JoLaCE

*Journal of Language and Cultural Education, 2018, 6(1)*
*ISSN 1339-4584*
*SlovakEdu*

sciendo

DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2018-0001

# The Perceptions of Future Language Teachers towards the Areas of Change at the Level of Initial Training Programmes

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**Abstract**

The quality of training teachers is an issue of great interest in many countries throughout the world. In this study there is highlighted the growing importance of initial teacher training for future language teachers, which impliesthe need for identifying the areas of change. The aim of the research consists in exploring the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding the areas of changes at the level of the initial training programmes. A total of ninety-five stratified selected pre-service language teachers participated in this study. We have explored the following research questions: A. What are the areas of change in the field of pedagogical competences development at the level of initial training programmes in the perception of future language teachers?; B. Are there any significant differences between the perceptions of pre-service language teachers regarding the areas of change in the field of pedagogical competences development at the level of initial training programmes according to their year of study, specialization, and age? A qualitative methodology employing semi-structured interviews was used to allow flexibility in the exploration of the conceptions of pre-service teachers on the areas of change at the level of initial training programmes. The study is relevant and valuable by offering first-hand signalling of the "areas of changes" proposed as a result of their own representations, with the purpose of developing innovative initial training programmes, with positive long-term effects.

**Key words**: areas of changes, pre-service teachers, semi-structured interview

## Introduction

In recent decades there have been significant changes in the teaching of language learning, which are no longer seen statically as linguistic systems, but as processes in which social and intercultural skills are important (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2011, p. 365). Benson (2008) summarizes the myths about language learning,

concluding that it is the false belief that the home language gets in the way of learning a second language. On the contrary, building a strong foundation in the first language results in better learning of additional languages. In this context, we may argue that there are great similarities between learning one's mother tongue and learning foreign languages, as they support each other and contribute to developing cultural competence. Thorough learning of the mother tongue has great benefits in terms of foreign language learning and the curricula objectives of curricula in the teaching of the mother tongue and of foreign languages should be interrelated.

These studies highlight the relevance of the language teachers' psycho-pedagogical competence (Schick & Nelson, 2001, Mâţă et al., 2013; Mâţă, 2014). The teachers' initial training can be no longer limited tothe content and methodologies of traditional approaches. Since teaching is conducted with students of different ages, there is required a greater preparation in the areas of childhood development, language acquisition, and grade-specific curriculum. Whereas we have a vast literature on the pedagogical underpinning of initial teacher education, and on the respective contributions of schools and higher education to the professional learning of new teachers, we have relatively few accounts of the management of change in initial teacher education. This is a curious lacuna, not least since the last decade has engendered a considerable literature on the management of change and the process of change in the schools to which the 'products' of teacher education proceed.

One of the main objectives of the reform of the Romanian system of teachers' education consists in the restructuring of the paths of education introduced by means of some decisions with a normative character. The basis of the study consists of the problem of professional integration of future teachers and educators in the Romanian education system. The legislation in Romania, in terms of training teachers, did not encourage the adequate pedagogical training of teachers, but academic, specialized preparation. In recent years, there have been some adjustments, but these have not been enough. The initial teacher education should reconsider the status of the pedagogical training as a "hard nucleus" of pre-service teachers. Otherwise, young teachers will have many gaps with important consequences upon their students and the preparation of their career examinations. The consequences generated by the risk of teachers and educators are multiple: instability and professional dissatisfaction; insecurity related to the teaching position; decrease in the number of qualified teachers; decreased motivation and professional efficiency; low quality of education. There is a need for an actual assurance of the growing importance of the initial teacher training for teachers, which implies the need for identifying the areas of change.

They are highlighted the main areas of change in the teacher training programmes for language teachers in Romania: the area of training teachers of Romanian language; the area of training specialists, didacticians; the area of experimental research for innovating educational practices; the area of curricular policies in language didactics.

*a) The area of training language teachers*

It should be noted, from the start that, for long, the Romanian laws on teacher training has not encouraged the teachers' pedagogical training, but their academic, specialized preparation. In recent years, there have been some, but not enough, corrections. As a result, the status of Didactics as subjects in initial training is marginal. Students pay little attention to pedagogy and didactics/ methodologies, by comparison to other disciplines that make up the "hard nucleus" of their specialization. Thus, young teachers come to class with many gaps that are felt in their work with students and their career exam preparation. Until the 90s, there were, in the curricula of Romanian universities designed to prepare future teachers of Romanian language, coursesof Language Methodology and not of Language Didactics. Gradually, after the 90s, Methodology began to be replaced with Didactics, which outlines the status of the discipline of the Didactics of Romanian Language and Literature as a border discipline (located at the intersection of the sciences of language and literature, on the one hand,and the sciences education and educational psychology, on the other hand), a discipline oriented both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the Didactics of language and literature studies the outcomes of the learning content and their achievement in the educational process; it identifies the key concepts and approaches of the reference disciplines and considers their introduction into curricula, textbooks and learning activities; it investigates assimilation conditions and processes, identifies problems and proposes solutions. The dissemination of specialty didactics is currently carried out in two ways: the initial and continuous training provided by a university. For the initial training, as of 2005, Romania has aligned with the Bologna Process, so that the concepts of language didactics are taught in the Bologna cycle 1, bachelor's study only for students who opt to attend the psycho-pedagogical module.

*b) The area of training specialists, didacticians*

Regarding didacticians, these need studies both in the fields of philology and psycho-pedagogy. In Romania, few academics have Didactics as their main specialization, even the young ones. For most universities in Romania, we cannot speak of a clear status of didactician status, this still being integrated in faculties and not in departments of education. Currently, many didacticians come from the

ranks of academics from the faculties of Letters being, first and foremost, linguists, philologists and less of the department people, who know the educational realities from the class. Within the training of didacticians, building the psycho-pedagogical competence is of great importance.

*c) The area of experimental research for innovating educational practice*

Studies rely on the partnership between the specialist didactician specialist and the classroom teacher in pilot classes. The language teacher education is a field of research and the action-research is the best opportunity for the researcher and teacher, due to the interaction between the two.

*d) The area of curricular policies in the domain of Language Didactics*

Language didactics from the initial training, school syllabi, syllabi for teacher tenure and teaching degrees examinations should be articulated coherently, as they are closely connected documents. Thus, future teachers would easily integrate into the system without having to start over and over again in learning series of psycho-pedagogical notions.

**Aims**

The global aimconsists in exploring the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding the areas of change at the level of the initial training programmes. To better understand how future teachers perceive the areas of change we have explored the following research question:

1. What are the areas of changein the field of pedagogical competences development at the level of initial training programmes in the perception of future language teachers?
2. Are there any significant differences between the perceptions of pre-service language teachers regarding the areas of changein the field of pedagogical competences development at the level of initial training programmes according to their year of study, specialization, and age?

**Methodology**

A qualitative methodology employing semi-structured interviews was used to allow flexibility in the exploration of the conceptions of pre-service teachers on the areas of change at the level of initial training programmes.

**Research method**

Semi-structured interviews are used when the researcher wants to delve deeply into a topic and to understand thoroughly the answers provided. The choice of this method was determined by the fact that it allows the flexibility and

the opportunity for unanticipated findings to be discovered, for clarification and for further questions to be asked and explored (O'Toole & Beckett, 2010).The items of the interview guide were analysed by 8 experts from the Romanian education system, specialized in Educational sciences. The open questions from the guide interview were related to the following issues:

a) What are the areas of changes at the level of initial training programmes for language teachers?, and
b) What were the areas of change you mentioned related to?

**Participants**

Ninety-five pre-service language teachers participated in this study. This study used stratified sampling (Thompson, 2012), because it involves dividing a population into two homogeneous strata and constructing a sampling frame for each stratum, based on the comparative analysis of the strata. The participants were from two Romanian universities (53 students from "VasileAlecsandri" University of Bacău and 42 students from "Al. I. Cuza" University of Iaşi).

**Procedure**

The interviews were prepared and organized in November 2013. During their deployment, the interviews were recorded, with the consent of the participants, and the data was transcribed and processed. The study participants were granted anonymity and data confidentiality.

**Results**

Taking into account the responses of the pre-service language teachers, there were established the categories and the specific themes with the help of content analysis (Hashemnezhad, 2015) at the level of the areas of change in initial training programmes. There was used the analysis of the main statistical indicators such as the statistical average, the standard deviation, and the frequencies to verify the first hypothesis.Table 1 shows the main statistical indicators for all the categories of areas of change related to the pedagogical competences development according to the perception of future language teachers.

As the results indicate, the most common aspects encountered by pre-service language teachers in terms of areas of change at the level of initial training programmes are those related to the increasing practical activities, based on efficient exercise of pedagogical competences (see Tab 1).

Tab 1: The main statistical indicators for all the categories of areas of change related to the pedagogical competences development

| Areas of change | N | | Sum |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Valid | Missing | |
| Using modern information technologies to form pedagogical competences | 95 | 0 | 2 |
| The application of alternative, modern, interactive and diversified training techniques | 95 | 0 | 16 |
| Increasing the number of hours of teacher training | 95 | 0 | 5 |
| Increasing practical activities, based on efficient exercise of pedagogical competences | 95 | 0 | 36 |
| Efficient evaluation of pedagogical competences | 95 | 0 | 7 |
| Achieving extracurricular activities | 95 | 0 | 1 |
| Assuring the training supports | 95 | 0 | 3 |
| Facilitating the correlation between content and didactic design | 95 | 0 | 0 |
| Correlating the development of pedagogical competences with didactics competences (lecture lessons, grammar lessons etc.) | 95 | 0 | 2 |
| Correlating the development and the evaluation of pedagogical competences with the national exam evaluation criteria for filling a teaching position | 95 | 0 | 5 |
| Deepening pedagogical key concepts | 95 | 0 | 5 |
| Improving the teaching style of trainers | 95 | 0 | 6 |
| Correlating the theory with the application of the pedagogical competencies | 95 | 0 | 6 |
| Improving the teaching style of trainers of prospective language teachers | 95 | 0 | 7 |
| Correlating the training activities with the curricular documents | 95 | 0 | 2 |
| Transforming the pedagogical language with an accent on accessibility | 95 | 0 | 2 |
| Respecting the principle of quality, rather than the principle of quantity in building pedagogical competences | 95 | 0 | 1 |
| Forming the adaptability capacity of pedagogical | 95 | 0 | 5 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| competences to different contexts (classroom level, accessible language) | | | |
| Creating training models with clear work requirements to facilitate the transition from the general to the personalized level | 95 | 0 | 3 |
| Forming the competences of applying the teaching methods | 95 | 0 | 10 |
| Forming and developing evaluation competences | 95 | 0 | 5 |
| Forming and developing the competences of varied and easy use of didactics instruments | 95 | 0 | 2 |
| Making changes at the level of the education system to facilitate the building of pedagogical competences | 95 | 0 | 4 |
| Using varied training instruments | 95 | 0 | 2 |
| Forming and developing the competences of organizing group didactic activities | 95 | 0 | 1 |
| Implementing some changes at the level of subjects based on building pedagogical competences | 95 | 0 | 11 |
| Developing abilities of efficient application of the pedagogical competences | 95 | 0 | 18 |
| Changing the attitude of trainers towards students | 95 | 0 | 7 |
| Improving the organization of training activities | 95 | 0 | 1 |
| Forming and developing the competences of didactic design | 95 | 0 | 6 |
| Achieving frequent research on the topic of forming and developing pedagogical competences | 95 | 0 | 1 |
| Increasing awareness of the importance of building pedagogical competences in the training of future language teachers | 95 | 0 | 1 |
| Forming the competences of using curricular documents | 95 | 0 | 1 |
| Elaborating training programs to further improve the pedagogical competences at future language teachers | 95 | 0 | 2 |

To verify the second hypothesis, there were used the Mann-Whitney U Test to compare two independent samples. Nonparametric tests were applied in order to obtain the abnormal distribution. The results shown in Table 2 show significant

differences between the perceptions of the students from the second year and the students from the third year, only at the level of the areas of change related to the application of alternative, modern, interactive and diversified training techniques (z = -2,431; p = 0.015).

Tab 2: The statistic of the Mann-Whitney U Test for the areas of change in the field of pedagogical competences development, according to the students' study year

| | **Mann-Whitney U** | **Wilcoxon W** | **Z** | **Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The application of alternative, modern, interactive and diversified training techniques | 834,000 | 2725,000 | -2,431 | ,015 |

At the level of the perception of the students from the second year, the mean rank is 53.97, while at the level of the perception of the students from the third year it is 44.67 (Table 3). Therefore, these aspects are particularly highlighted by the responses of the second year students.

Tab 3: The analysis of the means for the areas of change in the field of pedagogical competences development, according to the student's study year

| **Ranks** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Study year | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
| The application of alternative, modern, interactive and diversified training techniques | II | 34 | 53,97 | 1835,00 |
| | III | 61 | 44,67 | 2725,00 |
| | Total | 95 | | |

The results shown in Table 4 show significant differences between the perceptions of the students with the specialization Romanian language and those with the specialization English language, at the level of the following areas of change: using modern information technologies to form pedagogical competences (z = -1,904; p = 0.057); transforming the pedagogical language with an accent on accessibility (z = -1,904; p = 0.057); forming and developing the competences of varied and easy use of didactics instruments (z = -1,904; p = 0.057); implementing some changes at the level of subjects based on forming

pedagogical competences (z = -1,954; p = 0.051); changing the attitude of trainers towards students (z = -2,041; p = 0.041).

Table 4. The statistic of the Mann-Whitney U Test for the areas of change in the field of pedagogical competences development, according to the students' specialization

| | **Mann-Whitney U** | **Wilcoxon W** | **Z** | **Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Using modern information technologies to form pedagogical competences | 976,000 | 2867,000 | -1,904 | ,057 |
| Transforming pedagogical language with an accent on accessibility | 976,000 | 2867,000 | -1,904 | ,057 |
| Forming and developing the competences of varied and easy use of didactics instruments | 976,000 | 2867,000 | -1,904 | ,057 |
| Implementing some changes at the level of subjects based on forming pedagogical competences | 897,500 | 1492,500 | -1,954 | ,051 |
| Changing the attitude of trainers towards students | 918,000 | 1513,000 | -2,041 | ,041 |

The students from the specialization English language appreciate more the aspects regarding the use of modern information technologies to form pedagogical competences, transforming the pedagogical language with an accent on the accessibility, forming and development of the competences of varied and easy use of didactics instruments(the mean rank is 49.79), compared with the students from the specialization Romanian language(the mean rank is 47.00). The students with the specialization Romanian language appreciate more the aspects regarding the implementation of some changes at the level of subjects based on forming pedagogical competences (the mean rank is 50.29) and changing the attitude of trainers towards students (the mean rank is 49.95), compared with the students from the specialization English language (the mean rank is 43.90 for the first aspect and 44.50 for the second aspect).

Table 5. The analysis of the means for the areas of change in the field of pedagogical competences development, according to the students'specialization

| Ranks | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Specialization | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
| Using modern information technologies to form pedagogical competences | Romanian language | 61 | 47,00 | 2867,00 |
| | English language | 34 | 49,79 | 1693,00 |
| | Total | 95 | | |
| Transforming pedagogical language with an accent on accessibility | Romanian language | 61 | 47,00 | 2867,00 |
| | English language | 34 | 49,79 | 1693,00 |
| | Total | 95 | | |
| Forming and developing the competences of varied and easy use of didactics instruments | Romanian language | 61 | 47,00 | 2867,00 |
| | English language | 34 | 49,79 | 1693,00 |
| | Total | 95 | | |
| Implementing some changes at the level of subjects based on forming pedagogical competences | Romanian language | 61 | 50,29 | 3067,50 |
| | English language | 34 | 43,90 | 1492,50 |
| | Total | 95 | | |
| Changing the attitude of trainers towards students | Romanian language | 61 | 49,95 | 3047,00 |
| | English language | 34 | 44,50 | 1513,00 |
| | Total | 95 | | |

The research results contribute to understanding the perceptions of future language teachers towards the area of change from the perspective of pedagogical competences development at the level of initial training programmes.

**Discussions**

The research results indicate three levels of the areas of change in the field of the pedagogical competences at prospective language teachers: a) at the level of future language teachers, b) at the level of trainers and initial training programmes and c) at the level of the educational policies. There can be observed that it results a progressive view upon forming pedagogical competences at pre-service language teachers, from student and trainers to educational system.

*a) Changes at the level of future language teachers*

In the perception of students, there are necessary changes with respect to the following aspects:

- improving the teaching style of trainers (ability to teach clearly, concisely, systematically; ensuring the continuity of student learning; presenting the content in a form that is easy to remember; turning the authoritarian or laissez faire teaching style in a democratic style; providing concrete examples in specific situations; formulating clear and concise questions; explaining notions clearly to students);
- developing abilities of efficient application of the pedagogical competences (flexibility; the equal treatment of students; impartiality, objectivity; lack of discrimination; cooperation, effective communication with students; building a relationship with students based on mutual respect; appropriate behaviour; empathy; openness to students; increasing the motivation of language teachers; psychological testing of language teachers);
- forming the adaptability capacity of pedagogical competences to different contexts (adaptation to the classroom level; using accessible language; adapting teaching methods to the classroom level);
- forming the competences of applying teaching methods (the application of modern and varied teaching methods);
- forming and developing evaluation competences;
- developing the competences of varied easy use of didactics instruments;
- forming the competences of organizing group didactic activities;
- developing the competences of didactic design;
- forming the competences of using curricular documents.

*b) Changes at the level of trainers and initial training programmes*

There are mentioned important changes by future language teachers:

- increasing practical activities, based on efficient exercise of pedagogical competences (achieving exercises; conducting simulations; more teaching hours and fewer hours of assistance; more practice; applying pedagogical

concepts (teaching-learning strategies); achieving the applications during the hours of training and less during homework; achieving sufficient practice before teaching at class);
- efficient evaluation of pedagogical competences (formulating criteria for assessing pedagogical competencies in a practical, accessible, clear, objective way; formulating the requirements in concordance with the requirements of preparation for the teaching career);
- using modern information technologies to form pedagogical competences (the use of computers; the use of multimedia resources of training);
- the application of alternative, modern, interactive and diversified training techniques (interactive methods);
- using varied training instruments;
- increasing the number of hours of teacher training;
- implementing some changes at the level of subjects based on forming pedagogical competences (Language Didactics, Pedagogical practice);
- assuring the training supports;
- improving organizing training activities;
- correlating the development of pedagogical competences with didactics competences (facilitating the correlation between Language Didactics and

Teaching practice; ensuring the correlation between general content and didactic design);
- deepening pedagogical key concepts (highlighting key concepts; reducing the large volume of information);
- improving the teaching style of trainers of prospective language teacher (offering explanations, systematization of information; increasing interest in pedagogical competences formation; the presentation of theoretical contents in an attractive form; the selection of interesting content);
- changing the attitude of trainers towards students (encouraging expression of the students' opinions; providing support to students; creating an appropriate framework for pedagogical competence training; openness);
- correlating the theory with the application of the pedagogical competencies (organizing the theoretical material so that students can practice how to teach);
- creating training models with clear work requirements to facilitate the transition from the general to the personalized level;
- correlating the training activities with the curricular documents (conducting applications on syllabi);
- facilitating the correlation between content and didactic design;

- transforming the pedagogical language with an accent on accessibility (replacing demagogic language with concrete terms; substituting "bushy" information with concrete terms);
- achieving extracurricular activities.

*c) Changes at the level of the educational policies*

- increasing awareness of the importance of developing pedagogical competences in the training of future language teachers;
- making changes at the level of the educational system to facilitate forming pedagogical competences;
- respecting the principle of quality, rather than the principle of quantity in pedagogical competences forming;
- correlating the development and the evaluation of the pedagogical competences with the national exam evaluation criteria for filling a teaching position;
- elaborating training programs to further improve the pedagogical competences at future language teachers (creation of masters in the field of didactics);
- achieving frequent research on the theme of forming and developing pedagogical competences.

The research results obtained in this study are confirmed by other studies based on investigating the perceptions of pre-service language teachers upon different aspects. Walton and Rusznyak (2013) used focus group interviews, Facebook posts, and journal entries to observe pre-service teachers' pedagogical learning during practicum placements in special schools. Margolis (2014) highlights the need for practical training of graduates of educational programs. In another study, Shchur (2014) highlights the need to increase the number of teacher training hours to help build pedagogical competences. The results of a research conducted by Hardin et al. (2010) indicated that teachers were in need of continued support, especially when working with linguistically and culturally diverse children and their families. The findings of a study achieved by Uzun (2016, p. 12) demonstrate that the content and procedure of the courses need to be revised and restructured in such a way that "they would produce less memorization and more permanent, internalized and digested knowledge and experiences, possibly through extensive practice". Jašková (2016) identified important changes at the level of Pedagogical content knowledge components (the conceptions of purposes for teaching subject matter and the knowledge of instructional strategies) at the level of subjective perceptions of English for Specific Purposes university teachers' professional beginnings. Another studies are based on the investigation the differences between pre-service and in-service

teacher education programs. Genç (2016) observed that "pre-service teachers need more practice opportunities in their way to becoming a language teacher whereas in-service teachers definitely need to improve and update their theoretical knowledge base on current developments in the field". Meschede et al. (2017) analyzed the differences between pre-service and in-service teachers from perspective of relation of teachers' professional vision with pedagogical content knowledge and beliefs. Konig et al. (2017) found that teacher preparation in higher education institutions is effective for the pre-service teachers' acquisition of general pedagogical knowledge. According to the results of a current study (Depaepe & Konig, 2018), there is not significant association between general pedagogical knowledge and self-efficacy beliefs. All these results highlight the importance of investigating the pedagogical component of the formation of future language teachers.

## Conclusions

The research results reveal the most important areas of change at the level of the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding the areas of change in initial training programmes. At the general level, the future language teachers appreciate that there are needed changes at the level of initial training programmes in terms of increasing practical activities, based on efficient exercise of pedagogical competences. At the particular level, the areas of change are divided into three main categories, according to the perceptions of future language teachers: at the level of future language teachers, at the level of trainers and initial training programmes and at the level of educational policies. Also, conclusions were formulated based on the study year and the specialization of pre-service language teachers. The students from the second year appreciate more the areas of change related to the application of alternative, modern, interactive and diversified training techniques than the students from the third year. The students from the specialization English language appreciate more the aspects regarding the use of modern information technologies to form pedagogical competences, transforming the pedagogical language with an accent on accessibility, forming and developing the competences of varied and easy use of didactics instruments, compared to the students from the specialization Romanian language. The students from the specialization Romanian language appreciate more the aspects regarding the implementation of some changes at the level of subjects based on forming pedagogical competences and changing the attitude of trainers towards students, compared to the students from the specialization English language.

**Acknowledgements**
This research was financially supported by the Romanian Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation, Subprogram 1.1 - Human Resources - Mobility Projects for Researchers, Competition 2017 (PN-III-P1-1.1- MC-2017-0432).

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JoLaCE

*Journal of Language and Cultural Education, 2018, 6(1)*
*ISSN 1339-4584*
*SlovakEdu*

sciendo

DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2018-0002

# Development of Foreign Language Speaking Skills through the Application of the Dynamic Model of Speech Production and Activating Methods

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**Abstract**

The present time places considerable demands on the process of foreign language education both in the field of communication and information transfer. Teachers, occupying a pivotal role in this process, are not able to proceed with simple, lay approaches and methods. It has become more and more important to apply sophisticated approaches and methods in teaching which are based on primary and secondary researches. This paper discusses the Dynamic Model of Speech Production as a specific approach to EFL teaching. Furthermore, the application of activating methods in the process of teaching English as a foreign language is examined from the standpoint of gender, country, length of teaching practice, and type of university. The data was collected using a questionnaire about the use and the frequency of occurrence of activating methods, which was completed by 82 university teachers from the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic.

**Key words**: foreign language, target language, foreign language teaching, communicative competence, activating methods.

## Introduction

The continuing processes of internalization and globalization appear to be the most typical in this day and age. These two mutually interdependent processes are getting more and more intense, which means that not only the business and commercial spheres, but the entire society comes increasingly into contact with members of various national cultures and the resulting linguistic diversities. We may encounter distinctions and specific features of national cultures, languages, and the whole system of communication methods and exchange of information not only as tourists, but more and more within common everyday personal and work-related life experience. The rapid process of globalization in general brings about the requirements of indispensable integration of cultures and cooperation

within transnational organizations being encouraged to ever larger expansions to foreign countries, primarily by insatiable markets, relatively cheap qualified labour, advantageous localities, or tax benefits.

Present-day students as prospective employees of any future business enterprises are already working in more and more internationalized environment, cooperating typically with schools, businesses, enterprises, and companies abroad, i.e. with their colleagues from different cultural and linguistic settings. International work teams have become the subject of study programmes and work activities. Thus, cultural and linguistic varieties of multicultural teams play an important role in communication and everyday work of students. Diverse perception of various attitudes, different cultural and communication patterns, distinctive communication skills, and communicative competence along with the specific relevance determined by cultural differences may not only result in conflicting communication, but some good intentions and ideas might not be realized effectively and successfully (Leláková & Bačová, 2015). The lack of knowledge of communication patterns, communication skills, and poor communicative competence can lead to situations in which the people of various nationalities understand and interpret the same facts and actualities differently (for more details see Alasko, 2015; DeVito, 2009, or Searle, 2007). The significance attached to them primarily reflects the cultural differences and inherently related linguistic traditions. Culture and the inherent communication patters affect the conduct and communication skills of every individual; therefore, the transfer of cultural and communication patterns does not seem to be easy. However, the knowledge of culture and the related communication patterns may result in more effective foreign language teaching and help reduce possible misunderstandings. Moreover, the potential reactions of a partner in communication could be predicted (for more detail see Szarková, 2014 or Szarková et al. 2014).

