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Editors’ Corner

Dear Readers,

Those of you who regularly follow the BETA E-Newsletter will certainly notice several changes in this issue – they result from a recent change in the team, where Tsvetelina Harakchiyska stepped down as editor. Many thanks, Tsveti, for your dedication and hard work during the past two years and wishes for every success for your future!

The current editorial team, Sylvia Velikova and myself, will do our best to live up to expectations. From now on, both of us will take turns as main editor of each issue.

This issue will bring to you a variety of people and viewpoints from the spectrum of English language learning and teaching. We are happy to introduce Andy Thatcher and his column *Mind the Gap: Making English Language Literature Relevant*, where he will be exploring ways of connecting students with the literary text and overcoming barriers – historical, cultural and linguistic. He is followed by our regular contributor Bill Templer, who passionately argues for a different path of EFL schooling in an article about Basic Global English. Then comes Georgi Geshev with his practical suggestions for eco-friendly, ergonomic test formatting. Next, Eleonora Lazarova and Athena Lao, who take us on a fascinating tour through the challenges and joys of spelling bee contests.

As usual, you can read about events of interest to English language teachers: our report of the 23rd BETA-IATEFL Conference for those of you who were not able to
attend; Zhivka Ilieva’s account of the 48th IATEFL Conference in Harrogate and information about forthcoming events in the world of English language teaching.

In this issue we are introducing another two new features. The first one, Swap Shop, will share perspectives on English language teaching and practical ideas published in BETA partner organizations’ publications. Our choice for this issue is Tatjana Kociper-Štepec’s Teaching Colours To Very Young Learners, obtained through SEETA Articles Bank. The second new feature, Poetry corner, will bring a bit of magic through contemporary poems in English (and, perhaps, through some translations).

We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we have enjoyed preparing it.

Zarina Markova, Issue Editor
Mind the Gap: Making English Language Literature Relevant

Room for Something Spooky

Andy Thatcher

Bridging the gulf between contemporary teenagers and classic literature is a perennial headache for teachers of English, especially when teenage culture seems so far removed from the concerns of Dickens and the Brontë’s. How to link *To Kill A Mockingbird* with *Twilight*? Miss Havisham with Slenderman? *Wuthering Heights* with Gotham City? The audiences for which these fictions were created and the mediums their creators use may be poles apart, but running through them all is a vital and vibrant element that has appealed to people – and teenagers in particular – for generations: Gothic.

Gothic is a notoriously difficult term to pin down. Although largely an Anglophone phenomenon, its origins are deeply influenced by European folk traditions and it

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exerts its influence globally, as in Japanese horror *The Ring*. Vampires, werewolves, graveyards and haunted houses might be common features, but so, too, are doppelgangers, subterranean spaces, ancient manuscripts, bodily mutation, disturbing dreams, apparitions from the past, wilderness, decadent nobility and plenty more besides. Such a diverse stock of tropes means that one can have the Gothic romance of the *Twilight* series, the Gothic sci-fi stories of HP Lovecraft, even the post-modern Gothic of *Fight Club*. But a spooky story is not necessarily Gothic: at the heart of true Gothic is something out of view, genuinely unsettling and beyond rational thought. Freud called it ‘the uncanny’, but somehow to name whatever causes you to squirm at Dorian Gray’s portrait seems to miss the point entirely.

Aside from obviously Gothic classic writers, such as Edgar Allen Poe, Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley, we also have texts such as the grimly creepy *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*’s madwoman in the attic, Dickens’ ghostly mists and notoriously flammable characters and, when Stevenson came to write *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, his mental state so distressed his wife that she begged him to abandon it. Key c.20th writers have also used Gothic to great effect, among them William Faulkner, Angela Carter, Harper Lee, Flannery O’Connor, Daphne du Maurier, Toni Morrison, Brett Easton Ellis, to name but the most prominent examples.

As such, Gothic can be used to re-invigorate interest in a classic text by casting it in a fresh light, but it can also be used as a resource in its own right. There are plenty of Gothic books for younger readers and many of the writers mentioned above were excellent writers of short stories – several are best known for their work in this form – and some of the finest examples are collected in Chris Baldick’s *The
Oxford Book of Gothic Tales. Aside from his excellent introductory essay, the collection sources literature from 1773 to 1991, albeit with one or two stories appearing here in translation. Similarly, Gothic can be used as the stimulus for creative writing assignments, allowing teenagers a space to fictionalise the fears and thrills that accompany adolescence. Even speaking activities can take a Gothic turn – after all, everyone likes to hear a spooky story.

Having taught a workshop on Gothic throughout 2013, I was always pleasantly surprised at the enthusiasm which teachers showed for the theme, and I have received very encouraging feedback from several on their return to their students. I am now working with a GCSE student on Harper Lee’s To Kill A Mockingbird and am finding a focus on the creepy Radley place has brought it to life for him. I would encourage you to do similarly in your practice, to uncover the uncanny on your reading list, and to make room for the ghastly and the ghostly.
BASIC GLOBAL ENGLISH: A Leaner More Learnable Lingua Franca for Plurilingual Pedagogies

Bill Templer

This article introduces BASIC GLOBAL ENGLISH (BGE), developed in Germany, as a sustainable alternative compact, rapidly learnable communicative code, re-envisioning the ‘E’ in ELT. In my view, BGE or an analogue could become a potential ‘game-changer’ in a future TEFL oriented to ‘equality in communication’ (Phillipson, 2003, 167) across borders and cultures, and a paradigm shift to a pedagogy of ‘plurilingualism’ (CoE, 2001, 4-5; 168-76; polyglottaly, 2012; Stoicheva & Stefanova, 2012), where a simple basic ‘partial’ proficiency in English is for many more than enough. The present article is in the spirit of an earlier article in the BETA Newsletter on Special English (Templer, 2012b), but proposes a serious look at BGE at an elementary target plateau level of 1,000-word core lexis—a ‘thrifty vocabulary’ for

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‘everyday dealings and explanations’—as Ivor Richards (1943, 114) characterized Ogden’s Basic English. Target plateau means enough for most learners, a base camp to stay in and really learn well as part of one’s ‘plurilingual competencies’ instead of the long climb up the towering Everest of ‘full’ English. The deepened discussion of ‘plurilingualism’ and its alternatives is on today’s agenda (CMLR, 2014).

**Ideal vs. reality in ELT**

In a recent interview, Dr Ellie Boyadzhieva (2014) expressed her doubts, based on years of experience and recent empirical data, about the effectiveness of current EFL teaching in the Bulgarian schools: ‘Unfortunately, my impression is that the widely shared views that “everybody in BG speaks some English”, and “there are no real beginners today” are just myths. This impression is based on the following data coming from two recent tasks I had to do for my university.’

She then went on to describe findings from an examination of students across several years of undergraduate study in fields other than English studies at South-West University ‘Neofit Rilsky’ in Blagoevgrad, where she is based. These indicated that students who had had 7 years of school study of English, of 1,170 students who took the exam, 558 (47.69%) were at level A1, 391 (33.41%) were at level A2 (a total of 81.8% at beginner level). 199 students (17%) were assessed as B1, and only 22 (0.018%) at level B2. None were above that.

We also know that this reflects another fact: namely that many better-trained students in Bulgaria are going abroad to study—and perhaps stay there as immigrants, a form of pre-university teen brain drain. Dr. Boyadzhieva also briefly described an English course prepared for the academic staff at South-West
University, where some 160 staff members applied to participate: ‘About 80 of them signed up for the beginner’s groups and among them about 50% were real beginners.’ She noted: ‘Of course, the age range varied between 30 and 60 and this matters in the light of the English teaching.’ Learner age is something I comment on below and is also underscored quite surprisingly in Appendix 1, a recent news report on teaching BGE to senior citizens in Bavaria.

Significantly, Dr. Boyadzhieva stressed:

*The figures, however, show that the level of competence in English acquired in the Bulgarian ‘common’ schools is quite low. Some of my students at the New Bulgarian University where English at B2 is a requirement for graduation in every major say that they have been studying English for over 10 years and every time they have to start a course they start from the beginner’s level as they feel they do not know it well enough* (p. 10).

Her conclusion: ‘in my opinion ELT as promoted by the Ministry of Education for the common state secondary schools shows dramatically bad results despite the widespread view that it is one of the pillars in the compulsory education in general.’

