly rejected any linguistic proximity to Bulgarian, could to a large extent understand Bulgarian (and perceived it as an obsolete *high variety*).

The question is to what extent the level of perception and attitude is able to cause collective language change or influence identity discourses.

### “Melting Borders”

One of my best third-party-funded projects is titled “*Melting Borders. An Ethnography of Movement of Peoples and Goods in Border-Areas between Greece and the Republic of Macedonia*” and covers the same spatial context of my habilitation, although applying a completely different methodological approach developed by the ethnographer Rozita Dimova, who has recently been appointed to the University of Ghent.

Rozita Dimova is a well-know ethnographer and author of “*Ethno-Baroque. Materiality, Aesthetics and Conflict in Modern-Day Macedonia*” (2013), in which she retraced the Albanian-Macedonian conflict that escalated in the spring and summer 2001 on the basis of narratives on living room furniture and, ultimately, consumer behaviour in Yugoslav times.

“*Melting Borders*” broaches the issue of border porosity between Greece and Macedonia, which exists in spite of the undomesticated political-diplomatic conflict on the right to use the myth of Alexander in the naming and symbolism of the Republic of Macedonia that has been simmering since the 1990s. The project shows how border area residents on both sides – namely Florina-Bitola and Gevgeli-Salonica – negotiate social and material disparity in a neoliberal context according to their needs and in doing so undermine dominant political discourses.

Out of the daily routine of small border traffic, Rozita Dimova focuses on casinos, dental surgeries and beauty salons on the Macedonian side in so-called “*Balkan Las Vegas*” Gevgeli, which are being frequented increasingly by Greeks due to the worsening financial crisis. Additionally, the question arises of how not only ethnic Greeks, but also members of Slavic-speaking minorities could possibly use these economically-motivated border crossings for negotiating their own identity and come out linguistically or not.

### **The Pomak minority along the Greek-Bulgarian border**

My first third-party-funded project in Berlin surveyed indigenous Slavic-speaking Muslims in Western Thrace. Since their incorporation into the Greek state after World War One, the Pomaks experienced repression and discrimination on the part of the Greek state, but unlike Slavic speakers in the Macedonian area of Florina/Lerin and Edessa/Voden, they did not face cultural and linguistic assimilation.

This crucial difference is based on their status as a religious minority after the population exchange between Greece and Turkey that took place after the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Two effects can be identified: On the one hand, language is not an issue for Pomaks—Islam is a sufficient symbol of dissimilation for them. On the other hand, nearly the whole group is encompassed by a Turkish transnationalism. Since liberalization in the 1990s, we can observe a strong dynamic within the stable collective trilingualism of the group.

Pomaks are situated within a greater context of Balkan Muslims and the question whether Muslims cultivate confessionalities. All in all, we can see on the map that the phantom of a “*green transversal*”, which is consistently invoked by European right-wing extremists, is a chimaera.

Balkan Muslims are in no way a discourse community and have no collective identity (beyond being a Muslim *umma*, but that is present among Turks in Berlin-Kreuzberg as well). They are far from being *one* group in any social, linguistic, ethnic or religious sense, for they have predominantly—with the exception of Bosnia—maintained their local and micro-regional self-conception from Ottoman times. Above all, they share a common destiny, since they were stylized as a group in terms of their alterity and alienness since the emergence of ethnic nationalism in South East Europe beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Pomaks—in contrast to the population of the Greek-Macedonian space—cannot simply be considered in a reciprocal relationship of two nation-states and their respective minorities.

For Pomaks, being instrumentalized trilaterally by Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey means that they draw even more so than other *borderlanders* on neutral, local affiliations. After the Greek decision—following a foreign policy doctrine vilifying the greater “threat from the north” (Bulgaria) instead of the “threat from the east” (Turkey)—to turkify Pomaks in a Greek-Turkish minority school system in 1951, especially Greek right-wing parties and extremists support a Pomak regionalism and the development of the Pomak language to divide the Muslim group in Western Thrace.