Due to the impact of technological revolution, the key trends in foreign language education have recently changed considerably (for more details, see Štubňa, 2011 and 2015). Arising out of the shift from strategic sources of industrial society (the capital) to strategic sources of information society (information, knowledge, and creative thinking), the carriers of new sources are people with superior skills, particularly in communication, intercommunication, sharing and transferring information, knowledge, and experience. These skills appear to be the main pre-requisites of successful progress and development not only within the respective individual organizations, but also in terms of the entire general public (Richards & Schmidt, 1983; Savignon, 1983; Halliday, 1978). From this standpoint, the demands on teachers are constantly changing, requiring

them to enhance and expand substantially their expertise in teaching foreign languages. It should be noted, however, that education in the field of foreign languages is a very complex process, which has to take into account the labour market demands and the needs of an individual and his/her mental potential to get a good command of a foreign language, which is a life-long process. As far as the contemporary situation in the area of foreign language education is concerned, changing the educational system is a necessary pre-requisite for the compliance with the corresponding needs of a new information society. Such a change would make it possible for individuals to stand out in the multicultural job market of today in which the proficiency and competence in several foreign languages is crucial (Bygate, 1987; Halliday, 1967/8; Johnson, 1996; Repka, 1997; Sperber & Wilson, 1995). On the basis of these views, we have analysed some approaches and their contributions to the process of foreign language education, especially within the acquisition of communication skills and their use in communication in the multicultural EU area, namely from the perspective of the present and future needs.

Teachers occupy a pivotal role in the educational process. Thus, their ability to deal with the new trends, methods, and procedures in foreign language teaching is in the foreground of their interest (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hlásna, 2008; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Hajrová, 2015). As this necessity is getting more and more imperative, various communicative and communication models have been gradually and systematically developed. Some attention was devoted to similar issues in one of the more recent articles, the subject matter of which was to determine the current state of linguistic knowledge of students of Faculty of Education, Comenius University in Bratislava who attended bachelor and master study programs Teaching English Language and Literature (c.f. Pčolinská, 2009). Aiming to analyse the level of their linguistic proficiency, the research was conducted on a selected sample of subjects (students of English language and literature at the Faculty of Education, Comenius University) in order to show the relevant pedagogical implications – the results of the empirical part of a statistical study. The research revealed that we ought to seek possibilities of improving the quality of students´ oral skills. One of the possibilities is taking the nature of interpersonal communication more into account. As a result, we decided to pay more attention to these issues, and to follow up our current expertise and practical experience. Through the analysis of fundamental aspects of the process of negotiation of meaning we sought to synthesize the key moments in the process of speech production. The outcome was our own model of speech production, demonstrating a relationship between the linguistic and social aspects of this process.

## The Importance of New Technologies used in Foreign Language Education

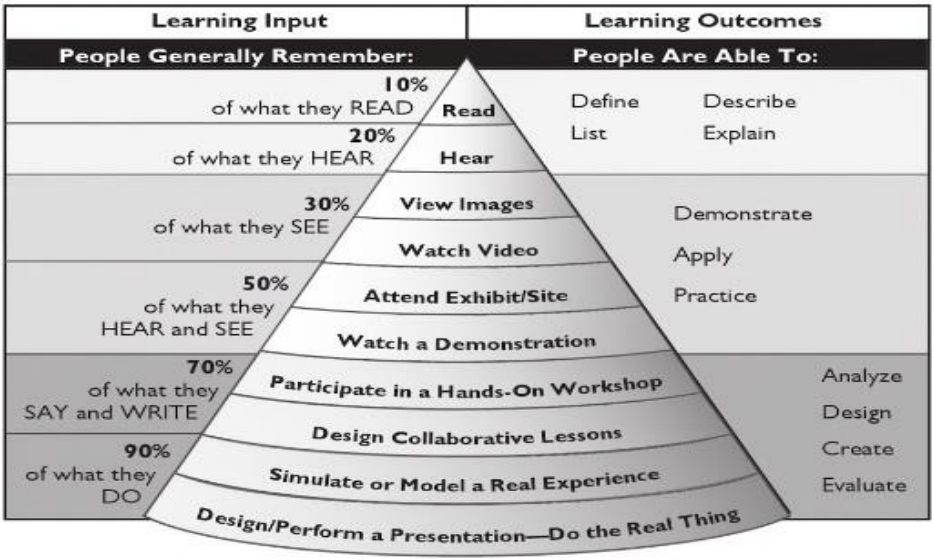
The new technologies have not hampered the field of foreign language education. Quite the contrary, the new technologies have become the fundamental, indispensable devices and tools for improving foreign language teaching. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that education in general is a process of consciously and actively acquiring, transferring, exchanging, and producing the system of knowledge and skills of any individual. The same can be also applied to the educational process focused on the acquisition of communicative competence and communication skills (Repka, 2001; Lojová, 2004; Widdowson, 2003 and 2011; Matkovčíková, 2011; Dušek, 2012). Therefore, for the educational process of acquiring communicative competence and communication skills, it is essential to have teachers with personal experience in using a foreign language. Furthermore, such teachers ought to be able to apply their linguistic competence in a sense of cultural patterns in a given language and support their learners by the instruments of new technology (e.g. e-learning) in order to make the whole teaching process more effective. Even though the teachers' role is essential in this process, there is no doubt that information technologies hold their proper place in foreign language education. The internet especially, which is used in various universities such as Stanford, Harvard, Yale, or MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), plays a significant role in conveying the teaching/learning materials and providing e-courses and other modern forms of informal education. Great importance is nowadays attached to the visual type of learning, e.g. watching videos or hands-on training (i.e. practical approach, or practical teaching), and Confidence-Based Learning including some forms of on-line testing of language proficiency. Finally, achieving communicative competence is also of increasing importance.

## "The Cone of Learning/Experience", a key to effective foreign language teaching and communicative competence acquisition

Several authors who were concerned with analysing the process of foreign language education refer to the use of information and communication technologies such as digital textbooks in the process of foreign language teaching. It seems that these technologies enable the students to learn a foreign language in a simpler way in comparison to traditional approaches as the learners at the same time consciously combine more senses and cognitive processes during the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Furthermore, the effectiveness of learning is also increased because the learners are able to demonstrate how they use foreign

using this model in teaching foreign languages and communicative skills lies in the fact that by means of inner speech (holding a dialogue with oneself), the student verifies, classifies, selects, and reinforces knowledge and experience by making observations within his/her own cognitive system. Moreover, by means of interactive dialogue (having a dialogue with other people), the student is activating (directly in a communication situation) and applying the knowledge and experience included in the acquired communicative competence.

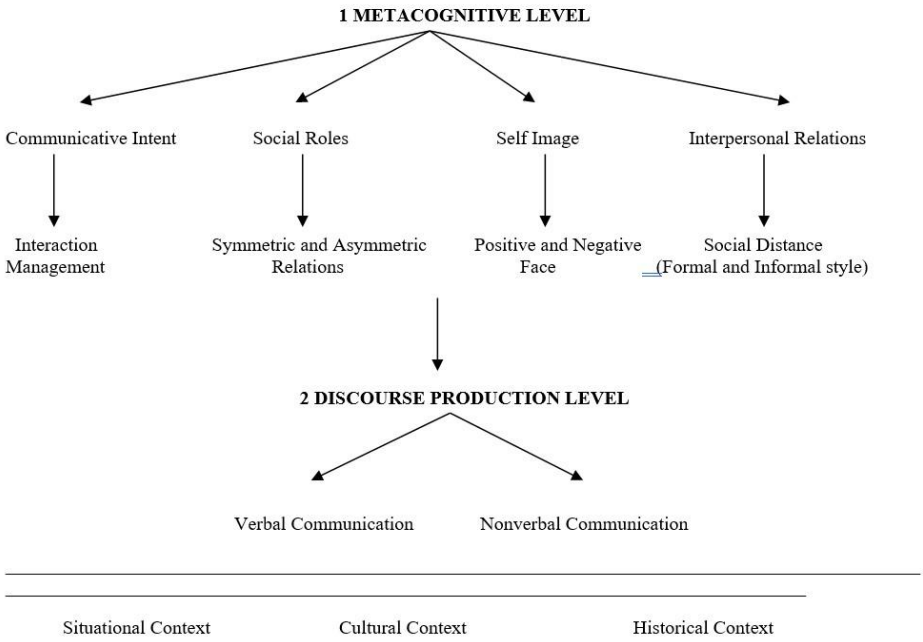
Fig. 1: Dale's Cone of Experience (Adapted from Stockard, 2007, p. 132)




The Dynamic Model of Speech Production (Figure 2) represents another specific approach to foreign language teaching. It arises from analysing various foreign language teaching models and speech production models. Its advantage lies in detailed specifications of individual elements of the process of interpersonal communication in the view of social and linguistic aspects. The model shifts the attention of communicating persons (both the speaker and the listener) onto the fact that any successful communication requires continuous monitoring of the actual situational context and all its variables, which may affect the choice of lexical units and communication strategies. In other words, interpersonal communication is basically a communicative continuum, and various communicative variables of different strength (authority, social roles,

self-image, etc.) may be enter the continuum and affect our verbal and nonverbal expressions. Its realization depends directly on the above-mentioned communication variables. Communicative competence involves the communication variables occurring in the process of communication, and the ability to react adequately. The scheme of the Dynamic Model of Speech Production and all its elements may be illustrated as follows:

Fig. 2: Dynamic Model of Speech Production




The model (Figure 2) consists of two levels: the metacognitive level and the discourse production level. The metacognitive level denotes appreciating the set of communication variables (requiring the activation of cognitive processes) that essentially affect the realization of verbal and nonverbal communication. At this stage of speech production (but also in reception), it is necessary to activate a set of mental processes, through which the factors which influence the materialization of communicative intent into a linguistic form may be interpreted.

The first indispensable prerequisite of successful communication is setting the goals. At the level of metacognitive processes, we have to realize the communication address, what aim is pursued, and how the communicative goal is to be achieved. It is extremely important to have a clear idea from the very beginning of what we wish to communicate. Based upon clearly set goals, we are then able to eliminate possible digressions from the main (leading) line of communication. Accordingly, we are then able to select more adequate devices to highlight the importance of idea (argument) and its superiority in a sense of significance in relation to other supporting ideas; this will be discussed at the next level.

Another pre-requisite of successful communication is the ability to *take on adequate social roles*. When communicating, it is important to assess the actual situation objectively, and to adopt the related social role which affects our verbal and nonverbal expressions. It is obvious that communication between very good friends who have known each other for many years will be rather different from the communication between a superior and an inferior staff member.

The third pre-requisite of effective communication is awareness of one's own self, self-*awareness*. This means that each of us has a concrete idea of one's self and also of how the people around should perceive us. All this considerable affects our communicative behaviour, the way of conducting the conversation as well as the behaviour of those nearby. Quite naturally, this element of metacognitive level is also concretized in the form of verbal and nonverbal communication, and it is primarily studied and analysed by pragmatics.

Finally, *interpersonal relationship* of people communicating together should be taken into consideration too. At this point, a close interconnection between interpersonal relationships and social roles may be recognized. Both of these categories refer to the relational format existing between the people involved in communication. For interpersonal relationship, that may be either a formal or an informal format, and considerable importance is attached to the so-called *social distance*. As for the social roles, quite similarly, the social distance is a determining factor depending on whether the relationship is *symmetrical* or *asymmetrical,* although it represents two different categories at a metacognitive level from the qualitative standpoint. The symmetrical relationship does not necessarily have to be informal in its nature, and, vice versa, asymmetrical relationship may be either formal or informal in its nature.

All the elements of the metacognitive level of speech production defined so far participate in the process of interpreting the subject regarding the actual *situational*, c*ultural,* and *historical context*. Subsequently, these contexts are materialized by particular linguistic means and communication strategies, and

language in real situations. This process was described by Dale (1969), who made a model which is nowadays known as Dale's Cone of Experience. The model illustrates various approaches resulting in retaining the information and activities according to which our ability to remember as much information as possible may be increased (for more details see e.g. Ovsenák, 2007). Despite some critical comments by various authors who examined the model and some inappropriate recommendations, this cone has become a sort of a formula for the most effective approaches and techniques by which the human brain can retain as much information as possible, and which may be used in foreign language teaching. The study suggests that the least effective methods of learning a foreign language are those most frequently used nowadays, i.e. reading and listening. According to Dale, by reading and listening we can merely absorb 10% and 20% of information, respectively. On the other hand, the most effective method appears to be represented by sharing information obtained in a complex manner by explaining or tutoring. Therefore, EFL teachers ought to find enough time to provide the students with the ample opportunity to discuss the topics and problems so that the students could share their opinions with other students (e.g. seminars can be used for these purposes at universities and institutions of higher education. As mentioned by (Turek, 2006; Sitná, 2009; Valentovičová & Hlásna, 2012; Valentovičová & Hlásna, 2001; Štubňa, 2016); Zelina et al. (2016), an educator has an important role in choosing the appropriate individual approach.

The analysis of the results achieved in foreign language teaching according to Dale's Cone of Experience indicates that after two weeks, the students remembered as much as 90 % of communicative competence which was linked with the real situations and real-life experience. This enabled the students to be emotionally engaged or "immersed" in a communication situation, and to verify the communicative competence in a sense of the required cultural patterns applicable in a particular foreign language. As shown by other experience from approaches included in the cone of learning and used in foreign language teaching, communicative skills acquired only from verbal symbols (spoken words) are far away from reality and often impracticable in actual communication situations. This is documented also by the Dale's model in which the effective teaching techniques include the methods using situations taken from real life. The same can be also implemented in teaching foreign languages (Nichols, 2015). Dale's Cone of Experience presents a starting point for another model, the Model of Active Learning by Dee Fink (2003). The central idea of this model is employing chiefly experiential learning and dialogic methods: "*In case we want a more active learning, we must learn how to enhance the overall learning by including experiential learning and options for dialogue*". The significance of

collectively concretized at the level of the so-called discourse production. This level has two subcategories: the *verbal* and *nonverbal communication*.

The following is an illustration of how the individual elements of metacognitive level, depending on the processes of their interpretation, become actualized at the verbal level.

a) setting the goal and pursuing the communicative intent as such – interaction management;
b) taking social roles – the symmetrical and asymmetrical relationship between the communicating persons (symmetrical: two friends; asymmetrical: a teacher and a student or a parent and a child);
c) self-image – inclination to the so-called positive or negative face. In case of the positive face, the individual who prefers friendly feelings from the part of the communication partner is happy when the people around him/her show that he/she is a part of the group; he/she may be best described by attempting to integrate into the group. This is also reflected in his/her verbal and nonverbal communication and the expectations of how the people around him/her will behave towards him/her.
d) interpersonal relations – transformed in the formal and informal style, showing by comparison principal qualitative differences not only as for the choice of relevant lexical units, but also at the sentence and text levels.

Using the models and the related innovative methods in foreign language teaching requires combining a theoretical approach with practical tasks (Vasiľová et al., 2013). These approaches are particularly important for building and reinforcing the communicative competence. The following table presents the choice of most frequently used activating methods in teaching foreign languages and reinforcing communicative competence and skills[1].

[1] It should be remembered that teaching methods must be chosen in accordance with the applicable educational and training goals, teaching/learning content, nature of teaching process, teaching conditions, teacher's experience and abilities/skills, but primarily according to the learners. Therefore, it is not possible to determine which of the methods is the best and most effective (Sirotová, 2010).

Tab. 1: Innovative and activating methods in foreign language teaching (Fink, 2003; Vasiľová, 2013; Turek, 2006)

| APPROACH/METHOD | DEVELOPEMNT OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE |
|---|---|
| **Cooperative teaching** | - arranging students' interaction and contacts;<br>- improving interpersonal and communicative skills;<br>- improving communicative competence. |
| **Methods of group teaching – e.g. brainstorming, brainwriting, role playing, mental mapping** | - creating and modelling a positive communication environment;<br>- encouraging to use communicative competence;<br>- encouraging to active listening and empathy;<br>- acquisition of communication strategies. |
| **Problem-based learning** | - learning communication patterns;<br>- mastering communication roles;<br>- learning communication and cooperation strategies. |
| **Project-based learning** | - mastering communication roles;<br>- gaining experience by practical application of communicative competences/skills;<br>- applying communication strategies. |
| **Experiential learning** | - reinforcing empathy in the process of communication. |
| **E-learning** | - reinforcing the knowledge basis of communicative competence. |

All of the methods given in Table 1 may lead to activating the students in foreign language teaching. The decisive role in this process, however, ought to be played by the teacher, mainly his/her ability to use the selected methods and apply them appropriately. However, the success is conditioned by the mutual, goal-oriented cooperation between the teacher and the students and the students among themselves. Although the activating methods are quite similar, each focuses on the development of different elements of communicative competence. Therefore, various partial educational goals are pursued, and different parts of learning process are reinforced, being convenient for another style of learning (Hlásna et al., 2006; Skalková, 2007; Sirotová, 2010).

**The study**

In 2016 we conducted a study within a research sample of teachers of English as a foreign language at public and private universities and higher education institutions in the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic. The programmes involved the field of humanities/social sciences, i.e. psychology, economics, business, education, social science, law, and political science (social and economic geography and mass media communication were not included due to the low number of potential respondents). The study attempted to examine two main aspects:

1. The overall frequency of activating methods used in teaching English as a foreign language;
2. The frequency of individual activating methods used in teaching English as a foreign language.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated:

1. What is the frequency of occurrence of activating methods in teaching English as a foreign language by the university teachers for the entire research sample?
2. What is the frequency of occurrence of individual activating methods used in teaching English as a foreign language for the entire research sample?
3. What is the frequency of occurrence of individual activating methods used in teaching English as a foreign language by the respondents according to the following criteria?

- the gender of teachers;
- the country in which teachers work;
- the length of teaching experience;
- the type of university/higher education institution.

**Research Sample**

The research sample was comprised of 82 university teachers, 40 from the Czech Republic and 42 from the Slovak Republic. 52 respondents were represented by female teachers and 30 of them by male teachers. The respondents were divided into two subgroups: teaching experience of less than twenty years and teaching experience of more than twenty years. For the purpose of statistical balance, the sample included 39 respondents with teaching experience of less than 20 years and 43 respondents with teaching experience of more than 20 years. 41 respondents were in the full-time employment with public universities/higher education institutions, and 41 of them had full time

employment contracts with private universities/higher education institutions. The questionnaire range of values was 1 to 5, 5 meaning always used and 1 meaning never used. The Chi square statistic was applied.

The following activation methods of teaching English as a foreign language were employed: didactic games, discussion methods, e-learning, simulation methods, cooperative learning, case studies, problem-based learning, project-based learning, situational methods, and experiential learning. The respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of using these activating methods in their teaching process.

Tab. 2: Frequency of occurrence of activating methods used in teaching English as a foreign language for the entire sample

| **always** | | | | **never** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| 0 | 14 | 56 | 12 | 0 |

According to the data in Table 2, the arithmetic mean was calculated at 2.97. Thus, it can be concluded that activating methods in teaching English as a foreign language for the entire research sample are used at an average level. Teachers of private universities/higher education institutions might have been perhaps expected to teach classes in a more appealing manner in order to attract (and not to lose) the paying students. This, however, was not a primary goal of our research.

Next, we attempted to discover the frequency occurrence of individual activating methods used in teaching English as a foreign language within the entire research sample. The results are demonstrated in Table 3.

The obtained data are arranged in descending order starting from the most frequently used and ending with the least frequently used activating methods of teaching English as a foreign language. Nearly all respondents indicate they always use discussion methods and e-learning (e-learning not in the true sense of the word). The least frequently used activating methods of teaching English as a foreign language include: situational methods, simulation methods, and experiential learning, which can be considered reasonable in the current situation. Unfortunately, is should be noted that those activating methods which, in our experience, are regarded as the most attractive for young people, are the least frequently used in foreign language teaching.

To summarize, Table 4 demonstrates that the majority of respondents always uses discussion methods and e-learning, and the least frequently

activating methods used are situational methods, simulation methods, and experiential learning.

Table 3: Frequency of occurrence of individual activating methods used in teaching English as a foreign language for the entire research sample

| Rank | Activating methods | Average |
|---|---|---|
| 1st | discussion methods | **4.97** |
| 2nd | e-learning | **4.91** |
| 3rd | cooperative learning | **4.36** |
| 4th | problem-based learning | **4.34** |
| 5th | didactic games | **4.24** |
| 6th | project-based learning | **3.87** |
| 7th | case study | **3.75** |
| 8th | situational methods | **1.63** |
| 9th | simulation methods | **1.57** |
| 10th | experiential learning | **1.23** |

Tab. 4: Frequency of occurrence of activating methods used in teaching English as a foreign language according to the gender of respondents – female and male teachers.

| Rank | Activating methods | Chí | Sign |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st | **didactic games** | **17.72**** | **P < 0,01** |
| 2nd | discussion methods | 4.133 | **N** |
| 3rd | e-learning | 5.505 | **N** |
| 4th | simulation methods | 4.111 | **N** |
| 5th | cooperative learning | 2.991 | **N** |
| 6th | case study methods | 2.492 | **N** |
| 7th | problem-based learning | 6.505 | **N** |
| 8th | project-based learning | 7.609 | **N** |
| 9th | **situational methods** | **12.24*** | **p < 0,05** |
| 10th | experiential learning | 4.416 | **N** |
| | **overall evaluation** | 5.456 | **N** |

Table 4 shows the results concerning the frequency of activating methods used in teaching English as a foreign language according to the gender of respondents. Statistically significant differences between the female and male teachers were identified within four activating methods – in didactic games (**$p < 0.01$**) and in situational methods (**$p < 0.05$**). The research reveals that the female teachers use the didactic games and situational methods more frequently (in a sense of statistical significance) than their male colleagues. Overall, the general evaluation of frequency of occurrence of individual activating methods used in teaching English as a foreign language according to the gender of respondents suggests that there are no statistically significant differences.

Tab. 5: Frequency of occurrence of individual activating methods used in teaching English as a foreign language according to the country of respondents – the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic

| Rank | Activating methods | Chí | Sign |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st | didactic games | 1.917 | **N** |
| 2nd | discussion methods | 1.234 | **N** |
| 3rd | e-learning | 4.765 | **N** |
| 4th | simulation methods | 3.807 | **N** |
| 5th | cooperative learning | 4.707 | **N** |
| 6th | case study methods | 5.159 | **N** |
| 7th | problem-based learning | 6.277 | **N** |
| 8th | project-based learning | 5.478 | **N** |
| 9th | situational methods | 6.781 | **N** |
| 10th | experiential learning | 6.955 | **N** |
| | **overall evaluation** | 4.561 | **N** |

Table 5 contains the results concerning the frequency of individual activating methods used in teaching English as a foreign language according to the country of respondents. According to the partial and the overall evaluation of the obtained data, no statistically significant differences between the respondents from the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic were detected. This is probably caused by the resemblance of educational systems, availability of relevant literature, and regular exchange programs for university teachers due to the similarity of languages.

Tab. 6: Frequency of occurrence of individual activating methods of teaching English as a foreign language according to the respondents' length of teaching experience – less than 20 years and more than 20 years

| Rank | Activating methods | Chí | Sign |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st | didactic games | **8.472** | p < 0.05 |
| 2nd | discussion methods | 1.045 | N |
| 3rd | e-learning | 1.152 | N |
| 4th | simulation methods | **10.44** | p < 0.05 |
| 5th | cooperative learning | **11.42** | p < 0.05 |
| 6th | case study methods | **14.44** | p < 0.05 |
| 7th | problem-based learning | **11.63** | p < 0.05 |
| 8th | project-based learning | **10.33** | p < 0.05 |
| 9th | situational methods | **7.944** | p < 0,05 |
| 10th | experiential learning | **8.744** | p < 0,05 |
| | **overall evaluation** | **8.729** | p < 0,05 |

Table 6 shows the results concerning the frequency of individual activating methods of teaching English as a foreign language according to the respondents' length of teaching experience – less than 20 years and more than 20 years. Statistically significant differences were identified in relation to all activating methods except for the methods of discussion and e-learning – **p < 0.05.** According to the overall evaluation of this variable, statistically significant differences of **p < 0.05** were identified. Thus, the university teachers with shorter teaching experience use more frequently eight of the ten activating methods. In the overall evaluation concerning the frequency of occurrence of individual activating methods of foreign language teaching used by the respondents according to the length of teaching experience, statistically significant differences were identified too.

Table 7 illustrates the results regarding the frequency of individual activating methods used in teaching English as a foreign language according to the respondents' type of higher education institution/university – public or private. According to the partial and overall evaluation, no statistically significant differences between the respondents teaching at public or private institutions of higher education/universities were recognized. It can be, therefore, concluded that there is no statistically significant difference in using the activating methods

in foreign language teaching by university teachers as regards the public or private type of higher education institution/university.

