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Dear Reader,

The concluding issue of the BETA-IATEFL E-Newsletter for 2014 is a special one which offers you diverse perspectives on the relationship between research and classroom practice in the context of teaching English as a foreign language.

The contributions to this issue have been developed from talks and workshops presented at the 23rd BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference, held in collaboration with the South-West University in Blagoevgrad between 11th – 13th April 2014. The aims of this international event were to explore the general theme *The English Language Classroom: Can Research Meet Practice?* by addressing the perceived tension between classroom practice and research, and to bring some local flavor to the discussion. It was at the BETA conference in Blagoevgrad where the idea for the SEETA teacher-led research project was born. The opening article in the present collection introduces the aims and rationale of this collaborative project which has already been launched and is currently running on the SEETA Moodle platform.

We hope you enjoy this volume and its special holiday corner featuring a seasonal article by Bill Templer and a Christmas poem by Fiona James.

Happy reading and a successful new year!

Zarina Markova and Sylvia Velikova
Editors of BETA-IATEFL E-Newsletter
SEETA Small-Scale Research Project

Desmond Thomas, Zarina Markova, Anna Parisi

Context and Underlying Aims

In many countries there is a strongly-perceived hierarchy of expertise within TEFL/TESOL. At the top comes research (carried out by university specialist academics) leading to publication of journal articles and books containing ideas which gradually filter into the consciousness of teachers, often through training courses and in-service workshops. Those who carry out research projects tend not to be active classroom teachers (except perhaps at tertiary level). As a result the gap between theory based on research findings and actual practice remains as wide as it has always been.

The underlying aim of this SEETA project is to seek to redress the balance by encouraging teachers to become active researchers, and for some specific TEFL/TESOL research to be classroom-based led by classroom practitioners.

Constraints

One of the biggest problems that teacher-researchers face is their own perceptions of what research entails. Research is often seen as a theoretical exercise, engaging with books, computer files and the virtual world of the internet – not the real world of teaching and learning. According to Nunan (Nunan, D. 1989: 2) the gap between educational theory and practice is one of perception and deeply-felt beliefs. Academics involved in research often complain about the lack of rigour with which teachers formulate and seek answers to their problems. They
argue that valid and meaningful research must adhere to important principles such as generalizability and replicability – a very difficult proposition for a teacher doing some classroom research involving just one group of students.

Teachers, on the other hand, are often impatient with academic jargon and emphasize the practical nature of the kind of research which they would like to carry out. More often than not, they are influenced by the academics’ arguments and do not regard themselves as potential researchers at all. The result is that teaching and classroom research continue to be separate activities.

Other considerations that currently prevent classroom teachers from being researchers include lack of time, lack of confidence, lack of appropriate levels of support and feelings of isolation.

Potential benefits

Despite all of the constraints, this project seeks to engage teachers in TEFL/TESOL research because of the wide range of potential benefits.

For the TEFL/TESOL field, Nunan suggests that teacher-initiated research has the following advantages:

1. It begins with and builds on the knowledge that teachers have already accumulated.
2. It focuses on the immediate interests of classroom teachers.
3. It bridges the gap between understanding and action by merging the role of researcher and practitioner.
There is arguably another strong reason why teachers should seek to become active researchers. Kincheloe (1991) emphasizes the empowering effects of research and the ways in which it can liberate individuals from being deliverers of pre-packaged coursebook products. Students stand to gain substantially from teachers who are actively engaged in asking questions about teaching approaches, teaching problems, activities and materials. And readers in the TEFL/TESOL field also stand to gain from the perspectives of teacher-researchers relating to aspects of classroom practice.

Finally, there are great benefits to be gained at an individual level in terms of increased knowledge, highly developed skill sets, increased confidence and better employability prospects. The key to all of this is publication of research findings in which SEETA can play an important support role.

**Project Description**

The project involves teachers engaging in *small-scale* rather than large-scale research. In other words, the research aims will be very specific, will relate to designated groups of learners or teaching colleagues and will be completed within weeks or months rather than years. Many of the research projects could also be considered as *action research* if they are focused on particular classroom-related problems and potential solutions.

The project is planned in two stages as follows:

1. **Collaborative Stage:** This involves EFL teachers in the state and private sector in schools in Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Turkey. The aim is to choose a common small-scale
research focus to be carried out by individuals in collaboration with counterparts in other institutions. The results will be published by SEETA in 2015 and will provide inspiration and ideas for Stage 2.

2. **Individual Stage**: EFL teachers will choose and develop their own research projects to be carried out in their institutions with the support of SEETA.

At both stages, we aim to find similarities and differences in EFL classes in the region. We also aim to find out our students’ opinion of current classroom approaches, methods, activities and practices.

**Research Topics**

The following list of possible topic areas was suggested by EFL teachers in a preliminary survey and opinions for and against each of them were taken into consideration when planning Stage 1.

1. Dealing with mixed ability groups of learners
2. Adapting coursebook materials to meet learner needs
3. Raising and sustaining motivation levels among learners
4. Using the L1 as a resource in the classroom
5. Innovative approaches in teaching speaking (or reading, or listening, or writing)
6. Corrective feedback techniques in the classroom - and their consequences
7. Preparing learners for tests/exams
8. Encouraging learner autonomy
9. Dealing with difficult individuals and groups
10. The use of technology and its consequences.
The chosen topic area for Stage 1

Title: The changing uses of technology in the EFL classroom

Research Questions:

1. What types of non-mobile and mobile technology do SEETA EFL teachers make use of?
2. How do different countries and different educational sectors vary in this respect?
3. How do learners make use of mobile technology as part of their EL learning?
4. What are the main challenges faced by teachers in the use of technology?
5. What are the main challenges faced by schools and universities in different countries?
6. What do teachers identify as examples of good practice in this area?
7. What has been published in each country related to this topic area?

Questions 1-3 aim to provide a snapshot of current classroom practices. Questions 4-6 explore teacher attitudes to the changing uses of technology. Similar questions could be added to explore the attitudes of EFL learners. Question 7 aims to provide an overview of context-specific publications in this area.

Implications:

This project is not just about the variety of uses of technology in different countries and in different teaching contexts, but it will also focus on ways in which changes in technology affect classroom practice – and the ways in which we
respond as teachers to technological innovation. The topic area can also be quite emotive for some people for the following reasons:

- It is hard to pinpoint and define as it can include a vast range of hardware, software and resultant activities.
- Some teachers fear technological advances - especially if they are made to feel incompetent. Other individuals feel empowered by such change.
- Technological innovation costs money that could be spent on other things (e.g., teacher wages), thus causing some degree of resentment in certain quarters. And it is often the case that teachers are not involved in decisions to invest in new educational technology.
- It is sometimes the case that learners are more attuned to technological advances than their teachers.
- Above all, the introduction of new technology means adjusting to change. Many people react negatively to change, unless they can see clear benefits. Teachers are no exception.

Project Procedures for Stage 1

1. The project was inspired by the topic, presentations and speakers of the 23rd BETA conference in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria. Stage 1 of the project was launched at the end of September 2014 in at a meeting of TESOL Thrace-Macedonia with an audience of teachers from Greece.

2. The international launch of the project took place in the form of a SEETA webinar on 21.10.14. Webinar 1, \textit{Designing a Research Project – Why? What? Where? When? How?}, aimed to answer the following questions:
• What is the overall design of the project and what are its intended outcomes?
• What are its underlying principles and how will they be put into practice?
• Who will be involved? What do teachers need to do to become involved?
• What data will need to be collected?
• Which data collection methods will be used?
• How will data be analysed and compared?
• How will the findings be presented and published?
• What support and training will be provided for teacher-researchers?
• Who will provide this support? How can the group of researchers support itself from within?
• How will participants communicate with each other?

3. Further webinars decided the design of data collection instruments and the procedures to be followed. They addressed the following questions:

Webinar 2, 4.11.2014
Collecting Data through Interviews and Questionnaires Part 1:

• Characteristics of research questionnaires
• Advantages and problem areas of questionnaires
• Framework for questionnaire design
• Pitfalls to avoid in question design
• Question wording principles
• Question wording principles
• Design checklist
• Piloting questionnaires
Webinar 3, 25.11.2014

Collecting Data through Interviews and Questionnaires Part 2:

- What we can learn from interviews
- Problem areas and constraints
- Formulating questions
- Standardizing interview procedures
- Recording interviews
- Transcribing and analysing interview data
- Ethical considerations

Webinar 4, Tue Dec 16th 2014,

Classroom Observation

- Different types of classroom observation
- Ethical procedures
- Structured vs unstructured observations
- Successful observing
- Recordings of lessons
- Keeping a research journal

3. Each webinar leads on to a series of practical tasks, including the piloting of data collection instruments.

4. Data collection takes place in participating institutions in all SEETA countries

5. Data analysis takes place in conjunction with the final webinar in 2015.
6. Stage 1 ends in May 2015. The principal findings of the collaborative research project will be presented at an international event and published on-line and in hard copy.

**Schedule for Training Webinars 5 & 6**

Webinar 5: Materials Evaluation *(20.01. 2015)*

Webinar 6: Analysing and Reporting Research Data *(10.02. 2015)*

Webinars are accompanied by on-line materials that can be downloaded from the SEETA website and printed. Sample tasks include the following:

- How would you conduct a data collection exercise in your own school? Who would be involved? What would the main problems that you would experience?
- (Based on a sample questionnaire) What are the main problems with this particular questionnaire in its current format? What changes would you make?
- Conduct and audio-record an interview with a colleague. Transcribe answers to the last three questions only.
- Ask a teaching colleague about his/her experiences of being observed. What was the context? What were the aims? What are their thoughts on the experience?

**Project Procedures for Stage 2**

In Stage 2 of the project (2015-16) teachers will carry out research within their institutions on a topic of their choice. As the EFL/ESOL classroom is a complex
environment and as the focus of research will be small-scale rather than large-scale, it is envisaged that much of the data collected by teachers will be qualitative rather than quantitative. There will be no requirement to conduct any form of statistical analysis or to demonstrate that the data is representative of a wider population of teachers and learners. The validity of the data will be internal rather than external. In other words, teachers will collect data from a small group because of the inherent interest of what these people say and do.

Six main data collection methods are suggested as a result of the webinar training in 2014-15:

2. Interviews with teachers and/or learners: can be one-to-one or in the form of focus groups.
3. Classroom observations: can be structured or unstructured.
4. Teacher/learner journals.
5. Questionnaires: can elicit facts and opinions from a wider group, if needed.
6. Tasks: learners are asked to complete a task and results are compared. These can often be accompanied by follow-up interviews in which teachers and learners discuss the tasks.

Teachers then collect their data and publish their analysis on the SEETA website for open discussion and reference. There will be a support discussion forum on the SEETA website from the outset of the project so that teachers can share their concerns and so that they do not feel isolated. This discussion forum will run until the completion of the project in 2016.
Ethical Principles

Throughout both stages of the project:

1. All participants will be informed of the nature and purpose of the research and their consent will be obtained in writing. This is built into questionnaires. We will suggest a consent form for interviews and observations.

2. All participants will remain anonymous. Participating institutions will be identified by name unless anonymity is requested.

3. The research findings will be divulged only through the SEETA project.

Dissemination of Findings

Collections of research papers will be published on-line and in hard copy. At the same time, conference presentations on specific projects will also take place.

The SEETA website address for the project
http://www.seeta.eu/

Project leader
Anna Parisi, SEETA Community Co-ordinator

Project collaborators
Desmond Thomas, University of Essex, UK.
Zarina Markova, South-West University, Bulgaria

References


Dr Desmond Thomas works at the University of Essex as a teacher trainer and Director of the Masters in TESOL. He previously worked as a lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London and in a number of TESOL-related positions in Brazil, Japan, Slovakia, Turkey, Spain and Bulgaria.
email: dthomas@essex.ac.uk

Dr Zarina Markova works at the South-West University, where she teaches Foreign Language Teaching Methodology, Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Teaching, general English; co-ordinates the school-based teaching practice and conducts state teacher certification examinations. She has been involved in various EFL and teacher training projects.
email: zarinamarkova@abv.bg

Anna Parisi is course tutor and materials designer for teacher development courses at ACCESS, in Athens. Anna has extensive experience in syllabus design and producing supplementary materials. She runs workshops for in-service teachers and consultancy on school management. She is a regular presenter at international conferences. She is the SEETA Community Manager.
email: seeta.pro.leader@gmail.com
Action Research in ELT: 
Customising Our Classroom and 
Improving Our Own Practice 

Svetlana Dimitrova-Gyuzeleva

Introduction

Can research meet practice in the English language classroom? If you ask researchers, they will readily tell you that the best research springs from practice-related contexts and its main aim is to inform practitioners in order for them to improve the quality of their own teaching and the efficiency of their students’ learning. However, more often than not, their scholarly studies – no matter how insightful and enlightening – fail to reach the targeted stakeholders in the classroom.

The problem often comes from the fact that many practising teachers, after spending some years on the job and reaching an adequate level of professional competence, stop feeling any need for change or further improvement of their expertise, basking in the comfort and success of their set professional routines in their relatively steady teaching contexts. Research (or rather the implementation of research findings into practice) is perceived as risky and threatening to ruin their smoothly functioning professional mechanism, something that will take them out of their comfort zone and face them against new unpredictable challenges. So these teachers consciously refuse to spend any time or effort on the endeavour, building glass barriers around their classroom to ward off any ‘intrusion’ from
research; however, they fail to recognize that the world is dynamic and constantly changing and that the new generations of language learners have new demands and different expectations.