How the EU is intervening as a *player* in regional relations and pursuing a policy of cohesion becomes visible, for example, in its project of *Pan-European corridors*. After the Rhodope Mountains ceased being a restricted military area after the Cold War, the EU today is building four-lane highways across the deserted mountain range and has opened two new border-crossing points in this Pomak area, a small one near Xanthi (Thermes) and a larger one near Makaza (north of Komotini)—the latter being part of *Pan-European Corridor* number 9, which extends from Kaliningrad and Helsinki via Moscow, Chisinau and Bucharest to Alexandroupoli.

The project was obstructed by Athens and Sofia for a long time since it allegedly improves contact only between Muslim and/or Turkish communities of both countries.

For the Greek as well as the Pomak populations, increased mobility and cross-border cohesion, the goal of this EU spending, is not taking place. Considering the Greek financial crisis, both communities fear an overturning of the welfare gap and the loss of economic superiority to Bulgaria, which has been stable for decades.

The open border is indeed intervening in the *linguistic landscape*. Linguistic landscape (being a consequence of the visual turn) is a relatively new approach developed in multilingual megacities and focuses on the visual representation of language hierarchies in bi- or multilingual milieus. Besides Turkish and Greek and after almost 100 years of absence, Bulgarian Cyrillic is experiencing a comeback in commercial advertising.

The case study of the Pomaks combines historical and ethnological methods. As a *longue-durée*-layer, we can observe Muslims obeying the old Ottoman logics of *millet* and religion as nuclei for ethnicity; at the same time, however, we can observe the conflation of Islam and Turkdöm. The analysis of this historic attachment can and must be completed by ethnologic fieldwork means describing very recent processes like small border traffic. That said, only a complementary application of both approaches will lead to an accurate description of the phenomenon.



## Borders in the Albanian-speaking area

My third linguistic case study is the roofless fringe of the Albanian language area. Within the context of the “Albanian question”, reconvergence processes in laboratory quality are taking place that could lead to further shifts of borders in South-East Europe in the medium term.

In a further third-party project sponsored by the DFG, Lumnije Jusufi has investigated since 2014 the long-term linguistic consequences of the Yugoslav experiment on the Albanian-speaking population, 40 per cent of which remained outside the borders of the newly founded Albanian state in 1912 and consequently being roofed by South-Slavic languages in the Macedonian and Kosova areas under varying circumstances (Serbian monarchy, monarchist interwar Yugoslavia, Socialist Yugoslavia).

The project retraces this process and explores the potential of an Albanian pluricentrism and the development of a Gheg Albanian standard, which would tend to be more archaic, less balkanized and showing traces of Slavic contact-induced language change.

This microstudy on divergence and recent vertical advergence—the Gheg dialect accommodating to the Tosk standard—has a high indicative value for the role of language in the cohesion process of Albanian-speakers from Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia as overtly propagated by nationalist parties in Kosovo.

Here we do not describe those sites of ethnic violence being focussed on by conflict-oriented news reporting such as Kosovska Mitrovica or the Preševo valley, but on a rural, uneventful space, which nevertheless shows how an old, in this case Albanian *hinterland* is gradually refocusing on the only urban centre in region, Debar, on the other side of the border, in dialectal and social respects.

## Summary

I would like to summarize the following points as research questions and possible unique selling points of border research as related to South-East Europe:

1. In spite of the ambivalence of the non-aligned Yugoslav state, many borders of South-East Europe were impermeable and subject to the security regime of the *Iron Curtain*. The Iron Curtain was legitimized by the Greek-Bulgarian discourse of being arch-enemies since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.
2. On both sides of the border the relation of the local residents towards the new demarcations is relevant: How are they fabricated,

interpreted, represented or even revoked in daily routines of society?