Tab. 7: Frequency of occurrence of individual activating methods of teaching English as a foreign language according to the respondents' type of higher education institution/university – public or private

| Rank | Activating methods | Chí | Sign |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st | discussion methods | 1.349 | **N** |
| 2nd | didactic games | 2.817 | **N** |
| 3rd | simulation methods | 3.807 | **N** |
| 4th | cooperative learning | 4.987 | **N** |
| 5th | e-learning | 6.765 | **N** |
| 6th | case study methods | 5.359 | **N** |
| 7th | project-based learning | 5.788 | **N** |
| 8th | problem-based learning | 2.277 | **N** |
| 9th | situational methods | 5.781 | **N** |
| 10th | experiential learning | 3.955 | **N** |
| | **total evaluation** | 4.277 | **N** |

**Conclusion**

Introducing digital technologies to everyday life has transformed the whole society. The needs of education determined by the labour market and the requirements for teachers and their position are changing. Despite the fact that the societal pressure and the demands on education are constantly growing, the traditional – conventional system of education still occupies a dominant position. As a matter of fact, it has been deeply rooted in the minds of the majority of both teachers and learners. This article describes some selected models and creative methods of foreign language teaching, emphasizing some of their advantages when compared to classical methods. Despite the large number of various innovative teaching methods (encouraging the students to be more active and independent, to develop their abilities and creativity) available in this day and age, several new - more creative methods of teaching have been gradually established. Nonetheless, the forms and approaches concerning evaluation of students and the process of applying modern methods in foreign language teaching may be expected to be very lengthy, yet unavoidable in the future.

The modern society calls for a new approach of teachers to education. Therefore, it is imperative that the educators and pedagogues study and get themselves accustomed to new methods, and that they gradually and systematically document these methods in their everyday practice. Through a variety of teaching methods, learning appears to be more pleasing, interesting, and enjoyable for the students (and the teachers as well) when a variety of teaching methods are employed. Furthermore, these methods enable young people to cope with complex problems, think critically, consider alternative views and options, and make reasonable decisions. Finally, the achieved results within the teaching/learning process may be more favourable too. This article also places some emphasis on the options of more effective teaching of target language that may encourage a more authentic process of speech production by way of the designed Dynamic Model of Speech Production. The model is predominantly based on the information and wisdom of pragmatics, which takes into consideration the nature of the meaning negotiation process.

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JoLaCE

*Journal of Language and Cultural Education, 2018, 6(1)*
*ISSN 1339-4584*
*SlovakEdu*

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DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2018-0003

# Investigating Metacognitive Strategies for overcoming Barriers to Reading Comprehension: Insights from a Pakistani Context

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**Abstract**

The main aim of this research was to investigate metacognitive strategies through reading comprehension practice by first year students of engineering departments. The students of four engineering departments were selected as the participants in this research work. The qualitative instrument based on focus group interview was used for collecting data from first year students of four engineering departments to know the perceptions and their needs to develop reading comprehension through metacognitive strategies. The researchers developed interview questions for this study. These questions were validated by two experts of faculty of cognitive science and human development at university Malaysia Sarawak. The researchers obtained permission from the chairmen of four departments at a university in Pakistan. Almost 8 groups consisting of 5 informants in each participated in this research. The data was documented by using audio-tape; NVivo software, version 8 was used to organize data for obtaining main themes of the study. This research generated the most important themes for the interpretation of the results. The study contributed the most promising results which revealed that more than half of these groups used metacognitive strategies in classroom reading practice while less than half of groups did not use strategies and remained poor in reading comprehension. This research suggested administrators, teachers, and curriculum designers to design and implement reading comprehension courses and syllabus for first year engineering students.

**Key words**: metacognition, reading strategies, reading comprehension barriers

## Introduction

In Pakistan, higher education is persistently being reformed from primary to graduate levels. Similarly, the engineering students need more help to improve their comprehension proficiency by using different strategies. Metacognition is used to apply one's thinking about and regulating one's cognition for developing their reading approaches for evaluating and controlling their learning in an effective manner (Young & Fry, 2008). The studies (Maki, 1998; Commander & Stanwyck, 1997) reported that students having higher metacognitive knowledge performed better in their academic performances as compared to their peers having low and average metacognitive knowledge. Further, Kramarski and Mevarech (2003) declared that most of research in the field of metacognition for reading comprehension is done with the school students but did not investigate with that of undergraduate level. Therefore, this present study has investigated the cognitive or metacognitive strategies including scanning, summarizing, and questioning used by engineering students to develop their reading proficiency and comprehension and the impact of a metacognition on undergraduate students' awareness of strategies. This study also examined the differences in the reading performances of the students.

## The metacognition concept

Metacognition can well be defined as the awareness of cognition and its processes and complete control over cognition and its processes (Flavell, 1979, 1981, 1987). Metacognition involves two main aspects including:

1) knowledge or awareness of cognitive processes, and
2) executive control over cognitive processes.

This concept has paved a way to work further in the area by following the metacognitive model (Brown, 1987; Otani & Widner, 2005) that included the knowledge and the processes of self-regulation. The knowledge of cognition or metacognition indicates about the awareness of individuals and their competencies, proficiencies, and their experiences at the time of their performances.

However, this metacognitive knowledge is based on three basic types that include declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, and conditional knowledge of cognition or metacognition involving mental abilities and individual thoughts (Brown, 1987; Kuhn, 2000; Schraw, Crippen & Hartley, 2006; Cohen 1998). Similarly, declarative knowledge is used for the constant awareness of metacognition and related factors to control the performance of individuals; whereas, procedural knowledge indicates the way to use strategies in an effective manner to expedite the learning of individuals; while, conditional knowledge is

used to ask about the time, place, and reason to use metacognitive strategies and appropriate settings as discussed by (Schraw & Dennison, 1994) to develop individual knowledge.

Metacognition relates to thinking to control over the cognitive processes of students engage in learning how to read and comprehend the text. The strategies involve in metacognition are planning that means how to approach a reading text in terms of proper meaning, monitoring reading comprehension, and evaluating the progress of reading text. Salataci and Akyel (2002) proposed that metacognitive strategies consist of thinking around what students ensure when they have to read, to check the result of problem solving methods, to plan how to practice with effective strategies, to control the value of an action plan, to test, to revise, and to evaluate strategies. This study was conducted to determine which practices using metacognition strategies were to be the most effective tools for engineering students in developing their reading proficiency and comprehension needs.

**Review of literature**

A number of studies (Channa, Nordin, Siming, Chandio & Koondher, 2015; Channa & Nordin, 2015; Channa & Nordin, 2014; Tarricone, 2011; Huff & Nietfeld, 2009; Mevarech & Amrany, 2008; Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill & Joshi, 2007; Wei, 2005; Flavell, 2004; Zelazo, 2004; Kramarski & Mevarech, 2003; Maki & McGuire, 2002; Schwartz & Perfect, 2002; Koutselini & Theofilides, 2001; Demetriou, 2000) suggested that the metacognition field can either be used in teaching or in learning to develop students' awareness of cognition and regulation of cognition in order to raise metacognitive efficiency for comprehension purposes. Similarly, Palincsar and Brown (1984) used meta-strategic in reading through reciprocal teaching method among middle standard students for at least 12 week training program. The findings revealed that metacognitive strategies including self-questioning, summarizing, making predictions, and debugging were considered to be significant. They suggested teachers to use the reciprocal teaching method for developing reading comprehension proficiency.

Moreover, Koch (2001) also taught metacognitive self-assessment strategy in reading comprehension of physics texts to 30 students of pre-university level. Findings of the study revealed that the experimental group beat the control group in reading the texts of physics subject and comprehension. Likewise, Kramarski and Mevarech (2003) examined the effects of metacognitive knowledge and mathematical reasoning by using different teaching techniques on 384 students. The findings revealed that the students using metacognitive strategies performed better with that of those who did not use strategies in reading and learning

mathematical and reasoning texts. Similarly, Mevarech and Amrany (2008) arranged training in the field of metacognition and selected 31 secondary school students to use the metacognitive strategies. The researcher divided these 31 students into two groups including the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group was completely guided and supported; whereas control group was not provided any help or guidance about metacognition. The results indicated that the experimental group performed better than the control group. Thus the study suggested teaching and learning metacognitive strategies for successful comprehension.

Recently, Shah, Yusof, Lip, Mahmood, Hamid and Hashim (2010) investigated the use of strategies through survey by comparing strategies in Malaysia. The results of the study indicated that differences were found among average and good readers. Sinthopruangchai (2011) investigated and assessed metacognition and use of reading strategies of students studying Bangkok Christian College, Thailand. Ballou (2012) conducted research on using explicit strategy instruction to improve reading comprehension. Students were analyzed through pre and post-assessment to determine the effectiveness and implications of explicit strategy instruction. Franco-Castillo (2013) investigated strategies through reading and comprehension of science text. This study focused on students' interaction through dialogue journals with their teachers in the class. Data was collected by using different measures. Findings of the study exposed better in terms of comprehension of engineering text.

**Research gaps**

Review of past research signified a variety of major issues in reading comprehension by using metacognitive strategies; at first, a little research is existed in line with the first year engineering students in Pakistan. At second, the curricula of engineering university are fixed; therefore, few studies have been undertaken for engineering students to enlarge their reading skills. At final, these elementary, science and technology students as well as primary and high school students get extra chances of reading texts; these students recurrently got opportunities in class room reading through strategies. Therefore, further investigation is needed in terms of first year engineering students' reading. The present study addresses these issues by investigating metacognitive strategies in reading comprehension. The following research question was framed for this research: What strategies do first year students of engineering departments use for developing their proficiency of reading texts at QUEST, Pakistan?

## Research method

This study used focus group interview as the qualitative instrument for students of four engineering departments in Pakistan. A total of forty students from a university in Pakistan volunteered to participate in the study. There were eight focus group interviews for engineering students; each group consisted of five students. These interviews were recorded using audio tape and transcribed for analysis and results. The data was organized through NVivo software version 8. The researcher analyzed the qualitative data of this research by following Strauss and Corbin (1990) which generated the final themes as given in the results section.

## Findings of the study

The informants of eight groups came to know about what potential metacognitive strategies were noted as beneficial to develop their comprehension in reading academic as well as general texts and their level of reading growth. Conversely, differences were investigated while using each and every metacognitive strategy among all groups who participated in this study. Similarly, the focus group interview data gathered was analyzed and the main themes generated for the interpretation of the results are discussed in table 1 of the study.

Tab 1: Presenting main themes of the study

| Level One Code | Level Two Codes |
|---|---|
| Metacognitive Strategies (Planning, Monitoring, & Evaluating) | 1. Thinking through images of the texts<br>2. Selecting the Main ideas<br>3. Selecting the topic Sentences<br>4. Scanning of the texts<br>5. Summarizing of the texts<br>6. Questioning |

## Thinking through images of the texts

The first item of the level-two theme is the thinking through images of the text in which most of the groups reported that thinking and making images of the text is the most important strategy for understanding of the text but they did not use this strategy frequently because using mental image leads thinking about the passages take lot of time. Three of these groups informed that they used this strategy in predicting and linking text with their thoughts and form meaning at the time of difficult text. Most of the groups considered this strategy as the most beneficial to develop reading and comprehension. Three more groups thought that they used this strategy when they find text as difficult to comprehend. They

presume the content of the passages and to link with their thoughts. Interestingly two of the groups stated that they used this strategy when they read the passages and practice on reading activities. They brainstorm the text before reading and tried to grasp the information bit by bit for the growth of their comprehension. These groups observed:

"*We start reading directly….and we never waste our time in thinking and image making of the text. Sometimes…we used thinking about text when we find difficult text in the article…..but thinking is important*…." [Group Two]

"*…we find information through guesstimating of the text, then slowly and gradually continue reading……it is very hard for predicting and linking text with our thoughts and forming its meaning through our images of the text. Reading passages by following images in our mind about text is necessary to understand the meaning of the text*". [Group One]

"*Firstly….students should read text without making imagery of the text. Second…we should not make images by thinking and brainstorming to save our time….because we cannot interlink text with thoughts in mind*…" [Group Three]

Conversely, three of these groups believed that this strategy is very essential to make mental images for the titles and subtitles and can form imagery of the material from that of titles before reading. Three of the groups stated that mental images can help students to guess what is going on in class activities. Three of them reported:

"*We believe that this strategy [thinking] is very essential to make mental images for the titles and subtitles….so we form imagery of the material in the passage and involve our thoughts and our brainstorms*…." [Group Five]

" *….the images making through thinking can connect mental links of the text with that of personal thoughts. This strategy can help readers to understand written text…and to develop reading.*" [Group Six]

Interestingly, two of these groups informed that they make use of this strategy regularly and believed that this strategy lead them to comprehend the meaning of text easily. These groups stated that they often linked texts with that of their mental thoughts to evaluate their understandings of the text. These two groups noted:

"*Firstly…reader should find headings and sub headings of the text to apprehend its meaning completely. Secondly….they should go through the world of imagination*

*about the text for better comprehension in depth. Finally…we can interlink our thoughts with our reading to reach exact meaning of the texts…*" [Group Seven]

"*When we read…we try to imagine about all the key information used and connect our thoughts….and imagination with that of text. We think this strategy [thinking] would help us to understand the text in a better way…and students can perform independently….*" [Group Eight]

**Selecting the main ideas**

The second item of the level-two theme is selecting main ideas of the text. Most groups reported that they selected the main ideas from the text. These groups gave great importance to this strategy. They believed that the main ideas help them to comprehend the important concepts in the text as they read the text. They practice a lot on this activity by finding out the main details of the text. Three of the groups informed that searching the main ideas of a passage seemed very important in reading to enable them to comprehend the key details of the text easily and quickly. This strategy had developed their reading proficiency and had paved a way for them to practice a lot with complete comprehension of the passages. Conversely, three of the groups informed that they do not know how to find and where to find the main idea in the passage of the article. Additionally, they had little practice and knowledge in searching out the key details or main ideas within the text. This strategy seemed very difficult for them to follow. Some of the examples are given here:

"*….selecting main ideas are the important strategy for students to understand passages of the article. We should find the main ideas either in the first sentence or in the last sentences of a paragraph in the text….finding main ideas can develop our level of comprehension of the text…..*" [Group Three]

"*To us…this strategy is very essential to follow….so, we depend on reading the text again and again to comprehend it with the help of main ideas and supporting details. Selecting the main ideas can clarify about text and showed the involvement of readers….*" [Group Two]

"*….students should focus on reading passages again and again till they find the main ideas in the text. This strategy would make us clear in understanding the meaning of a text….*" [Group One]

Importantly, three of these groups stated that they did not pay attention to select main ideas in the text. For them, this strategy took a lot of their time in finding out the main ideas. Three of these groups observed:

"*We do not pay attention…..to select the main ideas in the text. We think…this strategy took a lot of time in finding out the main ideas. We have little knowledge and very little practice on selecting key ideas*…." [Group Four]

"*Students should read text slowly and gradually for comprehension purposes….and they should underline the main ideas to support their level of understanding. We believe the main idea as significant to cognize the article*…." [Group Six]

"*….yes…selecting the main idea is very important for understanding the text. Weak students do not select the main ideas from the text as they do not know how to find and where to find and what to select….this is because of their little practice on reading*…." [Group Five

Most interestingly, two of these groups stated that they believed the main ideas can help them to comprehend the important concepts of the text. If they would read the text a lot, they would practice much to find out the main details of the text. These groups noted:

"*While reading…we focus on the key concepts in the texts and try to find the main themes of all passages in the text. We think…the main ideas indicate what the passages is about….and helps us to understand the meaning of the text in reading tasks*…." [Group Eight]

"*…..while reading…we see the different traits and features of the text…and find the main theme either in the first sentence or in the last sentence. We think…without looking main details is just like wasting of time. This strategy is beneficial for developing comprehension*…." [Group Seven]

**Selecting topic sentences**

The third item of the level-two theme is selecting the topic sentences from the text in which some of the groups reported that they try to read the first sentence of each passage in terms of determining the topic sentences. They just went to pick up the most important information of the article through reading the whole text. Moreover, these respondents indicated that their teachers taught them to look at the first sentence of a paragraph because the topic sentence can easily be obtained from the very first sentence of each paragraph. Most of these groups informed that some time they fail to find the topic sentences because of lack of knowledge and poor practice of reading text. So, when they could not determine the topic sentence in the passage, they continued reading again and again and tried to understand the passages. These groups noted:

"*…the first sentence in each paragraph has topic sentence….this first sentences tell us the main concept of the article. Students who have lot of reading practice can easily identify…and those who do not practice on reading activities…cannot identify topic sentences and would face difficulties in perception of the meaning of the text*…." [Group Two]

"*…the topic sentence is important for understanding the context of text…this [topic sentence] guides us to develop our thoughts. We should practice on reading as we should know what the topic sentence is….and how to select topic sentence from paragraph*." [Group Three]

"*…whenever, we find topic sentences…we get the main idea of the text that helps us to understand the text properly. So, we read the main sentence with great importance in order to find the meaning of the text*…." [Group One]

Similarly, three of the groups reported that they used to find topic sentence in the first attempt in order to comprehend the meaning of the sentences. Sometimes, they fail to find topic sentences and continue reading practice until they become successful in finding key concepts of the text. These groups considered this strategy as the most beneficial for quick understanding of the text. These groups stated:

"*We should search topic sentence before starting our reading. Our teachers have guided us that the topic sentence remains hidden in the first sentence….the topic sentence helps us to understand the text quickly*…." [Group Four]

"*…as we know that the topic sentence is the most beneficial for speed in reading….this strategy [topic sentence] makes quick understanding of the text. We know….our teachers guided that topic sentences remain in the first sentences of the paragraphs*…." [Group Five]

Interestingly, two of these groups informed that they looked for the main sentences in the very first attempt. If they fail to search the main sentences in the beginning of the passage then they find either in the mid or in the last of the text. These groups described:

"*We know…the topic sentence is given in beginning of each paragraph of the article. It [the topic sentence] is the most essential sentence within the passage of the article. The topic sentence helps us to know what would lay hidden in the sentence….it [the topic sentence] increase our comprehension and tells us about supporting details*…." [Group Eight]

"*…..while reading a paragraph….we should find the topic sentences….because the main sentence is very important and it remains hidden in the first sentence. The topic sentence informs us about the complete detail of the text*." [Group Seven]

**Text scanning**

In this fourth item of level-two, most of the groups informed that scanning is very important strategy for reading and comprehension. These groups reported that soon after scanning text, they start reading to obtain the central ideas of the text. This strategy helped them to increase their interest in reading. These groups commented:

*"….we read to know the main aim of a paragraph and what kind of information is discussed in the text….then we scan the text for key information…"* [Group Three]
*"We used to scan paragraph wise to evaluate…what does it inform about….and what purpose it would serve? Afterwards, we continue reading passages slowly and gradually to obtain complete meaning of the text. If we do not understand…we do read again and again the written text."* [Group One]
*"Scanning helps readers to know the main purpose of the article and get the first-hand knowledge of the text….scanning strategy makes students aware of the most important knowledge in the passage. If they fail to get the key information of the text…they continue reading till they understand…."* [Group Two]

Similarly, two of the groups reported that they used their background knowledge in predicting the headings of the text. These two groups noted:

*"Before start reading in detail…scanning strategy should be used to get overview of all passages. They should underline difficult words or unfamiliar phrases…this strategy would help readers to increase their reading speed with quick information…."* [Group Seven]
*"…before reading article in detail…..we use scanning strategy to find important words or sentences. One important point is that……we scan text to find supporting detail and headings or titles within the passages. Hmm…we know that every first sentence of the passage tells clearly about the main titles. So…we focus on the text to find information which we need…."* [Group Eight]

**Summarizing of the texts**

Text summarizing is the fifth item of level-two in metacognitive strategies. Most of the groups indicated that they summarized the text after completion of reading activity. Three of these groups stated that text summarizing is very

beneficial strategy that enables them to practice more independently. These groups said:

*"After the end of reading passages….we should summarize the text. We mostly review paragraphs for obtaining enough information…in terms of difficult sentences and unfamiliar words in the text…."* [Group Three]

*"….we can summarize the text after reading comprehension tasks complete….as we find difficult terms, problematic sentences, and confused parts of the text. If sometimes…we firstly reread the text three times….then would summarize the passages to develop our knowledge for understanding."* [Group One]

*"….summarizing is very beneficial strategy. This strategy can enable us to practice more independently on the text. This strategy can help us to groom our reading proficiency…."* [Group Two]

Further, two of these groups indicated that they always used this strategy after reading to verify their proficiency. Two of these groups indicated:

*"…we first read….then scan the whole concept….and select important ideas of the text. After the end of third time reading….we summarize the paragraph…."* [Group Five]

*"We summarize the main points of the passage. If we do not understand something in the text….we reread to know the exact meaning of the texts…."* [Group Seven]

**Questioning**

Questioning strategy in level-two of metacognitive strategies is the sixth item. Most of the groups reported that they used this strategy to ask questions to develop their reading and to find answers in terms of the texts. These groups stated that they used this strategy at the difficult parts of the texts to enhance their understanding of the text. These groups noted:

*"…..self-questioning strategy is beneficial….and we should ask different self-questions in beginning, during, and after reading comprehension activity. We also use self-questions to clarify the text when we found the passages with difficult language…."* [Group Two]

*"…we ask questions either in the beginning or after the end of my reading to confirm my understandings of the texts. Self-questioning strategy makes my reading very easy to know the meaning of the text..."* [Group One]

*"….we did not use this strategy [self-questioning]…when the text in reading tasks is simple. We use self-questions at the difficult parts of the texts to make our understanding clear to practice…"* [Group Four]

Interestingly, two of these groups reported that this strategy can help them to understand the text easily and draws their attention towards paragraphs. These groups avoided all confused parts of the texts. Two of these groups stated:

*"….we should use self-questioning strategy in pre reading, during reading, and after reading. Before starting to read….we should ask various questions about the problems discussed in the text. During reading activity…..we should question to confirm our hypotheses. After reading….we should ask to verify our proficiency level…."* [Group Six]

*"….self-questioning strategy is important for us to know the answers of the problems in the text. We use questions to analyses our learning progress in classroom activities….."* [Group Eight]

**Conclusion**

The main aim of this study was to investigate the use of metacognitive strategies by first year engineering students in classroom reading practice. Flavell's (1979, 1981, 1987 & 2004) theory was followed by many researchers who then divided metacognition into three way aspects that include planning, monitoring and evaluating. Similarly, Salataci and Akyel (2002) proposed that metacognitive strategies consist of thinking around what students ensure when they have to read, to check the result of problem solving methods, to plan how to practice with effective strategies, to control the value of an action plan, to test, to revise, and to evaluate strategies. Theoretical gaps for this research were based on metacognition theory of Flavell's (1979, 1981, 1987, & 2004). This theory suggested that the implementation of metacognitive practices support often for developing comprehension proficiency of students. The researchers of the study followed Flavell's theory of metacognition and in results, theoretical contribution in line of metacognition strategies including planning, monitoring, and evaluating were contributed to develop comprehension of engineering students in Pakistan.

The data of this study generated thinking through images of the texts, selecting the main ideas, selecting the topic sentences, scanning of the texts, summarizing of the texts, and questioning strategy to develop reading proficiency of students and their comprehension performance. The past studies suggested knowing the perception of students in line of planning, monitoring, and evaluating as the metacognitive strategies. The results of the present study indicated that the

students used thinking through images of the text and questioning strategies as their planning; applied strategies including selecting the main ideas, selecting the topic sentences, and scanning of the texts as the evaluating; and practiced through summarizing of the texts as their evaluating strategy. Although less than half of the groups showed slightly lower interest in using strategies while practicing on reading comprehension as they had little metacognitive knowledge.

The findings of this study reported that metacognitive strategies including many among thinking, text scanning, text summarizing, and self-questioning strategy were considered as the most essential for effective comprehension and learning how to read with complete meaning of the texts. To conclude, the findings of this study significantly validated the studies of (Franco-Castillo, 2013; Salataci & Akyel, 2002; Shah, et al. 2010) that investigated multiple strategies for students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their comprehension performances and ability to handle written texts.In short, this study has provided the substantiations that engineering students can develop their reading comprehension ability through metacognitive strategies.

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JoLaCE

*Journal of Language and Cultural Education, 2018, 6(1)*
*ISSN 1339-4584*
*SlovakEdu*

sciendo

DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2018-0004

# Continuous Improvement of the Teaching Process in Primary Education

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**Abstract**

Continuous improvement of the teaching process requires teachers to constantly think, analyse and evaluate their own work and try to improve its quality. The paper deals with the introduction of quality management in the teaching process, since one way of improving the quality of education is to build a quality management system at primary schools, focusing exclusively on schools with Hungarian language of instruction. The paper includes the climate survey of the school class aiming at verifying the current state of the social climate of the class in the subject of Slovak language and Slovak literature. When teaching this subject at the primary level of education, attention has to be paid to the fact that pupils in the first year of primary school with Hungarian language of instruction come with different linguistic and speech competences.

**Key words**: primary education, teaching process, quality management, schools with Hungarian language of instruction, school climate

## Introduction

At present, quality in general has a dominant role in all areas of life. The European Union (EU) emphasizes the need for "multilingualism" among Europeans. The majority of European nations can speak two or more foreign languages because of the need to communicate in their own country or with the members of neighbouring countries. The aim is not to master foreign languages at the level of a native speaker, but to develop a language repertoire that applies all language skills, knowledge and experience. The children and pupils of citizens belonging to national minorities and ethnic groups are guaranteed the right to acquire the state language. The importance of speaking the majority language by the members of minority is supported by several European recommendations.

