

Bulgarian English Teachers' Association

E-Newsletter

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Editors' Corner

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the first issue of the BETA-IATEFL E-Newsletter for 2015. This issue launches the E-Newsletter into its 4th year of publication and the fact that it appears on 1st March – a festive day in early spring in Bulgaria, called *Баба Марта* (in English: *Grandma March*) – adds a special holiday touch to it.

In her opening article, Svetlana Naydenova encourages teachers to weave poetry into classroom life. She shares some practical ideas how poems can be used to unleash learners' imagination, enrich their language, and sustain teachers' motivation. In the Poetry Corner, you can enjoy a poem written by Elitsa Vassileva, one of Svetlana's students.

To keep up with the festive mood, Bill Templer's article draws attention to a new year's tale from China and focuses on the necessary "global citizen" component inside EFL. Bill's teaching ideas show how the ancient Chinese legend about Monster Nian can bring learners closer to a distant corner of the world and its exciting culture and beliefs.

In the Czech Republic, Hanna Šteflová is currently conducting her PhD research in the field of English language teaching methodology. Her article examines the effect of study abroad on the self-assessment of linguistic improvement among international students at a UK university.

In her report on the JALT's 40th annual conference, Albena Stefanova takes us on a fascinating trip to Japan and shares her impressions from the Annual International Conference of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) which took place in Tsukuba, Ibaraki, Japan in November 2014.

This issue also includes Tanya Bikova's interview with Steliyana Dulkova, a member of BETA who is an active contributor to the work of the South Eastern Europe Teachers Associations (SEETA).

Finally, there are a number of announcements about SEETA courses and activities. We would like to remind you of the approaching deadline for submitting proposals for the 24th Annual International BETA-IATEFL Conference (June 5-7, 2015) and hope to see you in Sofia this summer.

We hope that you enjoy reading this "global" issue.

Sylvia Velikova

Issue Editor



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A Little Poetry to Change the Mood

Svetlana Naydenova-Georgieva

If you put a little drop of red paint into a glass full of water, the whole amount of liquid changes its colour. A piece of poetry can change the whole mood in class and can create a positive message of the English language lesson. It can motivate students at every stage of the lesson. It can be a bridge to language enrichment. It can make students laugh and respond in a natural and creative way. It is a “good source for developing

students’ abilities to infer meaning and to make interpretations” (Gillian Lazar 1993: 19).

Literature – and more precisely, poetry – is often neglected in Bulgarian schools and only a few teachers dare to use it for teaching the English language. Literature can be integrated into the language curriculum where the humanistic and authentic voice of the authors can provoke thinking and language enrichment.

According to Howard Sage (1987) poetry is a special and an extremely valuable source of teaching English. He points out that “[r]eaders are reached on both the intellectual and the emotional level. Surprise in poetry offers the experience of

pure, undiluted pleasure - heightened because the reader neither asked for nor expected it” (Howard Sage 1987: 13). Collie and Slater also state that:

Reading poetry enables the learner to experience the power of language outside the strait-jacket of more standard written sentence structure and lexis. In the classroom, using poetry can lead naturally on to freer, creative written expression. Indeed, poems are capable of producing strong response from the reader, and this memorable intensity motivates further reading of poetry in the foreign language. (Collie and Slater, 1987: 226)

Poetry can be used to address every possible topic in the classroom – it is universal. Even everyday topics can be connected to a piece of poetry in the English class. Reading a little poem is not time-consuming and can bring humour into the classroom life. It also induces the effect of surprise, thus making language more memorable for learners. Furthermore, the language in focus is presented in an amusing context, while the melody and sound provide strong connections and bring pleasure to the students. The positive emotions which poetry evokes make the process of learning English fun and facilitate language learning better than any strict language rules and definitions.

Poetry can be introduced at various stages of the lesson. For instance, Kenn Nesbitt’s website (<http://www.poetry4kids.com/>) contains rich poetry collections on different topics. For example, “I Taught my Cat to Clean my Room” is a poem which can be used when focusing on such topics as Chores, Furniture, Everyday objects, Pets.

What follows is an outline of a lesson which aims to get students practise vocabulary related to pets, chores, rooms and cleaning; to inspire learners' creativity, and to develop their writing skills.

The poems and the activities presented in this paper can be used with students at different levels of their language learning. I have introduced them to lower-secondary school learners at elementary and pre-intermediate level of English.

“I Taught my Cat to Clean my Room”

I. Pre-reading

1. Small talk

The teacher involves students in a small talk conversation, guided by the following questions: Do you like tidying your room? What are your chores? What objects do you use for cleaning? Do you have a pet? Do you look after it?

2. Matching words and pictures

The students are asked to match a word with a picture of an object.

	a litterbox
	underwear

	a broom
	a bucket

3. Do you know how rhymes are formed?

Students read a definition about the word “rhyme” in a dictionary. They use the online rhyming dictionary and thesaurus at <http://www.rhymezone.com/> and come up with suggestions for words that rhyme with “rooms”, “frames”, “fair”, and “socks”.

II. While-reading

1. Gap-fill activity

The teacher gives each student a copy of the gapped poem. The teacher reads the poem to the class and students have to supply the missing words in it. The rhythm and tone of the poem helps students to guess the pairs of rhyming words: room - broom, frames - games, fair - underwear, socks - litter box.

I Taught My Cat to Clean My Room

Kenn Nesbitt

I taught my cat to clean my room,
to use a bucket, brush and.....,
to dust my clock and picture frames,
and pick up all my toys and..... .

He puts my pants and shirts away,
and makes my bed, and I would say
it seems to me it's only fair
he puts away my

In fact, I think he's got it made.

I'm not as happy with our trade.

He may pick up my shoes and socks,
but I clean out his

Source: <http://www.poetry4kids.com/>

2. Listening and checking answers

Students watch the video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8mPFJtg1ck>),
listen to the poem and check their answers.

3. Poetry reading

Students read the poem out loud.

III. Post-reading

Individual students can choose between the following three options:

1. To learn the poem by heart. A recitation contest is organized.
2. To write a story or poem about their pet or their chores.
3. To draw their reactions to the poem. A class exhibition is organized.

Another Idea

The poem “Messy Room” by Shel Silverstein can be used for developing students’ listening skills. The students listen to the poem (read by the teacher without the last two lines) and have to answer just one question: “*Whose is the room?*”. The 5th-grade students at P. R. Slaveykov Secondary School – Varna (Bulgaria) find this question intriguing but not an easy one to answer. Some of them think it is Willie or Donald but there are students who arrive at the correct answer – the author, the poet. It is also very motivating for me as a teacher to see that children understand and appreciate the humour of the poem.