It cannot be denied that there are many other teachers out there, who refuse to be reduced to deliverers of information pre-packaged by others (Kinetchoe 1991), being well-aware of the fact that there are no two classrooms alike and no foreign language teaching method – or textbook for that matter – can meet the unique demands of their own learners. They try to keep an open and inquisitive mind about their profession and establish frameworks of care in which their learners can develop effectively (McNiff 1993): they do make an effort to tailor their classrooms to their students’ idiosyncratic needs and objectives and provide them with valuable learning experiences, drawing on their own insights and the outcomes of current research as they find fit. However, most of these teachers also report feeling that scholarly research studies are often ‘incomprehensible to them’, rather ‘aloof’ and ‘theory-oriented’, and/or ‘all about answering other people’s questions’: they are still frustrated at failing to effectively cope with their own very specific, practice-related problems; not rarely even the more pragmatic research-derived ideas and innovative teaching/learning strategies and techniques are regarded as hardly applicable to their own classroom contexts which are hampered by the constraints of reality. How can you harvest the benefits of using modern information and communication technologies in language learning and teaching when your classroom lacks the mere equipment for conducting a simple listening comprehension task? At the same time quite a few of these committed to professional excellence avant-garde teachers are scared and intimidated to conduct any piece of research of their own, believing it will require the application of rather sophisticated data collection techniques and complicated statistical analysis of research results before they could safely be implemented into practice.
Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to present the essence of action research in English language teaching (ELT) in simple terms and to link it with the strive for personal professional development and the need to improve our own teaching practice and our students’ learning. Producing a worthwhile practice-related study on the job and implementing its findings back into practice need not be considered off realm by any motivated teacher committed to quality in their professional performance. The paper also offers the readers hands-on experience of some practical activities that will empower them to become reflective practitioners, critically exploring their professional contexts and harnessing research into their service in order to ‘customise’ their own classrooms.

In way of defining Action Research

Before reading on, please think about the following questions:

Q 1: How many years of teaching experience have you got?
   - none  
   - 1-3    
   - 4-10   
   - 11-15  
   - 16-20  
   - more

Q 2: Do you agree with the following statement: "When you reach an adequate level of teaching competence, the process of professional development levels off."

Q 3: What can you do / have you done to further your professional development?

As in many walks of life, it is believed that when teachers master the subtleties of their profession, after completing formal training and spending a few years on the job, they stop developing, enjoying the fruit of their competence and the comfort of successful routines. The fallacy in that argument – known as the humpback of professional development, where teachers’ professional competence grows quite fast in the first years on the job, but then the process gradually levels off – is the fact that teaching is not a simple craft and professional excellence is a variable...
depending on many ‘unpredictable’ context-specific factors of influence. Teachers need to be alert and observant, reflecting, thinking on their feet and often outside the box (but staying inside it!), taking decisions on the spur of the moment in order to respond best to the call of the situation and meet their learners’ needs (the latter are also infinitely varied in character depending on the age, the cognitive style, the motivation and the language learning experience of each of the individual students). On the other hand, the on-going developments in the area of foreign language teaching over the last decades and especially in the methodology of teaching English as a foreign language (e.g. using modern information and communication technologies /ICT/ in the process of teaching and learning foreign languages, introducing content-language integrated learning /CLIL/ in the syllabus, developing learners’ intercultural communicative competence, improving their generic language learning skills and multilingual competence, fostering learner autonomy through active learning and project work, etc.), have made us all aware of the need to consciously invest time and effort in the acquisition of new professional knowledge and skills and the refinement of our professional competence in order to keep abreast of these developments and ensure good practice.

How can we do that? The list of options is an open-ended one: go to a conference or a seminar, do some training, attend an ELT refreshment course, read professional literature, network with colleagues to share experience, ideas and good practices, observe a colleague in their classroom or invite other teachers to observe us and give us some advice or help us find an answer to a professional riddle, etc. (Dimitrova 2007). And it is in this very list of options for personal professional development that lead to improving our own teaching praxis and our students’ learning that exploratory teaching and action research feature high. Through action research we get to ask the questions and find solutions to the
problems that are important for us and our own learners no matter how insignificant they can appear in the grand kaleidoscope of educational research concerns; we get the freedom to address the aspects of our classroom practice that are prominent for us, to implement the change that we want to see, to probe the dimensions of our own educational context and adapt our personal professional performance to them, striking a perfect fit; we capitalize on the autonomy to customise our own classroom and direct our teaching and students’ learning to achieving the best of results.

**Before reading on, please think about the following questions:**

**Q 4:** Have you ever felt the need to change anything in your professional practice – to challenge existing knowledge and follow your intuition, to solve a problem, to implement a new approach/idea, etc.? What was it? What did you do about it?

**Q 5:** Have you ever carried out any piece of classroom-related research? When did you do that – i.e. were you a teacher-trainee or a practising teacher? What was the focus of your research? What did you find out? What was the benefit/practical value of your outcomes?

The reasons for doing action research could be various: you may need to understand better an aspect of your classroom, make sense of your own experience or explain your students’ behaviour; you may wish to take a fresh look at things and update your routines by experimenting with a new idea or copying and implementing a colleague’s good practice in your own classroom; it maybe the case that you ran into a practical problem and you are searching for a solution for it or your own experience makes you question / challenge the validity of existing methodological theories. There could also be other, more personal reasons for carrying out research in your classroom, like the pursuit of higher
professional qualification and status promotion (which in many countries is linked with conducting and writing up small-scale educational research projects); or you may feel passionate about reform in education – one which is not imposed from without but the need for which is felt from within – believing that the most effective way to influence and/or change the wider educational context is through incorporating initiatives approbated at the grass-root level; last but not least, you may be quite resourceful and creative and wish to add to the store of human knowledge by offering better understanding of an educational phenomenon/process or by facilitating professional practice.

**Before reading on, please do the following task:**

**Q 6:** Match the beginnings and the ends of these 6 simple definitions of action research that can be found in the literature on the question. Underline key words, related to the essence of action research.

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<th>Action research:</th>
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<td>1/ ... is essentially practical in nature:</td>
<td>A/ or trying to answer questions which have some practical value for them and/or their students.</td>
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<td>2/ ... is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to [...] improve their understanding of their own practices</td>
<td>B/ for the benefit of our own professional development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/ ... consists of small scale investigations in the functioning of the real world and is closely related to the context in which it takes place:</td>
<td>C/ it comes out of practice and feeds back into practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/ ... is research carried by teachers themselves investigating problems they have identified in their current practice</td>
<td>D/ – i.e. the practitioner and the</td>
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It is often believed that action research is cyclical in nature and includes the following stages:

**Experience** is the classroom (teaching/learning) event. **Analysis and reflection** is based on (1) our own thoughts about what happened (or did not happen!) during the classroom event and why; and (2) the critical analysis of the experience and/or the research data collected for the purpose during the event. **Learning** derives from the knowledge and insights we have come to when interpreting the event and/or the empirical data, or – in case we are still puzzled and lack the answers to our research questions – it refers to the additional professional development.

Donald Schön (1983: 68) argues that ‘when someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context’.

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<th>researcher are one and the same.</th>
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<td>5/</td>
<td>... is for gaining insights into one’s own teaching or rediscovering something about oneself as a professional</td>
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<td>6/</td>
<td>... explores aspects of what goes on in a classroom</td>
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**Figure 1: A cyclical model for classroom action research**

- **Experience**
- **Planning for action**
- **Reflection and analysis**
- **Learning**

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1. Donald Schön (1983: 68) argues that ‘when someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context’.
knowledge we need to acquire through (1) reading relevant literature, (2) sharing the experience and discussing it with other teachers and/or a more experienced counsellor, a mentor / methodologist, (3) collecting further data about the problem (e.g. from interviews with students, external observations by colleagues, reviewing logs in professional portfolios depicting the event, analysis of data corporuses related to the investigated issue) and drawing conclusions from it, etc. **Plan for action** is about planning what to do next – e.g. explore further or take steps and intervene to solve the problem, detailing when and how to do it, as well as how to measure the effect of the implemented measures.

This sequence is not essentially different from any other type of research where the researcher begins by identifying a problem or an area of interest, then outlines the aims of the study, formulates research questions and hypothesizes about possible answers / outcomes; next comes the plan for action and he/she goes on to intervene and/or implement the change into practice; in the process he/she keeps an open eye, observing, reflecting, using various research tools and procedures to gather data and to measure progress and/or the effect of the change, exploring the problem from a range of possible perspectives in order to triangulate the data collected and thus increase the validity of research findings; in the following stage data is carefully analysed and critically interpreted, the researcher trying to remain objective and making him-/herself open to alternative viewpoints so as to reduce personal biases. This loop is repeated as many times as necessary until the research aims are achieved and the desired effect – attained (the problem is solved, the new model is implemented in place, the efficiency of learning is increased, etc.). The only distinguishing feature underlying action research is that the ‘doer’ / ‘practitioner’ and the ‘researcher’ are one and the same, and thus the gap between practice and research is for once successfully bridged.
**Getting ready for Action Research**

*Before reading on, please think about the following question:*

**Q 7:** What kind of ‘puzzles’ do you as a language teacher face or have faced in your practice (e.g. my students keep talking in Bulgarian during group activities; my students are afraid to speak; my students don’t understand my instructions, etc.)?

For many teachers finding a problem or an area of interest to investigate is the most difficult step of the process. Admittedly, it is not easy to distance ourselves from the object of our research – our own practice – and reflect on it critically. Professional burnout often additionally attenuates our sensitivity to detect weaknesses and/or our desire to undertake exploratory action. Change – and the chance of failure or getting it all wrong – is often perceived as a risk to our professional status in the classroom. However, if we are prepared to walk the extra mile and live with a certain degree of uncertainty about the outcomes of the conducted research, the results from it could be very rewarding – both for us and for our learners.

Our own students can help us identify worthy topics for action research – they will even be glad to be provided with a chance to voice their opinion and express their interests and needs openly. Here are some ways in which you can turn your teaching experience into research data with the help of the learners and involve them in generating research questions:

- class discussions (e.g. *What can I, your teacher, do to help you improve your learning?*);
- rounds (e.g. Say one thing you like and one thing you don’t like about our classes.);
- evaluation forms/questionnaires (e.g. an evaluation form, aiming to review a specific activity you have done together: for instance project work, or a questionnaire aiming at establishing and analysing students’ needs and personal objectives);
- pairwork / group work (e.g. Describe / Draw up a list of the qualities of your ideal teacher.);
- homework (e.g. Imagine you and I change roles: you’re teaching the next class. What will the class be like?);
- learner diaries, photos or video(audio) recordings of classroom practice.

Using these tools for reviewing your classroom practice with your students will help you see yourself through their eyes (and realise how you fall short of their expectations) in a very face-saving manner. Learners will feel your respect for their opinion and approach the tasks with the necessary degree of responsibility: thus you become a trusted partner in their learning. What is more, this way action research will derive from practice itself and your findings will help you customise your classroom and your teaching performance to your learners’ immediate needs and demands.

Apart from the above tools, there are other research instruments which can come in handy for evaluating our professional competence and/or keeping a record of our professional experience and reflecting on them critically, with the aim of identifying areas in our practice which need attention and/or set priorities for self-development. Here are some options:
- professional competence [self-]evaluation forms / checklists – recently, capitalising on the professional knowledge and experience of practitioners in the
field, there have been designed some very good, user-friendly tools for self- or expert evaluation of the professional competence of foreign language teachers, such as the *European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages: A reflection tool for language teacher education* and the *European Profiling Grid* for self-assessing the professional competence of practising foreign language teachers, or *Quality in Foreign Language Teaching: Assessment Criteria for Secondary Schools* to be used by experts when observing and evaluating the classroom practice of language teachers;

- a teacher diary or a pedagogical portfolio – e.g. *Pedagogical Portfolio for Foreign Language Teacher Trainees* – keeping it offers immense potential for critically reflecting on our diverse experience gained over time, leading not only to confidence-boosting tangibility of growth, but also to the ability to identify areas which need attention and set priorities for self-development (Dimitrova 2007);
- systematic observation (of students behaviour and/or of our own performance, done by ourselves or an by external observer) – it can be holistic/unstructured (with the researcher writing up his/her observations on anything which seems important in the form of field notes during or after the lesson) or structured (i.e. the researcher can design and use an observation sheet to record in detail certain aspects of the problem);
- feedback from a partner, a colleague and/or a mentor/methodologist – a critical friend can help us both in identifying weaknesses in our classroom performance and in clarifying puzzles we share with them;
- corpus analysis of students’ work (e.g. progress or final tests, outcomes of project work, etc.);
- reading specialised literature with a focus.
This is an open-ended list of options for tools and procedures which can help us turn our teaching practice into research data\(^2\): their role in providing an external perspective on what we are doing is essential – all that is required from us is to take a step out from our complacency and not be afraid of the challenge.

Another very helpful line of thought at this initial stage of the research is suggested by Dick Allwright (1996), who classifies the possible foci for classroom investigation in the following way:

- input to the classroom (e.g. the syllabus, the teaching / learning materials, lesson planning, etc.);
- the classroom itself (e.g. patterns of classroom interaction, communicative activities, teacher talk, students’ learning strategies, etc.);
- classroom output (e.g. learning outcomes, students’ test performance, etc.).

After finding a puzzle worthy of research, the next big step is about formulating our research questions (and/or refining them if necessary) and planning for action. Again there are some pitfalls on the way of the inexperienced researcher, which we need to be aware of. It is very useful to distinguish between the so-called ‘low-yield’ and ‘high-yield’ questions. The former are built on the false assumption that the problem is out there and you can explain it in terms of what you already know and do, but it still does not lead you to an adequate solution of it. Let us say you identified the following research problem in your classroom practice: ‘My students don’t understand my instructions.’ A possible comparatively low-yield question derived from it would be ‘Why don’t they understand my instructions?’ That is, it will not take you much further on your quest of problem solutions because you probably have a ready explanation of the cause of the problem (and the problem

\(^2\) Most of these tools and procedures are used during action research itself too for data collection in order to authentically describe the studied phenomena or processes – either through factual or through subjective accounts.
is definitely not you!) and there is still nothing you can do to change the situation: ‘they don’t understand my instructions because they don’t listen to me when I’m talking’. A much better, higher-yielding question for your action research would be something like: ‘How can I improve my instructions?’ or ‘When do my students listen to me? What is the quality of my teacher talk?’ Such questions put you – the teacher – in the centre and highlight the role of your own professional skills and values in finding a solution to the problem. You are not afraid to challenge the assumptions and traditional routines, to critically evaluate and change your own performance. And of course there are many alternative solutions to the problem and you just need to find out which ones work best in your professional context with your particular group of students.