Current social changes influence the education system, which emphasizes the active usage of the Slovak language by students at all types and kinds of schools, taking into account students with the language of instruction of national minorities, whose situation is even more complex as for most of them Slovak is not

the mother tongue. On one hand, it is essential for students to master the state language at a level adequate for their age, on the other hand pedagogical practice shows that new didactic approaches and innovative methods are not applied in schools in order to improve Slovak language skills.

## 1 The continuous improvement of the teaching process

Continuous improvement of the teaching process requires teachers to constantly think, analyse and evaluate their own work and try to improve its quality. A systematic approach called the PDCA cycle should be an indispensable part of their work.

The goal of the permanent improvement of individual steps and activities is a good and reliable process, because if all steps and activities are done correctly, then the assumption is that the entire workflow will meet customer expectations. If a service (e.g. the teaching process), despite the well-done steps and activities, does not meet the expectations of the partners, then there is nothing else to be done only to plan a new process (Horváthová, 2010, p. 45).

An inalienable part of the teacher's work should be a systematic approach called the PDCA cycle. This cycle consists of four stages:

1. Planning activities aimed at improving the quality of teaching (planning the process validation and the deployment of some innovations, no matter how small).
2. Plan implementation during the teaching process.
3. Evaluation of activities using appropriate methods and techniques.
4. The analysis, reflection on and assessment of activity results, which result in a new plan of activities (Albert, 2002).

An important fact when carrying out the PDCA cycle is that the proven innovation becomes a regular part of teaching (a standard procedure) and a new innovation is being tested.

## Creating a favourable climate during teaching

The climate in the classroom is usually understood as the atmosphere and the mood that prevails in the classroom. According to Mareš (2001), the term climate, from the point of view of the content, includes settled procedures of the perception, experience, assessment and response of all class participants (pupils, teachers) about what has taken place or what is taking place or is about to take place in the classroom. Albert (2002) understands the term climate as typical, relatively permanent interpersonal relations, ways of mutual communication that affect the experiencing, the impressions and the feelings of the persons involved.

The climate of the class significantly affects the motivation of the pupils. In successful schools, teachers show their interest in the subject and knowledge in general. There is a climate of sophistication where the teachers constantly make it clear by their attitudes that they require good performance from pupils, and they are convinced that the pupils "can make it" to achieve them. Pupils learn to a large extent as their teachers think they will learn (the Pygmalion effect). It is important that the teacher in the classroom should create an environment that encourages motivation (by the appropriate choice of curriculum, methods and tools) (Doményová & Halászová, 2014).

Teachers should create an environment in the education process where pupils are not be afraid, are not stressed or bored. They should allow the pupil to experience success, encourage the development of his/her personality, and put demands corresponding to the pupil's individual abilities. Through their creative work they must strive to humanize the world - not only themselves but also the wider environment, society and nationality (Šenkár, 2016, p. 16).

According to Průcha, the following are involved in building classroom climate:

- communication and teaching practices,
- pupil participation in teaching,
- preferential attitudes and expectations of teachers towards pupils,
- school climate.

For the improvement of classroom climate, Mareš (2001) suggests focusing on three areas of teaching. These are the following:

1. *Improving relationship among pupils* – trying to increase class consistency, organizing actions in and out of school, integrating situations in which pupils will co-operate rather than compete, using work in pairs and groups more often than whole-class teaching, preparing tasks that can be solved in groups, to lead pupils to find a suitable solution for interpersonal conflicts, eliminating bullying and aggression.
2. *Increasing pupils' interest in the education process* – making classes more interesting, using tasks that show the practical use of the subject, giving pupils topics that lead them to overcome the school context and to establish contacts with other people, saturating pupils' needs for competence, self-esteem and self-reliance.
3. *Ensuring peace and order in the classroom* – it may be cheerful during the class, but it is necessary to eliminate targeted disturbance of the class (Čáp & Mareš, 2001).

The climate of the class influences the mentality of both teachers and pupils, and thus has an impact on the course of the education process. Examining the influence of classroom climate on the teaching process did not receive much attention in the past. However, its importance in the teaching process is undeniable. One of the important prerequisites of successful pedagogical work is good social climate, so we paid appropriate attention to it and conducted a survey.

## 2 The survey of school class climate

In the academic year 2016/2017, we conducted a survey aimed at mapping the climate of classes at primary school. The survey covered four classes from the third and the fourth grade (3.A., 3.B., 4.A., 4.B.), i.e. 91 pupils, including 42 boys and 49 girls.

*Aim of the survey:* To find out the climate in the classes of Slovak language and Slovak literature.

*Survey method:* Questionnaire

The questionnaire surveyed the state of the social climate of teaching SL and SL. It contained 24 questions that were divided into the following six dimensions:

1. The interest of pupils in the class.
2. Relationships among pupils.
3. Teacher's help to pupils.
4. Orientation of pupils to tasks.
5. Order and organization in the teaching of the subject.
6. Clarity of the rules for the class.

In each dimension, the arithmetic mean and percentage of success were calculated. In the questionnaire, the pupils circled the answers (yes - no) with which they agreed, which they considered correct. There were no correct, good or bad answers.

As it can be seen from Table 1, the smallest percent of success in each class was gained in these three areas:

- *the interest of pupils in the class,*
- *orientation of pupils to tasks,*
- *order and organization in the teaching of the subject.*

The factors that contribute to the climate of the school class are different. It is not possible to think more deeply and to draw specific conclusions from this survey, but it will serve to determine the current state in each class.

Tab. 1: Evaluation of the survey investigating the social climate of the class

| Dimensions (%) / classes | 3. A. | 3. B. | 4. A. | 4. B. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The interest of pupils in the class | 60.5 | 50.9 | 55.3 | 61.3 |
| 2. Relationships among pupils | 79.7 | 76.6 | 71.2 | 87.1 |
| 3. Teacher's help to pupils | 70.3 | 80.4 | 59.8 | 80 |
| 4. Orientation of pupils to tasks | 48.9 | 47.4 | 54.5 | 71.6 |
| 5. Order and organization in the teaching of the subject | 60.5 | 52.8 | 56 | 73.3 |
| 6. Clarity of the rules for the class | 89.1 | 86.2 | 64.3 | 87.5 |

## 3 Findings from pedagogical research *Monitoring the level of teaching Slovak language and Slovak literature in primary schools with Hungarian language of instruction* (2016 – 2017)

The research findings suggest the need to innovate the current SLSL Teaching Concept from 1991 in the sense of a communicative approach, taking into account already existing and valid pedagogical documents. The teacher, his/her linguistic and professional-methodological competence have a key role in the realization of a communicative lesson. It is a fact that the basic philosophy of the current 1991 Concept is still up-to-date and its goals have not been fully fulfilled, which has been confirmed by the most important findings of the latest questionnaire survey for SLSL teachers in schools with Hungarian language of instruction. The questionnaire primarily focused on finding out the implementation of the communication approach to teaching SLSL.

- The teacher has the greatest influence on the *pupil's interest* in the subject SLSL and its teaching (methods and forms), but also the content of the subject and its didactic processing.
- As the most effective *form of* (foreign, non-native, second) *language teaching*, it is recommended to teach in small groups and in special language classrooms. However, the requirement of dividing classes during SLSL lessons does not appear explicitly in the Education and Training Act no. 245/2008 Coll. of 22 May 2008, as amended, and the documents in force thereon (except for Decree No. 65/2015 Coll., on secondary schools). Research has confirmed that the possibility of class division or teaching in special language classrooms is not sufficiently ensured.
- The most common *organizational form* in class is frontal work at all levels of education, which implies that effective teaching techniques and methods are not applied to the required level.

- Pupils have great difficulty in acquiring *subject skills* (oral and written work, listening comprehension, reading resp. reading comprehension) at all levels of education.
- For first level primary pupils, the most *motivating factors* are the effort to get a good grade, to meet the expectations of the teacher and the parents and competitiveness. Higher grade pupils predominate in trying to get a good grade and the ambition to get to secondary school, respectively university. Efforts to speak in the Slovak language are evident only among the students of secondary grammar school and secondary specialized education.
- Despite the fact that most teachers are aware of the need to continue learning, they do not use all forms and opportunities for *further education*. Teachers prefer methodological materials the most, and open lessons are also popular on the first level of primary school. The most popular form of further education is self-study. Teachers, however, do not, in their own terms, use the literature on foreign language teaching nor the new book publications from the Slovak literature for children and youth.
- Teachers use primarily SLSL textbooks and workbooks in the *planning and preparation process*, they use current Slovak literature for children and youth, and specialized literature less often.
- The *equipment of school libraries* is not at the optimum level. Schools have not made use of the opportunity offered by the Ministry of Education to revitalize their school libraries, and even teachers do not use the services of well-equipped school libraries.

Based on the observation of lessons, we report the following findings:

- the consistent principles of communicative language teaching were not fulfilled,
- on the first level of primary education, teaching was predominantly bilingual,
- little attention was paid to developing listening and reading comprehension; on the first level of primary education, speaking and writing prevailed at the expense of reading,
- teachers mainly preferred controlled, managed teaching techniques instead of partially controlled and uncontrolled techniques; out of organizational forms of work frontal work prevailed, little work was done in groups, in pairs and individual work of pupils,
- they almost always used only valid textbooks and workbooks from SLSL, Slovak literature for children and youth and available material didactic tools were used just rarely; they rarely worked with children's and youth's magazines.

On the basis of recent research findings, it has again been confirmed that the following serious shortcomings persist:

- the teaching of morphological phenomena continues to prevail, less attention is paid to the lexical, phonetic-phonological and syntactic differences of the Slovak and the teaching language,
- similarly, at the second level of primary and secondary schools with Hungarian language of instruction, more attention is still paid to the grammatical component of the subject at the expense of other components; the teaching of literature focuses largely on literary theory.

The above findings and conclusions from the research constitute an argumentation apparatus to justify the need for the elaboration of the Concept.

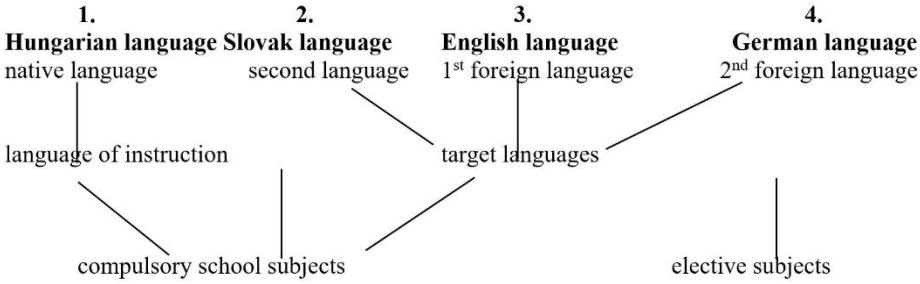
## 4 Analysis of the current state of teaching Slovak language and Slovak literature in schools with Hungarian language of instruction

In the Concept from the year of 1991, the goals of teaching Slovak language and literature in schools with Hungarian language of instruction state that it is necessary to consider the unreality of the requirement of true, symmetrical bilingualism, because in reality one language is always dominant. In an effort to reduce pupils' overload, it is important to respect the fact that the social environment in which many pupils grow up is not typically bilingual resp. multilingual. The content requirements of the SLSL subject should therefore be similar to the requirements of foreign language teaching.

In the teaching of Slovak language and Slovak literature at the first level of primary education, great attention must be paid to the fact that pupils in the first year of primary school come with different language and speech competencies. We also encounter a similar challenge at the beginning of the fifth grade of primary schools with Hungarian language of instruction, as the level of control of the Slovak language by pupils in transition to the higher level of primary education differs according to the language environment of pupils and schools, according to their level of expressive ability in their mother tongue, innate language skills, psychological and age specificities.

The fundamental difference is that teaching foreign languages in the planning of their content and educational process does not take into account the pupils' already acquired knowledge and skills in the Hungarian language. In SLSL lessons pupils perceive Slovak language and gain skills in Slovak language learning from the first year on the basis of acquired knowledge and skills in Hungarian language.

Fig. 1: Status of languages in schools with Hungarian language of instruction




**The status of Slovak language** – the Slovak language is the state language in the Slovak Republic, its use is governed by the Language Law[1] and its active knowledge is a social requirement. The Slovak language is a language of communication of citizens of Hungarian nationality in contact with nations and nationalities in the Slovak Republic. The social environment in which pupils grow up is not typically bilingual. Most pupils come from an environment where they mostly communicate in Hungarian. The Slovak language for the pupil of schools with Hungarian language of instruction is a second language ($L_2$). From its specificity it follows that the SLSL school subject occupies a very important place in the hierarchy of subjects. In the framework curriculum for schools with the language of instruction of national minorities, the SLSL subject has the same number of lessons as the language of instruction. Upon entering the school, the child already knows the Hungarian language (his/her mother tongue), has a developed articulation base, in the school s/he improves the use of language by adopting its rules and norms. The results of the monitoring of the level of teaching Slovak language in 1999-2002 show that about 50% of pupils at primary schools with Hungarian language of instruction had contact with the Slovak language only at school and at the beginning of compulsory school attendance about half of the children did not speak Slovak.

**Innovated State Educational Program for Primary Education** – First Level of Primary School. The document states that, in view of the objectives of communicative teaching, great care must be taken not to create a psychic barrier

[1] Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic no. 204/2011 Coll. of 28 June 2011 amending the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic no. 270/1995 Coll. of 15 November 1995 on the State Language of the Slovak Republic.

in the use of the Slovak language by the difficulty of learning content and by inappropriate educational techniques. For the specific choice of words, it is necessary to take into account developmental specificities in the formation of word associations, for the younger children there are typical syntagmatic associations that imitate speech, thus meeting the communicative goal of teaching.

### 4.1 Factors supporting the acquisition of the Slovak language

Skutnabb-Kangas introduces four factors supporting L2 acquisition and the formation of bilingualism, which can be successfully applied in the teaching of Slovak as $L_2$.

1. **Organizational factors** – among them, alternative learning programmes are important with high degree of success and ensuring the teaching of the second language by a bilingual teacher with good professional and methodological competence.

It is necessary to apply alternative teaching programme s for teaching Slovak as $L_2$ first of all for the different language environment of the pupils. Alternative learning programmes can be part of the innovated school education program (hereinafter as ISEP); they can be a guarantee of success also in the acquisition of Slovak language from the first year of primary school to the final leaving exam at secondary school.

2. **Factors of affinity** – are related to the humanization of the educational process as well as to the appropriate motivation of pupils' learning activities, e.g. a favourable learning environment, non-authoritative teaching, and internal motivation are related to understanding and sympathy for learning goals.
3. **Factors related to learning** – creating conditions to ensure a small degree of anxiety, a high degree of motivation, and a high level of self-confidence (feeling of success).
4. **Linguistic-social factors** – relate both to language and to the social and linguistic background of pupils. An indispensable linguistic factor in the process of acquiring a second language is the high quality teaching of the Hungarian language, because if the child learns to use the language in thinking and problem solving in one language, this potential can also be translated into other languages.

The process of teaching the Slovak language is the opposite of teaching the mother tongue. While in the mother tongue, the procedure is from the spontaneous use of the language toward its conscious use, in the Slovak language, it moves from a conscious acquisition to a spontaneous use of the language.

### 4.2 Priority strategic areas for further development

Building on the goals and successful implementation of the results and conclusions of the National Project, a qualitative shift in these strategic areas is expected.

***A) Strategic area focusing SLSL teachers***

- improving the relationship of the teacher with the Slovak language, the teaching of SLSL, the Slovak nation and Slovak culture,
- improving the communicative competence of SLSL teachers, especially the cultivated usage of the Slovak language,
- increasing the professional competence of SLSL teachers, especially in the area of SLSL teaching in schools with Hungarian language of instruction and the methodology of teaching foreign languages,
- improving the work of teachers with pedagogical documents in the field of teaching process planning and preparation for SLSL teaching,
- improving cooperation between primary and lower secondary education SLSL teachers,
- improving cooperation between SLSL teachers within the subject committee for SLSL and the methodological association within the school.

***B) Strategic area focusing on the teaching of SLSL***

- the teaching process must be governed by the principles of teaching foreign languages,
- increasing the effectiveness of the SLSL teaching process by dividing the classes into groups,
- increasing the efficiency of the SLSL teaching process by applying a communicative approach and applying an activity-oriented approach,
- improving the efficiency of the use of material-didactic tools in the SLSL learning process,
- improving the ratio of bilingual and monolingual teaching in favour of monolingual.

***C) Strategic area focusing on pupils***

- creating and fostering a positive relationship of pupils to the subject of SLSL, the Slovak language, the Slovak nation and Slovak culture,
- improving the communicative competence of pupils in the Slovak language by respecting the principle of the support of the mother tongue,
- improving the pupils' communicative competence in the Slovak language by using activating methods,

- improving the smooth transition from reproductive to productive forms of pupil communication,
- more effective use of Slovak language by pupils in authentic communication situations,
- improving the pupils' study results from Slovak language and Slovak literature.

## Conclusion

In the process of improving the quality of the school, the knowledge and analysis of the teaching process also play an important role. Quality teaching should result in a good level of knowledge and skills of pupils, which gives the best prerequisite for the success of graduates in the labour market. Introducing some innovation, no matter how small, leads to an improvement in the teaching process. Careful attention should also be paid to the class climate that should be diagnosed and continuously optimized in order to improve pedagogical work and pupil work.

In order to improve the teaching of SLSL in primary schools with Hungarian language of instruction, it is recommended to provide regular training for teachers (continuous education, lectures, seminars, workshops) focusing on methodology, conversation and the specific issues of teaching Slovak language and Slovak literature. It is essential to organize joint seminars, workshops, meetings of first level teachers and teachers of Slovak language and Slovak literature at the second grade of primary school with Hungarian language of instruction systematically and continuously in the future.

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JoLaCE

Journal of Language and Cultural Education, 2018, 6(1)
ISSN 1339-4584
SlovakEdu

sciendo

DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2018-0005

# Second Language Acquisition of the English Dative Alternation by Native Speakers of Arabic

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**Abstract**

This paper reports on an experimental study that investigates the influence of the disparity between English and Arabic on second language acquisition, namely the phenomenon of the acquisition of the English dative alternation by Arab learners. The disallowance of certain Arabic verbs to occur in the double object dative structure causes difficulty for Arab learners to acquire English as far as the acquisition of the dative alternation is concerned. The experiment is devised to examine whether Arab learners are sensitive to syntactic and semantic properties associated with the English dative alternation. The experiment involved picture tasks with two structures: the prepositional dative structure and the double object dative structure. Overall, the results of the experiment show that the L2 learners failed to acquire the double object dative structure which does not exist in their L1. Based on these results, it is argued that L1 has an important effect on the acquisition of L2.

**Key words**: second language acquisition, the dative alternation, the prepositional dative structure, the double object dative structure, the broad range rules, the narrow range rules.

## Introduction

Since the three last decades, the acquisition of English has been the topic of many studies. One of the issues addressed in previous research concerns the acquisition of the English dative alternation. It has received considerable attention and extensively investigated during the 1980s, for example (Gass & Selinker, 1983; Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). English and Arabic vary not only in the syntactic configurations they permit with some verbs classes but also in the ordering possibilities they allow for arguments and adjuncts. This paper aims to investigate the extent of the influence of these disparities on the acquisition of Second Language (L2) learners of English. The divergence between English and the Arabic argument structures is one of the obstacle that face L2 learners. An illustration facing L2 learners is the acquisition of structures that are not allowed

in their L1, this study intends to investigate how some verb classes are diversely utilised in English and the Arabic. This can be seen in the case of the expressing of certain verbs like 'read' in English and Arabic. English, on one hand, allows 'read' to occur in both the Prepositional Dative (PD) structure and in the Double Object Dative (DOD) construction, as exemplified in (1):

(1) a. Timor read the book to Campbell. (PD)
b. Timor read Campbell the book. (DOD)

Arabic, conversely, only allows the PD structure with verbs such as 'read', as produced in (2a) and the DOD structure is grammatically unacceptable, as exemplified in (2b):

(2) a. قرأ طلالٌ القصةَ لياسرٍ (PD)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| qara-a | ṭalal-un | alqišat-a | li | yasser-in |
| read | Talal-Nom | the story-Acc | prep | Yasser-Gen |

'Talal read the story to Yasser.'

b. قرأ طلالٌ ياسرًا القصةَ (DOD)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *qara-a | ṭalal-un | yasser-an | alqišat-a |
| read | Talal-Nom | Yasser-Acc | the story-Acc |

'Talal read Yasser the story.'

These illustrations provide an example of the difficulties which may face L2 Arab learners of English acquiring structures are not allowed in their L1 namely the acquisition of verbs like 'read' with the DOD structure, as exemplified in (1b).

**Theoretical background of the English dative alternation**

*Syntactic features*

The PD and the DOD constructions syntactically differ from each other. One of the major differences between them is that in (1a) the dative object is marked by a free morpheme (the preposition) and in (1b) the dative object is marked by word order (Hawkins, 1987). Moreover, it has been observed that the syntactic productivity of the PD construction is wider than the syntactic productivity of the DOD construction. This claim is supported by the fact that the majority of dative verbs that occur in the DOD construction can take the PD construction, however, only certain dative verbs take the DOD construction (Mazurkewich, 1984, 1985; Hawkins, 1987). However, some dative verbs require a recipient as in (3a), while

others require a benefactive as in (3b). The possibility of one proposition sometimes excludes the other, as illustrated in (4):

(3) a. Peter gave a book to Kim.
b. John baked a cake for Jane.
(4) a. John built a house for Heather.
b. *John built a house to Heather.

It can be observed that 'build' can take the *for*-PP but not the *to*-PP. It might be argued that in English the Goal argument is assigned by the *for*-PP such as in (4a) given that being assigned by the *to*-PP is ungrammatical as in (4b) (Hawkins, 1987). However, certain verbs that take the *to*-PP complements also permit the *for*-PP complement, but they have different meanings, as (5) shows:

(5) a. John sent some flowers to Mary.
b. John sent some flowers for Mary. Hawkins (1987, p. 22)

In (5a) 'Mary' received the flowers directly from 'John', however, (5b) illustrates that either 'John' sent some flowers on behalf of 'Mary' to someone else or 'John' sent someone some flowers for 'Mary'.

*Semantic features*

A semantic interpretation has been proposed by Pinker (1989) in Learnability and Cognition: the acquisition of argument structure draw linguistic attention to why several dative verbs are allowed to occur in the DOD construction while others are not. The proposal indicates that the dative alternation is the ability to be expressed into two various 'thematic cores' which are characterised in the following table:

**Table 1. Characterises the thematic cores of dative verbs**

| The PD structure | The DOD structure |
|---|---|
| 'X caused Y to go to Z' is realised as the PD form. | 'X caused Z to have Y' is realised as the DOD form. |

The Broad Range Rules (BRRs) is a primary proposal was suggested by Pinker (1989) to allow that the PD construction 'X caused Y to go to Z' to alternate to the DOD construction 'X caused Z to have Y' when the given verb can apply to the causation of change of possession. Yet, being applied to the BRRs is necessary for

the given verb to allow the DOD structure but is not sufficient enough to govern 'negative exceptions', as illustrated in (6):

(6) a. *Abel pushed Owen a box.
b. *Emma whispered Aileen the news.

It is easy to imagine an occasion in which someone is pulling a box to someone else leading to that person's possessing the box or an occasion in which whispering a secret to someone else leading to that person's possessing or knowing the secret. Regarding to the BRRs, examples such as those illustrated in (6) should be grammatically well-formed but they are not.

A consequence of the insufficiency of the BRRs to convert the PD structure to the DOD structure, the Narrow Range Rules (NRRs) application was proposed by Pinker (1989) to solve such problem. This application suggests a satisfactory explanation for a verb to occur in the DOD structure. As suggested, verbs are categorised into a number of categories, certain of them alternating and others non-alternating. Example (7b) is acceptable as 'throw' belongs to verbs of instantaneous causation of ballistic motion, which is an alternating class. However, example (8b) is unacceptable for the reason that 'push' is a verb of continuous causation of accompanied motion in some manner, which is a non-alternating class. Therefore, verbs must express a ballistic motion and not a continuous motion with a continuous imparting of force in order to alternate.

(7) a. Ellis threw the pen to Peter.
b. Ellis threw Peter the pen.
(8) a. Abel pushed a box to Owen
b. *Abel pushed Owen a box.

Pinker (1989) argued that verbs such as 'throw' permit the DOD construction since the event involved expresses ballistic motion as in (7b). On the other hand, 'push' is not allowed to occur in the DOD structure, as exemplified in (8b) because it implies a continuous motion and a continuous imparting of force.

*The animate possessor constraint*

It has been suggested that the DOD construction is restricted to a condition which is that the Goal argument should be animate and a 'projected possessor' of the Theme argument (Green, 1974; Oehrle, 1976; Pinker, 1989). This constraint can be seen in the following examples:

(9) a. Ann sent the book to Alison.
b. Ann sent Alison the book.

(10) a. Ann sent the book to Jeddah.
b. * Ann sent Jeddah the package.