Messy Room

Shel Silverstein

Whoever room this is should be ashamed!
His underwear is hanging on the lamp.
His raincoat is there in the overstuffed chair,
And the chair is becoming quite mucky and damp.
His workbook is wedged in the window,
His sweater's been thrown on the floor.
His scarf and one ski are beneath the TV,
And his pants have been carelessly hung on the door.

His books are all jammed in the closet,
His vest has been left in the hall.
A lizard named Ed is asleep in his bed,
And his smelly old sock has been stuck to the wall.
Whoever room this is should be ashamed!
Donald or Robert or Willie or--
Huh? You say it's mine? Oh, dear,
I knew it looked familiar!

Source:

http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/shel_silverstein/poems/14818

To conclude, a little poem changes the mood, makes students enthusiastic and motivates them to respond in various ways according to their learning preferences. A little poem is like a magic stick which changes not only the students and their mood but also brings a lot of joy to the teacher.

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The Monster Nian 年獸



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Bill Templer

Here a very old story for the New Year. It is a folktale about the Chinese New Year and why the Chinese celebrate New Year by wearing red clothes and making loud noise with fireworks. But it can also be an engaging easy read — a monster tale with a happy ending — for marking the New Year elsewhere, in Bulgaria and other countries. The level is elementary English.

This year Chinese New Year came on February 19th, with the new moon, and celebrations will last for 15 days. It is the **Year of the Goat**. We think it is “globally instructive” and interesting for

learners here to read a tale about the New Year from an ancient Asian culture, with a different calendar. As Velikova (2014: 41) stresses, quoting Steger (2013: 2), globalisation is also perceived as “the myriad forms of connectivity and flows linking the local (and national) to the global — as well as the West to the East, and the North to the South.”

First read the tale “The Monster Nian” with your pupils. Discuss a bit. Then watch and discuss an animated version of the tale from China with English subtitles. It is

an excellent video cartoon of the tale. There is also a link below to a reading in simple English about Chinese New Year: lower-intermediate pupils can learn a lot about New Year's festivities in another culture.



The Monster Nian 年獸

(image from <http://www.vonglitschka.com/2011/02/14/monster-ideas>)

A long time ago, there was a monster named Nian. Nian loved to visit a small village in China each year, and scare everybody he saw. He thought that was great fun. He liked to do this just as the new year began, to show people that Nian the monster was still around. Each year, after scaring all the people, Nian could hardly wait for the new year to come again, so that he could scare them all over again. The people began their new year very sad. They really were afraid of Nian.

Maybe this would have gone on and never stopped. But one day, one of the village boys was wearing a red scarf. It was getting cold. When the monster Nian

jumped out from behind a big tree to scare him, Nian took one look at the red scarf and ran away. Nian did not like red. He was mainly green, except for his tail and horns.

The village boy was so surprised that he dropped the iron bucket of water he was carrying. The bucket rolled down the hill behind Nian. It hit one rock, then another and another, and made a lot of noise. The noise was very loud. Nian was even more frightened and began running even faster. The village boy told everyone how lucky he had been. His red scarf had scared Nian. And the noise of the iron bucket had sent him running away. This was good news.

All year long, the villagers prepared for New Year's Eve. When Nian came the next year, everyone in the village got the big red flags they had made and the big metal pot covers and frying pans they had prepared. They banged their pot covers and frying pans together making a loud noise. They waved their red flags and lit red lanterns. And Nian ran away. The villagers never saw him again.

That is why people in China believe the color red is lucky, and at New Year's they give children money in big red envelopes. It is called "lucky money". And that is also why all the children and many adults make much noise on New Year's Eve, maybe lighting fire crackers and red paper lanterns. It is to scare away the bad spirits, and even to frighten the monster Nian, in case he is still around.

New Year's is the biggest traditional holiday for Chinese people. It lasts for 15 days. Chinese people visit their grandparents, parents, friends and relatives during the first few days of the New Year. Older people and moms and dads give

the younger ones red paper envelopes called *hongbao*, with money inside. They bring good luck. When they visit, Chinese people wear new clothes and often wear something red for the New Year. They also exchange mandarin oranges (tangerines) for good luck. Most Chinese children know the folktale of “Nian”, they love it. “Nian” also means “year” in Chinese, and people call New Year’s “*Guo Nian*”, the “passing of Nian”.

Here an animated video of the story “Nian”, with short subtitles in English: <http://goo.gl/089xRb> . Pupils can watch and compare the two versions of the tale. What are the differences? They can also act out the story. It is fun!

Discussion Prompts

What about in your country, do people make a lot of noise on New Year’s Eve? Do they give children money or other gifts, like hongbao? Is it in a special red envelope like in China? In Bulgaria and Russia, there was a tradition years ago that Grandfather Frost (Дядо Мраз in Bulgarian, in Russian called Дед Мороз) comes on New Year's Eve and brings small gifts. Maybe children in Bulgaria know about that from their mother and father.

Ask your pupils how they spent the New Year. Did they do “survakane”? Ask children and teens to describe this custom, which is quite unique to Bulgaria. What is a “survachka”? “Сурва, сурва година, весела година, живо-здраво догодина, догодина, до амина.” What are “survakari”?

Learning about the Chinese New Year

Students at lower intermediate level can read about Chinese New Year in an article in Simple Wikipedia. It is in easier English and gives a nice idea of the

Chinese New Year and something about the Chinese zodiac calendar: http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_New_Year. Teachers can explore Simple Wikipedia, with many articles in easy English. The story above was adapted from <http://goo.gl/nvrSkd> , it also has some hands-on activities.

Here a Ming dynasty sculpture (500 years old) of the monster Nian.



(Source: <http://goo.gl/3Dzimd>)

Best wishes for a year of peace and transformation!

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Self-Assessment of Linguistic Improvement of International Students at a UK University

Hanna Šteflová

Introduction

British universities enjoy great popularity among international students from around the world. Thousands of them come to the UK every year to study for a degree or to participate in an exchange programme to improve their English language skills. International exchange students can choose from a number of study abroad programmes, with their dominating reason being to improve their knowledge of English. Among other reasons to study abroad are a wish to get to know a new culture and to gain new academic learning experience, a self-development opportunity, a wish to travel, to meet new friends, and an opportunity to improve their career prospects (Teichler 2004). These reasons show that the major four benefits study abroad students expect are academic, linguistic, cultural, and professional (Teichler 2004). However, when they move to the UK, international students usually experience many changes: they find themselves in new cultural environment far from their friends and family, and have to get used to mostly speaking English and not their

mother tongue. International students at UK universities further have to adapt to the new academic environment and requirements: they have to cope with a considerable *amount of reading* for their disciplines as well as a number of writing assignments; they have to follow seminars and lectures and participate in them in English, and many of study abroad students may find it difficult to understand everything and make themselves understood. However, their efforts will pay off in the end and it will be a valuable cultural and language experience for most of international students.