Figure 2: Turning a teaching puzzle into a (good) question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low-yield questions</th>
<th>High-yield questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the problem is out there and I can explain it in terms of what I already do</td>
<td>I see the problem in me, too and challenge the assumptions, I am open to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Why don’t they understand my instructions?’</td>
<td>‘How can I improve my instructions?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q ⇒ ‘Because .... (they don’t listen to me when I’m talking)’</td>
<td>‘When do my students listen to me?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘What is the quality of my teacher talk?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☳ ‘………’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q ⇒ ‘………’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☳ ‘………’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After refining our research questions, we go on to generate possible solutions to our problem and we formulate our hypotheses (i.e. the possible outcomes from the change we intend to implement in our classroom practice).

Before reading on, please do the following task:

Q 8: Think of at least 3 possible solutions to the teacher’s problem outlined above and try to predict the outcome of each implemented measure.
How can I improve my instructions?

I think that if I [do what?] ... ⇒ ... the following might happen as a result:

* .......................................................... ⇒ ..........................................................
* .......................................................... ⇒ ..........................................................
* .......................................................... ⇒ ..........................................................

(Possible answers: 1. If I speak more slowly and clearly and/or keep my instructions short and simple, ⇒ their cognitive and linguistic load will be adapted to my students' level of proficiency and they will understand them. // 2. If I stage my instructions / deliver them step by step, ⇒ my instructions will have a truly communicative purpose and students will perform them as they listen. // 3. If I check task comprehension and/or provide an example, ⇒ group understanding of my instructions will improve.)

Once we are ready with the questions and the possible answers for our puzzle, we need to try them out in practice and see if they will bring about the desired effect. In order to increase the validity of the research results and facilitate their interpretation, researchers are advised to implement each of the solutions one by one, not all at once: thus they will be better in position to control the factors which may influence the studied phenomenon or process and will know what led to the obtained outcome of the research intervention. The sequence of implementing each of the solutions into practice is best detailed in an action plan, where apart from explaining what will be done at each stage, why (with what aim or hypothesis in mind) and how exactly, the researcher needs to plan for the research tools and data collection procedures, which will help him/her document / record what is happening and then measure the effect of the change. The use of more than one research tool will make it possible of the teacher to gather different kinds of useful data (both empirical / objective and ethnographic / subjective), which will enable him/her to examine the problem from different angles and see more clearly what is going on: this triangulation will also increase the validity and reliability of the research findings.

Before reading on, please do the following task:
Q9: Which of the following data gathering tools and procedures may be suitable for employing during the action research discussed above (connected with the improvement of the teacher’s instructions) in order to document what is happening and evaluate the effect of the implemented measures – explain how you will use them and what information you will try to ‘capture’:

- Observing my own performance and that of my students in class and writing field notes;
- Making video-/audio- recordings of my lesson (or certain activities);
- Asking a colleague to observe my teaching;
- Interviewing (incl. using questionnaires and evaluation forms) my students;
- Interviewing (incl. using questionnaires and evaluation forms) colleagues;
- Observing colleagues teaching;
- Gathering and analysing a data corpus (e.g. students’ tests / task performance);
- other (please specify) …………………………………………………………………

Answers to the above task will depend on resources (both material and human) available, as well as on the researcher’s own preferences. For example, the teacher might collect some data by observation (writing up the account in the form of field notes), and then supplement it by conducting a questionnaire with his/her students to evaluate each of his/her strategies for more efficient instructions, and finally carry out a follow-up interview with a selected number of his/her students to elaborate on interesting answers and/or unexpected findings. When choosing/creating a research tool, the teacher also needs to pay attention to its design (esp. if it is a structured observation sheet, or a questionnaire, or a list of questions for an interview) and possibly pilot it before using it in order to make sure it will obtain the necessary information and the data will not be biased in any way or be open to misinterpretation. Less experienced researchers and teachers embarking on more serious scientific studies are well advised to do some reading and/or training in research methods before they venture into designing their own data gathering tools. In classroom action research however no such sophistication
is required and patterns and tendencies are usually obvious even to the ‘naked’
eye of the layman.

To round up this stage, the following grid may be useful in writing up your action
research plan – you fill in the boxes for each of the solutions you have come up
with separately:

Before reading on, please do the following task:

**Q 10:** Choose one of the puzzles you thought of in Q7, turn it into a high-yield
question, generate some possible answers which you could try in practice
and, using the headings above, come up with an action research plan for it.

Finally, when you have fulfilled your action plan and gathered all the research
data you need, it is time to take a moment and reflect on your findings, to analyse
and interpret them in order to evaluate the effect of your actions / problem-
solving measures. This process may also require some skill on part of the
researcher: generally, it is good to remember that description and presentation of
data is not data explanation/interpretation, just like watching is not the same as
seeing. In order to be able to make sense of the experience and draw some
lessons from your research findings which will be useful for your future practice,
you need to ‘read’ your data critically, treating them objectively and making
yourself open to alternative viewpoints so that you reduce your personal biases in
the process of interpretation. With regard to the latter aim, it is very useful to
present our research findings (even before the research is complete) to colleagues
and/or senior mentors: through group discussion of results, pooling of professional knowledge and experience, along with constructive criticism, we will be empowered to make better sense of our research, to examine findings more thoroughly from a range of different perspectives, distinguish patterns more easily, pick up any loose ends in our work, and generally understand much better our classroom. Our improved ability to comment on our findings and articulate our professional knowledge and experience will also make it easier for us to share our research results and good practice with the wider professional community – what has worked for us, can work for others too.

With feeding our research results and gained insights back into practice to improve our own teaching and/or students’ learning (and monitoring the outcome) we have come a full circle to where we started – only this time we are on the cutting edge of events, bringing about change, customising our own classroom and adapting our professional performance to the times, educational contexts and/or our learners’ needs. And let us not forget that the end of an action research study is probably the beginning – or yet another snap-shot – of the life-long process of professional development.

**Conclusion**

Action research, or exploratory teaching (Allwright 2003) is something good teachers have always done, albeit unconsciously and probably not as systematically as ‘prescribed’: they try to improve their professional performance and increase the efficiency of students’ learning by careful analysis of their specific educational context, reflecting on their experience and modifying and/or adapting their behaviour as needed. Action research empowers teachers to understand their classrooms better, to competently solve problems of immediate relevance to their own practice, to implement innovative ideas, teaching techniques and
learning strategies, to bring about the change that they and their students want to see in education. Action research is the crossing point between practice and research and the synergy released at this encounter can make our own classroom a better place!

References


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**Dr Svetlana Dimitrova-Gyuzeleva** is an Associate Professor in Pedagogy at the English Studies Department of New Bulgarian University. She holds an MPhil degree in English and Applied Linguistics from the University of Cambridge and a PhD degree in FLT Methodology. She has long and varied experience of teaching English as a foreign language, as well as of teacher and mentor training in both pre- and in-service contexts.

email: sgjuzeleva@nbu.bg
An Action-oriented Approach

in the Context of Blended Learning

Mariya Neykova

Introduction

The necessity to establish a direct connection between theory and practice is unquestionable today. Foreign language textbooks offer a wide range of communicative tasks which prepare the learners to use their knowledge in their work and life in general. The recent developments in the field of Information Technology have a considerable influence on the process of language teaching, which entails the search for new procedures and new frameworks that could meet the learners’ needs adequately. Very often such initiative is taken by the teacher who not only knows what the interests and the needs of his/her learners are but is also in the position to exercise positive influence on the relationships in the group thus boosting students’ motivation and the effectiveness of the concrete activities.

Theoretical background

The idea of learning by doing is deeply ingrained in John Dewey’s theory of progressive learning. He points out that education fails when the school is seen as a place where children receive certain information, learn certain lessons, or form certain habits and they are expected to benefit from all this ahead in the future. In other words, learning prepares the child for his/her future life but is not part of the child’s life experience and, consequently, is not really educative. Dewey
Theorizes that education should be conceived as an intrinsic part of life and not a mere preparation for future life:

... much of present education fails because it neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life. It conceives the school as a place where certain information is to be given, where certain lessons are to be learned, or where certain habits are to be formed. The value of these is conceived as lying largely in the remote future; the child must do these things for the sake of something else he is to do; they are mere preparations. As a result they do not become a part of the life experience of the child and so are not truly educative (John Dewey in McDermott 1982: 446–447).

The action-oriented approach is thoroughly analyzed in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR 2006). The characteristics and forms of language use and language learning are defined, focusing on the learners with their competences and in particular their communicative language competences, the language activities they perform and the tasks they accomplish. By monitoring these actions the participants can rethink and adapt their competences:

Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of competences, both general and in particular communicative language competences. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various conditions and under various
**constraints** to engage in **language activities** involving **language processes** to produce and/or receive texts in relation to **themes** in specific **domains**, activating those **strategies** which seem most appropriate for carrying out the **tasks** to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences (CEFR 2006: 9).

Foreign language teaching aims at developing skills for communication in various domains – educational, occupational, public and personal (CEFR 2006). This is the reason why interaction between the learners as social agents is so important in the process of language learning. The method of Cooperative Learning offers ample opportunities for such social interaction. Shopov (2008) describes five factors of Cooperative Learning: (1) **Positive interdependence**, the first factor, means that ‘each group member depends upon every other group member to achieve a goal’ (Shopov 2008: 269). (2) The second factor is **face-to-face promotive interaction**, which ‘occurs as students encourage each other, reward one another, provide assistance to help each other learn, exchange information and ideas and challenge ideas of other group members’ (Shopov 2008: 270). (3) **Individual accountability**, the third factor, means that individual ‘students must learn that they are responsible for understanding the course content’ (Shopov 2008: 270). (4) The fourth factor points to the importance of **social collaborative skills**. ‘The cooperative learning environment, if well organized, provides an opportunity for students to grow socially and learn effective group communication skills’ (Shopov 2008: 271). (5) And finally, the fifth factor, **group processing**, is related to ‘the group’s self-evaluation of each member’s contribution’ (Shopov 2008: 271). It comprises student interactive evaluations, feedback from the peers and the
instructor and an analysis of improvements targeted at the group’s activities in the future.

The tasks in foreign language learning aim at achieving a concrete outcome. FL students strategically use their specific competences to achieve a given result (CEFR 2006). In order to facilitate that process FL teachers should try to select ‘tasks which are purposeful and meaningful for the learner, and provide a challenging but realistic and attainable goal, involving the learner as fully as possible, and allowing for differing learner interpretations and outcomes’ (CEFR 2006: 167).

**Practical application of the action-oriented approach in the context of blended learning**

Quite often the practical application of the action-oriented approach in the context of blended learning encounters problems. I am going to discuss the causes for these problems, and I will suggest some solutions, focusing on the structural framework of the tasks.

**Problems**

The action-oriented approach requires and presupposes team work. However, one of the most common problems a teacher encounters when setting a group task is the unwillingness of some students to work in a team. And even when the students do work in team, conflict situations occasionally arise. More often than not certain students try to stand aloof from their classmates and leave their partners complete the whole task. The consequences are quite familiar – tension, dissatisfaction with the final results, sense of injustice because of the distribution
of the workload, a bitter feeling in those who have done their utmost to accomplish the larger bulk of the work. In addition, in these cases assessment turns out to be a very delicate task for the teacher.

The rapid development of information technology makes its introduction in foreign language teaching inevitable. It is a fact that most language learners value the freedom that electronic learning gives them. However, some of them still feel uncomfortable with computers and prefer in-person classes.

Apparently, in the above situations the potential of the action-oriented approach is not revealed completely. The lack of effective learning community leads to a partial and fragmentary fulfillment of the designed activities and the targeted result is not achieved to its full extent.

Causes of the problems

In part, the inner resistance that some learners experience towards teamwork is due to inherited old practices, namely to lay stress upon memorization and mechanical reproduction of information. The unwillingness to work in team often stems from the lack of trust in the other members of the group. Some students would rather do most of the work themselves than take the risk of being misled by their partners.

Assessment requires greater effort on the part of the teacher since it has to reflect each member’s contribution to the accomplishment of the group task and, ultimately, to the achievement of the learners’ common goal.
Possible solutions

It is impossible to find a universal solution to these problems. Still, certain basic principles can be outlined: (1) First of all, teachers should try to involve all the students in doing the tasks. For that purpose they should be flexible when selecting activities for their classes. Needs analysis is equally successful with both classroom learning and blended learning. Students, and especially adult students, should be given greater freedom over the choice of topics to be discussed. They should be delegated the responsibility to choose topics which are of interest to them but also to their fellow students, topics which can provoke making comments, asking questions, expressing opinion or taking a stance. (2) Shy learners or potential conflict makers who may find it difficult to cooperate should be stimulated to join in the group activities. The teacher, together with the other students, should help them overcome their reluctance, which will boost motivation and enthusiasm in completing the task and will improve the atmosphere in the group. As a result, the action-oriented approach will no longer be an obstacle but rather a challenge. (3) The unwillingness to work online, although infrequent today, requires greater care and efforts on the part of the teacher. The fears and reservations of the learners should be attended to promptly and effectively. In order to overcome these fears the teacher has to stimulate taking responsibility and the development of positive interdependence between the members of the group, who have to achieve a common goal. (4) Assessment should reflect each participant’s performance. It has to be precise and personalized since a holistic approach would not reflect the individual contribution of each student and would not be fair. (5) But the achievement of optimal results depends primarily on the adequate structuring of the learning activities.
A framework for implementing an action-oriented approach in the context of blended learning (based on text interpretation and text transformation)

Blended learning creates the necessary conditions for alternating traditional in-person classroom interaction with asynchronous electronic distance learning with no prevailing importance of one context over the other. It also ensures the continuity of learning because there is no interruption between the learning sessions. That way the restrictions over the time, the place and the pace of work can easily be overcome.

The greater freedom over the selection of learning content and the open, flexible structure of the activities create the necessary prerequisites for tailoring the course content to the students’ interests and needs, thus making this content unique for each course.

The following model is easy to adapt to any level of language competence and allows for a wide range of authentic language tasks to choose from:

*Stimulus* (text) $\rightarrow$ *Discussion* (focused on text interpretation) $\rightarrow$ *Task Completion* (text transformation).

Sample tasks

I would like to outline two tasks that are based on the principles of the action-oriented approach and can successfully be accomplished in the context of blended
learning. They both involve a combination of classroom work and activities to be carried out on an electronic learning platform. In this case it is MOODLE NBU (http://e-edu.nbu.bg).