**Thinking out of the box**

These observations point up a serious problem in EFL instruction in Bulgaria, and reflect a situation not uncommon elsewhere: hundreds of thousands of boy/girl hours wasted in trying to learn a language that is in effect going in one ear and out the other. Recent observations from Turkey corroborate this malaise, where
‘more than 90 percent of Turkish students cannot progress beyond basic language skills even after 1,000 hours of English training, according to a joint report from the British Council and TEPAV’ (Boyacıoğlu, 2014). In Saudi Arabia, Almaeena (2014) confirms a similar depressing reality. In Southeast Asia, teachers in Vietnam often face huge classes of 60-90 students, many from poverty backgrounds, where it is a problem to keep kids awake or even manage the din of a boisterous large class, let alone impart knowledge (Tran, 2014). Graham (2006) notes that of the 3,500 university students he tested for placement in northeastern Thailand, the vast majority were classed at beginner level after nine years (!) of formal instruction, in part a common Thai analogue to Dr. Boyadzhieva’s findings. James (2010) is particularly incisive in her critique of Thailand’s English language woes.

This is partially the result of the pervasive impact of ‘class in the classroom.’ In a slew of developing and developed economies, much EFL instruction is aimed at learners from more privileged socioeconomic strata. With some exceptions, they are the few who may to rise to C1. So the social class gap, which is widening, should be openly addressed and called by name. The ‘Matthew effect’ (the rich get richer, gaps widen) is much in evidence in our profession (Rigney, 2010a; 2010b), and in many nations, we live in an intensifying age of the ‘wealth gap’ between a small privileged minority and the greater multitude. That is reflected in the vast disparity between learners in a number of countries, and in part reflects the A2/B1 majority of learners (or learners at false beginner level after many years of instruction), and a quite small generally more privileged minority rising to B2/C1 levels and beyond. Elliott (2014) discusses about working with LAPS (‘lower attaining pupils’) and HAPS (‘higher attaining pupils’). Across the profession, ELT is repeatedly scripted to target the more privileged learners, the HAPS, reproducing and strengthening interest in English not as a lingua franca but indeed a lingua
economica (Phillipson, 2003, 149). ‘Money talks—money talks English.’ The EU tends to exacerbate these inequities in social, cultural and ‘learning’ capital (Reich, 2013, 297-368) pervasive within its education systems, promoting English as the virtual ‘default’ language of wider communication (LWC) in the context of globalization (Phillipson, 2003, 169)—whether most learners will ever really ‘need’ it or not.

A key underlying thesis here: Standard English is climbing an Everest of complexity that most ordinary learners, the millions of LAPS, don’t need and are often intimidated by. I would argue that this EFL inequity poor achievement of many ordinary learners should be a wake-up call: to proceed in second-language policy down a different path: developing a compact form of English for international communication for limited possible learner needs, a basic tool for everyday plaintalk that most ELLs can add to their skill kit without struggling to spend hundreds of hours trying to develop proficiency in a difficult global language. This entails in effect rejecting the ‘maximalist principle’ (Templer, 2008; 2009; 2011; 2012a; 2012b) oriented to ‘meritocratic’ values. Training teachers to a good fluent level in such a mini-English is likewise a lot easier. In many countries, there are few primary teachers of English, especially outside the major cities. To my mind, this is basically in line with Phillipson’s (2003, 167ff.) concern for a ‘language for equality in communication.’ Shifting to a focused pedagogy of a compact form of English is also largely in sync with such a plurilingual approach that emphasizes building up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact. In different situations, a person can call flexibly upon different parts of this
competence to achieve effective communication with a particular interlocutor. [...] From this perspective, the aim of language education is profoundly modified. It is no longer seen as simply to achieve 'mastery' of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the 'ideal native speaker' as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place (CoE, 2001, 4-5).

That repertory can be chronicled and self-assessed in the ELP (European Language Portfolio) ‘by recording learning experiences of all kinds over a wide range of languages, much of which would otherwise be unattested and unrecognised’ (CoE. 2001, 20). Stoicheva (2012) indicates that the ELP and the associated Common European Framework of Reference have had very mixed reception to date in Bulgarian education. Stoicheva and Stefanova note (2012, 94): ‘Basic CEFR concepts such as learner autonomy and plurilingual education have not become an inherent part of the necessary reflection on learning and teaching practices. The CEFR has not yet become a vademecum or a book of reference for the language teaching community.’

A target level of around 1,000 lexemes rigorously recycled, much graded reading at that A2 level, might be enough for the greater majority of learners, allowing more time for short-changed focal areas in the school syllabus, like critical thinking, pressing global issues, and indeed other languages (Templer, 2012c)—including Italian, Spanish, French, Romanian and Greek, now scarcely studied here—as well as better grounding in Bulgarian, increasingly recognized as a literacy skill in decline (БНТ, 2014). This can help to facilitate a substantial savings in the huge investment today, in both time and money, in Bulgaria and globally, to
'master’ some form of Standard English, which remains a very high wall for most to climb. Instead, the policy can, I would argue, shift to creating a syllabus in a ‘downshifted’ form of the language enough in terms of lexis and grammar for most genuine basic needs. Much of what Seidlhofer (2002) says about Ogden’s experiment in BASIC English can be applied in part likewise to Grzega’s BASIC GLOBAL ENGLISH, discussed below. She bemoans:

foreign language teaching in schools usually amounts to a large investment of time (often nine years or more) and resources (many specialist teachers of individual languages) into an educational undertaking which in many cases is doomed to failure, as most learners neither achieve a significantly heightened general language awareness nor really satisfactory communicative abilities in one foreign language, let alone in several.

Her 2002 article (online) remains basic reading for a paradigm shift in English as a lingua franca (see also Seidlhofer, 2003).

Such a compact form of English, learned as a plateau target level, could serve the needs of (a) the large majority of ordinary LAP learners in the Bulgarian schools, taught to a level of ‘A2 fluency’; (b) various groups of potential future labor migrants from Bulgaria going to work abroad anywhere; (c) underprivileged children from backgrounds where learners leave school at an earlier age, such as the Roma communities in the Balkans, or the huge numbers of out-of-school children in many corners of the Global South, Pakistan one example, with over 5 million kids out of school (Shaukat, 2012); (d) older adults, including pensioners, eager to acquire a basic knowledge of communicative English for simple purposes.
It can also include even university staff, medical professionals and others who have never learned much of the language, as Dr. Boyadzhieva mentions (see Appendix 1). BGE is also relevant to the huge problems faced by hard-strapped adult immigrant ELLs in the U.S., as described in Cardoza (2013). Of course, learners could later build on that knowledge if they so desire, moving on to B1 and higher proficiency levels. But the goal would be relative fluency and mastery of a much simpler, in effect ‘non-native’ code—an enhanced lean & effective ‘survival English,’ or ‘English Lite,’ at mid-to-upper A2 level, ultimately promoting greater ‘equality in communication’ à la Phillipson (2003). It is a potential ‘paradigm shift’ experiment calling for serious empirical research (Templer, 2011). Can it work, and if so how? As a further slightly more advanced tier, VOA Special English can be learned as a second-level target plateau of plain talk proficiency (Templer, 2012b).

Below some introductory pointers to one such plain talk communicative option: BASIC GLOBAL ENGLISH.

**BGE**

BASIC GLOBAL ENGLISH, developed by linguist Dr. Joachim Grzega (formerly Catholic University, Eichstätt, Bavaria and Director, European House, Pappenheim), is centered on a vocabulary of ca. 1,000 words. As Dr. Grzega (2006) notes:

*BGE is based on findings from successful communication between non-natives. It includes only 20 grammar rules and consists of a basic vocabulary of 750 words (that is not bound to any specific single culture). In addition, learners are asked from the very beginning to do dictionary work and collect another 250 words (e.g. word-fields on*
hobbies or professions of family members). Additional rules for word-formation enable the learner to form a lot more than 1,000 words. Moreover, phrases for the most basic and frequent communicative situations are offered. Unlike, BASIC English, BGE is not a closed system, but allows variation and offers the learner to fine-tune his command of an internationally useful variety of English according to one's own wants and needs.

A good introduction to BGE is presented by its author in a two-part online interview: Part 1: (<youtub.be/B0iGgshLzxI>). Part 2: (<youtub.be/D8JWMAbM29o>). Spend 16 minutes and you will obtain an excellent overview direct from Dr. Grzega about what he has in mind. Appendix 1 below contains an excerpt from a recent article in a local northern Bavarian newspaper on teaching BGE to a group of older German adults, aged 55 to 91, with great success and learner satisfaction: The broader work in EuroLinguistiX being done under Dr. Grzega at the European House in Pappenheim can be explored here (<goo.gl/Nfxhss>). Joachim Grzega also edits the journal EuroLinguistiX, which he founded in 2004 (<goo.gl/KlHsj>.