3. Within the border societies new configurations of regional affiliation are also emerging; especially in the case of Greek biopolitics of settling Asia Minor in the 1920s in the Greek north, indigenism as being *dopios*, being local, is sufficient for the Slavic population to found a group identity.
4. The border remains an arrangement of interrelations and a location of social interaction, so that the aspect of permeability becomes central to showing the social and asymmetric character of borders. Illegal and subversive practices like smuggling also convert borders into a resource.
5. Many borders in the Balkans do not have any legitimacy in the eyes of the local population, especially when the demarcation of the border cut through family and social networks. Therefore, it is a challenge for state bodies to authorize the border (for instance, to present it as a security mechanism; in official GDR language use, for example, the Berlin Wall was labeled an “antifascist protection wall”).
6. Borders mark spaces of identity; often borders are drawn around language areas to create or exclude politically enactable identities. As Hobsbawm’s bon mot shows—“*Languages multiply with states, not the other way around*”—the debate on language and especially the distinctivity of languages is a highly politicized field.
7. In the Balkans, we see not only opened, free borders since the end of the bloc confrontation, but also reflections of the global trend of reterritorialization—and this is not, in fact, a recent development connected to the refugee route across the Balkans and attempts at its containment. It was no coincidence that Idomeni on the Greek-Macedonian border became the external border of the European Union for several months in 2016 with the absurd situation that non-member Macedonia took on the role of safeguarding Europe while EU-member Greece was crowded by unwelcome refugees. Here, the European political center simply exploited local conflicts in the Balkans for its own purposes, knowing that the Macedonian-Greek border was mentally closed.

### **New networks on borders in Berlin**

In conclusion, I would like to introduce five networks that in different ways circle around the topic of borders in the Balkans.

1. Between 2008 and 2013, a network project with the self-explanatory title “*Remaking Eastern Borders in Europe: A network exploring social, moral and material relocations of Europe’s Eastern Peripheries*” was established under the direction of anthropologist Sarah Green (at the time in Manchester, today in Helsinki) and funded by *European Science Foundation* in the form of a *European Cooperation in Science and Technology* (COST).

Its target was to describe the transformation processes of Eastern European borders. With the profile issues of money, gender and sexuality, the ethnological focus on the daily life experiences of the post-socialist transition brought together more than 200 researchers from more than 20 countries.

2. Fortunately, the leadership of the Humboldt University is aware and even proud of its “eastern orientation” from before 1989 and has developed a Central European network with DAAD *Strategic partnership* funding that finances a total of twelve individual projects with the universities of Prague, Warsaw, Vienna and Budapest.
3. The DAAD is supporting by means of Erasmus+ academic exchange with countries outside the European Union—the main objective being the export of German model curricula—and actually provides large amounts of money for the so-called Western Balkans. We therefore founded a network with Belgrade, Kragujevac and Sarajevo (2015-17) and in the second application period with Tirana, Prishtina and Montenegro (2016-18), into which we have now incorporated the University of Niš as well (2017-19).
4. With internationalization moneys from the Excellence Initiative, and drawing on the heritage of Alexander von Humboldt’s *Kosmos*-lectures in 1825, the Humboldt University started its *Kosmos* programme, which supports, among other things, two very well financed summer universities per year.

Under the name “*Phantom borders – real boundaries. European experiences after 1989 in a global perspective*”, Hannes Grandits, Nenad Stefanov and I gathered more than 20 international postgraduates in September 2015 to develop book projects in three working groups – “*Transfer and Mobility*”, “*Center and Periphery*” and “*Integration and Discrimination*”.

5. The interdisciplinary centre *Crossing Borders* (cf. <https://crossing-borders.hu-berlin.de/de>), which was established by our academic senate in September 2015, has as its object the various forms, practices and consequences of drawing and traversing borders.