The first task is *sight translation* of a book. It comprises several stages:

- First, each student chooses a book and presents it in class. The presentation is followed by a short discussion with the students attending the class and a translation of a short extract from the book (about a page long), assisted by the presenter;
- The second stage is a discussion in MOODLE (focusing on the plot, the characters, the style, etc.) in which all the students participate;
- Finally, each student has to prepare his/her book for sight translation.

The second task is a *summary* of an article:

- The first stage is a short presentation. Each student chooses an article and presents it in MOODLE, where a link to the article is attached. The student presents his/her opinion on the issues that the article deals with;
- The second stage is a discussion in MOODLE (focusing on the topic and the views expressed in the article);
- The third stage is a discussion summary. In class each student presents a short summary of the discussion in MOODLE focusing on the opinions, questions and comments of the other students;
- In the final stage each student has to write a summary of his/her article.

These two tasks illustrate the way we can combine the advantages of the traditional learning context and the freedom that distance electronic learning provides. The tasks were incorporated in the *Reading Skills and Text Interpretation* course in the English Studies programme at New Bulgarian University. They are
based on the positive influence that the principles of team work and peer support exert on the learners’ performance. But it is peer teaching that brings the real ‘action’ element in the asynchronous blended learning context. It lies at the basis of collaborative work and multiplies the beneficial effect of the action-oriented approach.

The practical implementation of the above model has helped learners realize the potential benefits of the action-oriented approach in the context of blended learning. In a survey, carried out with the students, they had to answer questions about the effect of the described activities on their work. The answers to the set of questions concerning their general attitude to these activities show that all the students would like to have such discussions in their FL courses; three quarters of them would like to have such discussions in the other courses in their programme; and all of them are of the opinion that the acquired strategies and skills for text presentation and discussion in an online environment will be useful for them in the future.

**Conclusion**

The action-oriented approach is gaining more and more supporters among teachers in Bulgaria. Although at first sight it might seem time consuming, its benefits are numerous and unquestionable. The development of interpersonal skills can be viewed as both an achievement and a necessary prerequisite for the successful implementation of the action-oriented approach in the FL classroom. Teaching contents to peers, which is characteristic of cooperative learning, enhances responsibility, boosts self-esteem and creates a positive, low-stress atmosphere. But the most valuable advantage of the action-oriented approach is that it brings real-life tasks and relationships into the classroom so that education
Blended learning makes it possible to implement a task framework in which traditional classroom learning alternates with asynchronous online learning, thus diminishing the restrictions over the pace, the place and the time of learning.

**References**


**Dr Mariya Neykova** is an Assistant Professor at New Bulgarian University. She teaches English as a foreign language and various other courses in the area of foreign language teaching methodology. Her current research interest is focused on implementing interactive approaches in the context of blended learning.

email: mneikova@nbu.bg
Theory and Practice:
How to Make Ends Meet?

Ellie Boyadzhieva

Introduction

With the development of globalization the needs for English as a lingua franca in international communication change. English teachers have to meet the challenge of changing themselves in order to meet the particular needs of the learners in a world where English is everywhere. How and what do we teach and is this what is expected from us by the learners?

A Historical Overview

It is commonly agreed that in the modern world English is the most widespread language, which over the years has turned from a language spoken by relatively small island population in the modern lingua franca on the globe.

This remarkable development is due to several factors working at different times, each of which enhanced the internationalization of English. At certain historical stages all of them, individually or in combination, have contributed to the present day status of English.

First comes the internal linguistic factors rooted in the structure of the language itself. English almost lacks morphology and there are about nine inflectional morphemes altogether, among which the most frequent is ‘s’ functioning as an
ending for the present tense 3rd person singular, a grammatical marker of the regular plural of the noun, and expressing genitive case. Along with ‘s’ there are two morphemes indicating the comparative and the superlative degrees of the adjectives, the suffix ‘-ed’ marking the past tense of the regular verbs and the ‘–ing’ ending of the verb indicating either present participle or gerund. English, like Afrikaans, has lost its grammatical gender and the old case system of the noun, and in addition the adjectives lack any inflections. All these grammatical features make it quite a learnable language, especially at the beginner’s stage.

The external factors lie in the fields of the political and economic development of the countries exporting English. From a historical perspective the massive export of English can be placed in different historical periods. The first period reaches as far back as the seventeenth century when the English speaking puritans settled on the North American continent. The next great expansion of the language took place in the nineteenth century when with the immense growth of the British Empire English reached various countries in Asia, Africa and Australia. The two world wars in the twentieth century also contributed to the establishment of English as a world language as in both of them Britain and the USA were leading powers, and what is even more important, they were also the winning parties dictating the rules of the further development of Europe and the world.

After the Second World War the role of Britain as an economic and financial world leader was partly replaced by the USA which became the leading super-economic power. The advancements in the area of computer technologies, and especially the invention of the Internet, had a great impact on the world spread of English.

Finally, the process of globalization which started with the establishment of UNO and the creation of EU in Western Europe after the end of World War II also
played a significant role for the rapid spread of English as a language for international communication.

The process was intensified after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 when many countries of the former ex-Soviet bloc became members of the EU and is still ongoing at present with the expansion of the union.

There is plenty of statistical evidence of the immense spread of English in the world. One of the most reliable sources of information is the number of English language learners in the educational systems of various countries. Statistics about Bulgaria show that English has replaced almost all traditionally learnt languages such as French and German. Data show that the total number of students in the secondary schools in Bulgaria for 2013/2014 year is 606,300 of which 99.4% study foreign languages and 93.5% study English. As for the primary school 89.2% study a foreign language and the students studying English present 82.8% (National Statistics – Bulgaria 2013).

This situation comes to show how important the issues related to the theory and practice of ELT in the Bulgarian educational systems are.

**Theory vs Practice**

Foreign language teaching is an area that relates three basic scientific fields. The first two, namely, theories about language (linguistics) and educational theories, which touch upon philosophical understanding of learning, are traditionally interwoven. A relatively recent development is the discussion of FLT within the framework of social anthropology including psychology and the relations between language and culture.
The notion *language* may refer either to the cognitive ability to learn and use systems of complex communication or to describe the set of rules that makes up these systems and the set of utterances that can be produced from those rules. Language as a complex system and linguistics as the scientific discipline that deals with it, is best defined by Chomsky’s description of language competence in his *Aspects* (1965) as concerned with:

‘(...) an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of this language in actual performance.’ (Chomsky. 1965 - 3).

It is obvious for the specialists that such a definition of language is not applicable to the scenario that FLT provides. Learners are not and are not expected to be ideal speakers-listeners, neither is the classroom speech situation homogeneous, let alone the ‘perfect knowledge’ of language which is characteristic of grammatical mistakes and memory failures when retrieving the right word is concerned. Evidently, this theoretical assumption is inapplicable to the practice of ELT. Unsurprisingly, this Chomsky’s view about the nature of language competence was abandoned in FLT practices.

A year after the *Aspects* were published, D.H. Hymes came up with the proposal that the FLT practice needs a different definition of language competence which would be able to comply with the practical needs of teaching and learning a foreign language. He proposed that linguistic competence in FLT should be understood as part of the wider notion of communicative competence, which
encompasses four domains, namely, linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic. He argued that: ‘A distinction should be made between the grammatical rules that enable the users to frame correct sentences and the rules of the use of the languages to accomplish some kind of communicative purpose’ (Hymes 1966 - 114).

In this way the rigid Chomskyan distinction between competence and performance has been levelled and smoothed in such a way that to be able to serve the understanding how the acquisition of a second (or a foreign) language works. This is how the needs of practice contributed to the theoretical conceptualization and the differentiation between the notions of linguistic competence in theoretical and applied linguistics nowadays.

From the viewpoint of educational theories and psychology a basic distinction was later drawn between two other key technical terms which turn out to be pivotal in both research and pedagogical practice, namely, learning and acquisition. It was Stephen Krashen in the early 80-s of the twentieth century who proposed to specify the meanings of the two terms by preserving learning for the case of acquiring a foreign language and acquisition for the learning of the mother tongue (Krashen 1981; 1985).

Another problem that came to the fore in the course of the parallel development of theoretical and applied linguistics relates to the two linguistic methods used to describe the rules underlying the language structure and the language use. Descriptivism slowly but steadily has replaced prescriptivism in the theoretically oriented research, while the prescriptive rules survived in the grammars and hand-books oriented towards language learning. This is because theoretical linguistics predominantly deals with the features of subconsciously acquired
linguistic knowledge by the native speakers of a language, whereas learning a secondary (or a foreign) language is always a conscious activity which needs memorizing grammatical structures and vocabulary as well as their correct use in particular communicative situations. What is more, as Hymes also pointed out: ‘A distinction should be made between the grammatical rules that enable the users to frame correct sentences and the rules of the use of the languages to accomplish some kind of communicative purpose’ (Hymes 1966 - 123).

Hymes’ views on competence served as a primary starting point for the establishment and the development of the so called communicative approach in FLT in general, and ELT, in particular, during the 70s of the twentieth century.

The key concepts about the nature of language within the communicative approach related to the concept of building communicative competence can be summarized as follows:

1. Meaning is more important than the structure and form.
2. Language learning does not imply learning structures, sounds and words but learning to communicate.
3. Effective communication is sought and emphasized instead of mastery of grammar and pronunciation.

(Adapted after: Rini Ekayati, Linguistics: Linguistic and Communicative Competence)

The shift from the traditional teaching/learning methods to the communicative ones changed not only the theoretical didactic concepts in FLT methodology but also the textbook design, the types and forms of assessment and the concrete teaching practices in the ELT classroom.
First, the focus in foreign language learning was directed on communication and building communicative strategies in order to achieve results in language production. Thus the productive skills, namely, writing and speaking became focal areas in the learning/teaching process, while vocabulary and grammar were taught indirectly by using definitions in the foreign language, and ideally, let to the goodwill of the learners to be memorized.

Translation and the use of the mother tongue in the foreign language classroom were forbidden. The dialogues in the textbooks (if used) were bound with communicative functions only and the grammar was to be deductively discovered within the reading and listening texts. The teacher’s role in direct teaching was drastically reduced and from ‘a supplier of knowledge’ the teacher was supposed to turn into ‘a facilitator’ in the teaching/learning process. Assessment also changed. Instead of testing grammar and vocabulary, new testing formats were introduced, where grammar and vocabulary were tested indirectly mainly through reading and listening exercises.

Now, that ELT is in its post-communicative period, many of the advantages of the classical communicative approach of the seventies are still alive and widely used in ELT practice. However, many particular drawbacks observed in the practical application of the communicative approach, have undergone significant changes and some of them were eliminated from practice. For example, the mother tongue made its comeback to the English classroom as a more time-saving and thus more appropriate way of teaching new vocabulary, especially at the beginner and pre-intermediate levels. Second, at present we can observe the return of grammar as an important part of the language structure and use. Finally, even translation from the foreign language into the mother tongue started again to be used as a technique in the language classroom as it proved with time to be a
useful tool for making the learners aware of the structural and cultural specifics of the foreign language.

The components that go into the building up of the communicative competence at present have been expanded to include the interrelation of linguistic knowledge and the paralinguistic cues; the learners’ interaction skills have been bound with their knowledge and awareness of the foreign culture which is inevitably embedded in language structures, vocabulary and the rules of language use in certain communicative situations.

**Language and culture in ELT**

When culture is concerned though, it seems that the classical traditional role of the teacher as a supplier of knowledge cannot be changed as in a simulated foreign language classroom the teacher remains the only one who can explain the differences in how different cultures use their language, what the appropriate expressions to be used in particular situations are, and explain how the native-speakers’ use of idiom should be understood by the learners. This may become a real problem for the Bulgarian (and European) learners of English as it is shown below due to the fact the different cultures may belong to different types regarding the degree of coding the intended information in the language use. To describe the different ways information is encoded in the language idiom, Edward Hall introduced the terms ‘high’ as opposing to ‘low’ context cultures (Hall 1976), an idea that was further elaborated by L. Samovar and R.E. Porter (2004).

It has been argued that Bulgaria belongs to low-context cultures compared to the cultures such as Arabic, Chinese and Japanese which are typical representatives of high-context cultures. As far as English is concerned, it takes a medium position
between those two extremes presenting features that place it higher than Bulgarian and lower compared to Japanese, for instance. This difference may lead to misunderstanding and even communication failure as in real-life communication between native and foreign speakers of English words and understanding the grammar structure are not enough. The foreign speaker of English has to be aware of how language is used in a particular context in order to understand the message hidden behind the words of a native speaker. In the table below some typical examples of expressions that can cause misunderstanding are displayed.

**Words are not enough**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The British say</th>
<th>Europeans understand</th>
<th>The British mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hmm, very interesting...</td>
<td>I am thinking about your interesting comment</td>
<td>I am not even bothering to think about your idiotic contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With the greatest respect...</td>
<td>He is listening to me</td>
<td>You are an idiot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oh, incidentally/ by the way</td>
<td>That is unimportant</td>
<td>The primary goal of our discussion is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let’s keep in touch</td>
<td>We are getting closer</td>
<td>I never want to see or hear from you again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not bad</td>
<td>I’ve done well</td>
<td>Pretty unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I only have a few minor</td>
<td>He has found only a few</td>
<td>You need to re-write it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comments</td>
<td>typos</td>
<td>completely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You must come to</td>
<td>He is inviting me to</td>
<td>You shouldn’t, I am only trying to be polite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dinner</td>
<td>dinner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can we consider</td>
<td>They haven’t decided</td>
<td>I totally disagree with your idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some</td>
<td>yet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other options</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1**
(Adapted after: *Anglo-EU Translation Guide*)

It would be interesting to ‘translate’ the following English text into English ‘meaning’ using the table above:

*Incidentally and with the greatest respect, I find your essay not too bad. As for the text itself, it’s very interesting and despite my few minor comments, I think you should come for dinner, unless we can consider some other options.*

(Adapted after: *What Brits Say?*)

Teachers should be aware of this type of ‘cultural incidents’ and they are the source of knowledge of such issues for their students in order to teach them how to act in case this type of language is used in a particular situation.