Grzega (2009) stresses:

The basic idea of teaching BGE is to enable learners, as quickly as possible, global communication in English (in its internationally functional form) in an atmosphere of tolerance and empathy; beside linguistic competence, students should also acquire social and methodological competences (for situations in which there is a lack of words or in which there is a certain discomfort or misunderstanding). Thus students should be given opportunities to make creative and
interactive use of English as much as possible. The focus is on vocabulary acquisition (a common vocabulary and an individual vocabulary relevant to one’s own life) and communicative strategies, while grammar and pronunciation rules are taught only when they are important in lingua franca English. [...] Teaching and learning of cultural knowledge is not related to the UK or the US, but to foreign countries important to the learner group or foreign countries in general.

BGE includes fundamental concepts that lie in part behind Ogden/Richards’ BASIC English (Templer 2005; 2012a; Seidlhofer, 2002), Stein and Quirk’s Nuclear English, and van EK and Alexander’s Threshold Level English. As Grzega (2005: 66) states: ‘BGE should be seen as • a (fast) start for learners of English, open for developing larger skills of all kinds of Englishes (according to the learners’ individual wants) • reduced but still natural, not artificial English [...] • English for international contexts.’ He discusses there just how his conceptions differ from Nuclear English, Threshold Level and Ogden/Richards’ BASIC, with a detailed presentation of his choice of core vocabulary, including a full list of his 750 core-lexeme vocabulary (pp. 81ff.). He stresses (2005: 67, 80-81):

I think that BGE in all its areas (sounds, politeness strategies, vocabulary and grammar) can at least be covered in about 30 hours, but the learning process, or memorization process, will depend on the intervals between lessons, on the intensity of actual practice and on a learner’s natural gift for languages. [...] Ogden’s principle was to chose 850 words: this would enable to learn 30 words in one hour per day and learn the BASIC English vocabulary in less than a month. The concrete vocabulary items were selected by Ogden’s experience of 10 years. Ogden’s choice
was notion-based. BGE, however, wants to respect both the needs for active communication and the needs for passive understanding.

Moreover, ‘in BGE only those non-standard pronunciations are penalized that have been proven to endanger communicative success between non-natives,’ and ‘BGE lists only 20 elementary grammar rules. [...] Additional word-formation patterns provide the learner with the means to coin much more than 1,000 words’ (Grzega & Schöner, 2007, 6).

Furthermore, BGE includes internationally functional phrases [...] for the most basic and frequent communicative situations, including solutions for situations of communicative breakdown. Another important aspect is that BGE is not a closed system, but allows variation and offers learners to fine-tune their command of an internationally functional English according to their own desires (ibid.).

You can download a copy of Grzega’s Welcome to the World! textbook at (<goo.gl/lEMLVS>). Also available there is a preface to the teacher handbook for the textbook Hello World! (<goo.gl/NrDHoZ>). This preface is in English and can give you a better idea and sample of how BGE builds communicative skills right from the earliest lessons, and concentrates on a quite limited high frequency vocabulary of some 1,000 words, although somewhat different in lexis from Ogden/Richards original BASIC English 850, and far more communicatively oriented right from the start. A workbook for Hello World! is here: (<goo.gl/WiXS27>). BGE has largely been limited to very promising experiments in southern Germany, in a variety of teaching ecologies. Grzega & Schöner (2007) report in detail on one experiment teaching BGE to learners 7-9 years old in two
schools in southern Germany. Experimentation here in Bulgaria and elsewhere, with associated empirical class research on effectiveness and learner response, is highly desirable. It can also be combined with use of a ELP portfolio for self-assessment and progress at the target level, enabling an individual to record and present different aspects of his/her language biography, including minority home languages and how they are used (DoE, 2001, 175; Stoicheva, 2012, 79-80, 83).

**LWO -- Language Workout Method**

Dr. Grzega and his associates have also experimented with a new approach for beginners, linked with BGE but applicable to learning other additional languages:

*In a few hours, learners acquire skills for large aspects of the A1 language level (as defined by the EU). This is achieved by (1) a selection of items (words/phrases/structures) based on situational relevance, multi-contextual applicability and frequency, (2) an empathetic teacher guiding learners to the answer and including body-movement elements, (3) learners in a comfortable semi-circle, watching and listening without taking notes, (4) the presentation of new items in the source language and in the target language (with a literal translation), the indication of morpheme boundaries and a memory hook, (5) translation exercises, (6) conversational exercises with elements of LdL (Lernen durch Lehren ‘Learning by Teaching’), (7) revision sections according to LdL (Grzega, 2013, 76).*

Teachers in Bulgaria and elsewhere are urged to explore LWO as a new experimentally tested approach for beginners of any age. Grzega’s articles (2006; 2013) are a clear introduction.
**Learning by teaching, LdL**

In part, BGE and LWO also seek to use a method called ‘learning by teaching’ being elaborated in Germany, (termed *LdL, Lernen durch Lehren*), principally developed by Dr. Jean-Pol Martin, a French language pedagogue, see (<www.ldl.de>), where learners also become mini-teachers presenting materials and in effect tutoring their classmates. Here a brief overview in English: (<goo.gl/5KvdB>). ‘The methodological core idea is to have a pair or group of students instruct the majority of topics (selected by the teacher or by the students themselves) to their classmates, but in a way that activates their classmates’ participation and communication in the best possible way’ (Grzega & Schöner, 2008, 169), working in small groups. Tran (2014, 10) also uses some analogous techniques in her huge classes in Vietnam, as does Elliott (2014, 8), especially in working with mix-ability groups. *LdL* is likewise well worth experimentation elsewhere. Like BGE, much of *LdL*’s hands-on use in school and university pedagogy has been in Germany, where it was developed at the grassroots, with much experimentation. *LdL* needs to be more widely discovered and inventively applied.

**Intercomprehension analysis**

To what extent some aspects of BGE and its pedagogy are related to concerns in developing ‘Intercomprehension’ communicative strategies for building language awareness, intercultural education and learner autonomy (Pencheva & Shopov, 2003; Shopov, 2005; 2010; 2012) remains an intriguing open question, given the intense dedicated interest in the Modular Intercomprehension Model (MIM) among linguists at Sofia University, and its clear relevance for pedagogies geared to fostering plurilingualism.
Kindred vistas, other options

Another downshifted plain talk option, not discussed here, is GLOBISH, with 1,500 lexemes as its basic core: (<www.globish.com>). Here a recent extended youtube interview on Globish from Taiwan: (<goo.gl/OAaum>). A third option is BASIC English 850, the brainchild of Charles Ogden and Ivor Richards developed in the 1930s/40s and 50s—a classic vintage experiment in EFL that could be revitalized for the 21st century (Templer, 2005; 2012a; Seidlhofer, 2002). A further ensemble is a two-tier simplified English, BGE or Ogden’s BASIC, plus VOA Special English as a target plateau (Templer, 2009; Templer, 2012b). Related insights from the Plain English movement (<goo.gl/Xc9yo>) are also worth exploring (Templer, 2008; 2011).

Conclusion

Promoting a ‘people’s English’ as a leaner highly compact mini-language of wider communication should be on the democratic agenda, oriented to the mass of ordinary learners, and particularly the multitudes of LAPS (Elliott, 2014) in Bulgaria and elsewhere—not the technocratic elites, their ‘knowledge economies’ (Rubdy & Tan, 2008, 205) and privileged strata.

Most administrators and many in our teaching profession tend to be locked in the self-crafted cages of our inherited and inculcated mindsets. It is a bit like what Margaret Heffernan (2011) calls ‘willful blindness’: why we ignore the obvious, even the elephant in the EFL room, choosing ‘not to know. ... better not to see this stuff at all’ (Heffernan, 2013). The recent call by a key journal in Canada for a special issue on the topic “From second language pedagogy to the pedagogy of ‘plurilingualism’: a possible paradigm shift” (CMLR, 2014) reflects broadened approaches to what plurilingual pedagogies might begin to explore.
I think brainstorming about and experimenting with such simpler codes of English, such as BGE, should be high on the priority agenda in ELT in Bulgaria and across the Balkans. Particularly given another clear empirical fact: some 54% of Bulgarian university graduates are working at jobs in Bulgaria that do not require a university degree (Novinite, 2014a; 2014b). Similar situations exist in a range of other countries, in an era of mounting massive youth unemployment, mass trans-border labor migration and staggering underemployment—even in the U.S., ‘the number of college graduates toiling in minimum wage jobs is roughly 71% higher today than in 2004’ and the number of graduates with masters degrees working in part-time jobs is 3x higher than in 2006 (O’Connell, 2014).

For Bulgarian university graduates, whether their knowledge of English matters and can be applied is open to empirical research. In some service jobs in tourism, various corporations and foreign-supported NGOs, it is needed. Yet many become part of a growing Bulgarian ‘precariat’: workers with little or no job security, living literally at the edge. Or of course they flee the country to build a life elsewhere, what Bauman (1998, 91-102) calls the new ‘vagabonds,’ a paradigm of uprooting and dispossession in the existential centrifuges of globalization—with English as part of their ‘survival toolbox.’ But English should not be a skill that is serving to help shrink the population of Bulgaria and propel its youth abroad, never to return. The ongoing protests since June 2013 have in part been specifically about this pressure to emigrate to survive.