The centre puts—alongside the experiences of cities and universities with divisions and overcoming them—the relation between symbolic and territorial, topographic and topologic processes of border drawing into the focus of interdisciplinary and comparative research contexts and is also intended to integrate post-colonial and intersectional approaches. Thus, borders are understood in a constructivist manner: they limit the scope of social orders. Implicitly, this centre includes a strategic self-positioning of Slavic studies and Eastern European area studies.



COMMENTARY:  
LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT  
OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXCHANGE—  
HOW MUCH TIME DOES A STUDENT NEED  
TO MASTER THE LANGUAGE OF THE HOST  
COUNTRY?

DUNJA ŽIVANOVIĆ

### Outline

This paper explores the process of language learning in the context of high school student international mobility. A growing number of students around the world decide to spend a school year in another country with the aim of mastering a foreign language and bringing it up to a native-like level. However, it is not very clear how much time and which circumstances are required to achieve this goal. In this piece of research we are interested in the time frame of the process, mainly how much time is needed for students to switch to the target language and stop relying on English, and also how much time is needed for them to learn the language sufficiently to complete school tasks.

**Key words:** foreign language learning, international student mobility.

### Introduction

The widespread belief that one best learns a foreign language in the country where this language is spoken is one of the strongest motivators for young people around the world to take part in various programmes of international mobility during schooling. According to some estimates, over 9.2 million youth in the world take part in some kind of international mobility programmes and out of this number 1.3 million take part in secondary school mobility programmes. While these figures are rising,

what also rises is the pedagogical interest in the quality of the learning processes related to such programmes, in order to evaluate their educational outcomes and maximise their effects.

Bearing in mind that language learning in the study abroad context is far more complex than the often oversimplified and misleading popular beliefs about language learning tend to suggest, research in this area aims to explore more systematically the factors which influence language learning in this setting, such as the length and structure of a programme, the role of previous language education, the impact of experienced cultural differences, student motivation and individual differences, the role of language courses etc. (Collentine 2009; Freed 1998; Pellegrino 1998; Regan 1998). Freed (1998, 37) and Collentine (2009, 211) found that the development of speaking, listening and reading skills is more intensive if students can read or have some grammar knowledge in the target language before the exchange. The progress is most notable in general fluency—fewer hesitations in speech, a larger repertoire of fillers, modifiers, formulaic expressions, and compensational strategies (Freed 1998, 44; Regan 1998, 78; Collentine 2009, 220). However, since there are a number of programmes organised in various ways, findings from one setting do not necessarily apply to all other settings.

The very term *learning* also raises some issues. In the literature on international student mobility authors often use the term *acquisition*, sometimes interchangeably with *learning*. We believe, however, that it is important to clarify the terms and the processes to which they refer. Krashen (1981, 1-2) defines language learning as a conscious process, supported by error correction and acquaintance with explicit rules, while acquisition refers to a spontaneous process where language is acquired through interaction, without reference to language structures themselves, similar to the mechanisms children use when developing competences in their mother tongue. In the context of high school student exchange, when students are immersed in another language and culture, some aspects of the target language are very likely acquired unconsciously, such as sociolinguistic competences (Regan 1998), or style and dialect (Freed 1998). However, the fact that students explicitly refer to language learning as their aim and invest conscious effort into this process, including receiving language instruction, we believe that learning is a more appropriate term in this research, although we do not claim that acquisition is completely absent.

Language learning obviously does not happen in the same way in all kinds of international exchanges and with all students. Moreover, we can hardly say that immersion automatically leads to language competences

within a certain time frame. This paper therefore aims to explore the time frame of the language learning process in the context of a high school student exchange programme. We are interested in how much time an exchange student who goes abroad needs to master the target language, more specifically: 1) at which point during their year abroad do students switch to the target language without relying on English? 2) at which point in time is their linguistic competence sufficient for them to fully take part in school lessons and complete school tasks in the target language?