The animate possessor restriction illustrates the disparities between (9) and (10). The DOD construction is grammatically well-formed in (9b) since 'Alison', unlike 'Jeddah', is able to act as a potential possessor of 'the package', whereas in (10b) 'Jeddah' may be simply interpreted as the endpoint of the motion of 'the book' but not as a 'projected possessor'. The PD construction, as shown in (9a) and (10a), is acceptable with either 'Alison' or 'Jeddah' since not only 'Alison' but also 'Jeddah' can be understood as the endpoint of the movement of 'the book' or the physical location where 'the book' went to.

So far, all DOD instances that have been presented satisfy the possessor restriction. Specifically, the possession and the animacy are observed in all the DOD examples illustrated thus far. As long as such an observation is concerned, it is almost certain to hold the view that the animacy restriction is assumed. Moreover, it should be argued that such restriction might be an extremely fundamental condition for the possessor restriction.

However, regardless of widespread support for this argument, some researchers argued that the Goal argument sometimes is not an animate recipient. The examples in (11) were provided to support their argument. These examples are cited from Oh (2010, p. 410):

(11) a. We gave the house a fresh coat of paint.
b. We gave the house a new roof.

The previous examples in (11) obviously display the absence of the animacy restriction on the DOD structure. It could be argued that the possessor restriction is the heart of the semantic constraint on the DOD structure. It is likely that the animate restriction is a result of the possessor restriction to the extent that the animacy condition is respected for the DOD sentences where the referent of the first object is animate. The animacy restriction has been assumed in the DOD structure due to the widespread appearance of its Goal argument in an animate case which may legalize the inanimate goal in the DOD structure, which is probably rare.

*The physical movement restriction*

It is a vital role of the PD construction to indicate 'directed motion'. That is, it illustrates an event in which the Theme argument moves from the Agent to the Goal argument. This movement denoted by the PD construction, is known as 'physical transfer' (Green, 1974; Oehrle, 1976; Gropen et al, 1989). The physical

movement is an essential element in the PD structure in which the *to*-PP is employed. Such a structure denotes the physical movement for the Theme argument from the Agent to the Goal argument. The following examples are presented by numerous researchers (den Dikken, 1995).

(12) a. The revolution gave the country a new government.
b. *The revolution gave a new government to the country.

The ungrammatical PD sentence in the above example is due to the failure of 'direct movement'. Thus, the Recipient of the Theme argument must be a physical entity so as to be transferred by the preposition 'to'. The unacceptability of the PD constructions in (12b) is attributed to impossibility of transferring the Theme argument 'government' and 'perspective' in this example.

The PD construction and the DOD construction seem to be semantically different from each other. The differences can be observed in many aspects. One of which is that the DOD construction, but not the PD construction, may possibly be related to a causative meaning (Oehrle, 1976; Larson, 1988; Pinker, 1989; Gropen et al., 1989).

(13) a. The article gave me a headache.
b. *The article gave a headache to me. Miyagawa & Tsujioka (2004, p. 2)

As can be understood from example (13a), reading the article caused the headache. The causative interpretation is impossible to be expressed in the PD construction, as shown in example (13b).

The second semantic difference between these two constructions is that the DOD structure often implies a meaning of completion which possibly will be absent in the PD structure. This disparity can be clarified by Green (1974) who mentioned that an intuition that (14a) may possibly take place although 'the pupils' may not learn 'English'; while the interpretation of example (14b) proposes that 'the pupils' learned it.

(14) a. Paul taught English to the pupils.
b. Paul taught the pupils English.

A further semantic disparity between the dative structures noted by Green (1974) is that the Goal argument in the DOD construction, unlike in the PD construction, should exist, as in (15):

(15) a. Alex told his sorrows to God.
b. Alex told God his sorrows.

It can be understood from example (15a) that God does not exist and it may be uttered by non-believer in God. However, the interpretation of (15b) must entail the existence of God.

To sum up, the semantic proposals: the BRRs and the NRRs are successively proposed by Pinker (1989) to solve the issue of why some verbs are syntactically allowed to occur in the DOD structure, while others are not allowed. The DOD structure is restricted by the animate possessor. Moreover, the physical movement is a vital condition for the PD structure.

**Theoretical background of the Arabic dative alternation**

*Syntactic features*

A variety of Arabic verbs permit what is known as the dative alternation, as exemplified in the pair of sentences in (16). Example (16a) shows the Arabic PD structure and example (16b) illustrates the Arabic DOD structure. Dative verbs in Arabic are verbs which appear with two objects that cannot form by themselves a separate verbless sentence. This definition was built on the base of the relationship between the two internal arguments of the dative sentence. In other words, the relationship between the indirect object (the Goal argument) such as 'Ali' in example (16b) and the direct object (the Theme argument) such as 'the book' in example (16b) does not have to be like the relationship between the subject and its complement in case of verbless sentence. The direct object 'the book' in (16b) cannot be the complement of the subject in a sentence such as *Ali (is) the book.

(16) a. أعطى عمرُ الكتابَ إلى عليٍ (Theme) (Goal)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a'ta | omar-u | alkitaab-a | ela | ali-in |
| gave | Omar-Nom | the book-Acc | prep | Ali-Gen |

'Omar gave the book to Ali.'

b. أعطى عمرُ عليًا الكتابَ (Goal) (Theme)

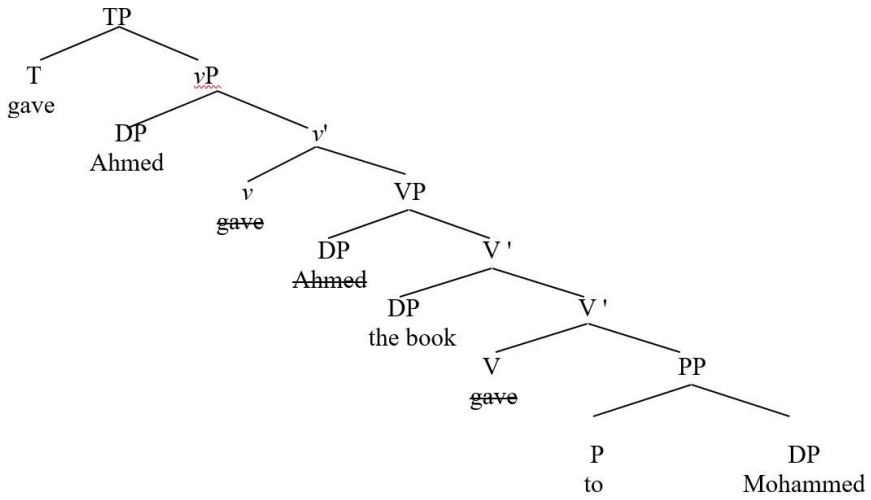
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a'ta | ahmed-u | ali-an | alkitaab-a |
| gave | Omar -Nom | Ali -Acc | the book-Acc |

'Omar gave Ali the book.'

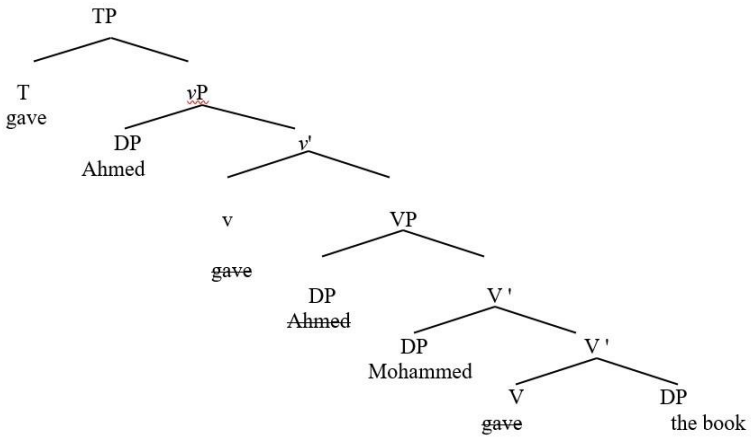
To show the structures of the PD as in (16a) and the DOD as in (16b), I will assume that the direct and the indirect objects are base generated inside the VP

projection, the former occupies an intermediate position of VP while the latter occupies the complement of the VP. This can be supported by the VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis which is formulated by Koopman & Sportiche (1988). They assumed that the subject of the simple clause is generated in the specifier of the VP whereas the objects are generated inside the VP. Therefore, the PD structure as in (17a), the direct object 'the book' adjoins to V' and the indirect object 'to Mohammed' has its own PP projection below the V. Similarly, the DOD structure as in (17b) has the indirect object 'Mohammed' adjoins the V' and the direct object 'the book' is in the lowest position of the clause structure. The verb merges in the V and then moves to the T position via the *v* while the subject merges in the spec-VP and moves to the spec-*v*P to receive the nominative case with the T 'gave', as shown in structure (17a & 17b).

(17) a. The tree of the Arabic PD structure



b. The tree of the Arabic DOD structure




*Semantic features*

In Arabic alternating verbs, the Goal argument must be an animate in order to become the 'prospective possessor' or 'benefactive recipient' of the Theme argument as shown in (18):

(18) a. باعَ إسماعيلُ المنزلَ لفيصلٍ

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ba'a | ismail-u | almanzi-a | li | faisal-in |
| sold | Ismail-Nom | the house-Acc | prep | Faisal-Gen |

'Ismail sold the house to Faisal.'

b. باعَ إسماعيلُ فيصلَ المنزلَ

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ba'a | ismail-u | faisal-a | manzil-a |
| sold | Ismail-Nom | Faisal-Acc | a house-Acc |

'Ismail sold Faisal a house.'

In the example (18) 'Faisal' is a potential possessor of the house. Therefore, this example follows the animacy constraint. However, the Recipient has to be a potential animate possessor in the DOD construction but not in the PD construction. Al-Sadoon (2011) proposed that this animacy constraint is supported by the fact that $P_{HAVE}$ encodes possessive relations for which the possessor must be animate, whereas $P_{LOC}$ encodes locative relations which do not

need any animacy restriction. The following examples demonstrate this phenomenon.

(19) a. أعطيتُ الهديةَ للطالبِ/ للمدرسةِ

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a'ʈay-tu | alhadiyat-a | li | ʈʈalib-i/mmadrast-i |
| gave-I | the gift-Acc | prep | the student-Gen/the school-Gen |

'I gave the gift to the student/the school.'

b. أعطيتُ الطالبَ/المدرسةَ هديةً

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| a'ʈay-tu | alʈʈalib-a/*almmadrast-a | hadiyat-an |
| gave-I | the student-Acc/*the school-Acc | a gift-Acc |

'I gave the student/* the school a gift.'

In contrast, numerous verbs do not dativise even though their Goal argument is the 'possessor' or 'benefactive recipient' of the Theme argument as in example (20):

(20) a. ركلَ أحمدُ الكرةَ إلى محمدٍ

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| rakala | ahmed-u | alkorat-a | ela | mohammed-n |
| kicked | Ahmed-Nom | the ball-Acc | prep | Mohammed-Gen |

'Ahmed kicked the ball to Mohammed.'

b. ركلَ أحمدُ محمدًا الكرةَ

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *rakala | ahmed-u | mohammed-a | alkorat-a |
| kicked | Ahmed-Nom | Mohammed-Acc | the ball-Acc |

'Ahmed kicked Mohammed the ball.'

A concern that may be raised is that why certain Arabic verbs such as the equivalent of "kick" do not dativise even though their counterparts in English do and they follow the animate possessor constraint. Hamdan (1997) proposed "involvement in the act" as a condition for Arabic dative verbs to alternate. He argued that the Agent and the Goal argument with alternating verbs in Arabic should involve in the action. This condition will be named as a simultaneous participation in the act and will be explained in the following section.

*A simultaneous participation in the act*

The underlying semantic analysis of Arabic alternating verbs, for illustration, *a'ta* 'give' and *akbara* 'tell' both the Agent and the Goal argument essentially participate in the act, as the following example:

(21) أعطى عليٌ خالدًا كتابًا

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a'ta | ali-un | khalid-an | kitaab-an |
| gave | Ali-Nom | Khalid-Acc | a book-Acc |

'Ali gave Khalid a book.'

In the above example both 'Ali' and 'Khalid' simultaneously participate in the act of giving the book. The image of this action is that Ali handed the book to Khalid and said that 'the book is for you.' On the other hand, Ali accepted the book either by receiving the book physically or indicating the acceptance verbally. In such situation, it can be said that Ali gave Khalid the book. However, if the involvement in the action did not occur, it may not be truly said that Ali gave Khalid the book.

The concept of the simultaneous participation between the Agent and the Goal argument in the DOD construction was highlighted by Ibn S-Saraaj (1996) who advocated that the meaning of the following example should be understood as 'Abdullah gave and Zaid took.'

(22) أعطى عبدُ اللهِ زيدًا درهمًا

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a'ta | abd-u Allah-i | zaid-an | dirham-an |
| gave | Abd-Nom Allah-Gen | Zaid-Acc | dirham-Acc |

'Abdullah gave Zaid a dirham.'

It may be widely agreed that the simultaneous participation in the act mentioned previously is very significant for dativisation. If a verb lacks this feature, it will not dativise even though the Agent and the Goal argument deliberately arrange the involvement between them in the act. This is illustrated in (23):

(23) أرسلتُ عيدًا الكتابَ بعدما طلبه

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| * arsal-tu | eid-an | alkitaab-a | ba'dama ṭalaba-hu |
| sent-I | Eid-Acc | the book-ACC | after he had requested-it |

'I sent Eid the book after he had requested it.'

To conclude, it has been argued that the Goal argument in the Arabic dative alternation should be animate. A further necessary condition for the Arabic

dativisation is that the Agent and the Goal argument must simultaneously participate in the act.

*The phenomenon of learners' acquisition of argument structure*

The phenomenon of the vital role of L1 influence on the acquisition of L2 has been widely recognised by both practicing language teachers and L2 researchers for decades. Specifically, the role of L1 in L2 learning has been a major concern in applied linguistics inquiries for some time now. It has been assumed that knowledge of L1 is a crucial cognitive element in shaping the process of L2 acquisition. For instance, Schwartz & Sprouse (1996) established the Full Transfer / Full Access (FT/FA) hypothesis and stated that the initial stage of the acquisition of L2 is the final stage of the L1 grammar and L2 learners will transfer the L1 representations to the L2 grammar (FT). Late, L2 learners will have to restructure their interlanguage and resort to principles and operation constrained by Universal Grammar (UG) once the input cannot be analysed by the L1 grammar (FA). Following the FT/FA hypothesis, Lardiere (2008, 2009, 2013) proposed the Feature Reassembly Hypothesis (FRH) and argued that successful L2 acquisition proceeds by means of reassembling sets of lexical features which are drawn from the L1 lexicon into feature bundles appropriate to the L2. The feature reassembly process follows 'initial mapping' as argued by Gil & Marsden (2013, p. 118):

> *'L2 acquisition proceeds by means of the learner perceiving correspondences between lexical items in the L2 input and items in their own L1. This results in the L2 form being mapped to the L1 feature set for the item that is perceived to be equivalent. Once this initial mapping is established 'feature reassembly' can occur, if required: features can be added or deleted from the L1-based feature set, as motivated by evidence in the input.'*

The FRH follows the FT/FA hypothesis by assuming that adult L2 learners bring the formal features, which are assembled into the L1 lexical items to the task of L2 acquisition. It could be said that the FRH is a modulation of the FT/FA approach as it insists that the successful acquisition of L2 relies on the reassembling the sets of feature bundles of L1 lexical items into feature bundles appropriate to the L2, in circumstances where divergences occur.

The learning task for L2 learners is twofold, namely, mapping features and feature reassembly. Firstly, L2 learners have to map a lexical item to its closet equivalent in L2, then, they reassemble the features that do not correspond

within both L1 and L2. During the first stage which is the mapping of the sets of lexical items in L1 to those of L2, Lardiere (2009, p. 191) predicted that:

> *'It seems plausible to assume (and the feature re-assembly approach indeed rests on the assumption) that learners will look for morpholexical correspondences in the L2 to those in their L1, presumably on the basis of semantic meaning or grammatical function (the phonetic matrices will obviously differ).'*

Consequently, the FRH assumes that L1 transfer is the initial attempt to directly map between L1 and L2 lexical items. However, in the case of failure of mapping, L2 learners need to refine the combined features which were transferred from their L1 and reassemble features that attribute to different feature bundles in L1 and L2.

At the second stage which is feature reassembly, L2 learners may need either to learn new features, or abandon features allowed in their L1, but not in their L2. As a consequence, interlanguage development might be conceptualised by the FRH as a process of assembling L1 features into L2 features.

There are certain previous studies of the acquisition of the dative alternation by L2 learners. One of these studies was carried out by Whong-Barr & Schwartz (2002) who investigated the acquisition of the English DOD construction by L1 English, L1 Japanese, and L1 Korean children. This paper aimed to examine whether L2 children overgeneralise the DOD construction as L1 children. It also sought to explore whether L2 children transfer structures of their L1 grammar. Their first question was that whether L2 children, like L1 children, overgeneralised the DOD structure. The second question was that whether L2 children, like L2 adults, transfer properties of the L1 grammar. Japanese disallows all DOD structures. Korean disallows them with analogues of *to*-dative verbs; but with analogues of *for*-dative verbs, Korean productively allows them more broadly than English if the benefactive verbal morpheme *cwu-* is added. The experimental participants in this study were five Korean children who were eight-years old and five Japanese children who were seven-years old. Six English children who were eight-years old also took apart in this study as control group. An oral grammaticality judgment task was carried out to examine the use of the DOD structure. There were four types of DOD structures: grammatical and ungrammatical *to*-dative sentences and grammatical and ungrammatical *for*-dative sentences. The results generally can be summarised by outlining that Japanese learners accepted all the grammatical DOD structure with *to*-dative and

*for*-dative verbs and overaccepted all the ungrammatical DOD structure. However, Korean learners accepted all the grammatical DOD structure and rejected the ungrammatical DOD structure with *for*-dative verbs but they overaccepted the ungrammatical DOD structure with *to*-dative verbs. The results of this research can provide evidence of both overgeneralization, like in L1 acquisition, and L1 influence, like in adult L2 acquisition, in this case from the (syntactic) argument-changing properties of overt morphology.

*Research questions*

The current study intends to explore how Arab learners of English express certain verb classes in English: verbs of act of giving, verbs of type of communication and verbs of ballistic motion. More specifically, to what extent can these learners realise the grammaticality of the Throw class verbs with the DOD construction in English as *Ellis threw Peter the pen*?

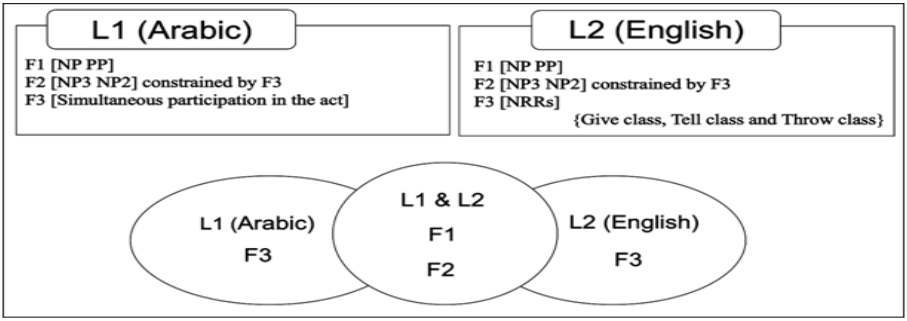
*The experimental study*

The current study seeks to explore to what extent semantic constraints play a crucial role in mapping verb classes onto different syntactic configurations. The extent to which the acquisition of the semantic constraints assists L2 learners to map the investigated verb classes onto different syntactic configurations that are not allowed in their L1. This will be conducted through an investigation into how well native speakers of Arabic acquire the English dative alternation. With the intention of addressing this question, the study concentrates on the acquisition of three verb classes in English: act of giving verbs, type of communication verbs and ballistic motion verbs. English allows all these verb classes to appear in the DOD form. Arabic, on the other hand, only allows some verbs in the act of giving class such as the equivalent of 'sell' and the type of communication class such as the equivalent of 'show'. In other words, English structures correspond to a superset of those in Arabic by allowing the DOD2 structure. In such a situation, according to the FT/FA hypothesis, it is speculated that Arab learners will initially transfer their L1 grammar hence they will not acquire such structure due to its ungrammaticality in their L1. Late, they will acquire this structure once the input cannot be analysed by the L1 grammar.

A hypothesis tested in this study is that even though the equivalent of ballistic motion verbs and certain verbs in the act of giving class such as 'pay' and the type of communication class such as 'read' are not allowed to occur in the DOD construction in Arabic since these dative verbs violate the Arabic semantic constraints, Arab learners of English, to a great extent, are able to acquire such verbs with the DOD construction as long as positive evidence is available.

A question may be highlighted is that how Arab learners of English acquire the English dative alternation. In accordance with the superset and the subset of English and Arabic dative features as illustrated in Figure 1, Arab learners of English may need to substantially fulfil a learning task to acquire the English dative alternation. The task is twofold and corresponds to two distinct stages. The first stage is mapping L1 features to their equivalents in L2. An illustrative task for this stage is the mapping of the occurrence of the PD structure with all dative verbs as well as the allowance of the DOD structure with verbs such as 'give', 'sell', 'tell', and 'show'. The second stage is the reassembling of L2 features. This stage can be accomplished by abandoning L1 features that are not available in the L2 grammar. For example, they should stop assuming the validity of the notion of the simultaneous participation between the Agent and the Goal argument in the DOD structure. The abandonment of this point will occur based on the availability of negative evidence. The reassembling occurs also through learning the NRRs to assist them to acquire the DOD structure with certain verbs that are not allowed in their L1 grammar such as 'pay', 'read', 'write', 'throw', 'kick', 'toss', and 'shoot'. The acquisition of the NRRs is provided by positive evidence.

Fig. 1: English acquisition by Arab learners (mapping features and feature assembly)




## The methodology

*Participants*

Two major groups contributed in this study: one was the experimental group that was made up of 50 Arabic speakers learning English as L2 and the second group was 10 native speakers of English who acted as controls to certify the reliability and validity of the used test.

*The picture-judgment task*

The participants were given written grammaticality judgment tasks with pictures. The investigated items consisted of pictures and sentences containing alternating verb followed by a three-point Likert scale from 1 (bad example) through 2 (not sure) to 3 (good example). It was comprised of 24 pictures; each two pictures describe a verb in two different constructions. The different constructions are shown in the tables below. The investigated verbs were 'give', 'sell', 'pay', 'hand', 'tell', 'read', 'write', 'show', 'throw', 'kick', 'toss' and 'shoot'. The verbs used in the study were classified into two classes. The first class composes of five alternating verbs ('give', 'sell', 'hand', 'tell' and 'show'). The second class includes seven alternating verbs ('pay', 'read', 'write', 'throw', 'kick', 'toss' and 'shoot'). These two classes should be in one category since they all are alternating verbs in English, however, they were classified into two classes due to the fact that the first class can occur in the DOD form in Arabic but the second class cannot. This classification was made in order to assist the researcher to investigate the extent to which the participants can recognise the grammaticality of structures that do not exist in their L1. Table 2 shows an example of the two structures with 'give'.

Table 2. Examples of the four different structures with 'give'

| Sentence type | Example |
|---|---|
| PD1 | Peter gave the book to Kim |
| DOD1 | Peter gave Kim the book. |

Table 3. Examples of English constructions

| The abbreviation of each structure | Example |
|---|---|
| PD1 | Peter gave the book to Kim. |
| DOD1 | Peter gave Kim the book. |
| PD2 | Ellis threw the pen to Peter. |
| DOD2 | Ellis threw Peter the pen. |

*Results*

Fig. 2: The mean responses on the acquisition of English dative constructions

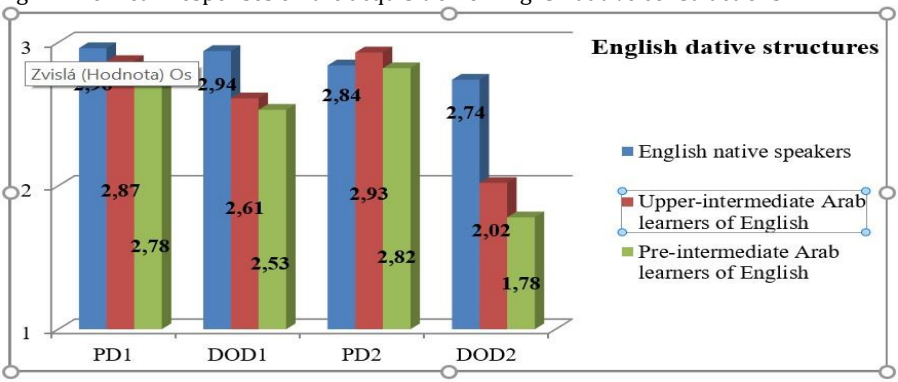



Table 4. Tests of within-subjects effects on English basic structures

| Source | DF | MS | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Structures | 1 | 10.155 | 36.611 | .000 |
| Structures * group | 2 | 1.431 | 5.159 | .009 |
| Verb group | 1 | 3.984 | 47.550 | .000 |
| Verb group * group | 2 | .151 | 1.797 | .175 |
| Structures * verb group | 1 | 3.809 | 53.622 | .000 |
| Structures * verb group * group | 2 | .522 | 7.352 | .001 |

A three-way mixed ANOVA was run within participant groups (native speakers of English, upper-intermediate learners and pre-intermediate learners of English), as a between-subject variable, and structures (PD vs. DOD) and verb groups (group one {give, sell, hand, tell and show} vs. group two {pay, read, write, throw, kick, toss and shoot}) as within-subject variables. The statistical analysis showed a significant main effect of structure and verb group, and significant two-way interactions between structure and group, and between structure and verb group, as shown in Table 4. Moreover, the three-way interaction between structures, verb group and group was significant, $F$ (7.352) = .522, $p$ = .001. However, the interaction of verb group and group showed no significant main

effect for the acquisition of the basic structures $F$ (1.797) = .151, $p$ = .175. As the three-way interaction was significant results, it could be worth following this analysis up with a two-way ANOVA to find out the drives effects.