Another problem in ELT in Europe is related to the teaching/learning the British or the American variety of English, which can also cause misunderstanding as the two varieties differ not only in terms of vocabulary, but also grammar and meaning as it is demonstrated in the following true story of an American daughter who describes an argument with her British father:

*My Dad is English, and when we were in high school, my sister asked him if she could drive into Detroit with her boyfriend to see a band.*
He said, ‘I’d rather you not.’

She went anyway. When he got mad later, she was confused:

‘But you never said I couldn’t go; you said you’d rather I not, while I decided I’d rather.’

(Adapted after *What British People Say?*)

**Conclusion**

Instead of conclusion, I will quote a letter of a young Pakistani woman who, being his student, wrote to prof. David Crystal on 26 May 2013, asking him for advice. The correspondence is still available on his website. Riaz Hussain wrote (Note: The original spelling and punctuation are preserved):

> Mr, David Crystal i am Riaz Hussain From Pakistan, and i just did master in English literature, Now either i want to get TEFL or PGD in linguistic, i can’t decided my self, what do you think which is essential to be a better Teacher of English, i am puzzled now which one i get, eiper if i get TEFL WHY or i get Linguistic Why, which one build my career and to be the best, i hope sir, I must enjoy your Lecture on mention time. Good Luck

Prof. David Crystal answered:

If you’re planning to be a full-time teacher, then you need much more than a linguistics background and you should get as much TEFL training inside you as you can. If you are more a researcher by inclination, then developing a sophisticated linguistic skill-set would be good. If you do both, you have the best of both worlds, but few people have the time (or money)!

(Crystal 2014)
To summarise, I personally believe that an English teacher should be a skilled linguist, good anthropologist, but mainly an educator, who can teach life through English, where English is both a goal and a means of teaching.

References


Dr Ellie Boyadzhieva is Associate Professor of General Linguistics, Cultural studies and English morphology and syntax at Neofit Rilsky University of Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria. Her main interests are in three basic areas: contrastive analysis, comparative analysis of cultures, and language planning and language policies with regard to the place of ELT in the Bulgarian cultural context. She has published two books and over 25 articles in these three fields.

email: e.boyadzhieva@gmail.com
E-CLASSROOM:

A Global Ocean of Fluctuating Signs

Gergana Pencheva-Apostolova

Introduction

This paper is focused on the efficiency of the pragmatic aspects of philosophy in the invention and application of the socio-cultural change-based mind-governing methodology for learning, involving an intercultural rhetorical paradigm.

Ever since the turn of the 21st century, Bulgaria has been learning how to continue its existence individually. The WWW (World Wide Web) has provided a mighty medium and the environment for our virtual cultural extension.

Staying informed while developing our knowledge and skills is facilitated by the incessant and multi-layered dialogue on line in the communities each individual is part of.

Nowadays, it is clear that it was not the invention of nuclear bombs, nor the escalation in war supplies and technology that has conquered the world, but the binding of the globe into the talking web where language is the tool, the environment and the measure for an individual’s freedom and responsibility for the future survival of humanity.

1 This is a quote of Lévy's *Cyberculture* 1992:8
Yet, for Bulgarians, ‘nowadays’ started earlier: in the 1990s, when the socio-political change of our society was taking place: the years 1992 to 1994 were the period of the highest intensity of the turn where the question of our next day was heavily pressing on our minds. We needed restructuring of our mental structures and we needed opening of our view to the West. It began in the English Learning Classroom as an integrated mechanism for filling in the triadic fundament of ethos, pathos and logos of our connection with the world with different contents from what the previously reigning ideology had prescribed. The minds of the learners needed to be persuaded into making the effort. We needed a teacher-centered classroom methodology of the mental experiment carried out within the AA (Argumentative Approach) practices: the presumption on which the idea of a new way of teaching was based is that the East gives the leading role to the teacher while the West gives the right of choice to the learner, and our culture is stated in the middle of the crossroad between the East and the West. These two enter into an AA-based matrix where each next step into the English-based knowledge about a changing world is negotiated, while the teacher remains the key figure in an incessant learning process. That is how the Argumentative Approach came into being. It is generally seen as verification of incoming data in two-step educational practices of argumentation through motivation, and building awareness through heaping database. In the mid-2000s it was broadened to a SIAN: Systematic Integrated Approach to the Net.

The description of the Argumentative Approach (AA) in its two modes of functioning is further explicated in four steps: the first one tells about the beginning when a need for creating a methodology for EL learning and teaching was an imperative; the second step is the isolation of the specific features of the AA as a complex method of teaching containing a host of interactive procedures such as involvement into a public activity; showing; sharing; experiencing; gaming;
competing; winning; becoming the leader of the group. Next follows the description of the two main phases of the AA as a public competitive talk: motivation and awareness; its efficiency based on trust and hard learning where the learners are involved into the practical research of their own goals, and the routes to them. The fourth step of the AA display is focused on the effect of its application to the e-classroom aimed at harmonising the expectations of the teacher with those of the learners in the optimal choice of learning community public image, the choice of texts besides the textbooks for making up our own story of the future which is to carry both the teacher and the students past cultural negation and rebuttal; past being shy or ashamed of the foreign sounds; past the period of e-illiteracy; past the illusion of picture being worth a thousand words and turning instead to research for the answer to the question HOW it works? And, also, past our fears of becoming useless.

The beginning

In the year 1990 I started a private language school and in the designing of its strategy I employed all my previous studies of socially significant communication. The first attempt at modelling the communicative situation in the English classroom was in 1992 and a series of publications followed (Apostolova 1993 c; 1994; 1997). In 1993 I started publishing my classroom series of training courses (Apostolova 1993 a, b) and continued with academic research into the situational and cultural features of translation, creative writing, analysis of text features and speaking (2005; 2007; 2012; 2014).

The theoretical grounds lie in the development of rhetoric towards intercultural studies of current classroom practices and in employing rhetorical analysis to serve the purposes of ELL and ELT. The development of intercultural rhetoric
studies ran parallel with the development of a method of successful ELT. First came the need to answer the complex rhetorical question of setting the purpose for the teaching of English, finding out my students’ individual purposes of learning English, inventing an approach for them and selecting the teaching techniques and activities. That led to the synthetic tool of the basic rhetorical matrix and its subsequent optimization to suit the smaller tasks of each next communicative situation where I was involved in my classroom (Apostolova 1999: 205).

The ELL classroom provided rich practices for developing both an ELT methodology and intercultural rhetorical analysis that in the latest decade have served as the grounds for the development of a constructive semiotic approach to the *infosphere* (L. Floridi 1999: 7-8), where the focus is on the creativity of the four agents of translingual phenomenology: the Learner, the Teacher, the Translator, the Story-teller.

**The Story of the AA**

At the turn of the millenium our world became suddenly inefficient, not to say – useless and thrown out of history. It was a predictable turn, though, and not the change itself brought the shock to mind but the immediate collapse of a value system that had seemed prospective. We still had to bring up children and take care of the people both leaving for the wide world and remaining here, at home, in Bulgaria. Hard work became the fundament of staying motivated as a teacher. Since the old state no longer existed, and the new one was confused in its constituting, the school kept its inertia in both method and content.
A philosopher had no other choice but to work for the future and make the change actively in agreement with the circumstances. Thus it happened that for the first time in my life in 1990 I had the freedom to start a school for English language teaching where the methodology was sheer pragmatism and kept growing with each next class. I did not need to follow official school curriculums. We had all the freedom to let the world in and feel comfortable in seeking our individual places in the world outside, both my students and I. They competed for licensed diplomas and state certificates elsewhere; they only came to the ABC-Universal school of English to improve their English to the efficiency of their planned future practices.

The teaching of philosophy in its full range as the Mother of all Knowledge disguised as English language learning ran with time and was proved successful. The environment of this method designed basically for saving our minds in the time of stress, has ever since been talk: an incessant broadminded talking with people of all ages and trades and in this flowing debate reaching the reasonable grounds of our activities as the tangible effect of brainstorming experiment and activating dreams through texts serving as topi or the places where our motivation got argumentative power. Therefore I called this method ‘argumentative’.

I was to introduce new worlds to my students and that needed restructuring of their minds brought up to the best of the Bulgarian natural quality of inquisitive mind and capacity for learning, and to the worst of the Bulgarian environment in terms of culture-closed practices.

A restructuring of the mind of a learner is based upon the restructuring of the value system and the remotivation of the teacher, therefore I needed the establishment of the integrity of the teaching method. By that time Dr. Lozanov, a psychiatrist, had applied to practice his method of learning through suggestion but...
it was not very popular then with the educationalists in Bulgaria, and the global information device of the Web was not available, either.

Today we all have the WWW-environment to do the intensive-learning classroom background for us. Still, there are searching minds, who need freedom in their interpretation: systematization, hierarchial ordering and further uses of the acquired information, however vast it might seem to the untrained mind.

I felt the need for building awareness of what we were doing with my students. Before that, though, the learners needed motivation for learning the language of a foreign culture. That was not just advertising, nor even persuading them to attend the course or do their drills. It was clearing our minds from ideology, and opening them to the world without fear. What we were doing was intercultural rhetoric practice in which Bulgarian background was to be translated into efficient English. And we negotiated every next step throughout our English classes. The most frequently asked question was 'Why?' and I needed to do both hard study of the linguistic grounds for certain language usage so different in English from our habitual Bulgarian-speaking or writing practices, and inventing purely rhetorical arguments in order to make them learn it. The first couple of years I had really hard time in establishing a name of a reliable teacher. It was a time of fast changes, though, and results came fast with successful job positions or enrolment in high-prestige foreign universities. That was the first stage of verification. Hard toil followed.

Then came the younger learners, and each year 60 to 80 % of the participants continued at the next level. And we continued analyzing our findings and setting our further search as work in progress.
Thus it comes that my corpus is based on the study of about 7000 young learners in progress, about the same number of adult learners, 5 to 7 state school students of all grades and university undergraduates who participated actively in the process of their own growth. This is the third phase of the AA. I shall not stick to introducing the AA as an ELT approach: it is my methodology for learning the minds of the learners and as such it is not focused on the error analysis or on developing a typology (that has been, and is still being, successfully and diligently done by all my EL teaching colleagues at all levels) of errors or incompatibilities. What makes the AA valuable is the access to a changing mind – to some 20 000 changing minds in this single case. The main two categories to follow are Bulgarian and existence. The difference comes from the theoretical grounds the AA starts: the rhetoric theory of argumentation which is open when topics are concerned and rigid when the principles of good argumentation are to be followed, practically applied here as the chain: motivation – heaping information about the target language – verification – awareness – getting to the next level.

It worked. It still works: I am trying it out again with my 3rd year undergraduates of Applied Linguistics and English Philology and there are recognizable patterns of cultural speech behavior.

Back then, between 1990 and 2007, we were bringing up a young generation which needed integrity while being trained to accept each new culture as extension. The expanse of the World Wide Web made it possible. Then it expanded beyond our individual control. And now, we seem to have been going through similar steps at a broader turn of the spiral of human development.

It might appear to the outsider that it has been like running through layers of times and living a dozen of lives. It is much easier: learning to feel synchronic in
diachrony relaxes the mind of the learning teacher. *Suggestion* and *argumentation* then step aside, letting space for *curiosity* and *adventure*. We rediscover all the same old humanity in each novel outburst of infomania, pessimism, and aggressive attempts at ultimate control of the infosphere. We need to intensify the good old method of Induction and reconceptualize the *Organon* again as Francis Bacon did once but this time recognizing the power of deduction and the ubiquity of analogy.

Teaching English while learning the philosophy of language, thus, has always kept my interest focused on the growing mind and its placement in the world. While living in our native environment we tend to position ourselves in the center of cross-cultural communication. Suddenly, finding ourselves displaced in an expanding world, we start easily moving in both history and geography, while searching for the promised land of our deemed future.

Negation comes first and that leads to rebuttal.

Rebuttal is the almighty principle that directs the movement of the individual human particles within the collider of histories. Once displaced, individuals look for other communities, for humankind cannot live in isolation. Being on the move, we tend to forget that our starting point has also changed position, and we cannot return to it as a fixed ground. Extending our notions of belonging somewhere to the planet Earth, we inevitably become global, while remaining culturally bound to the place and time of our origin. Again rebuttal drives us forth until we find out a global communication environment finally providing us with a home: our own expanded Self.

The chronology of ideas is not like the chronology of events. It is not a line. I have not attempted to retell the history of the Web. Neither have I set as a goal to
follow historic events. What I have in mind is to tell the live story of our perception of the opening world for the past 20 years and how we were restructuring our minds using the tools of English studies and the Internet. The people I include in the agent ‘we’ are three generations, distinguished not necessarily by age: the complete outsiders to the Internet, those who remained in the peripheral groups of ‘users’, and those who accepted it as novel territory for our adventurous spirit to conquer.

The stages of this adventure of the mind can be summarised as:

- Discovering the spaces of high tech through young and eager to explore them minds and constructing our novel world without turning back to regrets;
- Fighting our sorrows, fears and anger by extending the horizons both eastwards and westwards in the case studies of global humanity, finally arriving at the common grounds of not being unique in being human;
- Stressed by the fact of being just a single case in the cultural sphere of humanity, looking for our specific features that make our single case special and turn our single existence into a unique experience worth sharing globally;
- Reconsidering our own story, told again and again over the talkative web in the languages of the mind (Jackendoff 1992) in the languages of the heart, (Wang 1987) and in the languages of all our diverse backgrounds while reaching the freedom of our common and shared human essence.
- The concern of all four stages has been communication, aimed at understanding and tolerance while stopping at cross-points and defending our identities of risk-takers, doers, and creators of new worlds (Obama, B. 2009) first in tale and play and then in serious deed.
Further we are to apply our method of study to the virtual spaces where virtual worlds are created. First comes the tangible, man-made frame of the Internet as a tool, a tale, a playground, a workshop for building worlds, an environment, a territory somewhere between practice and imagination: a vast space to experience and to design, to magic and to name. Next we turn to the familiar grounds of language woven in the texts of those stories that served as roads to follow or abandon, and as doors to open or close in the phenomenology of our Self-restructuring. Third comes the matrix of our Self-expression that has no need any longer of shiny and noisy toys, or tales about others like us or alien worlds, but reaches directly into other minds engaged in the same old activity of expanding our lives to the frontiers of our experience, or, at least, to where our knowledge might take us.