Some argue that English has become part of the ‘commodity fetishism’ so dominant in our cultures, itself a discursive ‘commodity’ and fetish-object (Wiki, 2014; Rubdy & Tan, 2008), welded to the incessant ‘overselling of false promises of employment and economic success through English’ (Skutnabb-Kangas & Heugh, 2012, 270). Whether another simpler international auxiliary language like...
Esperanto (Phillipson, 2003, 169-73) could come to replace near-monopolistic reliance on English, with its huge negative washback effects on local and minority languages (Rapatahana & Bunce, 2012), remains an open question.

But in Bulgaria, teaching a workable, compact plateau level of English like BGE—while aiming at an ensemble of plurilingual competencies as envisioned by CEFR—could encourage developing additional literacy and oracy, even at basic 1,000-word levels, in second-languages other than English, such as the languages of close neighboring countries like Romania, Greece and Turkey, and preferred countries of labor migration, like Italy and Spain. It could also open the door (and provide needed time in the curriculum) for developing greater bilingual literacy training at school for L1 speakers of Turkish and Romanes, still highly controversial in the Bulgarian context (Templer, 2012c), as authors writing in Skutnabb-Kangas & Heugh (2012) would strongly recommend for building overall literacy. Moreover, the teaching of French (and training of novice French teachers at university) have now plummeted here, although since 1993 Bulgaria has been a member of the International Organization of the Francophonie. Understandably, the learning of Russian has also markedly declined among the ‘generation of the transition.’ What is needed across Europe and beyond is to begin to interrogate English language hegemony in its current constellations, its fetishism (Wiki, 2014) and commodification (Rubdy & Tan, 2008), transforming English teaching in more equitable, multicultural directions (Rapatahana et al., 2015), within an authentic plurilingual paradigm shift.

A classic poem expressing this need for a plurilingual shift and ‘mother-tongue multilingual education’ (MLE) by Tanzanian-born linguist Dainess Maganda (2012) is “Who am I?,” available online, which I recommend EFL teachers everywhere should read and ponder. A few of its first haunting lines: “I am a lost identity / […] I
am a shuttered mind / I am a mumbling mouth / I don’t know who I am / I was born with a voice but lost it / I am told English is all that matters ...

Appendix 1

“Basic Global English” - A Course in the European House Pappenheim

He learned English at the age of 91. Hans Navratil was the oldest participant in the course, the youngest aged 55. Important basic knowledge learned in only 16 two-hour class sessions.

Pappenheim/Bavaria:
Hans Navratil decided to try his luck and successfully completed a course in “Basic Global English” in the European House in Pappenheim. After 16 two-hour classes, he and the other course participants can now communicate in a simple but effective way about personal things, everyday matters and experiences. They can manage typical situations encountered when traveling and can cope with emergency situations using English, and they have acquired useful knowledge and skills for international communication.

The course director Prof. Joachim Grzega felt the beginning of the course was an interesting but huge challenge, since almost all the participants were older than
his customary students in the past. He was pleased that they demonstrated in the end: people aged 55 to 91 can learn a first foreign language just as well younger learners. Of course, none of the participants speaks English now like a native after only 16 weekly lessons, two hours long. But that’s not the point, as Dr. Grzega stresses. His BGE concept teaches students to be able to communicate and make themselves understood internationally in a range of basic situations. […]

The participants were also surprised about themselves at times, finding they were able to deal well with oral tests or understand texts above their basic level. In order to stay active and in practice, they plan to meet during the summer for free conversation (translated from: Weißenburger Tagblatt, 2014).

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Teacher- and Learner-Friendly Test Formatting

Georgi Geshev

Ready-made free tests accompanying virtually all ELT courses today do make our life easier. We are given Placement Tests, Unit Tests, Final Tests etc. made by the best professionals in the field, with the latest methodology, their validity and reliability guaranteed … thank you, authors and publishers! **But ... and here is the ‘but’: while test content has very little to wish for, its form is subject to some criticism.**

To begin with, the tests in the Teacher’s CD (or Resource Pack) - either in .pdf or .doc format - are typed in an uncomfortably small font size, usually 10 or 11. And students often have eyesight problems; even more so with teachers (eyes weaken with age, don’t they!). As the owner of reading glasses I’d argue that even the “standard” 12 is not always readable enough in some fonts. What’s more, elegant-looking fonts (Bookman Old Style, Garamond ... even good old Times New Roman) are often hard to read on a sheet of paper. The spaces left for students to fill in (not type!) their answers are obviously inadequate, especially when a longer phrase needs to be inserted.

As I presented my point at the 2014 BETA Conference in Blagoevgrad I illustrated it with a sample test (proved very easy to find) from an otherwise good publisher with just 3 or 4 lines of text on the last page. The audience reacted immediately:
“Waste of precious space!!!” Let’s not forget: tests are there to be photocopied, often in tens or even hundreds of copies, so one page less saves time, money, paper ... not to mention the environment. And this is so easy to fix - just think of the “Shrink to fit” function in Microsoft Word. Needless to say, Tests should be printed duplex - that is, on BOTH sides of the sheet whenever possible, reducing the use of paper in half. Only the directly printed pages should be used as the “master”: making copies of copies can make the test very hard to read.

By the way, the week after my presentation at the 2014 Conference (great job, Zarina Markova & Co!) a half-blind student managed to struggle through my University Admission Test (font size just 12) without complaining.

What can we do about it?

A publisher replied to my criticism with “But you have it on disc - edit and change and format it in any way you find appropriate!” Fair enough ... but for one reason or another not all teachers do it.

My modest suggestions are given below (not claiming to be new or original, just useful practical tips).

1. Maximise available space/bring space loss to the absolute minimum. Fiddle a lot with page setup: you need A4 (not Letter!) paper size, all margins under 1.6 cm. (your printer won’t mind), NO header nor footer, SINGLE line spacing, “Normal” style. Reduce size of “empty” lines used to separate text to 8 or 9 rather than 12 ... you’ll be delighted by the effect achieved. Warning: it is time-consuming.

2. Trim and squeeze and “zip” the contents. For example, a sentence taking a bit more than a line can be carefully paraphrased to fit into one. The reading passage
A dialogue of short lines ("Put the phrases given below in the right gaps. There are extra phrases you will not need.") can be repositioned like this:

\[ \text{it's on / we have left / Can I help you / I'm looking for / for me / What do you like? / there are / I wish} \]

**Shop Assistant:** Good afternoon.  
(1) ___________________________?  
**Customer:** Yes, (2) ___________________________ a portable TV for my car.  
**SA:** Have a look at these three models then. **C:** Can you turn them on (3) ___________________________, please?  
**SA:** Sure. Just a moment. **C:** Excellent picture quality, but I'd like a 9 inch screen size model.  
**SA:**(4) This is the only 9 inch one ___________________________. **C:** Not bad. How much is it?  
**SA:** Just 99 € - (5) ___________________________ sale at the moment. **C:** I'll take it. Can I pay by credit card?  
**SA:** Yes, no problem. Please type your PIN here. **C:** OK, done.  
**SA:** Enjoy your new TV. **C:** Thank you. Goodbye!  

I “made up” the whole exercise (nothing stolen from any publisher, and no offence meant!), so it may not be in perfectly authentic English. But it does show how it shrank from 14 lines to a mere 8. Also note that the options in the box are arranged in the most space-saving way possible.

3. Provide enough room for answers; the dialogue above is, I believe, a good illustration of this. Students’ handwriting can be surprisingly large. Use the largest font size possible; but you might have to bring it down one point to make some element “fit”.

4. Special attention to the instructions in tests. I personally find this: “Complete this phone call where the caller, Simon (S), leaves a message for Luke (L). Use one
word from the box in each space.” far too long, and too difficult for lower-level students to understand. After all, “complete” is NOT a high-frequency word, is it? Perhaps this “Fill the spaces in the dialogue with words from the box.” will do a better job … and is one line only.

5. Use **bold**, *italic* and *underline* wisely to make your test visually friendlier, and easier to work with /for both the students and yourself/. Add this: “___ of 5/6/7 …” at the end of each exercise to help you with the score calculation.

6. Having come to “score”: a Test with a maximum of 29, 32, 47 … points is torture for the teacher - especially in Bulgaria - who has to convert the points to a mark between Poor /2/ and Excellent /6/ !!! By adding or removing a few test items you can easily bring that number to one that directly divides to 6: 24, 30, 36, 42 … My personal favourite is, understandably, a test with a max of 60 as 43 points equals Good /4.30/; 51 is Very Good /5.10/, 58 is Excellent /5.80/ etc. without any need to recalculate. We teachers are - or should be - practical people, and our time is quite precious.