Table 5. Tests of within-subjects effects on the English PD1 and DOD1 structures

| Source | DF | MS | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Structures | 1 | .763 | 6.699 | .012 |
| Structures * group | 2 | .112 | .987 | .379 |

Two two-way mixed ANOVA, were run with group (native speakers of English, upper-intermediate learners and pre-intermediate learners of English) as a between-subject variable, and structure (PD1 vs. DOD1) as a within-subject variable. Table 5 provides an overview of the analysis of the PD1 and the DOD1 structure. The ANOVA pertaining to verb group 1 revealed that there is a significant effect of structure, $F$ (6.699) = .763, $p$ = .012. However, the interaction between the structures and group was not significant, $F$ (.987) = .112, $p$ = .379.

Table 6. Tests of within-subjects effects on the English PD2 and DOD2 structures

| Source | DF | MS | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Structures | 1 | 13.201 | 56.283 | .000 |
| Structures * group | 2 | 1.841 | 7.848 | .001 |

A two-way ANOVA was run with groups (native speakers of English, upper-intermediate learners and pre-intermediate learners of English) as a between-subject variable, and structure (PD2 vs. DOD2) as a within-subject variable. It showed considerable results on both the structures $F$ (56.283) = 13.201, $p$ = .000 and the interaction of structures and group $F$ (7.848) = 7.848, $p$ = .001, as illustrated in Table 6. This table will be followed by one-way ANOVA to identify the source of interaction.

Table 7. One-way ANOVA on the English PD2 and DOD2 structures

| Source | DF | MS | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PD2 | 2 | .079 | .826 | .443 |
| DOD2 | 2 | 3.492 | 12.154 | .000 |

Table 7 provides a statistical analysis of the PD2 and the DOD2 structures on one-way ANOVA. It was run within participant groups (native speakers of English, upper-intermediate learners and pre-intermediate learners of English) as a between-subject variable, and structure (PD2 vs. DOD2). As shown in Table 7, there is no evidence of the disparity between the participants on the assessment of the PD2 structure. However, there was a statistical disparity between the participants on the assessment of the DOD2 structure. These ANOVA analyses are followed by certain t-test analyses to further perceive the significance in assessment of the BDOD2 structure. It is interesting to find that there was a noticeable difference between native speakers (2.74) and the experimental participants (2.02 vs. 1.78) in terms of the assessment of the DOD2 construction, which led by the low acceptance of this structure by the non-native participants, as illustrated in Table 8 and 9 respectively.

**Table 8. Comparison between English native speakers and upper-intermediate Arab learners of English assessing the DOD2 structure in English**

| Groups of participants | N | Structure | Means | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English native speakers | 10 | **DOD2** | 2.74 | .001 |
| Upper-intermediate Arab learners of English | 25 | | 2.02 | |

Table 9. Comparison between English native speakers and pre-intermediate Arab learners of English assessing the DOD2 structure in English

| Groups of participants | N | Structure | Means | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The English native speakers | 10 | **DOD2** | 2.74 | .000 |
| Pre-intermediate Arab learners of English | 25 | | 1.78 | |

*Discussion of the findings*

The results of this study show that the Arab learners did not accept the DOD2 structure as their ratings were statistically lower than the native speakers' rate (2.02 : 1.78 vs. 2.74), as observed in Figure 2. As this results show, it seems that L2 learners realised the overlap between the L1 and the L2 and indicated that the L1 and the L2 are identical. Therefore, the DOD2 structure is allowed neither in Arabic nor in English. These results provided a support for the FT/FA hypothesis

as these learners transferred their L1 grammar to L2 grammar despite its ungrammaticality in the L2.

In terms of discussing the current findings on light of the acquisition of the semantic features, it is the focus of this study to explore the acquisition of English semantic features. The previous investigations of the acquisition of the semantic constraints in the English dative alternation showed varied and contradictory findings. An example can be revealed in the investigation undertaken by Sawyer (1996) found that Japanese learners could distinguish between the Throw class verbs and the Push class verbs despite the absence of such a distinction in their L1. Moreover, Inagaki (1997) explored the acquisition of the English NRRs by native speakers of Japanese and Chinese. He found that Japanese learners could distinguish the Tell class verbs from the Whisper class verbs while they could not do so with the Throw class verbs from the Push class verbs. The interpretation of these unexpected results was built on the selective access to UG and the frequent input. Chinese learners performed well in the distinction between the Tell and Throw classes but they could not do so with the Throw and Push classes.

Undertaking the investigation of the acquisition of the English dative alternation by the native speakers of Arabic to explore the extent to which the current participants well resemble the target semantic constraints. The findings of this investigation showed that in spite of the acquisition of the BRRs which are general semantic constraints these learners could not acquire the NRRs which are the specific semantic constraints that govern the dative alternation in English resulting in the failure of acceptance of the grammatical structure in the L2.

It might be a possible explanation for the weak acceptance of the DOD2 structure as a consequence of the unavailability of this structure in the L1 grammar. L2 learners will accept what is available in their L1 due to their assumption that the L1 and the L2 are the same and what is ungrammatical in the L1 has to be ungrammatical in the L2. The negative transfer (ignoring L2 grammar due to its absence in L1) revealed in this study by the Arab learners of English may simply reflect the insufficient evidence available to them which might be related to the low proficiency levels. L2 learners at low proficiency levels seem to be, to great extent, affected by their L1 due to the heavy reliance on the previous experience (L1 grammar) to fill gaps in the target language grammar. Another possible explanation could be that these learners are not sensitive enough to the NRRs which govern the dative alternation in English to realise the occurrence of the Throw class verbs and several verbs in the Give class such as 'pay' and in the Tell class such as 'read' in the English DOD structure. The delayed acquisition of the DOD2 structure is due to difficulties in acquiring the semantic features (NRRs) in the English dative alternation. Such

undergeneralisation errors can be easily overcome due to the availability of positive evidence.

The question that may be raised here is that how Arab learners of English eventually recover from the phenomena of undergeneralisation. Based on White's (1991) argument, the phenomena of undergeneralisation in the acquisition of L2 argument structures is easier to be solved than overgeneralisation. Initially, once L2 learners assume a restrictive grammar, L2 positive evidence will probably draw their attention to extend their L2 grammar. Once the Arabic native speakers notice the grammaticality of sentences such as *Ellis threw Peter the pen* in English, they will restructure their grammar to incorporate the English dative alternation that are not allowed in their L1.

Along with the investigation of the syntax-semantics interface conducted by Oh (2010) which proposed that the influence of negative transfer may be overcome once the proficiency level increased. As she found that certain participants particularly at advanced level could acquire the semantic properties associated with the benefactive DOD structure progressively but surely. It also was revealed that although the Arab participants could not acquire the DOD2 structure, some individuals, particularly at the upper-intermediate level, were able to acquire the semantic constraints related to the dative alternation gradually. Accordingly, it may be suggested that the acquisition of the semantics of the dative alternation can assist learners to acquire the semantics of the DOD2 structure, which in turn promote learners to correctly accept such structure. Moreover, it was suggested by Oh (2010) that the acquisition of the semantic constraints of a structure leads to the acquisition of the syntactic configuration of that structure. The syntactic and semantic relationship should be investigated to draw a definitive overview on the relation between them. Furthermore, it might determine the linguistic knowledge and mechanisms are occupied in this process. Learning a verb entails learning its semantic roles related to the inherent meaning of that verb (see Goldberg, 1995). Equally, learning a construction entails learning its associated semantics (Tomasello, 1992, 2000; Goldberg, 1999). Therefore, it may be assumed that the acquisition of the English DOD construction necessitates the acquisition of its semantic restrictions. The present study attempts to address the raised issues by examining Arab learners' knowledge of English semantic constraints governing the DOD construction. An exploration of the learners' knowledge of the relevant semantic restrictions provides a good understanding of the recovery from the negative transfer effects. As stated by the researchers, the acquisition of semantic features of a structure is the prior step to acquire that structure. Based on this suggestion, the Arab learners should learn that the English DOD construction encode certain semantic

features. Therefore, the acquisition of the semantic features associated with the DOD structure precedes the acquisition of its syntactic internal arguments.

*Conclusion*

The present study was set up to explore the ability of L2 in the acquisition of L2 structures that are absent in the L1 grammar. It investigated how Arab learners of English acquire the DOD with certain verbs such as 'throw'. It was revealed that the Arab learners could not acquire L2 structures that are not allowed in their L1. This can be observed in the assessment of the DOD2 structure (e.g. *Timor wrote his wife a letter*). All experimental participants did not assess this structure as positively as it should be. Both groups, the pre-intermediate and the upper-intermediate, revealed significant results when their judgements of the DOD2 structure compared to the English native speakers' judgements, as tables 8 and 9.

These results confirm the vital role of the L1 in the acquisition of L2. Lefebvre, White & Jourdan (2006) observed that the L1 transfer is the appropriate analysis until contrary evidence is provided to L2 learners. In case of the absence of such evidence, the influence of L1 will continue till the L2 advanced level. It is possible for these L2 learners to ultimately overcome the problem of L1 transfer and acquire the L2 grammar, once sufficient positive evidence is provided. Furthermore, the FT/FA approach assumes that L2 learners will eventually access to UG and acquire the L2 grammar.

To accurately discuss the possibility of the full acquisition of the dative alternation in English and Arabic by L2 adult learners after the critical period, the advanced learners should be examined as Sorace (1993) did in the acquisition of unaccusativity in Italian. Regardless of the participants' levels, it was probable to notice certain individual differences at each level. Individual findings showed that certain L2 learners seemed to be entirely influenced by their L1 whereas other learners started to incorporate the L2 grammar by accepting the grammatical sentences and ignoring the ungrammatical sentences.

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JoLaCE

Journal of Language and Cultural Education, 2018, 6(1)
ISSN 1339-4584
SlovakEdu

sciendo

DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2018-0006

# On the Codification of Usage by Labels

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**Abstract**

The present paper focuses on the question of how usage is marked within dictionary macrostructure of five most representatives of *EFL* lexicographic works, namely *Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary*, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, *Oxford Advanced Learner`s Dictionary*, *Cambridge Advanced Learner`s Dictionary* and *Macmillan English Dictionary*. What is more, it sets a number of reasons why this particular area of lexicographic enquiry poses problems not only for dictionary users but also for dictionary compilers.

**Key words**: lexicography, label, usage, diasystematic information

## Label classifications

We feel justified to start with the basic notions employed in the codification of usage by labels. As to the very notion of labels, when we turn to *Dictionary of Lexicography* (Hartmann & James, 1998, p. 80), we find out that: "label is a specialised symbol or abbreviated term used in reference works to mark a word or phrase as being associated with a particular usage or language variety. Dictionaries differ widely in the way they do this. As the information necessary to support a particular decision is not always available and boundary lines between different usage features are fluid, consistency is rarely achieved".

Obviously, when we face the challenge of investigating usage specifications in lexicography, we come to realize that one should by no means refrain from tackling the problem of the meaning of the usage category which is defined variously in the literature of the subject. And so, for example, according to Allen (1992, p. 1071), usage may be defined as "the way in which the elements of language are customarily used to produce meaning", while Landau (1989, p. 174) argues that the term *usage* is related to medium upon which the communicative event relies, that it denotes either spoken or written language, the standard ways of its usage, as distinguished from non-standard ones or – alternately – the study of any limitations on use (geographic, social or temporal).

In current lexicographic practice such data is provided by usage labels, usually given in the form of one word labels or abbreviations (such as, for example, *old-fashioned*, *slang*, *AmE*). Quantitatively, Landau (1989, p. 175) claims that most common usage labels are as follows:

1. currency or temporality: *archaic, obsolete,*
2. frequency of use*: rare,*
3. regional or geographic variation: *U.S., British, Canadian, Australian*,
4. technical or specialized terminology: *astronomy, chemistry, physics*,
5. restricted or taboo: *vulgar, obscene,*
6. insult: *offensive, disparaging, contemptuous*,
7. slang: *slang,*
8. style, functional variety, or register: *informal, colloquial, literary*,
9. status or cultural label: *nonstandard, substandard*.

The idea of incorporating thus understood labels in the structure of lexicographic description is by no means new, and it has existed, or has at least been tacitly implied for a long time. For equally long time lexicographers have faced the multitude of problems related to both shape and scope of the possible labelling system (Ptaszyński, 2010, p. 411-412). One of the main reasons, as indicated in Atkins & Rundell (2008, p. 496), is that: "many labels are umbrella terms that conceal a good deal of variation". To uncover the content of these umbrella terms is to say that labels proposed for the dictionary content aim at indicating data about limitations concerning the way words are to be used, in the contexts they occur or, alternatively, in relation to different lexical items within the body of a dictionary. In the literature of the subject, these limitations are referred to as *diasystematic marking*, which is used synonymously with the name *diasystematic information* (see, for example, Hausmann, 1989; Svensén, 2009). In turn, Landau (1989, p. 217) argues that the labelling system guides the readers how to use a given language correctly, but also its aim is to provide relevant information on the limitations of use. As a rule, usage comments are provided in dictionaries as a guide on how to use words appropriately (the use of a particular lexical item can be restricted to a certain area, a specific domain as well as style/register). Normally, these limitations are indicated in such a way that dictionaries employ labels (either in the microstructure, or in the megastructure of a dictionary).

In other words, one may say that they are to be useful when dictionary users are uncertain if a given word is old-fashioned/slang/taboo, etc. Such pieces of information, in the words of Svensén (2009, p. 315), inform dictionary users that "a certain lexical item deviates in a certain respect from the main bulk of items described in a dictionary and that its use is subject to some kind of restriction".

Obviously enough, a dictionary user normally consults the work of reference for the guides on how to use a lexical item appropriately (or alternatively one of its senses), its spelling, pronunciation, the fact if is restricted somehow (to a geographical region/ a domain / a style). Within the canvas of lexicographic reference works such items of information tend to appear in different forms, as well as varying positions. Most frequently, limitations of all types are provided as labels given within the dictionary microstructure. At the same time, they are at times to be found in the dictionary megastructure (front or back matter).

When we make enquiries about the causes of incorporating usage labels, we come to realize that lexicographers tend to claim that – most frequently – dictionary users react negatively to the lack of this kind of lexicographic information (see Landau, 1989). What is more, as revealed by the Lew's (2004) research, users turn to works of reference for data concerning usage limitations, though this need tends to develop at more advanced levels of language mastery. The author stresses that stylistic information is "primary useful in encoding tasks" (Lew, 2004, p. 126). Apparently, this seems to suggest that the incorporation of labels is justified mainly for the purpose of language production. When producing a text, one is forced to make various choices while the system of labels is supposed to guide dictionary users through the set of alternative options, as well as to warn users about the possible social consequences of using one word instead of another, since usage labels are primarily intended to show various restrictions on word application. Another problem that arises in this context is the problem of label typology.

The discussion concerning label classification has been carried by, among others, Milroy and Milroy (1990), and the major distinction drawn by the authors covers the difference between group labels and register labels. To be more specific:

1) Group labels indicate that a lexical item is restricted in its use (here geographical, temporal, frequency and field labels are mentioned).
1.1) Geographical labels show that a particular word is used in a certain region (that is it does not belong to standard language).
1.2) The function of temporal labels is to indicate the first/last occurence of the lexical item.
1.3) Frequency labels – although generally these labels are hardly ever used in printed dictionaries, their function is to indicate which forms are used most frequently.
1.4) Field labels have the function of indicating to what professional or social domain a given word belongs.

2) Register labels guide individual language users in their choice of the right words in the right contexts.

Although far from being plentiful, there have been other typological proposals, too. One of them is that of Jackson (2002, p. 109 -115). The author postulates the following categories:

10. dialect labels – that refer to geographical restriction,
11. formality labels – a number of words that are marked as *formal* or *informal*,
12. status labels – concerning the propriety of the use of a word,
13. effect labels – they relate to the effect that a word or sense is intended by the speaker/writer to produce in the hearer/reader,
14. history labels – labels for words or senses that are either no longer in current use or whose currency is questionable or suspect,
15. topic or field label – they relate to where a word or sense is restricted to,
16. usage label – used when the usage of words is a matter of controversy,

More recently, Atkins and Rundell (2008, p. 227-230) distinguish the following marking indicators:

17. domains labels,
18. region (dialect labels),
19. register (slang and jargon labels),
20. style labels,
21. time labels,
22. attitude labels,
23. meaning type labels,
24. using labels.

As to the typologies that have been advanced so far, one finds what seems to be the most detailed classificatory scheme in the work of Hausmann (1989, p. 651), who itemizes the following kinds of labels:

25. Diachronic information, which refers to time, is a feature which connects a word or any of its senses with a given period throughout the history of a language. Within this dimension, one finds a variety of labels that can be placed on a chronological list, from archaic, through obsolete to the contemporary words and senses. Likewise, we find here recent neologisms, and those lexical items which do not refer to old use are usually not marked with any label. Therefore, in practice, there are no labels used to mark neologisms. Among the temporal labels that are often present in modern dictionaries, one finds categories labelled as: *old-fashioned, obsolete,* as well as *archaic, old use* or *dated*.

26. In turn, diatopic information which refers to place, is a dimension that connects a word or any of its senses with either a national language variety or with a given regional dialect. Naturally, language communities often differentiate between standard and non-standard uses. The former use is most frequently unlabelled in dictionaries, while the latter, the regional or dialectal use, is predominantly marked as *regional* or *dialect.*
27. In turn, diaintegrative information, which refers to place, is a feature associating a word or any of its senses with the dimension of integration into the repertoire of native words in a given language. Monolingual dictionaries often provide information concerning the source language, and this is especially true about those words which have preserved their original form (e.g. loan words taken from Latin incorporated into English at various stages).
28. One may also speak of diamedial information, which refers to medium. On the whole, it is a feature which connects a word or any of its senses with a given medium of communication. The labels which are the most frequently used are *written* and *spoken*.
29. Diastratic information, which refers to socio-cultural group, is a feature which connects a word or any of its senses with a specific social community. This kind of label is often associated with the social varieties, such as slang or jargon. The most common labels of this kind are *slang, vulgar* or *taboo*.
30. As to diaphasic information, which refers to formality, this feature associates a word or any of its senses with a specific register of a given language. The most common labels that are provided here are *formal* and *informal*.
31. In turn, diatextual information, which refers to text type, is a feature which connects a word or any of its senses with a given type of discourse or genre. The most frequently labelling markings here are *poetic* and *literary*.
32. So-called diatechnical information, which refers to technicality, is a feature which connects a word with a specific subject field. In monolingual dictionaries, one finds subject-field labels, field labels, as well as domain labels which usually signal that a word or any of its senses belongs to scientific or technical domains of the lexicon. It is obvious that numerous sublanguages pertaining to different subject fields may pose problems even for those native speakers that are well-educated, because any given subject field is known to have its own specialist vocabulary. For the reasons stated above, some dictionaries often make use of such general labels as *technical* or *science,* usually without providing any specific information on particular subject fields.

33. What has come to be known as diafrequent information, refers to frequency, and it is a dimension which associates a word or any of its senses with their frequency of occurrence. *Less frequent* and *rare* are the most frequent labels found in dictionaries.
34. Diaevaluative information pertains to attitude, and it may be defined as a feature which connects a word or any of its senses with a given attitude. The labels used in this context are *derogatory, offensive* as well as *humorous, ironic* and *euphemistic*.
35. Finally, there is dianormative information, which refers to normativity, and one may define this type of information as a dimension which associates a word or any of its senses with some departure from a linguistic standard established by a given language community. Typically, the labels used to denote a dianormative kind of information are *non-standard, substandard* as well as *disputed.* That is to say, the items marked with such labels tend to be considered as linguistically incorrect by the members of a given linguistic community.

The detailed typology worked out by Hausmann (1989) is by no means the only one. Much along the same lines is the division proposed 20 years later by Svensén (2009, p. 326-331) where we find:

1) diachronic marking involves archaisms and neologisms (*archaic*, *old-use*),
2) diatopic marking refers to geographical dimension,
3) diaintegrative marking concerns dimension (*native* vs. *foreign*),
4) distratic marking covers all kinds of markings that have to do with style (*spoken*, *written*, *formal*, *slang*),
5) diatechnical marking pertains to technolects or subject field (*medical*, *law*),
6) diafreqential marking involves frequency of occurrence (*often*),
7) diaevaluative marking is related to speaker's attitude or mood (*derogatory*, *humorous*, *ironic*),
8) dianormative marking refers to these words and expressions which acceptability is questioned as regards linguistic correctness (*substandard*).

As could be seen, the classificatory systems that have been proposed in the literature differ both with respect to their scope and the number of typological categories that are distinguished. Yet, one may say that all the classifications that have been sketched jointly provide evidence that is welcome, if not downright indispensible to classify both restrictions and constraints that should be incorporated within the structure of lexicographic works.

**Labels in *EFL dictionaries*: the state of the art**

It seems reasonable to continue our discussion by taking a closer look at each of the *EFL* dictionaries individually, in order to find out how practicing lexicographers classify usage labels. To start with *Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary* (2009) (henceforth: *CCAD*), its usage information may be sampled in the following manner:

**Style Labels**

BUSINESS: Used mainly when talking about the field of business, e.g. **annuity**

COMPUTING: Used mainly when talking about the field of computing, e.g. **chat room**

DIALECT: Used in some dialects of English, e.g. **ain't**

FORMAL: Used mainly in official situations, or by political and business organizations, or when speaking or writing to people in authority, e.g. **gratuity**

HUMOROUS: Used mainly to indicate that a word or expression is used in a humorous way, e.g. **gents**

INFORMAL: Used mainly in informal situations, conversations, and personal letters, e.g. **pep talk**

JOURNALISM: Used mainly in journalism, e.g. **glass ceiling**

LEGAL: Used mainly in legal documents, in law courts, and by the police in official situations, e.g. **manslaughter**

LITERARY: Used mainly in novels, poetry, and other forms of literature, e.g. **plaintive**

MEDICAL: Used mainly in medical texts, and by doctors in official situations, e.g. **psychosis**

MILITARY: Used mainly when talking or writing about military terms, e.g. **armour**

OFFENSIVE: Likely to offend people, or to insult them; words labelled OFFENSIVE should therefore be avoided, e.g. **cripple**

OLD-FASHIONED: Generally considered to be old-fashioned, and no-longer in common use, e.g. **dashing**

RUDE: Used mainly to describe words which could be considered taboo by some people; words labelled RUDE should therefore usually be avoided, e.g. **bloody**

SPOKEN: Used mainly in speech rather than in writing, e.g. **pardon**

TECHNICAL: Used mainly when talking or writing about objects, events, or processes in a specialist subject, such as business, science, or music, e.g. **biotechnology**
TRADEMARK: Used to show designated trademark, e.g. **hoover**
VERY OFFENSIVE: Highly likely to offend people, or to insult them; words labelled VERY OFFENSIVE should be avoided, e.g. **wog**
VERY RUDE: Used mainly to describe words which most people consider taboo, words labelled VERY RUDE should be avoided, e.g. **fuck**
WRITTEN: Used mainly in writing rather than in speech, e.g. **avail**

When we move further to the relevant features provided in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2014; henceforth: *LDCE*), we see that its treatment of usage guidance is merely restricted to the inside front cover within the space given, and the labels that are distinguished are grouped in the following way:

**LABELS**

**1. Words which are used only or mainly in one region or country are marked:**

*BrE* British English
*AmE* American English
*AusE* Australian English

**2. Words which are used in a particular situation, or show a particular attitude:**

*approving* a word that is used to praise things or people, although this may not be clear from its meaning
*disapproving* a word that is used to show dislike or approval, although this may not be clear from its meaning
*formal* a word that is suitable for formal speech or writing, but would not normally be used in ordinary conversation
informal a word or phrase that is used in normal conversation, but may not be suitable for use in more formal contexts, for example in writing essays or business letters
*humorous* a word that is normally used in a joking way

**3. Words which are used in a particular context or type of language:**

*biblical* a word that is used in the language of the Bible, and would sound old-fashioned to a modern speaker
*Law* a word with a technical meaning used by lawyers in legal documents etc

| | |
|---|---|
| *literary* | a word used mainly in English literature, and not in normal speech or writing |
| *medical* | a word or phrase that is more likely to be used by doctors that by ordinary people, and that often has a more common equivalent |
| *not polite* | a word or phrase that is considered rude, and that might offend some people |
| *old-fashioned* | a word that was commonly used in the past, but would sound old-fashioned today |
| *old use* | word used in earlier centuries |
| *spoken* | a word or phrase used only, or nearly always, in conversation |
| *taboo* | a word that should not be used because it is very rude or offensive |
| *technical* | a word used by doctors, scientists and another specialists |
| *trademark* | a word that is the official name of a particular product |
| *written* | a word or phrase that is used only, or nearly always, in written English |