The specific features of the AA

It is both an approach to learning and a complex method of teaching containing a host of interactive procedures such as involvement into a public activity; showing; sharing; experiencing; gaming; competing; winning; becoming the leader of the group.

Today it might not be called ‘argumentative’. Ray Jackendoff has chosen to speak of the languages of the mind (Op.cit); Maria Georgieva (2002: 146) would probably focus on the intercultural compatibility modeling, L. Grozdanova (2002:131) would follow her study of the micro-cultural techniques for developing multi-cultural competence. It was 1990 and there was no trace of today’s knowledge and practice of ELT methodology exchange. There was an opening new world, the old schoolbooks of English, and the usual plead of the learners of English was: “Explain to me”. What ‘explanation’ means in the case of beginners in the field of new
studies is ‘translation’ of the meaning of a language unit or a term into something known – a picture, a text, an action, familiar or compatible with our own environment and cultural space, and it was the task of the teacher to find connections of the knowledge of language and the specific interests of the learner.

It is a curious fact that today's university undergraduates who have grown up in Bulgarian speaking environment tend to ask the same or similar questions and have even a lesser idea of social register: why is a ship 'she'? In the capacity of what knowledge do you instruct me to write an argumentative essay in this particular way? This can't be so. I've never heard of it. Where did you hear that? Here is my Term Paper: enjoy your reading.

That was not the question about the universality of grammars, but the question of the universality of the human culture in terms of thinking and in terms of practices fixed about the subject and the object of an action, event or process occurring under certain circumstances. It was a question of ‘translating’ grammar into cultural experience and linguistic categories into existential categories. Existence is the final ground for the universality of human talk.

In explanation of that sort the task was to find the position of a language structure and the arguments for defining it as such. I chose to call it ‘argumentation’ for it was grounded on the understanding fixed in our mother tongue and had nothing to do with the real story of that unit in English. It was sheer rhetoric but its value was in the motivation of introducing new structures – we needed restructuring of our brain activity and we needed rhetoric for relaxing and neutralizing the opposition of the brain of the learners. The metalanguage of a language teacher is like that of a psychiatrist for it is tracing the points of cultural compatibility. It is a
fight and the brain is under stress, arguing for its usual grounds. That is why I considered it relevant to call the approach ‘argumentative’ – I acted as a philosopher and like a psychiatrist but relied on awareness of what I introduced in each next step so that we could have reliable structures built-in without damage and with the opportunity for their functioning as generative structures.

Our culture is not tolerant: it needs motivation and verification. A teacher becomes trustworthy in impressing the validity of new information in speech.

I still wonder how subtle the grounds that make other people believe in us are, for the above described case is nothing else but a demonstration of the effect of the *Magister dixit* fallacy to people who never thought it might not turn true: the desire to make it so did make it. That exactly is the initial step of motivation of the AA. It was followed by hard toil.

The *a priori* motivation is the awareness of the learner's goal: very often it is the task of the teacher to first be aware of it, and then to lead the learner to that awareness. It is the challenging part where a teacher gains the trust and the authority to continue with the work on the mental structures of the learner. Still an individual brain fights against intervention but allows to be accompanied in the effort by the teacher following the same path. Ethos needs getting into the shoes of the ones you teach and be affected by team passion. Pathos grows into empathy and empathy into telepathy. All these procedures effect in data collection and improvement of the teaching-learning methodology. AA is applied in dialogue where awareness and motivation become the two-staged product of shared effort.
The two main phases of the AA:

Motivation and awareness

I have been trying to clear a simple model of the Argumentative Approach all these years. The initial idea was that it would be a two-stage teaching based on motivation and awareness, followed by a pause and applied again at the next level. This is not the whole idea although it is the core of the incessant line of progress of both the learners and the teacher.

A later development reveals the pre-stage of investigation: the study of the group carried out by the teacher in terms of analysis of their demographic and psychographic features which are recursive as far as the current cultural environment is concerned and the four types of groups of learners with their needs established: the adult learners; the state school groups; the university groups; the fast growing student learners in the private groups. The first phase then is limited in time: initial motivation does not take other time than the time of the first two or three sets of classes and then goes as underlying situational complex that optimizes the relations within the matrix of the learning situation. Then there is fast heaping of information and incessant drills demanding involvement of the whole group. This is based on all the teaching and public speech performance strategies and techniques within range and includes an incessant advertising campaign of the newly acquired language territories. Competition is the main vehicle and reward in any form that is known to the teacher: a box of chocolates at the far end of the classroom that is to be reached by those who manage to produce language at each step, whether it be a number of nouns, adjectives, irregular verb forms or rhymes; a pack of sweets; an apple; a cardboard star; a pen; a piece of chalk; even – a button of a peg. Nothing abstract.

It is not sufficient to be praised: learners need the pin to fix the praise. Then
suddenly awareness dawns and we go to the next stage: motivation, based this time on previous achievement; heaping information, which turned hardest at the second level for all the groups; drills based on competition and awareness. It is easy to notice the lack of the final step: verification. For the adult groups it comes immediately for their effort is grounded in the acquisition of a document, a visa, a job position and that determines the objectives and the tempo of learning and motivates all the exhausting drills of tired people after a hard day. Many of them kept sharing that the two or three hours spent in class were the only time they felt important. The students, however, need their time to get verification of their cross-cultural achievement. Therefore we kept having group events like stage performance for Christmas and outings at the end of the year between 24th and 30th May with special certificate ceremonies. Summer groups came as doing the hard work for those who were preparing for exams and as fun for those who visited the computer-based classes and relief for their parents. The basic requirement for the teacher was to be immersed in the learning situation as one of them: to have joy at the beginning of each next lesson, to take part in the cunning of a game of making them understand and do things, to be the friend who listens to their talk and offers exits of hard situation, to take part in the adventure of the young inquisitive minds into vast new opening worlds, forgetting about other ambition and grow up together with the young learners. In short: to live in the future. And to design a syllabus each time for each group. The first year I designed my own Complete Beginners course. The rules were given to them at the beginning of each lesson, followed by small sheets of ten-line drills – there were a hundred of them circulating in the group. The page for homework was given to them at the end of the lesson: 50 times of 3 classes followed by homework 48 times. Next Strategies (Abbs & Freebairn) seemed closest to my style and I used that system in combination with English Grammar by Vessela Katzarova (Katzarova & Pavlova 1992); then Murphy's practical grammar, the Discoveries
series and *Success at First Certificate*, combined with my first two published books of exercises: *Reading Comprehension* and *The Composition*, supported by thousands of unpublished exercises based on excerpts from unadapted text, and the books for TOEFL and SAT training as well as some Proficiency books. I basically applied Oxford books for my groups, for they have a clear-cut lay out without polluting the pages with their exercises: the exercises were what I did for them.

We sometimes used the workbooks, particularly when I introduced the *Matrix* books for levels 3 and 4 i.e. for intermediate and advanced learners in their 5th to 7th school year. The Sofia University series of *Admission Tests* and the *Book of Tests for UNWE* by Irina Perianova applied in the 9th and 10th year groups made the learners like ‘real’ hard text and take a challenge. Later on we used Stephen King and Terry Pratchett, Tolkien and the Harry Potter series, Andersen and the Bulgarian folk tale *The three brothers and the Golden Apple*. Age did not play an important role: there was a young inquisitive kid who covered all the levels for children the first 4 years and I moved him to the adult group where he felt at home, yet the group seemed unhappy for he kept asking hard questions all the time, so I moved him with the intensive group for *TOEFL Test* drills. He is now a lawyer in New York. There is a professor at Stanford, another one did law at Harvard, still others have found jobs in great software design companies; there are a couple of doctors, a psychiatrist in Kentucky, some work in Denmark, some study in Germany, some are in the WWW hereabouts – all of them – the people who never knew that something ‘is forbidden’ or ‘cannot be done.’ My workbooks were not precise: I did them in haste and they have their design fixed to a purpose. They worked to that purpose. Now they could be revived – in a way. Not with the same texts for the cultural situation has changed. The matrix is still valid though just as it has been valid ever since the time of Confucius and the later times of Socrates and Aristotle, and the shining Aspasia, the sun of Greece, disciple-daughter of Epicurus and Pericles’ concubine.
(www.epicurus.info/etexts/wallace_epicureanism.html), who had her own school of rhetoric in Athens and wrote some heap of books. All the teachers of humanity who relied on good will – good feelings and good logic, and who never missed a chance to learn: the displaced binders of realities who travelled in time and experienced the adventure of the mind.

The transition to SIAN was just a step forward: out of the classroom and into the vast spaces provided by the WWW for extending the existential spaces of a culture where the main problem is how to keep our identity. For this purpose we have to first find our unique features and the motivation *why* we shall stick to this identity. And again we turn the wheel up a broader turn of the spiral: motivating our existence, searching for and storing database, letting awareness dawn on us individually, and search for verification in the shared mind of the E-kind.

**Overview of interdisciplinary background:**

**turning spatial**

There is no way, while looking for our common cultural Self in the textual store-spaces of the web, to avoid being interdisciplinary.

The Net as the creation of human culture has its fascinating story. Its nature as an environment for our Selves calls for exploration and adventure; its influence on the mind needs close study, and its being shared info space, not necessarily text-bound yet communicated in message bodies, and based on semiotics-emerging on the spot appearance suggest that we start from the beginning of its existence and go through three layers of or enquiry:

- The first layer of questions concerns the exploration of the virtual existence and the anticipation of the problems an individual can run into;
• Then comes the question about the signs needed for efficient transfer and further existence of humankind in the virtual environment;

• Next there comes the prospect of a new type of culture arising within the virtual environment whose beginning was set back in the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century and whose progress is still inadequately assessed;

• Upon the end of the first decade of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} millennium many questions about the cultures of the Earth seem to have found their answers. At the same time prognoses from the last decade of the past century seem to have faded away missing to come true. There have been frontier findings, now looking absurd, useless, senseless, and funny.

That has made me adopt a descriptive methodology and just tell the story as it used to grow and had us involved with its further development as mere players on a stage that is a whole world of worlds.

In the beginning it was the fastness of communication: in the late 1990s we used to send emails overseas and keep in touch with people all over the globe.

Later on we discovered we could still win the competition with the web intelligence in designing our individual codes – writing down messages the ways we spoke and the ways we could hear other people’s speech.

Then we formed communities. We needed to know how we were changing. We also discovered that the world wanted to know about us and that the world had an image of us that did not coincide with our view of ourselves.

We kept travelling round the world and discovering other people like us – looking for our spaces, yet remaining lonely.
We needed information and motivation. We needed a distant view to the growing set of worlds so that we knew what it was like. We needed some general view, a system of philosophy of the rising new culture that was to establish its roots and its prospects.

Philosophy, theory of culture, linguistics, theory of the intertext, new rhetoric, cultural anthropology and so on - every next researcher seemed to start from their own grounds, while ending at computer studies and plunging into the ocean of the global web.

In my experience, it happened so that I was involved in studying the theories of intercultural communication and designing rhetorical models, theories of intertextuality and functional styles, while my heart as always belonged to philosophy of science where prognostics abides.

This text is based on my individual experience and – to me it is structured to the basic fields I explored while pursuing my own adventure in the net spaces. That makes it seem eclectic. Yet, I dare say, it is consistent and while running across a couple of fields it is targeted at the entity of the Self displayed in the entity of the Individual’s e-projections in the varied body of one’s encrypting of oneself in one’s messages. It is a Demosthenes-type of self-talk in public or the inventio aspect of a rhetoric outcome.

I shall not overuse terms like ‘discourse’ or ‘text’. It is the message that matters with its intertextual searches for the universal features of human culture and its metaphoric vehicles of individual significance. It is the eloquentio aspect of rhetoric.
I shall not put markers of extreme significance on either term used here, for they are only temporarily valid. They are insufficient if used alone, for very often they refer to the same object while explaining it in their own ways as is the case with *cyber space, virtual space, e-space, web-space, and net-space*.

What is of importance here is *the connection between fields of inquiry*: the path of knowledge that goes through term-grown fields where the knowledge of our future existence grows. We do not extract the threads from a carpet in order to enjoy the pattern closely. We need not extract what we have been used to call terms from this text in order to understand how the author has used them until they have grown into categories of a broader nature.

Our object of investigation is complex seen from the inside and vast seen from the standpoint of its creators. On the outside it is being experienced to the effect that each individual (person or culture) is trying to translate itself into the opening environment for survival. It is the *actio* aspect of rhetoric based on the sufficiency and relevant distribution of arguments, and on the good memory of who we are while we are exploring the spaces of the talked-into-being *brave new world* (Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*) of global humanity.

**What next?**

Today things are different as far as the information flow is concerned. The English-speaking environment of the WWW hardly leaves us alone, yet it contains infinite pieces of data that can be used to our own intention or serve as inspiration to a creative mind.
The features of the English classroom where Weblish reigns: internet-based, interactive, intertextual and intercultural. The changed learning environment provokes the search for new forms of expressing human values.

Teachers of English today work for the Earth community of the future where they have to compete with the multivoiced ubiquitous Web for the attention of their students.

A classroom is a stage for our incessant academic show and we rarely become aware how much research we do while preparing for a single class and while teaching.

We need freedom to show up while growing up with each next generation and that is based on our polemics with time and cultural binders.

Freedom of choice and the triple entity of ancient agora ethos – pathos and logos apply to the standards of e-agora today where we state our identity with our human Selves again and again.

The goal of this paper then is seen in the attempt to show a way of teaching while doing research and keeping record of its results as well as establishing the nature, the steps and the features of teacher’s learning.