Using tricks like these, I have managed to reduce an A1 Level Test of 3 full pages to just a single page … and my version is easier to use and friendlier for both students and teachers.

Why don’t you try for yourself?
The Spell of the Spelling Bee

Eleonora Lazarova

Bulgarian National English SPELLING BEE (BNESB) is an English language school competition, which is held over a single week in mid-March in every participating Bulgarian school. A month later, in April all school winners meet at the Regional Bee. The national qualifiers, who are all 30 regional winners, gather together for the National Spelling Bee Competition. The participants are supposed to spell the word given, i.e. say it letter by letter slowly and punctually. Although the competition is very popular in USA, in Bulgaria it started 4 years ago, organized by Peace Corps volunteers. This is the third year of my school ‘St Kliment Ohridski’ Secondary School of Foreign Languages in Blagoevgrad participating in Spelling Bee. In the school year 2012/2013 the 7th-grader Kristiyan Rosenov Stanoev qualified for the National Spelling Bee and became the 10th superspeller of the country, which still is the greatest success of a student of my school in this competition. Together with him, I participated in a summer camp for all national qualifiers and their teachers.

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Here is Kristiyan’s opinion about the Bee: “When I was in the 6th grade, I missed the opportunity to participate in the Spelling Bee. Last year I knew that it was my first and last competition and I was eager to compete. I was quite excited and a bit nervous, I did not practice very seriously until the school bee because I did not believe that I would win. Well, I did, and I decided to study the words from the wordlist and practice every day. We practiced a lot with my teacher after classes at school or in the evenings via Skype. Sometimes we would meet Nathaniel, a Peace Corps volunteer who helped me prepare myself as well. I was eager to win the National level and to attend the summer camp. To do so, I had to reach the first or second place on the regional level. When I became second during the Regional Bee, I was calm, because I already knew that I am one of the 30 best Spelling bee national level qualifiers. Although I did not win the national Bee, I find the competition useful and unique- an experience which I will never forget!”

For sure both of us will remember the visit at the American Embassy in Sofia on 10 May 2013, where we met Mr. Richard Damstra. He explained to our students about the various sections of the Embassy and their work. He also mentioned lots of facts about the marketing, history and culture of the USA. Each student got a funny “Uncle Sam”’s hat and each teacher- a set of methodology books. The next day, 11 May 2013, after the official opening ceremony in “Musala” Hall at Hilton, the National Bee began. All the 30 competitors had to go through 8 difficult rounds, and Kristiyan made no mistake. During stage 2 the competitors had to
translate the word first from Bulgarian into English and then spell the same English word. Again Kristiyan did his best to continue. The next stage was with English words, not mentioned in the wordlist. In the fourth round, almost at the end, Kris encountered the unknown word “RESIGN”, which he misspelt and placed himself tenth among all 30 participants. He “defeated” 20 regional winners, including last year’s National Bee winner Rumen Dimitrov from Ruse, who finished 17th this time. The winner in the 2013 National Bee competition was the 13-year-old 6th-grader Martin Boshkilov from “Kuzman Shapkarev” Secondary School in Blagoevgrad. He got a Champion Trophy and a tablet.

We won’t forget the summer camp near Bansko, where we spent a fabulous week and made friends with all the 30 competitors and their 30 teachers, and Peace Corps Volunteers as well. It was then, when I “booked” Miss Athena Lao, who is usually a very busy “bee” and she eagerly agreed to attend our school bee this year …

This year an important change occurred in the rules, benefiting the students from 3rd grade or younger, who are eligible to compete as well. This fact made it possible for Nadya, Yanitsa, Martin and Anita, the so-called “Team N-Za-M-A” to compete for the first time (the abbreviation is formed by the first letters of their names and in Bulgarian it means “No”, “No way”, “We won’t”) Obviously those kids are highly motivated and determined to win! I invited Kristiyan in one of our English classes, and the whole class crowded around him asking for autographs… On the school competition day they brought it for luck, and Kris was there to support them too - it helped a lot, because Martin made it to the 3rd place- isn’t that a serious promise for next year`s victory? This is what Anita says about her participation in the school Bee: “Когато видях думичките в списъка, малко се
притесних, стори ми се, че е невъзможно да ги науча. Да, но само така ми се стори. Когато започнах да спелувам, всяка следваща думичка ми се виждаше по-лесна от научените до сега. До крайния срок успеха да ги науча и невъзможното за мен става възможно. През последния месец от обучението ни беше много забавно. Госпожата ни устройваше състезания, в които всеки от моите съученици искаше да покаже най-доброто от себе си и да спечели. Когато настъпи така очакваното състезание, бяхме с хъс за победа, макар и най-малки от участниците. Подкрепяхме се взаимно. Аз ще участвам и в следващото състезание Spelling Bee, защото, освен че получих знания, преживях и много силни емоции. Аз знам, че положеният труд ще се възнагради и ще се боря за победа.” Here is what Yanitsa thinks of it all: “Когато чух за Spelling Bee аз веднага реших да участвам. За мен това състезание беше едно вълнуващо приключение. Въпреки че не спечелих състезанието, аз спечелих нови приятели, както и знания, които ще са ми от полза. Определено ще участвам и другата година”.

This year our school winner was a girl: the sixth-grader Ivana Dyulgerova, who says: „Участвам за втори път, но миналата година изобщо не го бях взела на сериозно и нищо не стана. Тази година самото състезание беше едно невероятно преживяване, изпълнено с много труд и забавление. Не успях да стигна до националния кръг, но това не ме спира да участвам пак и това, че тази година станах училищен победител, ме мотивира още повече. Това състезание ми помогна много и научих доста полезни думи, които вече използвам. Никога няма да забравя емоцията и тръпката от самото състезание. Това е едно голямо постижение за мен и съм доволна от себе си, че обогатих знанията си в английския език. Определено догодина ще се постарая още повече и ще стигна до националния кръг.” Another 6th-grader
from our school, Ventzi Trenchev, is saying.” Лично аз харесвам състезанието "Spelling Bee". Участвал съм един път само, но мисля и другата година да си пробвам знанията и късмета. Според мен това състезание помага на всички участници да се стремят нагоре в знанията си и така да допринасят успехи.” Unfortunately, the seventh-grader Simeon Karakolev, the runner-up this year, will not be eligible to participate next year. Still, I hope our school’s Spelling Bee success will continue. Besides, a girl took the Champion Trophy this year for the first time - all the previous four National Bee winners were boys...

This year for the first time the organizers held 4 two-day training seminars for teacher coordinators from each region. It was very useful for me, I gathered various ideas on how to prepare my students better. I liked the songwriting technique best (with counting syllables and creating your own text to fit into the music of the song chosen) and the “Blackout poetry”(which is choosing a single word from a paragraph in a given journal page and coloring the rest of the words so that all words chosen from you in the page could form a sentence or a poem). Working with very young learners, in order to increase their learning vocabulary skills, I mainly use flashcards - I download and print them from the BNESB website. Next I
cut and tape them to make them shiny and firm enough - with all 500 words from the wordlist, it becomes a large pile of flashcards ready to be collected, divided, distributed and touched! There are words typewritten with big Bulgarian letters on the one side, and on the other one, there is the English correspondent word. I find flashcards very useful as manipulating them in various ways aids memorization: touching them helps some learners to remember better; others can memorize words according to how we order them. We also pick 10-15 words from the pile and create a poem, a story or even a song. We sing along and we laugh a lot - that is why I like the BEE!

Let it Bee forever! 😊
Perspective: An American Ex-Speller in Bulgaria

Athena Lao

From the age of eight until thirteen, I participated in spelling bees in the USA. I wrestled with words like *mellifluous*, *weltanschauung*, *denouement*, and *appoggiatura*. Not only did I increase my English vocabulary, but I also learned a great deal about the variety of sounds and expressions from languages throughout the world that had somehow found their way into English. When I was twelve years old, I was fortunate enough to win enough spelling bees so that I could participate in the United States National Spelling Bee, where I placed twelfth.

My spelling bee history certainly influenced my desire to share the beauty of the English language with others as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in Bulgaria. Over the past two years, I have always jumped at any opportunity to serve as an announcer or a judge for local bees in Blagoevgrad. I am thankful to the schools and to CORPLUS for allowing me to get involved.

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This year, I was lucky enough to serve as the announcer at the school spelling bees of ‘Georgi Izmirliev’ Secondary School (organized by Malinka Slivkova) and ‘St Kliment Ohridski’ Secondary School of Foreign Languages (organized by Eleonora Lazarova). Both bees were meticulously and lovingly organized. The students were adorable - sometimes it seemed like the words were bigger than the students were! But based on the amount of jumping for joy at correct spellings and tears shed at incorrect spellings, their cuteness belied their motivation to do their very best. I also cannot say enough about how impressed I am that the students can spell tough words (that even some native speakers have trouble with!) in what is most likely their second or even third language.