Literature Review

Study Abroad Students

A considerable amount of existing research about study abroad university students focuses on an increase in linguistic proficiency. An extensive research study relevant in nature to the current study was carried out by Opper, Teichler and Carlson (1990 cited in Coleman 1998:180) and it involved study abroad students from home universities in the UK, France, Sweden, and Germany. The respondents were asked to self-rate their language proficiency before and after their study abroad using a questionnaire based on a Likert scale. This research study suggested an increase in language proficiency of the participants in all language skills. The study further revealed that the greatest linguistic gains were shown by weaker students, whereas specialist language students showed smaller linguistic gain compared to students of other disciplines (Opper, Teichler and Carlson 1990 cited in Coleman 1998:180).

Several other studies tried to evaluate the linguistic gains of study abroad students through self-assessment. Allen and Herron (2003 cited in Sieloff-Magnan and Back

2007:45) administered a Can-do self-assessment scale to 25 students of French during their 6-week programme in Paris. The results of their study showed that all of the 25 participants but one felt they acquired greater confidence in speaking French. In another study of 135 students from a number of European countries carried out by Ife (2000 cited in Sieloff-Magnan and Back 2007: 45-46), 70% of the students reported perceived linguistic improvement in fluency, comprehension and vocabulary, over 60% in pronunciation, while only 40% of the students believed their grammar skills improved. Ball's study (2000 cited in Sieloff-Magnan and Back, 2007: 46) showed that many of the study abroad students believed they had made most progress in L2 understanding (25 out of 28 students), and in formulating their responses quickly when speaking in L2 (19 out of 28 students), while only 3 out of 28 students believed they had shown improvement in grammatical accuracy in speaking L2.

Self-assessment of Linguistic Improvement

A variety of names are used to refer to self-assessment: self-rating, self-evaluation, self-testing, self-appraisal, etc. (Wen-ming and Xiao-zhen 2008). Self-assessment can be defined as “useful information about students’ expectations and needs, their problems and worries, how they feel about their own (learning) process, their reactions to the materials and methods being used, what they think about the course in general” (Harris and McCann 1994:36).

According to Oskarsson (1978), self-assessment can be of two types: *terminal*, which takes place at the end of a course and *continuous* self-assessment, which takes place throughout the course. Oskarsson (1978) further states that the most important function of self-assessment should be to provide an individual learner a continuous feedback on what they have learnt, and self-assessment practices

should ideally enable learners to evaluate their total achievement in second language learning at the end of a course.

As far as the benefits of self-assessment are concerned, J. Ross et al. (1998 cited in Wen-ming and Xiao-zhen 2008:22) claim that their research participants in general preferred self-assessment to assessment carried out by their teachers for the following reasons: (1) students had a feeling that they had a much better understanding of what was required from them because they participated in the process of setting the criteria for the assessment; (2) students believed that they could include certain performance factors into self-assessment (e.g. effort), which were not always included in the mark; (3) self-assessment enabled students to express information related to their performance in second language learning (e.g. their reasoning and learning objectives); (4) as a result of self-assessment students acquired the information which they could further use to improve the second language learning process (J. Ross, et al. 1998 cited in Wen-ming and Xiao-zhen 2008:22).

Among the possible pitfalls of self-assessment is its reliability. According to Gardner (2000), reliability of self-assessment depends upon the purpose of its use: if assessments are to be used for accreditation, then their reliability is of higher importance; however, when self-assessment is used for monitoring of the individual's progress in second language learning, then reliability of self-assessment is of lesser importance.

The Study

The study and its goal

This study was carried out in the academic year of 2012/2013 at the University of Kent located in the south-east of the UK. The broader study investigated the influence of self-esteem on the self-assessment of English language improvement of international students at a UK university. However, only the results of the part of the research related to the self-assessment of the linguistic improvement of the international students will be presented in this article. The main goal of this part of the research was to investigate to what degree the international students at the University of Kent believed they had improved their English language skills during their studies in the UK, and which skills they believed they had improved most, they had not improved at all, and the linguistic skills they had got worse at, if any.

Research questions:

- ❖ Which skills do international students feel they had improved most, had not improved at all or had got worse at during their one-year studies in the UK?
- ❖ What did the research participants consider to be their greatest linguistic achievement during their studies at the University of Kent?

Our assumption was that our research participants would mostly improve their listening, speaking and writing skills due to the requirements of the new academic environment: students had to listen to lectures and seminars in English, they further had to write and submit a number of essays in English during each term, and, of course, they had to communicate with native speakers and other international students in the classroom and outside it.

Research participants

152 international students at the University of Kent took part in this research project. The research participants were undergraduate (56%, n=85) and postgraduate (44%, n=67) students. 65% of them (n=99) were females, and 35% (n=53) were male participants. The students were from a number of countries: 16% - Spain, 14% - Germany, 13% - China, 11% - France, 8% - Italy, 38% - other world countries. All of the research participants commenced their studies at the University of Kent in the academic year of 2012/2013. Students who had been studying at the university longer were not included into the research.

Data Collection

Data collection took place in May and June 2013. The main data collection instrument of this research project was a questionnaire designed by the author of this article. The questionnaire was entitled the *English Language Improvement Questionnaire*, and it included a number of questions about the factors that could have contributed to the possible linguistic improvement of the research participants. All of the students addressed took part in the research willingly. Most of them were very enthusiastic about the research and further asked their friends and acquaintances to complete the questionnaire. The main channels of the questionnaire distribution were: personal meetings with the research participants, e-mail and the social network Facebook. No time limit was set for the questionnaire completion, and no extensive supervision was given to the research participants.

Research findings

- 1. The English language skills the research participants believed they had improved most**

The research participants were requested to provide the skills they believed they had improved most during their one-year studies in the UK.

Figure 1: The distribution of skills and competences the research participants believed they had improved most