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**Dr Gergana Pencheva-Apostolova** is Lecturer of Translation Studies, Rhetoric, English & the Internet; English Literature, and Creative Writing. Author of some 20 books and 150 articles. Member of ESSE, ISSA, SIETAR and RSE. A Fulbright scholar. Interested in Philosophy of language and philosophy of the infosphere. Developed an Argumentative Approach to ELT and a Systematic Integrated Approach to the Net.

e-mail: apostolovag@abv.bg ; geapostolova@swu.bg
Again on Native Language Implementation in English Language Teaching

Boryana Ruzhekova-Rogozherova

Introduction

Native language (NL) use in ELT is a topic of crucial importance over which there have been numerous controversies all through the years. Many researchers in applied linguistics have expressed rather opposing views as to the advantages of bilingual and not just monolingual, English language (EL) classes. There are, on the one hand, still the adherents of performing all kinds of teaching and learning activities exclusively in English, though some of them have already started to realize that quite frequently it is a rather unrealistic objective to accomplish. There are, on the other hand, the supporters of a more balanced opinion, defending the conviction that the deliberate, result-oriented and carefully planned mother tongue implementation in ELT can be quite beneficial for a great number of reasons, most of which will be considered below.

The current paper has set the two-fold purpose to comment on arguments against and in favour of NL application in ELT and to treat the benefit of NL implementation in a range of TEFL activities, as far as learners’ communicative competence enhancement is concerned.
The relevance of the examined issue stems from the constantly growing need of equipping learners with awareness and understanding of taught categories, thus, promoting not only learning, but also the abilities of putting into practice language functions in real-life or simulated situations, as well as EL learning motivation.

**Paper rationale**

The paper will deal firstly with arguments against NL introduction in the EL classroom, taking into account the strong influence these views have exerted on ELT so far; secondly, NL implementation benefits will be revealed and supported and thirdly, positive beliefs as to the studied issue will be exemplified and considered in the light of methodologies such as Contrastive Teaching (CT) and Comparative Teaching (CpT), corroborated by insights in language awareness (LA). Finally, conclusions will be made as to the beneficial NL use in the ELT classroom and in relation to university teacher training, as well.

**Arguments against NL use in EL classes**

A number of researchers, most of them supporters of the direct method or the early stages of communicative language teaching approach, proponents of the ‘English only’ (Cook, V. 2001: 405) EFL teaching method, propose a range of reasons, for avoiding as much as possible NL application in the process of education, which can be subsumed under the following ones:

- There is the apprehension that the amount of target language used will not be enough to boost learners’ achievement. To Atkinson (Atkinson 1993: 4 in Sešek 2005: 224), similarly to others, ‘failure to engender enough use of the
target language in the classroom is one of the major methodological reasons for poor achievement levels in language learning.’

- The conviction that a FL should be learned the way people acquire their mother tongue (Asher 1986 in Cook, V. 2001).
- The view that ‘successful L2 acquisition depends on keeping the L2 separate from the L1’ (Weinreich 1953 in Cook, V. 2001).
- Teaching in a multilingual classroom excludes NL use ‘unless the teacher is capable of speaking all the respective L1s’ (Hawks 2001: 49 in Miles 2004: 8).
- ELT should be carried out in ‘an authentic environment for learning a language’ (Al-Seghayer 2010: 1).
- Students have to be ‘trained to understand the learned language without outside aid’; their thinking in the target language has to be promoted (ibid.).
- Learners must be trained for ‘face-to-face communication’, which does not generally happen if teaching is performed ‘through the medium of the mother tongue’ (Al-Seghayer 2010: 2).

**Analysis of Presented Arguments**

Before proceeding with arguments in favour of NL introduction in FLT we deem important to comment on the above enumerated ones. This will facilitate further discussion as to the beneficial use of carefully planned and deliberate mother tongue implementation in teaching process. It will also precondition studied issue exemplification and support.

No one can deny the need of abundant target language exposure. Quite logically, the better and the more lavish contact learners establish with the target language,
the higher quality of knowledge and mastery of skills they are supposed to acquire. Though, ‘this is not necessarily incompatible with L1 use in the classroom’ and naturalness in FL classroom communication ‘supports maximizing the L2 rather than avoiding the L1’ (Cook, V. 2001: 409). However, high standards in language teaching will only be achieved if knowledge is consciously learned\(^1\) and can be consequently freely manipulated and organized. This statement is supported by the contention, theoretically and practically maintained by many authors, such as Svalberg 2007, Robinson 1995, Schmidt 1995, Truscott 1998, Jourdenais et al. 1995, Leow 1997 and others, that all types of explicitness and consciousness in studying are crucial as to the efficiency of FL learning. It must not be underestimated that Krashen’s (Krashen 1985) hypothesis, tightly related to FL domination in teaching, insists on taught material understanding, in order to promote acquisition.

May FL learning happen in a way analogous to NL acquisition? From a cognitive perspective, a FL, respectively English, cannot be acquired likewise the mother tongue; learners have already mastered at least one linguistic code, their NL, and there are some, though, studying English as FL2, and not as FL1. The presence of the linguistic phenomenon of \textit{transfer} (positive transfer and language interference), deriving from the pervasive inner translation from NL or/and a FL1, is \textit{inherent}, and for that reason, \textit{crucial} to any language acquisition; transfer role has already been proved and studied by many researchers, such as James 1980, Selinker 1972, Corder 1981, Brown 1987, Odlin 1989, Danchev 1982, 2001, Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2010, 2011 and others. Thus, from the standpoint of applied linguistics, contrastive analysis and error analysis, no language code can

\(^1\) \textit{Rf. to LA components in Schmidt 2010, Soons 2008, Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2014.}
exist, develop and function independently from the others in a learner’s consciousness. All level linguistic knowledge and skills, pertaining to various codes, intersect and interweave, which also, quite evidently, motivates plurilingualism building, and also, bilinguism, being one of its varieties.

FL and NL compartmentalization can likewise be opposed by means of the above arguments. L2 cannot be separated from L1, notwithstanding this view proponents’ conviction or efforts; even though some may have attempted or are still trying to teach a genuine FL under simulated real-life conditions, cognitively speaking, striven for FL/NL isolation is impossible. Why should we then try to perform the unachievable instead of benefiting from the numerous opportunities purposeful NL implementation provides in the process of ELT and which have yielded significant positive results in learners’ communicative competence enhancement?

It is true that the multilingual classroom context quite often (though it is not always the case) puts obstacles to involving NLs in the teaching process due to the fact that there are not so many teachers or lecturers endowed with plurilingual knowledge and aptitudes in various foreign languages. Yet, learners’ NLs can be still benefited from if needed. Though it certainly will require additional time and efforts, the motivated teacher or lecturer may search for NL explanation of hard or intriguing to teach concepts and categories, he/she may refer to dictionaries and bilingual informants, grammar books and internet resources; last, but not least, instructors can always make use of their own and their students’ intercomprehension abilities and skills to enhance taught material understanding.
‘Authentic environment’ (Al-Sheghayer 2010: 1) role in language learning is undisputable. Notwithstanding, the following objections to NL banning from ELT classes, deriving from this argument, will be put forward. First and foremost, however enthusiastic the teacher may be about transforming the ELT classroom into a model of true and up-to-date English speaking milieu, this purpose will not be completely achieved, learning activities just imitating various pragmatic situations in the purpose of skill and ability acquisition. This statement should not thwart lecturer’s creativity in searching for, grading and applying authentic resources, which are highly beneficial from communicativeness enhancement point of view. It should be, though, kept in mind that no matter how ambitious an ELT instructor is about teaching real English, desired knowledge will not be attained unless adequately explained, consciously retrieved, manipulated and understood, which sometimes turns out hard or impossible with no NL use.

We fully subscribe to the view that learners should be trained in target language thinking and in understanding messages mainly resorting to target language linguistic code. This objective, though, cannot be immediately achieved, unless to a limited extent, partly within the framework of taught material, as the goal requires a multi-stage teaching / learning process. Already raised objections related to the necessity of NL implementation as far as overall LA is concerned, are also applicable here.

Last argument ‘against’, which will be commented on, refers to face-to-face communication stimulation. As it has already been mentioned, the relevance of ELT intense classroom implementation cannot be refuted; on the contrary, target language use should be performed as much as the teaching situation allows it. Two reasons will be adduced, though, in support of NL / EL complementary
application. The building of communicative competence various components\(^2\) is always dependant on awareness enhancement, tightly bound with the motivation to learn and practice the foreign language. In addition, in the light of communication theory, meaning is not drawn out, but put together (Chandler 1995); overall meaning is constructed through the adjustment of all message components, crucial to its enciphering and deciphering, to finally reach the greatest unequivocalness extent (Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2013c). Constantly struggling for better communicative abilities consequently involves training the learners to adequately decode in order to be able to successfully encode, and vice-versa, to get aware of all language level components logical relations, for that purpose, and apply this understanding in practice (ibid.). As it has already been shown on many occasions, adequate (thorough or fragmentary) NL translation and/or explanation can serve as a powerful tool in the attainment of successful communication, boosting encoding/decoding process.

**Arguments in Favour of Using NL in EL Classes**

There are a vast number of arguments, amongst which are the following ones that can be adduced to support the advantages of NL implementation in EL education process. All statements can not only be theoretically justified by means of applied linguistics, contrastive linguistics and error analysis, due to already referred to inherent inner translation occurring even at the highest levels of FL learning, but also practically, through successfully conducted teaching experiments.

\(^2\) Rf. in Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2013b on communicative competence and ideas as to its enhancement through LA improvement.
Deliberate NL use has been proved successful in ELT (FLT) teaching approaches, such as: the New Concurrent Method, Community Language Learning (CLL), Dodson’s Bilingual Method (Cook, V. 2001), Contrastive Teaching (CT) (James 1980, Corder 1981, Schmidt 2010, Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2014, etc.), Comparative Teaching (CpT) (Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2014).

It has been established that the exclusive use of English in ELT most often damages students’ learning (Chaudron 1988, In Miles 2004).

NL can function as a teaching resource, a source of information as to students’ already acquired language knowledge, interests and culture, a time saver facilitating teaching process (Prodromou 2002 in Krajka 2004).

Students must feel psychologically at ease in the ELT classroom, anxiety should be reduced to a minimum level; learners need to be granted the opportunity to express their ideas and ask questions even when not still able to do this adequately in English (Miles 2004).

NL use can facilitate communication, teacher-student relationship and FL learning (Harbord 1992 in Miles 2004).

NL use is also profitable from a cultural and sociolinguistic perspective, learners being given the opportunity to express their personalities through the medium of their mother tongue if needed; EL unique application approach may mean not only neglecting NL, but also students’ culture and even their identity (Cook, G. 2003 in Spahiu 2013).
Analysis of Presented Arguments

Arguments, already adduced in favour of NL implementation, will be theoretically and experimentally corroborated. Exemplifying evidence will be produced in compliance with their order of presentation.

Thus, for example, the *New Concurrent Method* is characterized by teacher-performed language switching, from FL to NL and vice-versa at particular, crucial for the explanation points (Jacobson 1990 in Cook, V. 2001).

In *CLL*, code switching is spontaneously carried out by students themselves, NL use progressively diminishing as knowledge advances; in the early stages, learners express themselves in NL, while the teacher translates (Cook, V. 2001).

According to *Dodson’s Bilingual Method*, the teacher reads and interprets a FL sentence into NL, awareness being tested by eliciting a FL reaction to the same NL utterance (rf. Dodson 1985 in Cook, V. 2001).

*CT* aims at preventing and overcoming NL (and / or FL1) *negative transfer* or *interference*, revealing to the learner NL/FL1/FL2 contrasting items (see above on transfer role). It has also become evident that *positive transfer* should be equally explored, along with both, NL, FL1, FL2 *similarities* and *differences* in terms of *form, meaning and functioning*, these studies leading to insights in *LA enhancement* techniques (Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2014).
"CpT" aims at comparing similar structures or meanings (within a Fl and a Nl) at various levels of language and at commenting on divergences again in terms of form and semantics. CpT and CT have turned out to be interdependent (ibid.).

The above mentioned methods, complementary to some extent, have proved to yield noticeable results, when appropriately implemented. Their theoretical foundation resides in already commented on issues related to inner translation in FL studying, preconditioning joint NL and FL code use in the purpose of providing the learners with more awareness, leading to knowledge, skills and motivation. Practically speaking, presented methods are beneficial as they make students feel at ease in a bilingual environment, this way guaranteeing naturalness of expression and, consequently, stimulating FL acquisition.

The statement of English-only unfavourable use is supported by studies indicating that students would like teachers to understand their NL (Briggs 2001 in Milles 2004), as well as by conducted experiments, providing evidence that NL use promotes learning (Miles 2004). Experiment analysis testifies to higher overall achievement results of EFL classes allowing NL use than in classes excluding it (ibid.). Likewise, Damra and Al Qudah’s (Damra & Al Qudah 2012) experiment on NL use in EFL grammar teaching testifies to the experimental bilingual group better accomplishment.

Prodromou’s 2002 assertion of NL positive use can be corroborated by the numerous functions NL can fulfill in EFL teaching. Due to reasons related to language transfer role, cognition and motivation, anxiety reduction and naturalness of expression, NL has proved to be successfully engaged in the
following activities (Cook, V. 2001, Miles 2004, Damra & Al Qudah 2012, Krajka 2004, Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2012b, 2013a, b, c):

- Task explanation and clarification;
- Explanation of hard to understand grammar concepts and vocabulary;
- Explanation of rules (which, we believe, should accompany, if needed, pattern analysis, structure comparison or another LA enhancement procedure);
- Allowing students to ask questions in NL;
- Checking understanding by teacher or student translation;
- Performing CT and CpT;
- Encouraging learners to explain rules to classmates;
- NL use (code-switching, most often) in pair work – explaining tasks, negotiating roles, checking understanding or their own and their partners’ language production;\(^3\)
- Organizing the class;
- Maintaining discipline; the message conveyed is quite often more tangible and meaningful than if transferred in FL;
- Obtaining much more real and personal contact with individual students by means of NL;
- Translation with a teaching purpose to raise learners’ awareness on specific issues.

Anxiety reduction, being a basic intrinsic motivation component, bound with understanding and achievement (Dorney 1998), is essential in motivating learners

\(^3\) NL use represents a psycholinguistic process encouraging FL production and interaction (Brooks & Donato 1994 in Cook, V. 2001).
into performing EFL activities. That is why, as it has already been mentioned, surveys show that the majority of students interviewed prefer working with a teacher who speaks their NL.