In recent years in the USA, the spelling bee has become more of a corporate sporting event than a celebration of learning: participants are featured on America’s most popular sports channel, with TV commentators weighing in on the difficulty of words and on spellers’ every move, followed by commercial breaks. I prefer the Bulgarian version, in which the spelling bee is not so flashy and extravagant, but is more about learning, doing one’s best, and connecting English to other languages. The spelling bee is a wonderful activity for Bulgaria’s English language learners, and I hope that it continues for many years to come!
The 23rd BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference
11th – 13th April 2014,
South-West University,
Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

A. Suzan Öniz and Zarina Markova

The 23rd BETA-IATEFL Conference was held at the South-West University in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria this year. This year’s theme was ‘The English Language Classroom: Can Research Meet Practice?’ There were approximately 170 delegates from 14 countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, China, FYROM, or Macedonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Turkey, UK and USA) present to attend 4 plenary talks and 30 concurrent sessions, 4 promotional presentations and 6 concurrent forums each comprising 3 short presentations on a large variety of topics. The plenary talks were by the following invited speakers: Desmond Thomas from the University of Essex, UK: ‘Becoming a Researcher: Is It Worth the Effort?’; Terry Lamb from the University of Sheffield, FIPLV, UK: ‘Towards a Pedagogy for Autonomy: Exploring the Relationships between Learner and Teacher Autonomy’; Ellie Boyadzhieva from the South-West University, Bulgaria: ‘Theory and Practice: How to Make Ends Meet?’ and Gergana

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Pencheva-Apostolova from the South-West University, Bulgaria: ‘E-CLASSROOM: A Global Ocean of Fluctuating Signs’. The topics of the concurrent presentations were varied so that all participants could find a session to their liking. These presentation topics included lexical chunking, phonics, drills, brain research, testing, how to design interviews and questionnaires, CLIL, blogs, action research, motivation, ESP, storytelling …

You will find three session summaries in this article: Maya Mitova summarized the presentation with the title ‘Brain Research and Best Practices: Neuroscience in the classroom’, delivered by Daniel Perez, a representative of the English Language Fellows Program in Prague, Czech Republic; Nahla Nassar summarized the presentation ‘Grammar and Creativity’ by Valetina Lumezi, Aurora Zuna-Krasniqi, Bleta Zeqiri from ELT Oxford Studio: Prishtina, Kosovo; and A. Suzan Öniz summarized Desmond Thomas’ opening plenary with the title ‘Becoming a Researcher: Is it Worth the Effort?’

‘Becoming a Researcher: Is it Worth the Effort?’

Plenary Talk by Desmond Thomas

Summarized by A. Suzan Oniz, PhD

Desmond Thomas started his talk by stressing the importance of the relationship between teaching and research, stating that in an ideal world these would be integral, and that the answer to the question in the title is ‘yes’ but that it is not easy. He added that the most important question is: What is research?, which is closely tied with issues of credibility, among others.
If research is not approved, then it becomes very hard to get published. Then again teaching should be driven by knowledge derived from research and many departments encourage their M.A., Ph.D. or even undergrads to become researchers. In some cases people are doing linguistics research just so that it is recognized; as a result, the question arises: Where do teachers and classrooms fit into this? The speaker stressed that teacher-led research needs to be supported. Unfortunately, however, often teachers have a negative view of research as being isolated and difficult. Desmond Thomas stated that he firmly believed that teacher-led research can be grounded in the daily experience of the teacher.

One of the frequent problems that teachers who wish to do research face is that they are unsure as to how to choose a topic and how to narrow it down. The approach to research is another major issue: The scientific/positivist (quantitative) approach: The world exists independently of our knowledge of it (The truth is out there) versus the interpretivist (qualitative) approach: The world is defined by our knowledge of it (Truth is subjective/relative) The speaker stated that there is a hierarchy and that quantitative research is far superior to qualitative research.

Desmond Thomas continued his plenary by addressing why people do research, why teacher-researchers are needed, data collection methods including surveys, classroom-based ethnographic studies, classroom-based discourse analysis, materials evaluation and/or text analysis, analysis of task performance, action research projects, linguistic analysis. He also described some key concepts to bear in mind. These were:

* Validity of claims and evidence (Have I answered the precise questions set?)
* Reliability of claims and evidence (Have I answered the questions consistently?)
* Specificity of claims and evidence
* Significance of claims and evidence  
* Triangulation of data sources (How do data sources support each other?)  
* Ethical standards in data collection

Desmond Thomas then went on to explaining the research cycle by starting with the steps:

1. Choosing a topic.
2. Developing research questions.
3. Formulating claims or hypotheses.
4. Engaging with the literature.
5. Planning data collection and analysis.
6. Preparing a detailed research proposal.

The presenter cautioned the audience that the first step has to be the research topic and *not* a method. He emphasized this point because research courses unfortunately start with research methods. These certainly are important and necessary but *not* the starting point.
The presenter gave examples of topics that worked (e.g. ‘willingness to communicate’), one that did not (e.g. ‘using the internet to learn a foreign language’) and one still in progress (‘the use of activities for practicing speaking in English language classes in Greek Junior High School classes’). He continued with a list of possible research support including traditional one-to-one supervisors, colleagues, other researcher colleagues, professional networks such as BETA, UK-based organizations such as BALEAP and IATEFL (http://resig.weebly.com/), social network communities, literature and web pages. The final subtopics of this extremely informative and motivating talk were how teaching and research can benefit from one another. He ended his talk by asking: Is it worth the effort? Here is the answer:

His final words of advice included:

Don’t rush it, let it grow!

Get help!

Take a step back!

Don’t take too many short cuts!

Don’t believe everything you read!

Never give up!

**Editor’s Note:** If you are interested in doing small-scale research in your classes, Desmond Thomas is going to lead a SEETA project in which EFL teachers will be guided through the process of choosing and developing their own research
projects to be carried out in their institutions. Please check out the SEETA website for details: www.seeta.eu

‘Brain Research and Best Practices: Neuroscience in the classroom’
by Daniel Perez
Summarized by Maya Mitova, EAP Tutor, CELE, UNNC

Recently I have attended the 23rd BETA –IATEFL Annual conference, which was held in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria from 11th to 13th April 2014. I went to a workshop called “Brain Research and Best Practices: Neuroscience in the classroom” delivered by Daniel Perez, a representative of the English Language Fellows Program in Prague, Czech Republic. The presenter suggested practical activities to use in EFL classroom based on brain research.

The speaker mentioned that learners are concentrated mainly in the first 20 minutes of a lesson, then the period between the next 20 to 30 minutes is considered a down-time period; therefore, the teachers should use games and hands-on activities and cooperative learning to engage their students in the learning process. It was interesting for me to learn that in the closure, the last 30 to 40 minutes, the class attendees’ learning memory only summarizes the perceived new material. In this part of the lesson, which is different from reviewing, where the teacher leads the lesson, the learners do most of the work by rehearsing and summarizing the new concepts.
During the workshop we played two games, one The Memory game with animals and another one called ‘Cocktail Party’ which can be used to engage students in cooperative learning.


‘Grammar and Creativity’
by Valetina Lumezi, Aurora Zuna-Krasniqi, Bleta Zeqiri
ELT Oxford Studio: Prishtina, Kosovo
Summarized by Nahla Nassar

In her introduction to the school’s history, Zeqiri stated that the ELT Oxford Studio includes more than 5000 students in different centers. Zuna-Krasniqi and Lumezi continued to explain that their school does not make use of the traditional ways of teaching grammar. Their motto in teaching is ‘building good grammar is like building blocks’.

They gave numerous examples of their way of teaching grammar which includes visual aids such as clothes, posters, toys, flashcards, drama classes, art, music and culture. They
believe that students should ‘think, reason and feel the language’. They have
taken their students on many trips such as the USA and UK to allow their students
to practice the language in real life situations.