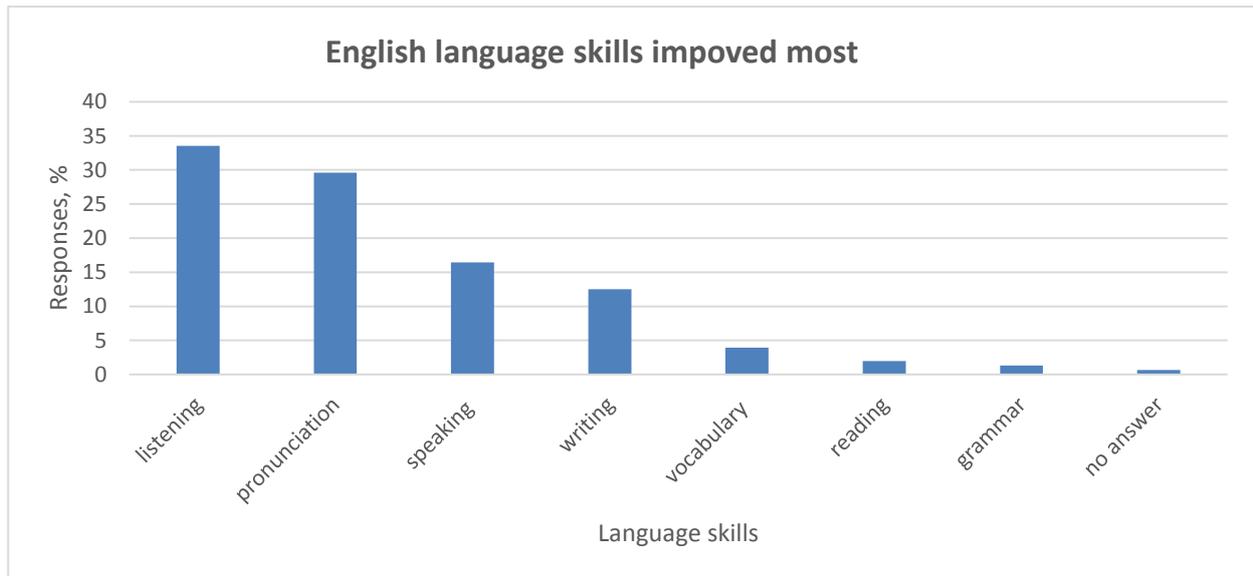


Figure 1 shows the English language skills the research respondents believed they had improved most during their studies in England. The skills improved most were: listening (34%), speaking (16%), and writing (13%). Apart from these, the respondents also felt they had improved their pronunciation (30%) The fourth skill, reading (2%), as well as : vocabulary (4%), and grammar (1%) were not considered significantly improved., and 1% of the respondents (n=1) provided no answer to this question.

The table below reveals the comments the research participants provided after they stated which skill they believed they had improved most. The students' comments in this table and all further tables are presented with the original spelling, grammar and stylistics.

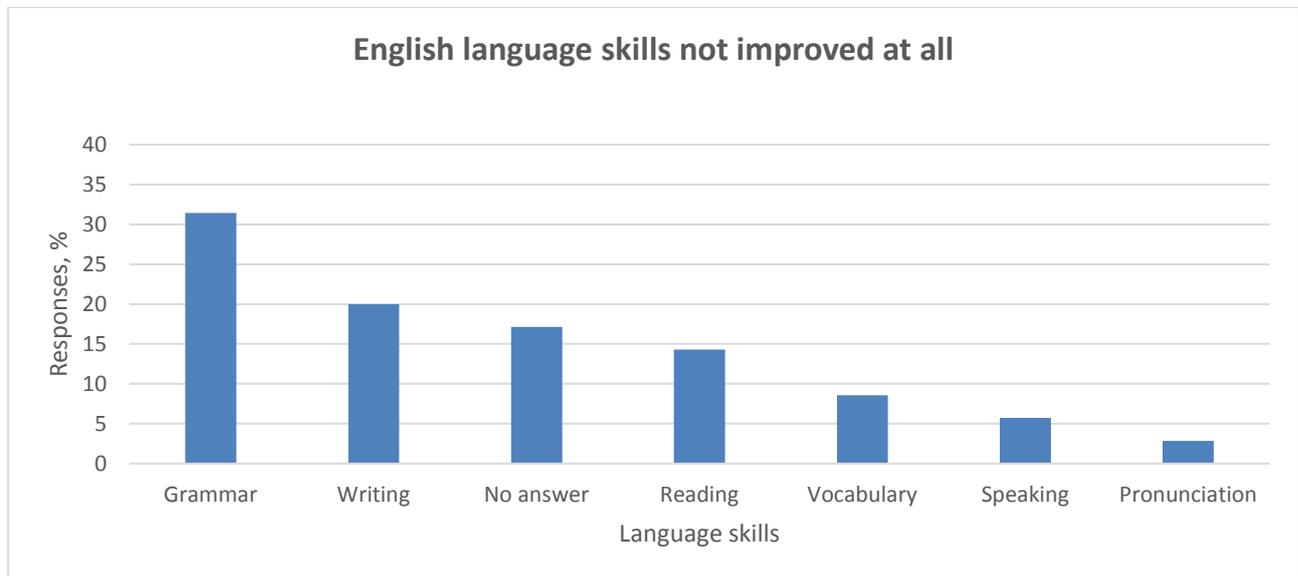
Table 1: The comments of the research participants about the skills and competences they believed they had improved most

Skill	Comment
Listening	<i>“Listening to complete English taught class is always good for improving English listening skills.”</i>
	<i>“Now I can get more easily, all the words people say in their speech.”</i>
	<i>“I can understand what teachers said in class.”</i>
Pronunciation	<i>“I have got more familiar with English pronunciation.”</i>
	<i>“Listening to native speakers and copying their accent → sound more native speaker like now.”</i>
Speaking	<i>“Using English daily improves the fluency.”</i>
	<i>“I used to be very timid and shy when speaking English. Now, I have better fluency and feel confident.”</i>
	<i>“I can express myself better and be more accurate in what I'm trying to say.”</i>
Writing	<i>“Writing, by writing my group coursework and individual course works.”</i>
	<i>“I had to write a lot of essays and had to use legal English.”</i>
	<i>“My writing had got more orderly and academic.”</i>

2. Skills the research participants believed they had not improved at all

In the next question of the *English Language Improvement Questionnaire* the research participants were asked to provide the linguistic skills they believed they had not improved at all during their studies at the University of Kent.

Figure 2: The distribution of skills and competences the research respondents believed they had not improved at all



The research respondents believed they did not improve the following at all: grammar (31%), writing (20%), 17% of the respondents did not provide any answer which could have meant that there was no skill the research respondents had not improved at all, reading (14%), vocabulary (9%), speaking (6%), and pronunciation (3%). The comments of the students are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The comments of the research participants about the skills and competences they felt they had not improved at all