## **Participants and research design**

This research was carried out with ten high school students who took part in an exchange programme in the academic year 2013/2014. The respondents were between 16 and 18 years old, depending on which year of high school they were when they applied for the exchange programme. They went to the following countries: Austria, France, Italy, Germany, Turkey, Russia, and Switzerland. All students could speak English when they applied for an exchange year abroad and only few of them had had some knowledge of the target language, acquired either through formal schooling or courses they took as preparation prior to departure.

The study abroad programme they took part in is run by Interkultura, a Serbian exchange organisation which belongs to the international network of organisations “AFS Intercultural Programs”. In all countries where this organisation operates, exchange programmes are set up in the same way: students spend an academic year (ten months) in another country, where they attend a local school in the local language and live in a family who volunteer to host an exchange student.

The students were interviewed by the researcher six months after they came from their exchange. Their answers were recorded and analysed as a part of the PhD research which was more comprehensive and explored multiple aspects of intercultural and language learning in the context of international student mobility (Živanović 2016).

## **Results and discussion**

Almost all students claim that in the beginning they used English for communication. The only student who did not do so had some knowledge of German and consciously decided not to use English and to try to communicate in German, although it was much more demanding. With the other nine students, the situations, intensity and timeframe in which they used English varied significantly. Answering the question at which point



in time they fully switched to the local language and stopped using English, some of them said it was several weeks and some of them several months. The longest time was reported by a student who went to a country whose language she had never studied before.

The students typically used English to communicate with other exchange students from around the world who came on the same programme but they did less so with host families. In some cases host family members were hardly able to speak English, or intentionally avoided using it, which made the exchange students try to communicate in the target language very soon after their arrival. In the beginning, the students thought this was perhaps too challenging and intimidating, but from a time distance, when they were interviewed, they said they had been grateful to host families for “pushing” them to use their language and supporting them in the learning process. On the other hand, in some countries and communities English is so widely spoken that people tend to address foreigners, including exchange students, in English rather than require them to learn the local language. Several students reported that they had to make a conscious effort to avoid English-speaking company, such as the company of other exchange students who spoke English, and ask the locals to talk to them in their language, although this required more time and patience on the side of the interlocutor.

Since the students wanted to have their school year abroad recognised by the Ministry of Education at home, one of their main goals was to learn the language enough to be able to complete school tasks and get grades. The students were asked how much time they needed to achieve the language level sufficient for them to fully take part in class. This question was asked separately because attending school in a foreign language requires another set of linguistic skills in comparison to conversational linguistic repertoire, which is probably acquired sooner. Expectedly, students referred to learning the “school language” as challenging, but the language of some subjects was reported as more difficult than others, so their class participation was not equal in all subjects from the beginning.

What is very interesting is that in contrast to the previous question, in this case the students’ answers were much more uniform. They all said that the time when they could follow lessons without difficulty and complete school tasks in the target language was at the end of the first and at the beginning of the second semester. They say that understanding came earlier, after three months, more or less, but that the ability to write, present, discuss and be evaluated took more time.

## Conclusion

The results of this research indicate how much time exchange students need in order to develop target language competences, while at the same time questioning some popular beliefs about study abroad and language learning. Firstly, the students' answers to the first question indicate that immersion alone, or being in a country where a language is spoken, does not necessarily result in language learning in a certain time frame that can be set a priori. The time when students start communicating in the target language varies significantly and largely depends on multiple factors: their motivation and willingness to make an effort to communicate in this language, previous language knowledge, and the support of locals, especially the host family. The respondents' answers to the second research question demonstrate that the motivation to succeed at school and have their school year abroad recognised, the effort they invested into language learning, and the specific setting of the exchange programme, override the impact of previous language knowledge when it comes to the time needed to learn the language enough to be able to take part at school. This finding is encouraging for the students who decide to go on an exchange to a country whose language they have not previously studied.