When we turn to the information section contained in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2014; henceforth: *OALD*) that is located on the inside cover we find out that the editors provide a list of labels that have been employed as guidance marks, and it is there that we find the following explanation: "The following labels are used with words that express a particular attitude or are appropriate in a particular situation*":*

| | |
|---|---|
| *approving* | expressions show that you feel approval or admiration, for example *feisty, petite.* |
| *disapproving* | expressions show that you feel disapproval or contempt, for example *blinkered, newfangled.* |
| *figurative* | language is used in a non-literal or metaphorical way, as in *He didn't want to cast a shadow on* (=spoil) *their happiness*. |
| *formal* | expressions are usually only used in serious or official language and would not be appropriate in normal everyday conversation. Examples are *admonish, besmirch*. |
| *humorous* | expressions are intended to be funny, for example *ankle-biter, lurgy* |
| *informal* | expressions are used between friends or in a relaxed or unofficial situation. They are not appropriate for formal situations. Examples are *bonkers, dodgy* |
| *Ironic* | language uses words to mean the opposite of the meaning that they seem to have, as in *You're a great help, I must say!* (= no help at all). |

| | |
|---|---|
| *literary* | language is used mainly in literature and imaginative writing, for example *aflame, halcyon.* |
| *offensive* | expressions are used by some people to address or refer to people in a way that is very insulting, especially in connection with their race, religion, sex or disabilities, for example *half-caste, slut*. You should not use these words. |
| *Slang* | is very informal language, sometimes restricted to a particular group of people, for example people of the same age or those who have the same interests or do the same job. Examples are *dingbat, dosh.* |
| *Taboo* | expressions are likely to be thought by many people to be obscene or shocking. You should not use them. Examples are *bloody, shit*. |
| *technical* | language is used by people who specialize in particular subject areas, for example *accretion, adipose.* |

The following labels show other restrictions on the use of words:

| | |
|---|---|
| **dialect** | describes expressions that are mainly used in particular regions of the British Isles, not including Ireland, Scotland or Wales, for example beck, nowt. |
| **old-fashioned** | expressions are passing out of current use, for example *balderdash, beanfeast* |
| **old use** | describes expressions that are no longer in current use, for example **ere, perchance**. |
| saying | describes a well-known fixed or traditional phrase, such as a proverb, that is used to make a comment, give advice, etc., for example *actions speak louder than words*. |
| ™ | shows a trademark of a manufacturing company, for example *Band-Aid, Frisbee.* |

In case of *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2008; henceforth: *CALD*), the front page explanation of usage labels employed in the case of this dictionary acquires the following shape:

Style and usage labels used in the dictionary:

| | |
|---|---|
| ABBREVIATION | a shortened form of a word |
| APPROVING | praising someone or something |
| AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH | |
| CANADIAN ENGLISH | |
| CHILD'S WORD/EXPRESSION | used by children |

| | |
|---|---|
| DATED | used in a recent past and often still used by older people |
| DISAPPROVING | used to expressed dislike or disagreement with someone or something |
| EAST AFRICAN ENGLISH | |
| FEMALE | |
| FIGURATIVE | used to express not the basic meaning of a word, but an imaginative one |
| FORMAL | used in serious or official language or when trying to impress other people |
| HUMOROUS | used when you are trying to be funny |
| INFORMAL | used in ordinary speech (and writing) and not suitable for formal situations |
| IRISH ENGLISH | |
| LEGAL | specialized language used in legal documents and law courts |
| LITERARY | formal and descriptive language used in literature |
| MALE | |
| NORTHERN ENGLISH | used in the North of England |
| NON STANDARD | commonly used but not following the rules of grammar |
| OFFENSIVE | very rude and likely to offend people |
| OLD-FASHIONED | not used in modern English – you might find these words in books, used by older people, or used in order to be funny |
| OLD USE | used a long time ago in other centuries |
| POLITE WORD/EXPRESSION | a polite way of referring to something that has other rude names |
| SAYING | a common phrase or sentence that gives advice, an opinion, etc. |
| SCOTISH ENGLISH | |
| SLANG | extremely informal language, used mainly by a particular group, especially young people |
| SPECIALIZED | used only by people in a particular subject such as doctors or scientists |
| TRADEMARK | the official name of a product |
| UK | British English |
| US | American English |

| | |
|---|---|
| WRITTEN ABBREVIATION | a shortened form of a word used in writing |
| E | Essential: the most common and useful words in English |
| I | Improver: the next level of words to learn to improve your English |
| A | Advanced: words to make your English really fluent and natural |

Finally, as to the labelling system devised by the editors of *Macmillan English Dictionary* (2007; henceforth: *MED*), there are the following labelling conventions:

| | |
|---|---|
| **formal** | in current use but not used in ordinary conversation or in normal everyday writing: *aegis, remonstrate, remuneration, accede, perpetrate* |
| **humorous** | used in an ironic and often friendly way; *ill-gotten, gains, rascal* (used to a child). Some humorous words are more disapproving than they seem, for example: ladies who lunch |
| **impolite** | not taboo but will certainly offend some people |
| **informal** | more common in speech than in writing and not used on a formal occasion: *guy, bloke, gobroke, gutsy, crackup, cop* |
| **literary** | old but still used in some kinds of creative writing: *behold, jocund, perfidious* |
| **offensive** | extremely rude and likely to cause offence |
| **old-fashioned** | no longer in current use but still used by some older people: *A-!* (=very good), *gramophone* (=record player) |
| **showing approval** | used when it is not obvious from a definition that a word says something good about someone or something: *fearless, tireless* |
| **showing disapproval** | used when it is not obvious from a definition that a word says something bad about someone or something: *babyish, smooth* (=relaxed and confident) |
| **spoken** | used in speech rather than writing: *believe it or not, after you, I bet* |
| **very formal** | not very common. People who use them often seem to be trying to be more intelligent and important than they really are: *ameliorate, asperity, abjure* |

| | |
|---|---|
| **very informal** | used only in very informal situations and mainly among people who know each other well. Some dictionaries use the label *slang: go ape, journo* |
| [modal verb] | that are used with another verb to express ideas such as possibility, permission, or intention: *She **might** come. He **can** go now. I **will** ask him to call you.* |

As stressed in the foregoing, both style and usage labels are aimed to provide dictionary users with restrictions on the particular word usage. Yet, it is fairly obvious that the main problem involved here is that we find different labels in different *EFL* dictionaries; fair enough all of the *EFL* dictionaries under scrutiny seem to propose different – both quantitatively and quantitatively – sets of labelling systems, and – what is more – they tend to employ them differently in the dictionary macrostructure. The most extended list of labels used is to be found in *CALD* (2008), where altogether 34 labels are provided. The dictionary distinguishes the following categories of labels: *abbreviation, approving, Australian English, Canadian English, child's word/expression, dated, disapproving, East African English, female, figurative, formal, humorous, informal, Irish English, legal, literary, male, Northern English, non standard, offensive, old- fashioned, old use, polite word/expression, saying, Scottish English, slang, specialized, trademark, UK, US, written abbreviation, E, I, A*. Much shorter lists of labels are proposed by the editors of *CCAD* (2009) and *LDCE* (2014), because only 20 different labels in either of them are employed. To be more specific, *CCAD* (2009) divides the body of labels into the following marking units: *business, computing`, dialect, formal, humorous, informal, journalism, legal, literary, medical, military, offensive, old-fashioned, rude, spoken, technical, trademark, very offensive, very rude, written*. In turn, *LDCE* (2014) proposes the following set of labelling categories: *BrE, AmE, AusE, approving, disapproving, formal, informal, humorous, biblical, law, literary, medical, not polite, old-fashioned, old use, spoken, taboo, technical, trademark, written*. In case of *OALD* (2014) we find 17 different markings, and the array of labels put to use there includes the following ones: *approving, disapproving, figurative, formal, humorous, informal, ironic, literary, offensive, slang, specialist, taboo, dialect, old-fashioned, old use, saying, TM*. Interestingly, the shortest list (13 in all) is identified in *MED* (2007), and the marking system includes such labels as: *formal, humorous, impolite, informal, literary, offensive, old-fashioned, showing approval, showing disapproval, spoken, very formal, very informal, [modal verb].*

As to the mode of presentation, only *OALD* (2014) and *LDCE* (2014) group labels in categories. In case of the first one, we have:

36. labels used with words that express a particular attitude or appropriate in a particular situation,

37. labels that show other restrictions on the use of words.

When we turn to *LDCE* (2014), we find the following:

38. words which are used only or mainly in one region or country,
39. words which are used in a particular situation, or show a particular attitude,
40. words which are used in a particular context or type of language.

The dictionary analysis that has been carried out reveals that in case of the majority of *EFL* dictionaries we encounter major variation in the way the guiding labels are introduced and presented to the users. In general, the editors of *LDCE* (2014) apparently prefer the acronimised forms for dialect words, such as: *BrE, AmE, AusE*., while in case of *CALD* (2008) we find the following versions of acronimised labels: *UK, US.* At the same time, there are one-letter acronyms, such as *essential* (*E*), *improver* (*I*), *advanced* (*A*). Moreover, substantial differences can also be noticed in the way the same information is codified. There are a number of labels that apparently mean the same, but acquire different labelling conventions. For example, we find the label *dated* in *CALD* (2008), while in *CCAD* (2009), *LDCE* (2014), *OALD* (2014), *MED* (2007) there is the label *old-fashioned* provided to encode exactly the same information. What is more, one is tempted to ask: What is the difference between *old-fashioned* and *old-use*. This is because both labels are given by the editors of *LDCE* (2014), yet – regrettably – there is explanation that might clarify the difference, if any.

Similar questions and queries may be formulated for other labelling conventions employed in various *EFL* dictionaries. And so, for instance, a certain discrepancy is found in case of *not-polite* that is put to use in *CCAD* (2009), *OALD* (2014), *MED* (2007), *CALD* (2008), *LDCE* (2014), and the label *offensive* employed by the editors of *CALD* (2008), *MED* (2007), *OALD* (2014), *CCAD* (2009), where – in fact – the label *very offensive* is provided, while the editors of *CCAD* (2009) have opted for *rude.* Less doubt goes with the label *disapproving* that is used in *LDCE* (2014), *OALD* (2014), *CALD* (2008).

Likewise, we observe certain inconsistencies that are related to the way the parameter of formality/informality is grasped and codified. In most general terms, the labels within the group are arranged according to the descending scale formal>informal>slang>taboo. As far as handling of register is concerned, the bulk of lexicographic works that have been examined is by no means free of variation and inconsistencies either. While the authors of *CALD* (2008) use: *specialized/ legal/ literary* labels, in *LDCE* (2014) we find such markings as: *technical/ medical/ literary/ law/ biblical*. In turn, *CCAD* (2009) provides the following labels: *business/computing, journalism, legal, literacy, medical, military,*

*technical,* while *OALD* (2014) employs only two register-specific labels, namely: *literary* and *specialist*.

Another general observation is that the information content of various labels is rarely treated with equal attention by the editors of *EFL* dictionaries: we notice that while some of them are almost universally included in the structure of the dictionaries others tend to be routinely ignored. And so, for example, it is noticeable that practicing lexicographers differ in their opinions concerning the importance of including and marking dialect words. In *MED* (2007), the regional dialects are not distinguished at all. At the same time, there is the label *dialect* given in *OALD* (2014) and *CCAD* (2009). In case of *LDCE* (2014), there are the following labels related to the dialect category: *BrE, AmE, AusE*, while in *CALD* (2008) we find: *Australian English, Canadian English, East African English, Northern English, Scottish English*.

At the same time, some of the labels are singular in the sense that they are employed only on individual occasions by one (or some) and not all (or many) other dictionary editors. In this context let us point to *MED* (2007) which provides 3 labels that occur in no other dictionary, and these are: *showing approval, showing disapproval, modal verb*. Simultaneously, these labels appear with certain modifications as *approving* and *disapproving* in case of *CALD* (2008), *LDCE* (2014), *OALD* (2014). The label *modal verb* appears in none of the dictionaries, except *MED* (2007). The label *very informal* used within the body of the dictionary, expresses intensification, and – although it is apparently close in meaning to the label *slang* – the latter is not used. Another label used only in case of one dictionary is *written* in *LDCE* (2014), explained as "used mainly in writing rather than in speech. When compared to formal used mainly in official situations, or by political or business organisations, or when speaking or writing to people in authority" (see *LDCE* 2014), one gets the impression that these two explain very much the same. Another observation worthy of comment is the fact that the system of labels worked out for *MED* (2007) is by no means detailed and all-embracing. In particular, it is striking to see that there is no special group of labels denoting different registers.

The survey of the labels that has been carried out in the foregoing shows that one may hardly speak of any consistency of either the system itself, or the usage of labelling systems in the dictionaries of current English. Let us now, for the sake of illustration, take a closer look at the sample of informal words and the labelling values attached to them within the body of the dictionaries under scrutiny.

Tab 1: Informal value markings of selected words in *EFL* dictionaries.

| lexical item | *LDCE* | *MED* | *CCAD* | *OALD* | *CALD* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *mate* | + | + | + | + | + |
| *quid* | + | + | + | + | + |
| *hooker* | + | + | + | + | + |
| *dude* | + | + | + | + | + |
| *shit* | + | + | + | + | + |
| *bloody* | - | + | + | + | + |
| *freak* | + | + | + | + | + |
| *moron* | + | + | + | + | + |

Tab 2: Usage labels provided for the informal words in *EFL* dictionaries.

| lexical item | *LDCE* | *MED* | *CCAD* | *OALD* | *CALD* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *mate* | informal | informal | informal | informal | informal |
| *quid* | informal | informal | informal | informal | informal |
| *hooker* | informal | informal | informal | informal | informal |
| *dude* | informal | informal | informal | slang | slang |
| *shit* | not polite | impolite | informal | taboo/slang | offensive |
| *bloody* | - | impolite | rude | taboo/slang | very informal |
| *freak* | informal | informal | informal | informal | informal |
| *moron* | informal | informal | offensive | informal | informal |

As may be noticed, the usage labels given in various dictionaries differ substantially with respect to the very system employed by individual lexicographic editorial teams. Consequently, it seems reasonable to clarify the usage labelling practices in case of each work of reference, as well as group the usage labels and their explanations.

**Ways of optimization: In search of a unified labelling scheme**

What we have already stressed many a time is that we have a strong conviction that the information labels should be included in the structure of current dictionaries, but in their present form they appear, and – in actual practice – turn out to be less useful as they are supposed, meant and expected to be. In general, the reasons of this state of affairs are varied and many. To start with, all dictionaries have their own criteria for marking words or word senses, which consequently causes problems related to accurate labelling policy. As indicated by Stain (2002, p. 14) "it is admittedly very difficult to make objective assessment on the social status of the word but it seems [...] that we need much more research in this area". Also, Leech and Nessi (1999, p. 259) admit that dictionaries "fall well short of perfection". Attempts to improve usage labelling devices in *EFL* dictionaries have been given much stimulus from the work of Atkins & Rundell (2008, p. 496) who admit openly that "labelling is an area of lexicography where there is more work to be done".

When we turn to the question of how lexicographers determine usage labelling, we see that practicing lexicographers consistently acknowledge the difficulty of labelling words. Ptaszyński (2010, p. 411) clarifies that "lexicographers have been searching in vain for an exhaustive and precise answer to the questions of which words to label in what kind of dictionaries and how to do it". As shown in the previous section, and emphasised by the same scholar, these difficulties "stem from the lack of firm theoretical basis for the application of diasystematic information in dictionaries" (Ptaszyński, 2010, p. 411). Certainly, it could be argued that the virtual non-existence of commonly agreed on criteria for usage labelling is dependent only on formal theoretical framework or rather functional approach, as suggested by practicing lexicographers.

As we have seen, some of the labels that are proposed in current *EFL* dictionaries overlap, and consequently labels that may be considered synonymous are assigned to unconnected words. The actual length of labels should be limited to one word (as the abbreviations and longer usage notes are rather cryptic). First of all, it is plausible to develop and propose a new systematized and unified schedule of usage labels that could be successfully employed in the structure of the existing *EFL* dictionaries. We find it justified to single out the following main categories according to which labels could be grouped as follows:

41. attitiudinal,
42. style,
43. field,

44. regional,
45. axiological

It should be noted that, as a consequence of the lack of clear distinction between the parameter of style and register, an attempt to account for this shortcoming has been made, and it is the category termed field that serves the purpose. What is more, in order to formalize the evaluative colouring with which various lexical items are charged, we propose the label termed axiological.

The proposal made here should be treated as a voice in the lexicographic discussion rather than an attempt to provide a final all-solving key in the infinitude of the theoretical and practical lexicographic ventures currently studied. Yet, what we hope to have made abundantly clear is that the diversity of English vocabulary can hardly be approached, and should by no means be approached, from the simplistic perspective of its correct/incorrect usage solely. Consequently, as a follow-up to this proposal, one may expect that some universal labelling system be formulated one day.

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JoLaCE

*Journal of Language and Cultural Education, 2018, 6(1)*
*ISSN 1339-4584*
*SlovakEdu*

sciendo

DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2018-0007

# Comparative Literature as Educational Means of Understanding and Communication

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**Abstract**

The paper explores possibilities of a more intensive use of comparative literature within literary education in which the adoration of national literature prevails together with the abstraction of the concept of world literature. This means putting more emphasis on area and comparative approaches. Emphasising comparative literature may bring in a search and respect for otherness, since it is not connected to any national language and literature, to any concrete tradition and culture, but refers to their variability, with the aim of explaining the contact with the other, which can be close as well as different. More effort should be put especially on the attempt to point to the interconnectedness and mutual influencing. The so-called educational, didactically applied comparatistics is a field of comparative literary studies aimed at overcoming binary, ethnolinguistic opposition of "the national" and "the worldly" in education, and, as far as literary education is concerned, it could become a new methodological stimulus. As a methodological basis of this educational comparative studies is being used the hermeneutic understanding of otherness, though not the interculturally remote one, but a close otherness which exists, for example, in the intertextuality of a particular work emerging within the framework of the "neighbourhood" of common Central European area. What is meant here is, first of all, the so-called innovated imagology, concentrated on the interpretation of images by means of which verbal text renders foreign countries and nations. The overall meaning of imagological impulses can also be seen on the weakening of the opposition of the traditional categories of "national" and "world", as well as in the overcoming of the ideas of some cultures being more developed at the expense of other ones. Applying the area and comparative approach, educational comparative studies may facilitate the dialogue of literature as art also with other spheres, and have integrating as well as didactic function, or develop the feeling of mutuality and the ability to "compare", not only in linguistic and ethnic circumstances, but in the value-contextual ones as well.

**Key words**: comparative studies; educational, didactically applied comparative studies; imagology; category "national" and "world" in literary education

In literary education, there have been a tradition of putting main emphasis on national literature, on its history and individual analyses, to create historical

consciousness and a receptive horizon of learners through a normatively defined set of texts. They reflect the linking of writers also with the history of a nation anchored in certain state legislative framework. This, many times "defensive" and still surviving concept, typical for small countries of Central and Eastern Europe, is explained to the students as an integral part of national culture involved in the struggle for social and political independence, i.e. in ideological struggles as well. But at the turn of the 20th and 21st century it already lost its educational, didactic subtext, since nowadays the writers may write out of various, including non-ideological, reasons, not only because they want "to fight" for their nation. World literature, that is, in fact, great, developed Eurocentric literary "powers," enters individual national "canons" selectively, and often as unreachable models which are only slowly approximated (cf. Neri 1999, p. 250-252). National literature in its so-called "school" understanding has up to now meant a relatively "closed" unit written (most often) in a national "literary" language, emerging at certain time and place with the purpose to affect especially home readers. On the other hand, world literature does not have its specific place, genesis, or a circle of recipients determined in advance, it cannot even define its language – if we do not accept the view that, for example, written in English (i.e. in the currently most preferred language) means "world". The inclusion of this or that text to the pantheon of world literature collides with the lack of clearness as regards contemporary literary terminology, which cannot be transferred to literary education in a simplified form.

One of the possible ways out of the situation, or a kind of compromise between the adoration of national literature and the abstract concept of world literature, could be the departure from strict defining of national literature at the background of the "distant" world literature and the attempt to point to the linkages and mutual influencing. First, this methodological approach would, however, require a greater application not of literary-historical and literary theoretical knowledge (which is often limited by the national context), but the area and comparative approach in literary education. This means to discuss, in the case of classical "national" texts, for example, the possibilities of their "worldliness" (from the aspect of literary and aesthetic quality, which can change), and, in the case of the so called "world works," to more closely determine their relation to a concrete time and space. It is so because comparing, both along the horizontal as well as vertical axis, is one of the basic methodological procedures in social sciences. The comparison of individual phenomena creates conditions for generalising as well as distinguishes essential elements from non-essential. The greater application of comparative procedures in literary education may also bring the search and appreciation of the so-called

otherness, since also in the "close" national literatures there are agreements as well as differences. Comparative literature is thus not bound to one national language and literature, to a concrete tradition, culture and region, but draws on their variability in unity, and should explain the contact with the other, which can be close, as well as different (cf. Gáfrik & Zelenka, 2015, p. 79). More emphasis should be paid to the highlighting of mutual interconnectedness and mutual influencing. Taking into account the principle that the text exists so far as it is spatially and temporally perceived at the background of other texts becomes, in comparative literature, one of the conditions of interpretation which explores agreements and differences, relations and "distances" between texts and cultures. The explanation of the comparing of literatures and cultures, understood in this way, results from the fact that the one who compares is positioned „into the middle of things," he/she is a mediator of the process which is carried out through reading, understanding or translations, or, generally speaking, through having pleasure from reading as if from the "culture of hospitality" (the interpreting subject, including the learner, hermeneutically accepts the "participation" of the foreign in oneself).

In our case it is associated with the respecting of unique cultural circumstances of Central Rurope in which national literatures were administratively, linguistically and ethnically interconnected, influencing one another. A significant role was played here by the principle of the struggle for national rights and self-determination within the existence of a large multinational state unit (Habsburg Monarchy), and understanding literary development as a wider, internally arranged and receptively open "interliterary," net into which enter, within the category of time (history of literature, literary history) and the category of space (national literature, Central European area), individual phenomena, works, personalities in mutual relations, not only as parallel representatives of the phenomenon of the "national" (cf. Juvan, 2006, p. 18). In educational practice and the tradition of Central European literary cultures, so far it has been taken into account only to a lesser degree that the category of national literature is, to some extent, relative, since the history of literature in this space of Central Europe does not take place only from the aspect of simple ordering, but is a problematic and discontinuous "story" of different (Slavonic - non-Slavonic) societies, having several parallels, breaking points and "whitespaces". For example, explaining the concept of Slovak literature in schools means paying attention not only to the works of Slovak authors written in Latin, Czech or Hungarian, but it needs to include minority literature as well, i. e. the literature of national minorities which did not originate in the Slovak territory, but outside of it (for example the works of the Lower Lands Slovaks). A

comparative didactic explanation should – not only in the given case – explain that the complementarity of several literary discourses, for example in the Central European or Mediterranean discourse, coexistence of several languages, poetics and religions, and presence of several ethnic minorities, historically created here a kind of "interliterary net" with a specific communication. In this "net" there appear, in addition to the members of national minorities, also the ethnically linguistically "unclassifiable" authors who, for example, stood on a threshold of two directions, or on the border line of two cultures (c.f. Zelenková, 2009). This also evokes a question of how the circulating themes, artistic traditions, ideas or texts themselves (without regard to the linguistic and ethnic criteria) contributed not only to the understanding of "national" specificities, but also forms, ways and modes of participation in the origin and functioning of this "interliterary net". And thus the didactic understanding and treatment of this process hits upon very many interpretive difficulties, sometimes even misunderstandings or communicational "noise".

A certain possibility for a new, or alternative model of the teaching of literature, its history and a whole complex of literary life, could be a still emerging new discipline labelled as didactics of comparatistics. Its competencies and thematic demarcation (as an independent field) are, in Central European context, being created especially in Polish theoretical discourse. Even though Polish comparative studies does not have such a long and great tradition of comparative study of literature as the Czecho-Slovak one, its development resulted from a strong national philology (domestic Polish studies), which since its beginnings was paying attention, for example, to questions like the aspect of Romanticism in the works of A. Mickiewicz, J. Słowacki, C. Norwid, etc. and further affected various forms of Europen Romanticism. The Czech and Slovak comparative studies were, in fact, developing outside national literature and relied either on Slavonic, or non-Slavonic writings. To the methodology of teaching comparative studies was devoted also the third convention of comparatists, carried out on 30th – 31st March 2016 at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun (c.f. Kola & Wołk, 2016), at which the set aim was not only to evaluate the works of national literature from the viewpoint of interliterariness (c.f. Zelenková, 2008), to interpret them not only from Central European or European perspective, but to analyse how the educationally applied area of comparative studies aims at overcoming the binary, ethno-linguistic opposition of "nationality" and "worldliness" in school practice. The convention confirmed inevitability of a reform of basic school plans as well as higher education curricula in the sense of "linguistically-ethnic and generic-thematic" borders. It highlighted the need of developing such unique reading competencies which

would lead to contextual reading, i.e. to perceiving a concrete work of national literature at the synchronic and diachronic background of the thematically close texts coming from different literatures, creating aesthetic norm of a European canon. This approach must be conditioned by a conscious weakening of the binary opposition the national – the worldly, that is, of an interpretive difference between a work included only to the system of national literature and a so-called generally known, world text.