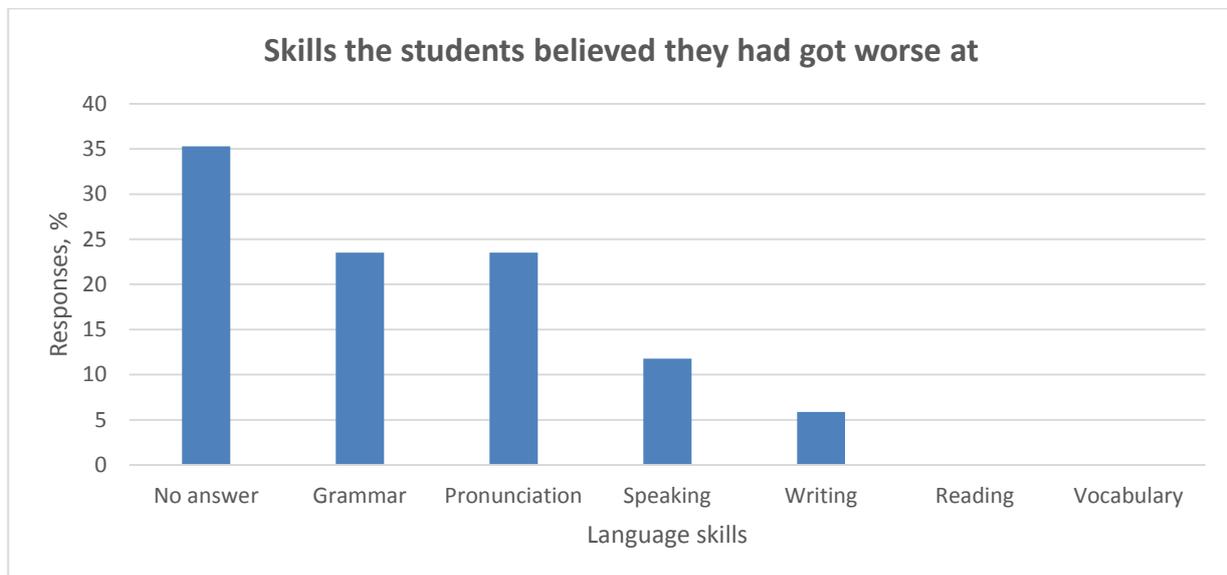
Skill	Comment
Grammar	<i>“Focus is not on grammar when you speak with native speakers – even they make mistakes sometimes.”</i>
	<i>“cause everyone makes mistakes & noone corrects me”</i>
Writing	<i>“Since I am used to writing in English I think that I cannot expect to further improve.”</i>

Speaking	<i>"haven't interacted with native speakers"</i>
Vocabulary	<i>"I still use basic words and sentences"</i>
Reading	<i>"I have just stopped reading because I have other things to do."</i>

3. Skills the research participants believed they had got worse at

The research participants were further requested to consider the English language skills they believed they had got worse at during their studies at the University of Kent.

Figure 3: The distribution of the skills and competences the research respondents believed they had got worse at



35% of the research respondents provided no answer to this question. Other students believed they had got worse at the following skills and competences: grammar (24%), pronunciation (24%), speaking (12%), writing (6%), and no student believed they had got worse at reading and vocabulary.

Table 3: Comments of the research respondents about the skills and competences they believed they had got worse at

Skill	Comment
Grammar	<i>"Forgot names of grammar structures; simplified "exchange English" with other international students."</i>
	<i>"using colloquial English degrades one's hold of grammar"</i>
Speaking	<i>"Because I spent most of the time with foreigners and started to pick up their mistakes."</i>

4. The research respondents' greatest linguistic achievement during their studies in the UK

The research respondents were further asked the following question: *"What do you consider to be your greatest linguistic achievement during your studies in the UK?"* Most of the research respondents, who provided an answer to this question, considered improvement in communication with native speakers of English and other international students, writing academic texts, and listening, mainly during lectures and seminars, to be their greatest linguistic achievement during their studies at the University of Kent. The research respondents further indicated the improvement in presentation skills. The comments provided by the students are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Comments of the research participants about their greatest linguistic achievement during their studies in the UK.

Skill	Comment
Writing essays	<i>"The capacity of writing long essays in a formal way."</i>

in English	<i>"Writing an essay which is nearly entirely grammat. Correct"</i>
	<i>"One of my submitted essays in which I got a high mark."</i>
	<i>"I can write essays really easily."</i>
	<i>"Improving ability to write/read academic texts."</i>
Communication skills	<i>"Having very fluent conversations with native English speakers."</i>
	<i>"The fact of making a long and well-structured conversation with other people in English."</i>
	<i>"I think my greatest achievement in linguistic was the possibility to understand native speakers most of the time."</i>
	<i>"Understanding as people speak with no need to think about what they are saying in spanish."</i>
	<i>"Communication in English gots more and more comfortable to me."</i>
Listening skills	<i>"Listening comprehension → The greatest achievement has been to understand a whole lecture."</i>
	<i>"listening; be able to understand different English accents of people with different background."</i>
	<i>"Listening (oral skills)"</i>
Presentation skills	<i>"I attended in British Conference Undergraduate Research in Plymouth University. My paper has been accepted and I had to present my paper."</i>
	<i>"I was able to hold a presentation without looking at a sheet and without stumbling around or searching for words."</i>
	<i>"doing a presentation in English"</i>
Other comments	<i>"I started to force myself thinking in English and now always think in English."</i>

	<i>"I have improved on colloquial language."</i>
	<i>"There is no greatest achievement but a little improvement."</i>

Conclusion

152 international students at the University of Kent in England completed the *English Language Improvement Questionnaire*, the main purpose of which was to identify self-assessed English language improvement of the research participants. The students in the research named the following among the language skills they believed they had improved most: listening (34%), pronunciation (30%), speaking (16%), and writing (13%). The respondents further provided comments about the most improved skills in their opinion. The perceived improvement was due to the academic environment: international students were surrounded by the English language at the university and outside the classroom. The respondents had to attend lectures and seminars, in which they had to listen to the lecturer and other students, and to actively participate and speak in the classroom, which consequently had a positive effect on their speaking and pronunciation skills in English. Writing was likewise indicated among the most improved skills due to the requirement to submit a number of essays and to give presentations in English each term.

The following English language skills were indicated by the research participants among the skills they had not improved at all during their one-year studies at the University of Kent: grammar (31%), writing (20%), reading (14%), vocabulary (9%), speaking (6%), and pronunciation (3%), and 17% of the respondents did not provide any answer. Grammar was what the students felt they had not improved at all due to the fact there was little focus on grammar in their modules: nobody

corrected their grammatical mistakes and no grammar instruction was provided to them. Writing was both among the skills improved most and not improved at all. The students who believed they had not improved writing at all claimed that they either had good writing skills prior to commencing their studies at the University of Kent or that they needed more time to adapt to the requirements for writing academic texts.

When asked which skills they had got worse at, if any, the research participants provided the following answers: grammar (24%), pronunciation (24%), speaking (12%), and writing (6%). From the students' comments it was obvious that they had not shown any improvement in those skills due to lack or no correction of their mistakes in grammar, pronunciation, speaking and writing by native speakers.

As far as their greatest linguistic achievement was concerned, the research respondents named the following: communication skills, mainly communication with native speakers of English, listening, writing and presentation skills.

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The Japan Association for Language Teaching

JALT 2014: Conversations Across Borders

40th Annual International Conference on
Language Teaching and Learning &
Educational Materials Exhibition

Albena Stefanova

Dear colleagues,

I would like to take advantage of the opportunity to share with you my experience and impressions connected with the participation in this exciting and significant event. It has always been difficult to use words

to convey emotions and perceptions, things that one feels through the senses, but I hope the pictures will help.