As stated in the introduction, the results of this type of research can hardly be generalisable to all student exchange settings. The time frame for language learning could be different if some of the conditions were different – for example, if students did not live with host families, or if they went to some other countries. This particular study was carried out with native speakers of Serbian who had studied other European languages and who took part in a high school student exchange programme under the conditions specified in the research design description. Although these limitations make research results more tentative, they additionally put into question the belief that immersion automatically results in successful language learning within an a priori given time frame, and call for more comprehensive research which would explore language learning in the context of international student mobility more systematically across different settings.

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# INDEX

## A

agglutinative languages, *295, 298, 304*  
Alternative assessment, *21*  
appropriateness, *34, 48, 85, 86, 93, 97*  
Argumentation Theory, *311, 312, 313, 328*  
assessment, *10, 11, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 42, 64, 79, 82, 85, 101, 111, 117, 118, 146, 165, 218, 219, 221, 222, 243, 245, 251, 252, 278, 353*  
attributions, *93, 95*  
authentic input, *26, 33*

## B

Balkans, *329, 332, 334, 339, 340, 354*  
Bennett, *175, 182, 188, 194, 207, 208, 223, 231*  
Boal's Image Theatre, *163, 165, 167*  
Brown, *20, 41, 188, 207, 269, 273, 288*  
Byram, *41, 79, 100, 163, 164, 165, 172, 173, 174, 182, 183, 184, 251, 252*

## C

classroom activities, *132, 169, 257, 271, 285, 323*

Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), *31, 45, 106*  
communication skills, *79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 92, 94, 97, 98, 99, 100, 226*  
communication strategies, *26, 79, 81, 83, 85, 89, 92, 94, 96, 98, 100*  
communicative competence, *35, 41, 79, 81, 83, 85, 87, 90, 91, 92, 94, 96, 98, 99, 100, 108, 231, 257, 320, 321, 351, 352*  
communicative skills, *11, 63, 85, 86, 88, 89, 90, 98, 99, 134*  
connectors, *311*  
contextual clues, *123, 128, 129, 132*  
Corder, *81, 98, 100, 243, 252*

## D

differentiation, *32, 142, 143, 144, 146, 151, 152, 153, 155, 157*  
Discourse Analysis, *311*

## E

Ellis, *242, 244, 252*  
emotion lexicon, *65*  
emotions, *63, 64, 65, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72, 75, 167, 172, 173, 176, 177, 179, 186, 354*  
empathy, *87, 163, 164, 165, 166, 168, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180*  
English as a foreign language (EFL), *3, 83, 142, 157, 271, 277*

English for Specific Purposes  
(ESP), 214, 256, 277  
error, 43, 45, 47, 60, 237, 240, 241,  
242, 243, 244, 248, 251, 252,  
344  
Error Analysis, 100, 251, 252, 253  
evaluation, 15, 20, 21, 23, 31, 90,  
97, 241, 271, 275, 276, 277, 278,  
280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 286,  
287, 289, 290, 320, 351

## F

feedback, 9, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 28,  
29, 30, 32, 34, 37, 39, 43, 44, 45,  
46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 60, 61,  
82, 88, 98, 156, 203, 242  
Finnish L2, 295  
Finno-Ugric (FU), 295  
foreign language learning, 64, 149,  
223, 237, 238, 239, 240, 251,  
272, 275, 288, 343  
formative assessment. *See*  
assessment  
French as a foreign language, 63,  
65, 67, 70, 354

## H

high school, 22, 27, 28, 29, 30, 38,  
39, 160, 235, 343, 344, 345, 347  
higher education, 22, 37, 106, 143,  
164, 213, 217, 228, 271, 276,  
280, 283, 284, 285, 327, 332  
Humboldt University, 329, 334,  
340, 354  
Hungarian L2, 295, 299  
Hymes, 20, 41, 321