It certainly can be maintained that NL use does facilitate teacher (or lecturer) – student communication, being more personal; this fact is not only due to better understanding under specific conditions, but it also has its more profound socio-linguistic foundations, stemming from the tight relationship between NL and social functioning (Bawcom 2002 in Krajka 2004). What is more, it was concluded in connection with NL – learner identity relationship that ‘The disregard of the students’ mother tongue can in fact de-motivate the students and be counterproductive’ (Spahiu 2013: 247).

Exemplifying Evidence as to NL Utilization

Benefits in CT, CpT

The overriding goal of FL (and EFL) teaching is communicative competence building. It is so due to the essence of this concept, representing the knowledge which allows us to transmit and decode messages in communication process (Hymes 1972 and Brown 2000). According to most referred to models (Canale & Swain 1980, Canale 1983, Bachman 1990), communicative competence consists of four basic components, and namely, *grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic (or pragmatic) and strategic competence*. This paper section will focus on instances of NL implementation in improving learners’ communicativeness through CT, CpT, crucial LA methodologies. Examples will predominantly treat grammatical competence enhancement, in compliance with our conviction of the paramount relevance of this competence component.
(Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2013b), dominating and controlling all the others. Illustrations provided will conform to the view, supported on many occasions (Schmidt 1995, 2010 as to essentials on LA crucial relevance in learning), of the tight connection between LA and real linguistic knowledge. Indeed, the better understanding of taught categories the learners achieve through explicitness, contrasts, interlingual and intralingual comparisons, pattern observation, deduction, induction, translation, transformations, analysis in terms of form and content, regularity hypothesis and rule formulation, in both, NL and FL, the higher learners’ communicative competence becomes.

**NL Implementation in Contrastively and Comparatively Teaching English Perfect**

This article section presents some frequently used procedures, we have developed, involving NL implementation in CT and CpT while teaching the English perfect, which has proved to be one of the hardest to master categories by many students due to its unique and pervasive connectedness to the present. Similarly to previous works of ours on CT and CpT approach application while teaching grammar categories, we shall underline these methods’ main objective, and namely, LA enhancement. NL relevance in explanation and, consequently, in values and use comprehension, will be commented on. Displayed procedures are applied in all grammar teaching stages, in compliance with their requirements, depending on learners’ degree of awareness and, particularly, with university students, generally with higher level of understanding.

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4 Rf. in Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2011 as to similar hardships experienced by French FL1 learners.
Basic presentation of convergences and divergences between perfect categories in English and Bulgarian in terms of form and semantics

We deem important to reveal (Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2013a), in broad outlines, the following convergences and divergences, concisely summarized in the table below, between both forms. Examined features are commented on before the learners predominantly in NL, quite often explanation being subsequently provided in English. Elucidation is supported by adducing exemplifying utterances and coherent texts in contrasted languages, establishing comparisons and drawing inferences, again in NL and if possible, in English, utilizing up to students’ knowledge concepts and terminology. If needed, terminology is translated and explained in NL. Understanding is checked at various stages through questions in NL as to composition, values and use of taught periphrasis in both languages, by means of translation of selected forms or contextual features.

Table 1: Convergences and divergences between English and Bulgarian perfect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convergences</th>
<th>Divergences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A crosslinguistic category (Dahl 1985)</td>
<td>• English periphrasis aspectual essence / mixed temporal-aspectual characteristics of Bulgarian perfect (‘Bulgarian does possess a separate perfect tense’ (Lindstedt 1995: 243).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • A periphrastic structure | • English Perfect non-narrativity (Lindstedt 2000); the form cannot be used with deictic
features: resultativity, current relevance, omnitemporality, “not-yet” perfect meaning, superlative perfect meaning, experiential value

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time indications / Bulgarian perfect duality - notwithstanding typical perfect values, Bulgarian perfect can also be used with time indications (Lindstedt 1982).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• ‘Presuppositional’ (Lindstedt 1985: 222) and ‘inferential’ perfect in Bulgarian (Lindstedt 1982: 246); the same value compatibility with reference to a point in time, e.g. ‘Бил е тук миналата неделя.’ (Lindstedt 1982: 169)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interplay of perfect features and Finished/Non-finished aspect (Sv. /Nsv. vid) in Bulgarian, influencing resultativity, current relevance, experience, omnitemporality, repetition, e.g. ‘... какво е станало...’ / ‘... какво е ставало...’ (Lindstedt 1985: 226)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interplay in Bulgarian between perfect and aoristic features in the ‘Indirective Aorist’ (Lindstedt 2000: 270); the Conclusive Aorist (Alexova 2003, Nitsolova 2007, Kirova 2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Pattern identification

An important component in form and meaning presentation of a studied category is pattern observation and analysis. Thus, for example, learners are required to identify in a coherent text or exemplifying utterances, in English and Bulgarian, perfect structures; they are asked to point out at periphrasis components in both...
languages. They are led in conclusion making as to both perfect forms’ use and meaning on the grounds of discovered FL and NL regularities. Categories are compared with similar to the English perfect ones, in terms of function and form, -ed – adjectives or the passive (Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2012 a, b). Discussion is carried out in NL and, if possible, partly, in FL.

### Contrastive analysis of contextual factors

Contextual factors, such as adverbials, prepositions and time phrases, determining to some extent the use of perfect in FL and NL are explored, underlined in FL, NL parallel texts. The use of perfect is justified through comparison established with preterit / aorist functions, again in both languages. Analysis is, similarly to above, carried out in NL and, partly, in FL.

### Translation (and selective translation) with a teaching purpose

Translation with a teaching purpose is performed from English into Bulgarian within the framework of exemplifying utterances or short coherent paragraphs. Translation choice is justified in terms of contextual factors, studied category use and values. While performing selective translation learners are required not to integrally translate a paragraph or a sentence from English into Bulgarian, but attention is focused on specific components.
Various types of fixed / structured format exercises

Exercises, such as true or false answers, multiple choice items, matching, ordering words or sentences, brackets opening, filling in blank spaces, writing essays, stories, CVs., etc.\(^5\) intended for knowledge consolidation, are more beneficial if accompanied by NL explanation, when appropriate. Error analysis, including NL translation of wrong answers, should be performed so that interference factors are faster eliminated due to learners’ LA improvement. Thus, wrong test items, such as *They have enjoyed their last year holidays*\(^*\) are supposed not only to be corrected in English, but also, to be translated into Bulgarian; reference, in NL, to the above mentioned characteristics of perfect forms in both languages is relevant, along with pointing out at specific differences and similarities, in NL again. It is essential to stress the fact that although Bulgarian perfect allows specific past time indications, this is not applicable for its English counterpart.

**Conclusion**

Already commented on and examined issues reveal and support the numerous advantages of NL implementation in ELT. Multiple ways of NL application as well as, more specifically, described procedures involving Bulgarian as a source language in explanation, translation, simplified contrastive analysis, error analysis, pattern identification and conclusion making while teaching the English perfect, have proved to be successful. All suggested ideas, quite logically, should be selectively applied and to the extent required by the needs, knowledge and

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\(^5\) Rf. in Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2010 as to some English perfect teaching activities.
degree of awareness of the specific groups of high school or university students we work with. We affirm the usefulness of the methods mentioned above as all of them have been found beneficial to LA enhancement, and consequently, to motivation and overall communicative competence improvement, which is the ultimate objective not only of ELT, but also of foreign language teaching in general.

These insights make us suggest that teacher-training university courses should pay more attention to the issue of NL implementation in ELT in the purpose of overcoming the wrong, obsolete or unbalanced ideas as to the sole application of English in the English language classroom.

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рамките на дисциплината "Английски език за докторанти" във ВТУ "Тодор Каблешков". *Mechanics Transport Communications 11(3) IV-38 – IV-44.


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**Dr Boryana Ruzheko-Rogozherova** teaches English at the Todor Kableshkov University of Transport in Bulgaria. She is a doctor of philosophy in contrastive linguistics. Her studies, in applied linguistics and ELT, mainly treating contrastive teaching, plurilingualism, English language studying motivation, language awareness and communicative competence building, are not only theoretically, but also practically oriented.

email: boryana@vtu.bg; boryanarogozherova@abv.bg
A classic Christmas story in American English fiction, and one of my favorites for learners around the age 10-11 or older (including adults), is O. Henry’s famous short story, ‘The Gift of the Magi’ (published December 1905). Here it is in simplified VOA Special English, also with an MP3 reading <goo.gl/GxjDZM>. It is 1,565 words. Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level 4.4. Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease 84 (on a scale from 1 [extremely difficult] to 100 [very easy]. Students at high elementary (A2) and low B1 (intermediate level) can read the story easily. For more advanced students, it is a very pleasurable and comprehensible tale in this simplified version.

Della and her husband Jim are very simple poor working people. They do not have much money. Christmas for the poor. That is central in the story. Jim earns perhaps 30 cents an hour, maybe $3 a day as an office clerk. Why does Della’s life have more “little cries than smiles”? The story was later published in O. Henry’s
book of 25 stories, *The Four Million* (1906). These are stories about ordinary working-class people, the ‘four million’ who lived in New York in 1905. By 1910, New York’s population had increased to 4,760,000, growing very fast.

Here is the original story: <www.fiftytwostories.com/?p=914>. It is 2,089 words. Yet many words in the original are *not easy*. O. Henry, writing 110 years ago, is not an ‘easy writer’ to read. You can test for vocabulary levels (the VOA Special English version is much easier, the original version has over 11% vocabulary above the 2000-basic word level). Just test the two in <www.lextutor.ca> and you will see. There are several different online tools at lextutor.ca to test the difficulty level of English words. It is a good site for teachers and pupils to learn to use.

Students can discuss and summarize the plot of the story. What is its meaning? What gifts do Della and Jim buy for each other and why? What is Della thinking as the barber cuts her long hair? How much does she get for the hair she sells to the barber? What is the surprising ‘twist-ending’ of the tale? Who are the ‘magi’? Children may know this Christian legend. It is in part the basis of giving presents at Christmas. There is no Santa Claus in this story.

Students can break into small groups and discuss what kind of gifts they want or give at Christmas, and how they celebrate the last week of the year in their family. Teachers in Bulgaria can talk about gift-giving years ago more on New Year’s Eve. New Year’s Eve is important because everyone, Christian, Muslim, Jewish and other religions, can celebrate the end of the civil calendar year. In Thailand, for example, New Year’s Eve is a big holiday, but most Thais are Buddhist.
The tale’s lexis in the simplified version has many useful everyday words, they can be practiced. It is a good review of basic useful vocabulary.

**DRAWING:** Students can draw Della with her long beautiful hair, and other scenes in the story, such as when Della goes to the shop of Madame Sofronie. Or draw the small apartment as it is described or as they imagine it. Here many visuals for the story, online: <goo.gl/jvzbUr>.

(Images from: <goo.gl/jvzbUr>)

**DRAMA:** They act out the simple tale, there are several characters and scenes. Many families in the SEETA area face the same problem throughout the year. This can be discussed, although perhaps a sensitive topic. If you teach Roma kids in your classes, most of them will probably come these days from very poor backgrounds at home.

Learners can also compare some sections of the simplified story and the original story and determine what has been changed. This is a very good exercise (also for teachers!).
There are a number of video adaptations of the story on youtube, all based on the original. Here is an illustrated reading: [http://goo.gl/GxAgaX](http://goo.gl/GxAgaX). A famous Hollywood movie, *O. Henry’s Full House* (1952), included a 23-minute dramatization of the story, here on youtube: [<http://goo.gl/TblxlV>](http://goo.gl/TblxlV). The video can be watched after the learners have tried to dramatize the tale in their own way. There are many additions to the movie version of the tale. Try to spot them, a good exercise with intermediate-level students. The movie version stars Jeanne Crain as Della, Farley Granger as Jim, both well-known Hollywood actors in the 1950s. This Hollywood version is really an excellent short film once you have read and discussed the story. It is also a fine film for Christmas, students will follow it easily.

Here is Wikipedia entry on the story: [goo.gl/4Dspqb](http://goo.gl/4Dspqb). Several of O. Henry’s stories are available in VOA Special English, and most of his tales can be found online in the original. He is still a popular writer, and his stories are read in many school syllabi in the U.S. Most have a ‘twist-ending,’ a surprise. Another popular tale by O. Henry (also about money) is “One Thousand Dollars.” Here a VOA simpler version: [goo.gl/gyJZ0s](http://goo.gl/gyJZ0s). Here is the book *The Four Million* on the Gutenberg site: [www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2776](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2776). Students can download it easily.
Bill Templer is a Chicago-born applied linguist with research interests in English as a lingua franca, Extensive Reading theory & practice, critical pedagogy and Marxist transformative educational ideas. Within IATEFL, he is active on the committee of the SIG Global Issues (http://gisig.iatefl.org/about-us). Bill is Editor for Eastern Europe at the Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies (www.jceps.com), and also copyedits for the new CLELE journal (http://clelejournal.org) on children’s and young adult literature in ELT. Bill is now based as an independent researcher in Shumen.

email: templerbill@gmail.com
The Christmas Way

Christmas time is the start to an end
Of a year gone by leaving pieces to mend.

It’s the only way forward
The past is behind
Time to open our eyes
To a path undefined.

Christmas time is the end of our year
The beginning of horizons new, yet unclear.
A time for illusions fresh,不限恐惧
For breaking those habits unwanted each year.
Like the sun streaming in a window left open
Hope creeps into those hearts that are true to emotions
A spirit undaunted by a labyrinth unraveled
Truth versus lies left behind in the struggle.

Life is so short to grasp what is reason
To understand all that is, and all that it isn’t
reality or illusion, faith or belief
we have only the self to urge forth, break defeat.

We have what we’ve given
We are what we’ve loved
Our spirit once shared is full to enjoy.

A generous heart bears treasures unthought
A kiss, a hug, a few words of warmth.
The best part of Christmas is being together
Life is not endless but love is forever.

Poem written by Fiona James
www.made2stick.es
Painting by Conrad Borucki
http://www.chipswork-art.com/tvas/borucki.html
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Zarina Markova
Sylvia Velikova
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E-mail: beta.iateflbg@gmail.com
Address: PoBox 1047, Sofia 1000, BULGARIA

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