I learned about JALT and received information about the conference call for proposals thanks to my BETA membership. I was thrilled when I received the mail with



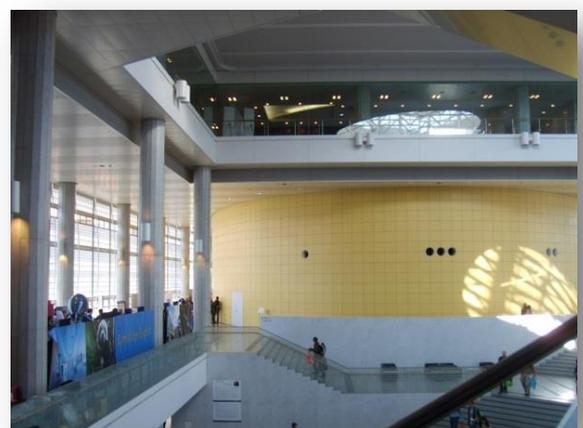


the good news that my proposal had been accepted. Now I started organising the trip– a daunting task for a Bulgarian teacher. You can learn more about JALT, the history and the mission of the organization by checking out their website: <http://jalt.org/main/history>

Having tackled with all organisational challenges connected with the trip to Japan, I set off with the feeling that I had embarked on a fairy adventure. I felt the Japanese spirit with my first breath in this magical country. Strict but very polite ground staff, exceptional organisation, bus drivers wearing white gloves, warm and radiant smiles, readiness to be helpful.

The event was held in Tsukuba, a modern city which is a part of the enormous Tokyo conglomerate. According to the Japanese standards, it is not a big city. However, there are many sights worth visiting there because it is called Japan's "Science City". In 1985 the city hosted the International Science and Technology Exposition, "Science Exposition-Tsukuba Expo '85". There are Tsukuba Space Centre, the Science Museum of Map and Survey, Doho Park and Tsukubasan Shrine. One can also enjoy the gorgeous scenery of Mount Tsukuba.

The hotel I had chosen was next to the conference hall as part of the congress centre. On entering my room, I found an





origami paper figure of a crane with an explanatory note saying that cranes and turtles are traditional Japanese symbols of longevity – a crane for 1000 years and a turtle for 10 000 years. Keen on feeling the conference atmosphere I went to Tsukuba International Congress

Centre – a magnificent building with modern equipment and a variety of facilities intended to cater for the smooth hosting of any business or scientific event.

In the last picture above, you can see the “Pink Shirts” – students who are part of the JALT 2014 Pink Shirts Intern Program. These students were from universities throughout Japan and performed tasks and duties that included setup, assistance to presenters, guidance to conference attendees, technical support, registration and room monitoring. “The idea of the program is to provide students with meaningful experience, opportunities to develop new skills and abilities, the chance to use English in a variety of real-life settings and a broader perspective of the language-teaching profession and JALT as an organisation.”

Next, you can see that the Pink Shirts are wearing kimonos of different colours. Each of the students was responsible for the registration and the badges of the attendees depending on the initial letter of the attendees’ surnames.



The conference was attended by professionals from all over the world– Australia, Canada, the USA, Serbia, Russia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Latin America, Korea, Iran, the UK, China, Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore.

There were sessions from 9:15 a.m. to 7:15 p.m. Right after the last sessions for the day there were evening parties “to honour the speakers who make JALT events such valuable experiences and to toast the hard work of the many people who make JALT such a wonderful organisation”. We could taste traditional Japanese dishes and beverages, enjoy live Irish music or country music, exchange experience and share opinions.

Here is a picture from the Welcome Party:



In the Multi-Purpose Hall participants could find the Special Interest Group (SIG) booths, the domestic and international affiliates. So, everything was made to cater for the participants' needs and interests. Involvement and devotion were, in my humble opinion, the key conference words.



The Educational Materials Exhibition was impressive as well:



It is worth mentioning that the organisers had thought about the time for relaxation. After all, relaxation turned out to be a vital part of the ambitious and intensive programme. The Happy Room was intended to help participants recharge and recreate. The free of charge wide array of activities included meditation, yoga, martial arts, etc.



Among the plenary speakers were Prof. Thomas Farrell, Bill Harley – a Grammy-award winning musician, Prof. Claire Kramersch, and Assoc. Prof. Kimie Takahashi. Prof. Farrell quickly became the conference favourite for his outgoing attitude and gift to present serious topics in a fascinating and light-hearted manner.

Below is a picture of his workshop.



The conference programme included a host of short papers, poster sessions, workshops, forums, SIG AGMs and showcase sessions. Among the events I attended were the following:

- **Plenary sessions**

Why Conversations Need Borders, Claire Kramersch, UC Berkeley.

Reflecting on Practice, Thomas Farrell, Brock University.

- **Presentation of short papers**

Autonomy, Language Learning and the Brain, Philip Benson.

The next picture is from his presentation.



Brave New World: The Third Language Learners, Paul Nagasaka.

Proactive Professional Development: PLNs, Vanaja Nethi.

Plagiarism across Cultures in the 21st Century, Gavin O'Neill.

Teaching L2 Idioms through Pictures and Etymology, Zorana Vasiljevic.

The Conditional Relevance of Native Pronunciation, George O'Neal.

- **Forums**

Business English Forum: Examining Hot Topics in BE, Bill Burns, Shirley Young, Matthew Nisselius.

- **Workshops**

Reflecting on the Teacher behind Practice, Thomas Farrell, Brock University.

Inspire or Perspire? Getting students Speaking, Andrew Boon, Toyo Gakuen University.

Exploring Worlds Inside: Teachers as Researchers, Andrew Boon.

Using a Corpus as a Teaching Tool, Crayton Walker, University of Birmingham.

- **Poster sessions**

Healing English: The Lay of the Medical Land, Shari-Joy Berman.

Tips for Bringing Phonetics into Speaking Classes, Suzanne Yonesaka.

- **Meetings**

Business Communication SIG AGM.



As a member of the faculty of the University of National and World Economy I was interested in attending the BE forum, which presented a good opportunity to meet colleagues from different corners of Japan and the world.

My new friends from the BE SIG invited me and the other participants to take part in the SIG AGM which was a very useful experience and a sign of fellowship. Below is a picture from the event.

My short paper was devoted to the teaching of English for specific purposes and was entitled *ESP for Students of Economy and Political Studies* and you can read the abstract below.



“I have been teaching English to students of Economy and Political Studies at the University of National and World Economy in Sofia, Bulgaria. They study English either as their second or as their third language. These two courses aim at the achievement of a high-level language competence together with a comprehensive knowledge of specific content facilitating the acquisition of professional expertise and competitiveness as well as the further academic progress within the particular field of interest.