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It is pleasing to report that a good deal of conference sessions were evaluated as
informative and appealing: the plenary talks by Terry Lamb and Desmond Thomas,
‘Lexical Chunking – Practical Activities for Word Partnerships in Class’ and ‘Fixed
Expressions - When, If at All, Are Idioms Useful?’ by Paul Davis, ‘Grammar and
Creativity’ by Valetina Lumezi, Aurora Zuna-Krasniqi and Bleta Zeqiri; ‘Bringing
Magic in the Classroom’ Velyana Penkova, Evelina Porolieva (who are offered a
free attendance at a conference in the region as their presentation was rated first
among the Bulgarian ones); ‘Keeping Learners Motivated and Behaved’ by Suzan
Oniz; ‘Just a Storytelling Session’ by Zhivka Ilieva; ‘Teacher Trainees as
Researchers’ by Irina Ivanova; ‘Fun with Phonics’ by Joanna Flint; ‘Teacher Voices:
Does Research Meet Practice?’ by Zarina Markova. Positive feedback was given on
the presentations by Daniel Perez, Ellie Boyadzhieva, Galina Velichkova, Gergana
Apostolova, George Chinnery and Gergo Santha, Georgi Geshev, Iva Nestorova,
Jemma Prior, Jenny Dooley, Krste Iliev and Natalia Pop Zarieva, Mark Andrews,
Maya Mitova and Maxine Mou, Svetla Tashevska, Svetlana Dimitrova, Sylvia’s
Velikova.

The 23rd BETA-IATEFL conference would have been impossible without the
generous support of the sponsors and exhibitors: British Council Bulgaria, the
Embassy of the United States Sofia, the U.S. Regional English Language Office
Budapest, the American University in Bulgaria, the University of Essex, Pilgrims
Ltd, AVO-Bell Language and Examination Centre, Sharing One Language (SOL), ET
Infolink, Cambridge English Language Assessment, Educational Centre Ltd, Express Publishing, Global ELT Ltd, Klett Bulgaria Ltd, Macmillan Education, Oxford University Press, Pearson Longman – SAN-PRO Ltd exclusive distributor for Bulgaria, Prosveta Publishing House. With their exhibition stands, sponsorship of plenary or featured speakers and donations to the raffles and the conference packs they added to the variety of the event and this was highly appreciated by conference participants.

An important event that took place at the 23rd BETA-IATEFL Conference was the 1st SEETA Meeting (South-Eastern European Teachers’ Associations), where the SEETA Constitution was signed, steps for future development of the community were discussed and the SEETA small-scale research project was initiated.

Here is the overall conference evaluation (answers given on a scale of 1-6 with 1 being very bad and 6 excellent) followed by a few of the comments in the feedback questionnaires. Many thanks to everybody who completed an evaluation form!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Mean score</th>
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<tr>
<td>Registration process</td>
<td>5.62</td>
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<td>Change of notification</td>
<td>5.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conference brochure</td>
<td>5.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentations: Selection to choose from</td>
<td>5.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variety of topics</td>
<td>5.45</td>
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<td>Quality of speakers</td>
<td>5.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of food and drink</td>
<td>5.85</td>
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**Location** | **5.33**  
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**Rooms** | **5.45**  
**Equipment** | **5.10**  

**Comments and suggestions:**

1. I enjoyed it all and feel grateful for the help I got from the organizers. Thank you! (Temenuzhka Seizova)
2. There were many publishing houses and I liked the refreshments during the breaks. (Maria Angelova)
3. I think it was a good balance to see plenary speakers from both international and local scenes. (Daniel Perez)
4. I enjoyed again my third conference in Bulgaria. It is nice to exchange ideas and know more people hardworking. I couldn’t join the trip on the last day. It might be nice to arrange it earlier, I guess. (Esma Asuman Eray)
5. I was unhappy on Saturday morning for cutting my stay at another great conference in order to arrive home on time for the BETA conference: my sorrow ended about 9.15 when the first plenary speech began and I saw so many faces of my fellow-teachers and ex-students. The level of the conference presenters was excellent and our undergraduates who were present there commented they were greatly impressed. We all enjoyed it extremely and I feel the publicity must be broader and noisier, for it is connected with an academic event of rare quality for our university (Gergana Apostolova).
6. I really enjoyed the fact that the BETA Conference was truly international with speakers from quite a few countries. The Lira Female Chamber Choir was amazing. Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to listen to
them live. Please do invite them to future conferences. (Anna Parisi)

7. I already congratulated the committee members on doing such a good job with the conference organization, and now I’d like to add that the conference was a really successful event that made this couple of days a most worthwhile experience. I was particularly impressed by the presence of the sponsors this year – the coffee breaks and the cocktail. Here I would just express my gratitude to all organizers for the efforts they invested in holding the conference. The conference exceeded our expectations, and there were really valuable books among the prizes. As for the Saturday evening concert – my deepest thanks to the girls from the Lira Chamber Choir and to Zarina in particular for letting us indulge in their singing. (Syana Harizanova)

8. The Choir was SUPERB! Thank you for this wonderful concert. It was unforgettable. (A. Suzan Öniz)

9. Excellent organization, efficiency and friendliness. Thank you. (Ellie Boyadzhieva)
Zhivka Ilieva

The annual IATEFL conference is a huge event – enormous, impressive!

In Harrogate there were about 1500 delegates and about 500 presentations of various kinds.

Every day started with a How to... session from 08:15 to 08:45 followed by a plenary at 9:00. During the final day we were treated to sandwich plenaries – one in the morning and one just before the official closing.

As BETA official representative I attended IATEFL Associates’ Day – 1\textsuperscript{st} April. The Associates’ Day coincides with the SIGs pre-conference events. The Associates’ Day started with introductions by the IATEFL’s Associates Committee: Les Kirkham, Amy Jost, Nazli Gungor, Harry Kuchah, followed by a welcome by IATEFL President Carol Read and Eric Baber, Vice-President. The sessions included: 2014 Awards to Associates (Hornby IATEFL Award, IH/IATEFL Training Award, IATEFL Projects), Associates & Research, Associates & SIGs, Developing Teacher Excellence, IATEFL Scholarships, IATEFL Webinars. During these sessions we were kindly invited to apply for the awards, to encourage our
members to apply for scholarships, to collaborate with SIGs through newsletter article exchange. A rough programme of the webinars was introduced to us. The webinars are open to both IATEFL members and non members, but the recordings can be viewed by members only. 

There were presentations by SPELT (Pakistan) dedicated to their 30 years’ anniversary, FAAPI Argentina, IATEFL Peru and poster sessions by BETA (Bulgaria), SPELT (Pakistan), ETAS (Switzerland), INGED (Turkey), TESOL Arabia (UAE), NATESOL (UK), TESOL Spain, NATECLA (UK), RATE (Romania), ELTA (Serbia), CI-IATEFL (Cote d’Ivoire), ELTA (Albania), BELTA (Bangladesh), FELTA (Kyrgyzstan).

During the Associates Day I received the partnership agreement from MSATE (Moravian and Silesian Association of Teachers of English) and an offer for cooperation by TESOL Spain (e.g. Newsletters exchange). 

On 1st April there was a Welcome reception supported by Harrogate International Centre in the Royal Hall where the delegates received a warm welcome by the IATEFL President Carol Read and the Mayor of Harrogate.

I attended the following How to... sessions: How to get the most out of this conference by Susan Bardhun; How to get published in a refereed journal by Graham Hall; How to write successfully for IATEFL Conference Selections by Tania Pattison.
All the plenaries were interesting but the most impressive were Michael Hoey’s *Old approaches, new perspectives: the implications of a corpus linguistic theory for learning the English language* and Sugata Mitra’s *The future of learning*.

I attended primarily presentations connected to teaching languages to young and very young learners, lexical approach and corpus linguistics. I was able to see the following presentations:

- **You teach vocabulary, but do the learners know it?** by Corne Ferreira
- **Gamified language educational e-tivities: chocolate-covered broccoli or honey-coated peas** by Karenne Sylvester
- **First English words: what can pre-schoolers do?** by Hans Mol & Niki Joseph
- **Reasons for rhyming** by Rosemary Westwell
- **Learner autonomy through free play in pre-primary** by Sandie Mourao
- **Lexical sets, texts and vocabulary choice** by Andrew Walkley
- **Teaching young learners: re-thinking curricula for the 21st century** by Matthew Stubbs
- **Essential elements for nursery English teaching** by Judy West
- **The ELTJ / IATEFL signature event**
- **Pronouncing meaning: rhythm and stress games** by Mark Hancock
- **Collocation and the learner** by Michael McCarthy
- **Deconstructing video** by Jamie Keddie
- **Evaluating the long-term impact of a primary teacher training course** by Gail Ellis and Carol Read
- **Language chunks that improve speaking and writing** by Maria Parker, Carson Maynard, Brenda Imber
- **Authentic English in the young learner classroom** by Georgina Middleton
- **Online tools for analyzing lexis, grammar and discourse in texts** by Stephen Bax
Content, context and emotion in language learning by Jeanne Perrett

Teaching ESL beginners using corpus linguistics in a lexical approach by Adam Scott

Implementing cooperative learning in EFL teacher education by Johanna Marks

All of them very interesting and inspiring!