## I

inferencing, 119, 123, 125, 126,  
127, 128, 138, 259, 260, 261,  
263, 269  
integrated assessment. *See*  
assessment  
Integrated performance assessment  
(IPA), 19  
intercultural communication, 183,  
213, 217, 220, 224, 225, 226,  
231  
intercultural competence, 87, 90,  
163, 179, 183, 187, 188, 191,  
194, 197, 198, 199, 203, 204,  
208, 226, 350, 351  
intercultural sensitivity, 166, 194,  
196, 198, 207, 208  
international student mobility, 343,  
344, 345, 347, 354

## J

James, 242, 253

## K

Kramsch, 188, 192, 206, 208  
Krashen, 145, 150, 159, 258, 269,  
344, 348

## L

language typology, 295  
Larsen-Freeman, 238, 242, 245, 253  
Lesson Study (LS), 3  
lexical competence, 124, 255, 256,  
260, 269  
lexical guessing, 123, 124  
lifelong learning, 213, 216, 220,  
226, 228, 230, 231, 232

*lingua franca*, 106, 213, 225, 227,  
253

listening skill, 109, 119

## M

multiperspectivity, 163, 164, 165,  
167, 168, 170, 171, 172, 174,  
175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180

## N

Nation, 70, 77, 124, 125, 132, 138,  
150, 159, 257, 258, 259, 260,  
268, 269, 285, 290

Norwegian as a second language,  
187, 188, 189

## O

online translation, 311, 324, 325,  
327

Oxford, R., 121, 269

## P

politeness, 65, 77, 93, 97, 202, 352  
primary schools, 141, 142, 156, 157,  
158, 350

process drama, 163, 164, 165, 166,  
167, 168, 169, 170, 174, 175,  
176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 183,  
184, 185

process writing, 43

## R

reading aloud, 33, 151, 272  
reading comprehension, 124, 125,  
138, 139, 144, 150, 268, 271,  
274, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280,  
281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286,  
287

reading instruction, 141, 142, 143,  
144, 145, 150, 151, 152, 154,  
155, 156, 157, 158, 274, 350

reading materials, 142, 143, 145,  
146, 147, 149, 150, 152, 153,  
154, 156

reading skill, 123

Richards, 79, 100, 101, 143, 160,  
253, 274, 275, 290

## S

second language, 36, 60, 61, 100,  
138, 139, 158, 166, 173, 182,  
185, 187, 188, 191, 194, 217,  
245, 253, 268, 269, 272, 273,  
274, 287, 288, 289, 311, 313,  
315, 320, 324, 349, 350, 354

Slavic studies, 329, 330, 331, 332,  
333, 341

Spanish as a foreign language, 311,  
320, 349

speaking skill, 108, 111, 118, 119

strategic competence, 108, 117, 118,  
119, 121

strategies, 33, 34, 35, 37, 63, 64, 65,  
68, 70, 73, 74, 75, 79, 81, 83, 84,  
85, 87, 88, 89, 90, 92, 94, 96, 98,  
99, 100, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109,  
110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115,  
116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121,  
123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 132,  
138, 143, 144, 152, 156, 191,  
194, 199, 225, 252, 255, 256,  
260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265,  
266, 267, 268, 274, 276, 285,  
287, 288, 291, 344, 351, 353  
student exchange, 344, 345, 347

**T**

teacher beliefs, 19, 43, 44, 141, 143  
teacher cognition, 142, 143, 144  
teacher education, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 13,  
14, 15, 16, 21, 79, 80, 82, 90, 99,  
100, 102, 143, 163, 164, 166,  
167, 168, 171, 173, 177, 179,  
180, 183, 275, 290, 349, 350,  
351, 352, 353  
teacher training, 20, 80, 169, 218,  
351

teaching practice, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11,  
12, 13, 14, 19, 37, 88  
textbook analysis, 187, 350  
*topos*, 315, 319, 322  
transferrable skills, 213, 228, 231

**V**

vocabulary instruction, 255, 256,  
258, 259, 262, 265, 267