The main problems I have faced with throughout my practice refer to the following: the lecturer’s importance with reference to the five key roles of the ESP practitioner identified by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998); the distinctions between the absolute and variable characteristics of ESP; the types of ESP; the characteristics of ESP courses and ESP curriculum design and optimisation.

All these are seen as facets of the learning process and are examined with reference to the ESP courses optimisation regarding the four basic skills and the correlation between them, and their integration aiming at fluency and autonomy.

Finally, the curriculum is addressed as a means providing the necessary basis for the successful accomplishment of the course with reference to the abilities required for successful communication in a professional environment.

The author’s findings are considered within the discussion of each key point. The last part of the talk includes practical recommendations for overall optimization of the ESP courses for students of Economics and Political Studies.”



Before the Farewell Party we gathered in the main convention hall to thank the organisers and the plenary speakers and to discuss the topics that will be the focus of the next conference. Each plenary speaker was invited to the platform and was heartily applauded.



I have to mention one more thing that added to the overall picture. Our partners from JALT have not forgotten their prominent departed colleagues and paid tribute to them by devoting a small corner to them and their work and by giving us the opportunity to share our memories and impressions in special notebooks.



Of course, I would not forget to mention that I did some sightseeing. I went to Tokyo and visited Asakusa, an area where an atmosphere of the Tokyo of past decades survives and where one can see famous magnificent shrines and statues, buy souvenirs and typical Japanese sweets as well as feel the Japanese spirit and warmth.



I would like to share with you something that made a great impression on me in Japan. Whenever I was asked about my nationality or the country I come from, I felt the Japanese respect for Bulgaria. No one asked where

it was. Very often, before I had mentioned Burugaria yogurtu (Bulgarian yogurt) and Kotooshu, people reacted quickly and excitedly by exclaiming: “Stoichkov? Kotooshu?” and bowed. My Japanese friends shared the general belief that our country’s merits were worth respecting. They took me to a nearby supermarket and showed me the big stands full of various kinds of Bulgarian yogurt. Curious to taste it, I bought boxes of two different kinds and I can assure you that they tasted just like the original homemade yogurt.



During my stay in Japan there was a sports event held in Tsukuba – the annual Tsukuba Marathon. We saw a lot of keen runners and enthusiastic spectators. The last day of the conference coincided with a Japanese public holiday equivalent to Thanksgiving. On that day people don't work and visit their relatives or have a family lunch. Unfortunately, those of my Japanese colleagues who had Monday classes had to go to work because of a special order of their Ministry of Education.

With the end of 2014 coming close, we could feel the celebratory atmosphere of the New Year.





Now I understand the people who are enchanted by Japan and visit it again and again. I would like to thank BETA for giving me the wonderful opportunity to take part in a prestigious international scientific event and to experience the magic of Japanese culture.

Every participant in the conference showed surprise and respect for the fact that I come from a small country in Europe and had travelled all the way from another continent especially for the JALT conference. I had never seen my travel to Japan from this perspective. I had just grasped the opportunity and had done my best to realise it for I have been brought up to believe that when there is a will, there is a way. So, my dear colleagues, never ever give up dreaming!



THANK YOU!

Interview with

Steliyana Dulkova



Tanya Bikova is a teacher of English at the High School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Blagoevgrad. Since April 2014 she has been a co-opted BETA-IATEFL Committee Member.

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Tanya Bikova conducted a short interview with Steliyana Dulkova, a member of BETA and a regular contributor to the SEETA community.

I have been teaching languages (English to Bulgarians and Bulgarian to foreigners) for the past 8 years, with some interruptions due to my travels here and there. This is what I like about that job – you can always resume it after a break. I have taught mainly in the private sector



having students coming to my home. I have a special interest in teaching children, as it is much more fun. It gives me the freedom to move, jump, act and laugh during a class, kind of makes me feel like I am on a theatre stage. Currently though, I am teaching only adults in skype classes and live classes. It has its own charms and challenges which I love exploring and improvising with!

Tanya:

How did you decide that working with young learners should be your sphere in English language teaching?

Steliyana:

I just like children and this has naturally led me to choose to work with them.

Tanya:

What qualities should a good kindergarten and/or primary school English teacher possess in your opinion?

Steliyana:

Being able to connect with one's inner child is a good start and instead of playing the responsible adult, one should try and really play and have fun, this is what inspires children and then they copy you.

Tanya:

Working with kids is rewarding but also exhausting. What is the source of inspiration for the energy you need to go on?

Steliyana:

Currently, as I have a very young daughter, my source of energy for teaching young learners has been a little depleted. For me the satisfaction of a great class is the biggest inspiration for the next one.

Tanya:

When did you start your rubric at SEETA's site called *Young Learners: Tips and Tricks* and what experience and emotions has it brought you?

Steliyana:

I think it was back in 2013 and I did it for a year. At the moment all the tips and tricks are still there but I have taken some time off from posting in that specific area, as I am gathering experience for bringing up a bilingual child and soon will be sharing tips and tricks on that.

Tanya:

What will it take to get more teachers to share their tips and tricks with everybody?

Steliyana:

If they do it once and feel the satisfaction of people actually being interested in their work, they will want to share some more. Besides, doing something like that makes you enthusiastic to try out new things in your classes and you get really excited to share them, if they have worked out well.

Tanya:

Who do you admire the most from the methodologists in foreign language teaching? Is there anyone you would like to meet in person?

Steliyana:

I really like Helen Doron's work and style of teaching English which is play and have fun!

Tanya:

What project have you been working on lately and what are your future professional ambitions?

Steliyana:

As I said I have been taking a break from teaching young learners as I am taking care of my very young daughter and learning from her how to teach, as she is growing as a bilingual child. Her daddy is American, so this helps me see what her first constructions in both languages are, attempts for sentence building, code-switching or translation between the two languages that all come in their natural

sequence as she is growing. Hopefully I will be able to transfer some of those in my future classes. I don't really believe in the traditional grammar sequence used in most text books. For example she knows "broken" as this is relevant to her, but she doesn't know 'break'. This is what I mean, more free speech and useful words that children can directly relate to, more situations in the classroom, more movement.

Tanya:

Do you have hobbies outside of the ELT world? Could you tell us something about them?

Steliyana:

Yes, currently I am into homemade cosmetics. I am playing an alchemist. I am making my own creams and lotions with essential oils and herbs. I love it.

Tanya:

How do you want to finish this interview? What is your advice for new teachers of young learners?

Steliyana:

Try to avoid rigidity. Be as free as you can, think of what you liked as a child and try to bring that in your classroom and teach some English through it.