There were also poster presentations. Some of them: An old rule applied anew by Liudvika Drazdauskeine, Multiple intelligences theory: two experiences with young learners by Debora Paschoaletto Possani. Mila Angelova had a poster entitled Applying CEFR principles to testing and assessment in practice.

My presentation Lexical approach with young learners was from 12:05 to 12:35 on Friday, 4th April, just before the lunch break.


Of course, one cannot see everything interesting. There were so many things happening at the same time that I missed lots of interesting presentations, some of which partly coincided with mine: Jane Willis’ Task leading to task: priming and preparation activities for TBL, Janice Bland’s Graphic narratives: ideal choice for both reluctant and ambitious readers.

This is an event where one can start new friendships and professional relations, rekindle old ones and keep abreast with the new trends in ELT.

THANK YOU, BETA, FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY!
Since many children start learning English when they are four, five or six years old, we must adapt the vocabulary, songs, rhymes, games and all the teaching materials to their age. Children of this age are definitely interested in toys, clothes, food, colours ...

Here are some practical suggestions of teaching colours to preschool children:

a. CHANGE YOUR VOICE

Show the students different colours and ask the students to repeat after you, first in a gentle voice, then try to imitate a bear, a mouse, a monster, a witch ...(»OK, children, we are bears now. Repeat »blue« like a bear.«)

b. TOUCH IT!

Put all the flashcards of colours on the board and ask a child to touch one of them.(Point to the blue ball, please!)

c. WHAT'S MISSING?

Ask the students to shut their eyes and remove one of the pictures on the board. (»Open your eyes, children! What's missing?«)

d. A BALLOON
Make the children stand up and make a circle, then throw a balloon to one of them. When they catch it and send it to another student they should say the colour of the balloon.

e. A CHAIR
All the children are holding a colour in their hands. When the teacher calls out two colours, they swap their seats.

f. RHYMES
Teach them simple rhymes.

1. Rainbow, rainbow,
What colour are you?
Red and yellow, green and blue.

2. My chair is free,
»Blue« come to me!

(The teacher sits on a chair opposite the students and starts playing the game by saying the rhyme. The child holding a blue picture sits on the teacher's chair and does the same.)

g. A TRAIN
Form a train by holding each other's shoulders and walk around the classroom imitating the sound of the train.
Red and yellow (several times, faster)
BLUE!!!(whistle)
h. A RIVER  
Make some stepping stones of different colours. Tell the children in their mother tongue that they are going to cross a river jumping on the stepping stones. When they land on a particular stone, they have to say the colour, when they miss all the other children scream »Water!«

i. WHISPERING WORDS  
The teacher says a colour very silently and the children must observe them very carefully and say the word aloud.

j. CHINESE WHISPERS  
The teacher whispers a colour to the first child, and the the child repeats what he hears and whispers it to the next one, until it reaches the last student. He must tell the teacher the word.

k. AUTUMN LEAVES  
Ask the children to bring some autumn leaves to the classroom and glue them on a big sheet of paper. Label them: Orange, Green, Red...

l. COLOUR POSTERS  
Ask the children to find as many yellow, red... things in magazines and stick them on a large piece of paper. Label them.

m. MAGIC WATER
Take a glass of water and put a piece of blue and yellow crepe paper into it. Mix them with a magic wand saying the magic words: »Abracadabra!« The children will be fascinated by the green colour of the water.

Source: SEETA Articles Bank (*First published in IN-latefl Slovenia Newsletter, No.42, Autumn Issue 2007*)
Who Am I?

Dainess Maganda

I am a lost identity
I am a struggling soul
I am a shuttered mind
I am a mumbling mouth
I don't know who I am
I was born with a voice but I lost it
I am told that English is all that matters
I am told my identity doesn't matter
I am persuaded that my voice is worthless
I am taught to learn what is popular
I am told to ignore who I am
I am told to forget what it means to be me
I am told to go with the flow
I am forced to mourn the loss of my essence
But, I don't know who I am and so, I don't think it matters
I am a lost soul, a lost voice, a lost identity, a lost value of humanity

The world tells me
Don't worry,
You don't need to learn in a language you understand
Because it is not the language of power
You don't need to comprehend what you learn
You don't need to be who you are in order to know what the world is
You don't need to be heard for the world to notice you
You only need to speak as the world does - what matters is what
You should do and not what you need to do.
Cry your heart out - the world can't hear because it doesn't know your voice
Speak, the world won't mind because it doesn't understand your language
Sleep, the world won't notice because it can't feel your heartbeat
Close your mind, because that is what the world wants you to do and
Close your heart, because that's what the world NEEDS you to do
BUT, I say
Let me speak, let me breathe,
Let me live.
My life makes Humanity
I matter.

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Small-scale teacher-led Research Project
SEETA in collaboration with Desmond Thomas, University of Essex
Join the project area and find out more.

Two different age groups, two different worlds
Margarita Kosior
Every day of my teaching career over the past ten years has been divided into two parts: kindergarten English classes in the morning and sessions with college-level students in the afternoon. Two different age groups, two different worlds... A whole lot of challenges, but first and foremost, a whole lot of uplifting moments.

Young Learners: Tips and Tricks
Amazing Systems for Teaching English to YL - Roleplay
Fortune telling and palmistry - Teaching the Simple Past Tense
Join us here 😊

Coming Your Way
SEETA Interviews by Philip Kerr
Join the interview with Willy Cardoso

Respecting Diversity
A Social Inclusion project for schools. Open for visits.
24th BETA-IATEFL ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

SAVE THE DATE!

6 - 8 June 2015
in the University of National and World Economy, Sofia
In 2015 FIPLV (International Federation of Language Teacher Associations) joins forces with CASLT (Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers) and OMLTA (Ontario Modern Language Teachers’ Association) to hold the 2015 World Congress of Modern Languages in Niagara Falls (ON), Canada, March 26-28, 2015.

The Call for Papers is still open, with a closing date of July 15, 2014. For details on how to submit, please see the World Congress webpage:

49th Annual International IATEFL Conference and Exhibition
Manchester Central, Manchester, UK
11th-14th April 2015

Pre-Conference Events and Associates' Day, 10th April 2015

Plenary Speakers

Ann Cotton  Carol Ann Duffy  Joy Egbert  Donald Frreeman  Hary Kuchah

Scholarship application deadline 24th July 2014
Speaker proposal deadline 18th September 2014
Speaker payment deadline 16th December 2014
Earlybird Deadline 29th January 2015

http://www.iatefl.org/annual-conference/manchester-2015
Writing for the BETA E-Newsletter

Have you ever wondered if you should write an article for the E-Newsletter of BETA?

- Please DO! Your contribution may act as a springboard for discussions, inspiration for colleagues or facilitate the work of fellow teachers!

What exactly do you have to do?

If you feel you have something you would like to share:

- Send us your article in MS Word format.
- Send us a photo of you (in jpeg format) and short biographical information (about 50 words) which will accompany your article.
- You will receive feedback from us within 10 days of your submission.
- Please, check the deadlines and the topics of the forthcoming issues. Note that the topics announced are just illustrative; if you would like to submit an article on a different topic, please do. It will be considered for publishing.
- We are looking forward to your contributions.

For further information contact: beta.iateflbg@gmail.com
Notes for Contributors

- Your article must have not been previously published and should not be under consideration for publication elsewhere.
- The length of your article may vary - short contributions of 300 – 800 words are as good as long ones.
- Electronic submission of your article is preferred to the following e-mail address: beta.iateflbg@gmail.com
- Text of the article: Times New Roman, 12 points, with 1.5 spacing.
- Headings and subheading: Times New Roman, 16 points, bold, centred; first letter capitalized.
- Author names and title as well as contact details should be submitted in a separate file accompanying the article.
- About 50 words of biographical data should be included.
- New paragraphs – to be indicated with one separate line.
- Referencing should follow the APA referencing style.
- References in the text should be ordered alphabetically and contain the name of the author and the year of publication, e.g. (Benson, 1993; Hudson, 2008).
- Quotations have to include the relevant page number(s), e.g. (Peters, 2006, p.76).
- Tables, figures or diagrams should be numbered accordingly and included in the relevant part of the text. Each should have an explanatory caption.
- The editors will not return any material submitted, but they reserve the right to make editorial changes.
Established 1991 in Sofia, BETA seeks to build a network of ELT professionals on a national and regional (Southeast Europe) level and establish the association as a recognized mediator between educators and state bodies, public and other organizations.

BETA members are English teaching professionals from all educational sectors in Bulgaria – primary, secondary and tertiary, both state and private. BETA activities include organizing annual conferences, regional seminars and workshops; information dissemination; networking with other teachers’ associations and NGOs in Bulgaria and abroad; exchange of representatives with teachers’ associations from abroad.

We are on the web:

http://www.beta-iatefl.org/

Thank you for your support!

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