Poetry Corner

A Fairy Tale

In a very little city
there are so pretty
girls and fairies.
In the city there is
the famous shop of Bart –
he is handsome and smart.
There are elves and boys
And the music shop Voice.
There lives a girl – Monny
And her small brother – Tonny.
Monny's best friend is Fanny,
Tonny's best friend is Danny.
There is also a forest of wizards,
They sometimes cause blizzards.

One day the friends decided to walk
to find the fairies and have a talk.
They brought some food: cherries,
bread, jam and berries...
They talked about elves and wizards
And played with small green lizards.
One by one the friends fell asleep.

They were alone in the forest deep.

While the kids were sleeping there

all of a sudden appeared a bear.

It was not real, it was a bad witch.

The enemy of the good wizard Stitch.

She quickly cast a spell in the air

And took the four kids in her lair.

The children woke up in fear

And said: "We are not near

to our home." The witch came:

"I'll cook you on slow flame."

The kids were afraid. In the house

of the witch appeared a mouse.

Then the witch got frightened.

Suddenly the sky got brightened.

And arrived the good wizard Stitch.

He helped the kids get rid of the witch

And all four to their home he took.

That's the end of the book.

Poem written by Elitsa Vassileva,

a 4th-form student

at P. R. Slaveykov Secondary School – Varna, Bulgaria

<http://www.seeta.eu/>

Happening Now!



The Actor In Me !

SEETA Closed Course :22 February-18 March 2015

• Anna Parisi

Drama activities that students prepare and act out

An online workshop for the members of the SEETA Associations



Small-scale teacher-led Research Project

SEETA in collaboration with Desmond Thomas, University of Essex

ELT Teachers becoming researchers

Welcome SEETA BOOKLET

New Teachers ❤️

What advice would you give to new teachers ?

Post your article to the forum to be included in the SEETA Booklet for new teachers



SEETA BOOKLET

Join us on a collaborative project : a SEETA Booklet on how to become a successful blogger!

See the project as it's happening and find out how you can contribute.



Young Learners: Tips and Tricks

Amazing Systems for Teaching English to YL - Roleplay

Fortune telling and palmistry - Teaching the Simple Past Tense



SEETA Teachers' Lounge

On-going community forum



How To

Find out out how to use some popular web 2.0 tools. Read teachers' experiences and share tips and ideas. Follow how-to- videos

Forthcoming Events in the World of ELT

SAVE THE DATE!

24TH BETA-IATEFL ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**The 24th BETA-IATEFL
Annual International
Conference**

will take place between

5 - 7 June 2015

at the
**University of National and
World Economy, Sofia**

June 2015

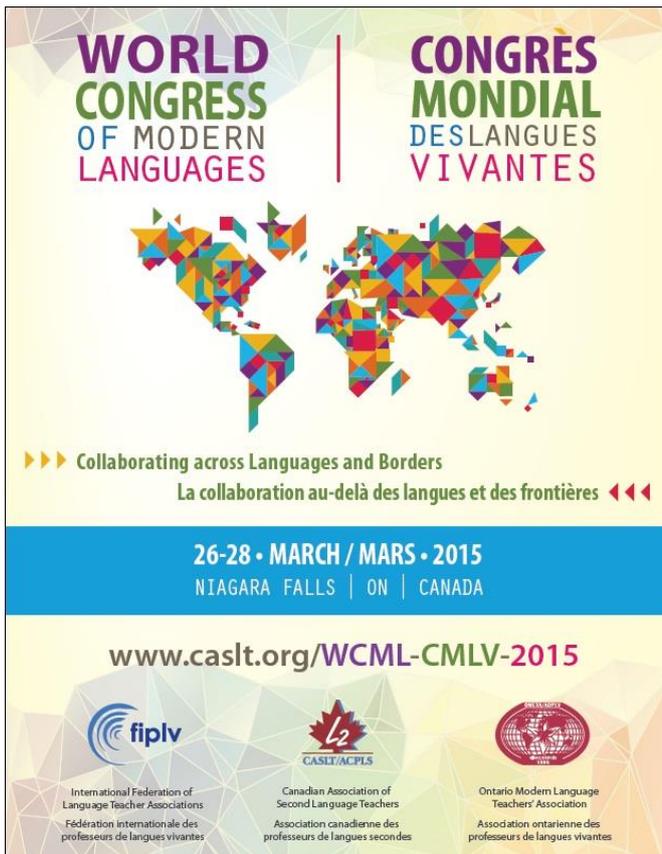
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29	30					



2015 FIPLV World Congress

Collaborating across Languages and Borders

In 2015 **FIPLV** (International Federation of Language Teacher Associations) joins



forces with CASLT (Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers) and OMLTA (Ontario Modern Language Teachers' Association) to hold the **2015 World Congress of Modern Languages** in **Niagara Falls (ON), Canada, March 26-28, 2015.**

This exciting and rewarding event will bring together over 1,000 participants, including a wide range of national and international language education

stakeholders – it is a unique opportunity to benefit from networking and from learning about innovative pedagogies, research, and policy in the field.

For details, please visit:

http://www.caslt.org/conference15/conference2015_en.php

49th Annual International IATEFL Conference and Exhibition

Manchester Central, Manchester, UK

11th-14th April 2015

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

Plenary Speakers



Ann Cotton



Carol Ann Duffy



Joy Egbert



Donald Freeman



Hary Kuchah

For further information, visit:

<http://www.iatefl.org/annual-conference/manchester-2015>

Writing for the BETA E-Newsletter

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

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

What exactly do you have to do?

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

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

For further information contact: beta.iateflbg@gmail.com

Notes for Contributors

- Your article must have not been previously published and should not be under consideration for publication elsewhere.
- The length of your article may vary - short contributions of 300 – 800 words are as good as long ones.
- Electronic submission of your article is preferred to the following e-mail address: beta.iateflbg@gmail.com
- Text of the article: Calibri, 14 points, with 1.5 spacing.
- Headings and subheading: Calibri, 24 points, bold, centred; first letter capitalised.
- Author names and title as well as contact details should be submitted in a separate file accompanying the article.
- About 50 words of biographical data should be included.
- New paragraphs – to be indicated with one separate line.
- Referencing should follow the APA referencing style.
- References in the text should be ordered alphabetically and contain the name of the author and the year of publication, e.g. (Benson, 1993; Hudson, 2008).
- Quotations have to include the relevant page number(s), e.g. (Peters, 2006, p.76).
- Tables, figures or diagrams should be numbered accordingly and included in the relevant part of the text. Each should have an explanatory caption.
- The editors will not return any material submitted, but they reserve the right to make editorial changes.

Established 1991 in Sofia, BETA seeks to build a network of ELT professionals on a national and regional (Southeast Europe) level and establish the association as a recognized mediator between educators and state bodies, public and other organizations.

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

We are on the web:

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

Thank you for your support!

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