Another way towards a change of traditional interpretation, closed into national borders, can be the approximation of educational comparatistics to media studies as well as the search for the intertext and generic transformations, for example, of a concrete character, concrete motif, and so on, in an extensive temporal and spatial framework. What is meant by this is the carrying out of an intertextual communication, when a work of art (or its part) becomes a basis (most often thematic) for the origin of another text. The analysis of the meaning of a literary work thus is done not only on the basis of a receptive impression and experience from the read text, but is created through the intertextual linking as well. This type of interpretive act in the communication process is suitable not only through the so-called project and integrated teaching (see Binterová, Hašek, Karvánková, Pech, & Petrášková, 2016, p. 14) of contemporary literature and art, that uses, for example, postmodern narrative strategies (citations, parodies, allusions, and so on), but also to the posttext existence, i.e. of the so-called classic work in TV, radio and theatre adaptations. In this case it is ideal if the synchronic and diachronic circle of linking transcends the border of one national literature.

As an example, one can mention a classical work of Slovak literature of the 19th century *Faustiáda* by Ján Záborsky (1864). It is a grotesque parody of a traditional heroic epic poem, situated into a fictitious Slovak, "noodledom" small city between the Tisza and the Danube. Through the ironizing hyperbole, the author depicts here discords of political life and also creates an interliterary net of reminiscences of Dante, Swift, Rabelais, Cervantes, Milton, Goethe, Kollár, etc. It is possible to identify here two dominant circles of intertextual linking, towards the domestic and world literature. One can find here affirmative allusion to the comedy of the Slovak author from the national revival period Ján Chalupka entitled *Kocourkovo*, *aneb Jen abychom v hanbě nezůstali* (1830), which is complemented by a controversial response to the Goethe´s *Faust´s* becoming a parodied symbol of tragic break from reality, resulting from the inability to resist the political pressure of the time (see Žilka, 2015, p. 57). A comparatively tuned interpretation with a didactic subtext can thus transcend the "closed off" ethnic-linguistic borders and enter the "interliterary net" of European cultural tradition.

If one tries to sketch out the methodological lines of a still forming didactic comparatistics, its starting point is the hermeneutic understanding of otherness, though not the interculturally distant one, but the close otherness that exists, for example, in the intertextuality of a work originated within the framework of the "neighbourhood" of common Central European area. This is the subject of research especially of the so-called innovated imagology aimed at interpreting the images ("les images") through which foreign countries and nations are captured in a verbal text (see Zelenková, 2016). These images are not an immediate reflection of reality, but have a nature of myths, stereotypes and communication models which manifest themselves as certain ideological schemes, especially the relations between neighbours. It is neither, however, a psychological study of the national character, nor a sociological bearing of reception responses. The basic issue in imagological interpretation of a literary texts is not what qualities this or that national literature has, but what subjective qualities are attributed to individual texts and which interest ethnic and social groups benefit from the individual functions of this text. From imagological perspective, the texts are not divided based on the aesthetic or linguistic aspect, but on the importance and topicality of the theme, and especially on the reception effect on the circle of recipients. The educational aspect may be seen in the fact that the history of images and ideas of what the individuals and groups think of themselves, how they perceive and value one another, are relative and often do not correspond with reality. They are just certain "metadescriptions", which, however, influence (not only) the neighbouring nations.

Imagological impulses are also used by educational comparatistics. The beginnings of imagology originated in the German-French discourse, i.e. between the two nations whose rivalry was during the centuries influencing not only the Central European, but world history as well. However, in the 1950s and 1960s Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle began, after the WW II, creating symbolic foundations of the unified Europe, and their previous competition was to be transferred from the political-ideological sphere to the sphere of artistic and intellectual discourse, to the art of language and culture (Sinopoli 2009: 262). A common group of German and French philologists, historians and literary scholars was selecting works in both literatures form the 18$^{th}$ to 20$^{th}$ century and was trying to capture the themes of mutual "seeing each other", that is, how French characters and institutions are depicted in German texts, and vice versa. After several years, already first results brought a surprising finding – the "images" which were over the centuries influencing political confrontation (on one side Germans as a symbol of militancy and barbarism, on the other one the careless and emotional French, etc.) are in fact long forming stereotypes which,

however, have no bearing on reality. In the Central European territory, the imagological method of educational comparatistics can also explain the Slavonic-Slavonic relations (Russian x Poles, Czechs x Slovaks, etc.) or Slavonic-non-Slavonic ones (Czechs x Germans, Slovaks x Hungarians, etc.). In all the cases, they are "neighbours" with specific relations, not only within a mutuality, but non-mutuality as well. The imagological focus of educational comparatistics can thus be used at schools as well, e.g. in the study of national proverbs, phraseological expressions or anecdotes reflecting the supposed "character forming" qualities of individual ethnic and social groups or individuals, etc. For example, the analysis of Jewish humour created by non-Jews (especially Germans) can, in some cases, reveal either the hidden or even open elements of antisemitism and xenophobia, or point out to ethnic stereotypes which draw on a generally accepted idea of Jews, leading, for example, to the physical (big nose, prominent ears) or inner characteristics (stinginess, greediness, etc.).

At the beginning of the 21st century, with regard to the globalisation of the ideologically non-bipolar Europe within the European Union, human sciences, including comparative literary studies, began concentrating on the search for "a new language" of its "unity", i.e. searching also whether there exists something as "European" literature, or a consciousness of literary belonging to European values based on the ancient legacy and Christian civilisation. From this point of view, the easiest and fastest way could be the creation of generically, chronologically or thematically interconnected anthological books of reference and translations which would be based on the principle of geographically-cultural area (i.e. a kind of virtual poly-literary system), and which would, despite the multilinguality of individual territories and texts, lead to the creation of a specific interliterary community (cf Ďurišin, 1995, p. 73). This aim of the methodology of teaching comparatistics could possibly lead to the creation of a kind of common European reading book functioning at schools, especially in higher grades in parallel language mutations. The entire suppressing of auditive approach would probably be not real, and a certain counterbalance could be represented here by a selection of extracts from individual national literatures according to a parity aesthetic key set in advance, e.g. in the number of three to five texts, but irrespective of the measure of aesthetic "development" or "greatness" of a national literature. Thus, in general without regard to the existing "framing" to an idea of some kind of accepted European pantheon of literary texts. This should be gradually formed by this anthology into a dynamic and flexible phenomenon. One must be aware of a danger of the extent of time (from ancient literature up to the postmodernism of 21st century) and the multilingual nature of the texts, which should be balanced by the quality of

translations and their selection, which, in turn, should give preference in individual national literatures both to the authors on the threshold of cultures with a variable linguistic code, and the cosmopolitan authors drawing on common European civilisation tradition. It is understandable, and I am aware of it, that the "de-nationalising" realisation of the task and the problematic nature of the selection and creation of such anthology would run into several technical and translatological difficulties resulting from the variability and great number of texts. But despite this, the so far only possible attempt to include a European reading book into the schools of European nations could become one of the tasks of the methodologists of comparatistics.

As mentioned above, the sense of the use of comparatistics in literary education may be seen in the weakening of the opposition of traditional categories of the "national" and the "world", in fact, it is the overcoming of national ideas of the dominance or development level of some cultures at the expense of other ones. A non-ideological study of certain "images" incessantly circulating among the nations of Central Europe, as it is understood by the imagological orientation of comparative study of literature, relativizes the normative understanding of a nation and national language in literary education. The educational compartistics may use the area and comparative approach in the explanation of the history of Central Europe to make possible a "dialogue" of literature as art also with other spheres, for example, with political or economic sphere (integration function), and may have an education aspect as well, since criticism of nationalism leads to a greater mutual tolerance and understanding (didactic function). At the same time, it also provides an instruction for alternative reading of generally known reader book texts, through a possible revealing of hidden layers in a text (aesthetic and axiological function). And finally, it may also develop a consciousness fellowship and an ability to "compare" (ethical-moral function), i.e. to perceive reality around oneself not only in linguistically-ethnic, but value-contextual relations.

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JoLaCE

*Journal of Language and Cultural Education, 2018, 6(1)*
*ISSN 1339-4584*
*SlovakEdu*

sciendo

DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2018-0008

# The Contentious Debate over the Language Literature Division

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**Abstract**

In the early 20th century literature was woven into language curriculum to endorse learners to acquire language structures and perform drills successfully. The actual use of the target language upstaged grammar instruction as the primary focus of language learning in the fields of language pedagogy. In the late 1960s and 1970s literature fell into disuse on the grounds that it was not in conformity with standard grammar rules and the widespread perception was that literature was complex and inaccessible for learners. In the late 1970s and 1980s a decisive swing against literature was experienced and literature came into prominence to enable learners to make huge leaps in language learning. Learners can reap many benefits from the inclusion of literature in foreign language teaching. In attempting to support their arguments of incorporating literature into language teaching a considerable number of researchers offer a number of reasons why literature is an ideal medium for extending language use. By means of inclusion of literature in language teaching, learners are at an advantage to acquire profound knowledge of language. The present paper investigates the language-literature division and focuses on the three phases with regard to the inclusion of literature in language teaching. The supportive role of literature in the development of language awareness is another issue the paper deals with.

**Key words**: language, literature, division, phase, language awareness

## Definition of the Term 'Literature'

It has always been difficult to pin down a definition of literature. Among the various suggested definitions, Carter (1995, p. 102) suggests that literature is "a body of written texts, produced by a culture and highly valued within that culture over a period of time". Williams (1977, p. 80) characterizes literature as a special text that embraces "full, central, immediate human experience". Swaffar (1992, p. 245) focuses on the view that literature repudiates accepted social conventions but rather "challenges cultural norms …enables the readers to reflect about cultural stereotypes". She opines readers are forced to rethink accepted norms by literature. Literature serves as an ideal means for expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest (Scott & Huntington, 2002). Pugh (1989) posits that literature

is a writing that preeminently reflects in depth and quality aspects of the human experience which is illuminated by an observer. Literature is a use of language to articulate experiences and perceptions, to transmit thoughts and feelings, and to verbalize points of view through inviting readers "to draw conclusions from characters and events, to relate thematic truths to their own lives and values" (Morgan, 1993, p. 496). Literature is rendering of life. It has boundless possibilities of discovering ourselves and others. It brings to the fore the use of various angles of vision in examining thoughts, beliefs and actions (Langer, 1995). The notion of becoming a well-rounded person lies in the learners' appreciation of literature (Morgan, 1993). Interestingly, literature opens up infinite possible worlds to the learners (Meijer, 2002) and puts to the fore life and human nature.

**The Language Literature Division**

The language-literature divide known as "lang-lit split" (Scott & Tucker, 2002, p. xvii) has long been contentious. Communicative and literary goals are at odds with each other in foreign language teaching (Kramsch, 1985). The widespread assumption is that literature should not be taught to learners without attaining a high level of language proficiency; additionally, literature is merely a tool to design language knowledge through passive reading (Hall, 2005). The dilemma whether literature can contribute to language learning is a controversial issue. On the one hand communicative goal reinforces the desired result of achieving negotiation with people. Literary goal on the other hand considers literary texts "as finished products, to be unilaterally decoded, analyzed, and explained or … to illustrate grammatical rules and enrich the reader's vocabulary" (Kramsch, 1985, p. 356). Starting in the 1990s language-literature divide shifted towards teaching language, literature and culture as a continuous whole to promote advanced-level language abilities (Paesani, 2011). Literature commenced to re-emerge from exile conducing Maley (1989, p. 59) to announce that "literature is back - but wearing different clothes". There has been renewed interest in the use of literature in the language classroom. Soon after Swaffar's (2006) redefinition of communicative competence as the ability to read, write, listen, speak and develop critical reflections about cultural aspects, literary texts have been situated at the core of the curriculum and such language skills as reading, writing, listening and speaking are regarded as complementary skills (Paesani, 2011; Kern, 2008). Henning (1993, p. 24) also satisfies this concern advocating that literature must be woven into language curriculum as "students can develop a full range of linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge and sensitivity".

The inclusion of literature in English language teaching is distinguished between three phases: traditional, functional and discourse stylistics (Durant,

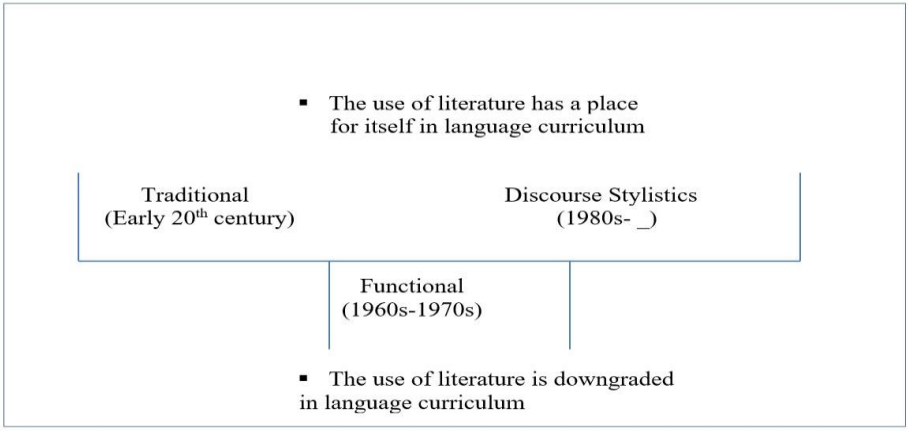
1993). In the 'traditional' phase the use of literature was considered worthy of concern and appropriate to the language classroom because "literary language was superior to spoken language" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 15). In the early 20th century foreign language learning meant a close study of the literature (Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000). In the Grammar-Translation Method, the main language teaching tool was literature, and literary texts were used to master grammatical rules (Duff & Maley, 1990). Literary works served as "illustrations of the grammatical rules" (Duff & Maley, 1990, p. 3) and samples of good writings to enable learners acquire language structures and perform drills successfully (Durant, 1995). Literature held a place of prestige and was the ultimate goal of foreign language study on the grounds that there was exclusive focus on reading and writing (Paesani, 2011).

In the 'functional' phase, which covers the 1960s and 1970s the Grammar-Translation Method fell into disuse and the use of literature in the language classroom was downgraded. Though it was not entirely removed from language classes, there was a widespread perception that literature was complex and inaccessible for learners. Topping (1968) supports the exclusion of literature from language curriculum claiming that literature does not play a supportive role in improvement of language proficiency nor is it in conformity with standard grammar rules. To him, the syntax and lexical items in literary texts constitute a largely disruptive influence in language classes which directly constrains teaching of standard grammar. Another argument against the use of literature in language instruction is evident in the belief of Allen (1976) who notes that deep division exists between linguistics and literature. The presence of literature waned and its use resulted rather insufficient due to the view that "a text which is extremely difficult on either a linguistic or cultural level will have few benefits" (Vincent & Carter, 1986, p. 214). With the onset of communicative language teaching (henceforth CLT), literature was left out of language classroom and place was given to the development of communicative competence. Literary texts were eliminated from language classes and the emphasis was placed on mainly teaching language skills. Even then, some voices rose that there was place for literature in L2 classroom for instance; Marckwardt (1978) argues that literature has a 'justifiable and profitable' place in language learning. However, literature was challenged by the notion that it had little functional application. The Grammar-Translation Method was replaced by methods which aim at preparing and teaching learners manageable structure and vocabulary. Multifarious developments in language instruction did not allow the Direct Method, the Audio-Lingual Method, Suggestopedia, the Silent Way, and Total Physical Response to utilize literary works in the foreign language classroom due to intricacies of literature. New

findings in language acquisition began to question the prestige of literature and literary texts grew in rather inefficiency in language classes.

In the 'discourse stylistics' phase which emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s literature made a place for itself in language teaching once again. This is the period which experienced "a decisive swing against literature in English as a foreign language" (Collie & Slater, 1987, p. 2). The mid 1980s felt the need to provide basic content knowledge for language learners therefore; literary texts came into prominence "to teach the necessary strategies and study habits to enable them to undergo highly demanding reading requirements in most tertiary level courses" (Gilroy-Scott, 1983, p. 1). This phase suggested that it was important to study a wide range of literary texts to promote CLT. A period of distrust has been overcome by literature and it has been recast as a useful medium in the development of communicative competence. As such, the reconfigured view of literature has reclaimed its primacy at all levels of foreign language instruction (Paesani, 2011) as literature covers "the greatest skills a language user can demonstrate" (Bassnett & Grundy, 1993, p. 7) and the usefulness of literature enables learners to make huge leaps in language learning.

Fig. 1: Durant distinguishes the inclusion of literature in language teaching into three phases




Kramsch and Kramsch (2000) examine the role of literature in foreign language teaching in five stages. Before World War I, literature played a preeminent role in language teaching and up to 1918, literature prevailed as an uncontested source. By and large, language learning was concerned with canonical literature. The first

stage began with the emergence of social revolution after World War I ended. Literature had value and became a contributing force in social arguments of the day. The second stage began with the Coleman report of 1929 and reading fell into the domain of education; hence became the most effective way of acquiring foreign languages and replaced literature. Canonical literature was abandoned. Although teaching literature survived, the third stage that began with the end of World War II discarded literature as a noncontributing force in language instruction. The rising influence of linguistics highlighted speaking hence ability to read literary works was replaced by ability to speak the language. The fourth stage began when the National Defense Education Act in 1958 issued the split between foreign language teaching and literature achievement. Linguistics emerged as a significant discipline for language teaching. The fifth stage began after President Carter's report in 1979 and literary texts served as authentic texts which had prominence in linguistic and cultural proficiency.

Exposure to literature in the language classroom is still a matter of debate (Widdowson, 1985). A number of researchers prefer delaying the use of literature to develop language proficiency until learners become linguistically sophisticated. For instance; Davis, Gorell, Kline and Hsieh (1992, p. 321) argue that learners with low levels of proficiency in the target language are incapable of handling literature because it includes "highly abstract vocabulary, complex syntactical patterns, and sophisticated style and content". Similarly, Lee (1986) questions the use of literature in beginner-level and intermediate-level learners to promote reading skills. Edmondson (1997) presents several arguments against the use of literature in the language classroom and suggests that literary texts do not have any advantage over other texts to offer language teaching. He argues that literature does not have anything special to boost motivation to foster language learning. However, there is a growing body of researches which support the use of literature at all levels in language teaching (Kramsch, 1985; Shook, 1996; Ghosn, 2002; Weist, 2004; Liaw, 2001; Davidheiser, 2007). They all argue that the use of literature in language classes is an ideal medium for improving linguistic fluency, cultural awareness and critical thinking.

**Raising Language Awareness through Literary Texts**

A broad definition of language awareness has been clinched as knowledge of language. Surrounding the definition of language awareness, views reflected by linguists refer to two distinct senses, knowledge and awareness. Language awareness is "the knowledge, perception and attitude of the nature and function of language" (Chan, 1999, p.40). Literature is repository of language knowledge inasmuch as it triggers learners to explore different aspects and functions of the

language. Donmall (1985) defines language awareness as "a person´s sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life" (p.7). Language awareness refers to enhanced consciousness of the language forms and functions (Carter, 2003). Language awareness promotes the understanding of what has been discovered about language (Preston, 1996). Van Lier (1995, p. xi) attempts to define language awareness from a pragmatics point of view and formulates it as realizing "how language is used as a tool". James (1999, p. 102) clinches the definition of language awareness as "having or gaining explicit knowledge about and skill in reflecting on and talking about one's own language". The concept of language awareness is associated with conscious discernment and sensitivity in language learning and teaching. Language awareness is characterized by exploration of benefits that can be deduced from development of a good knowledge about language. It exposes learners to a conscious understanding of language itself; in addition, language awareness develops an impetus to conscious perception of how language is learnt and used (Ellis, 2012).

On the other hand, language awareness denotes "the awareness that learners have of language, independently of conscious reflection on language" (Nicholas, 1991, p. 78). In this sense, language awareness shapes learners' psycholinguistic endowment (Little, 1997). To put the matter at its most basic, these two phenomena differ from one another. While language awareness in the psycholinguistic sense is derived from innate capacity for language acquisition, language awareness in the educational sense ensues from language knowledge teachers impart to learners through schooling (Little, 1997).

Eric Hawkins (1984, p. 150), the founder of language awareness movement in the UK, sees language awareness as an important attribute to gain "insight into pattern". There exists a consensus view that language awareness is imparted through schooling (Little, 1997), and "draws upon metalanguage to explain aspects of the language code in the classroom" (Masny, 1997, p. 105). It should be borne in mind that, language awareness, which has been strongly advocated as a consequential component in teacher education (Wright & Bolitho, 1993), appertains to "teachers' explicit knowledge of language" (Andrews, 1997, p. 148), in this case teachers are recipients of language awareness. Language awareness enables teachers to draw their attention to similarities and differences between the native language and the target language (Masny, 1997), in order that "contrasts are not seen as separate and unconnected linguistic accidents, but as related by implication" (James, 1994, p. 209). Language awareness, which is bound up with language education, aids learners in language learning and thereby viewed as a form of consciousness-raising (Masny, 1997).

The underlying idea is that literature can increase language awareness. Literature is a resource to endorse learners to become cognizant of patterns in texts and linguistic features of the language. This approach lays emphasis on talking about language both in foreign language and mother tongue. The notion of language awareness backs learning all other aspects of language structure as they pave the way for the learning of the target language (Lasagabaster, 1999). Many studies brought to light the fact that knowing about language ushers in one's performance (Leow, 1997; Schmidt, 1995; Lasagabaster, 1999). Linguistic elements through experiential and meaning-focused language learning do not result in target-like levels (Doughty & Williams, 1998). Language learners do not notice the gap between their output and model utterances; therefore, language awareness has been advocated to enable learners to analyze linguistic forms and functions (Lasagabaster, 1999).

Simplified or informational texts have some advantages to use for pedagogical purposes as they make language more accessible by stages (Chan, 1999). However, a predominant exposure to them limit deep processing and dilute the information because the use of these texts "simply manifests language usage, put it on show disposed in a way that makes minimal demands on thoughts" (Widdowson, 1984, p. 169). The introduction of complete original texts to learners helps them become effective language users. Learners are best stimulated when they raise awareness of the operation of language in texts. Literature has the potential to build language awareness because "it would seem natural to draw on literature as a means of teaching language" (Kramsch, 1994, p. 7), thereby it makes learners realize the meaning potential of language and in the creation of meaning by dealing with real examples learners enhance their language awareness. Complex texts offered by literature are assumed to be of benefit to generate multifaceted meanings behind the events; by means of this learners are alert to subtle differences in meanings (O'Sullivan, Davis, & Billington, 2015).

Language learners need to be presented "a continuum of texts including all kinds of examples of creative and purposeful plays with the resources of language" (McCarthy & Carter, 1994, p. 167). Literary texts embody the artistic and creative use of ordinary language "with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode: with irony, exposition, argument, narration, and so on (Collie & Slater, 1987, p. 4). The analysis of the creative uses of language by learners leads to propagation of more functional written or spoken forms of language. Lazar (1993) defends the merits of literature as a valuable resource to denote the awareness that learners have of language. According to the account she has given of language awareness through literature reading, interaction with literature endows learners' awareness of sequencing of discourse, and

relationship between words in terms of synonymity and opposition. To put the matter somewhat differently, literary encounter helps learners recognize different uses of language at different levels.

## Conclusion

Literature is a use of authentic and highly-skilled language that reflects human experience and it brings fore actions, thoughts, feelings and beliefs. Although the inclusion of literature in language teaching has long been contentious, it has prevailed as a contributing source. Incorporating literature in language teaching offers a motivating medium for profound knowledge acquisition. Literature provides an ideal context for language development because learners become cognizant of linguistic features of the language through literary texts.

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JoLaCE

Journal of Language and Cultural Education, 2018, 6(1)
ISSN 1339-4584
SlovakEdu

sciendo

DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2018-0009

# Organization of School Reading: the Role and Significance of Students' *Open Interpretations*

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**Abstract**

The following article is about cultural and literary education at school. Its point of reference are considerations regarding conditions of Polish education system in relation to Polish language classes. The article emerges from the need to seek solutions helpful in overcoming the reading crisis, which being conditioned by various cultural and social factors, is present at school and is expressed by the negation of mandatory reading material, as well as rejection of teaching model established in education. The author of this text attempts to reflect on the awareness of reading material which is used, or might be used in modern school. The criteria proposed in this article are related to the issue of choosing material suitable for reading. They can be used as a selection mechanism implemented at the stage of designing the process of teaching. Further parts of the text describe the ways of obtaining *open interpretations* from students in the process of education while designing introductory reading material classes. They can be treated as solutions which could have different functions, useful in terms of the quality of literary-cultural education. The article is complemented with the concept of planning the lesson based on the use of students' *open interpretations*, which if organised in a planned and conscious way, could stimulate students' participation and facilitate reading while dealing with literature discussed at school.

**Key words**: education, teacher, student, literature at school, open interpretations

## Introduction

No one should be convinced that the main foundation of education in terms of culture and literature is a live and direct contact of young people with a book. It conditions the development of adequate cultural competences and allows conscious reception of the world – it is the key to understand and value culture itself as well as the way of building up identity and a vital element of conscious personality formation. This is not the time and place to elaborate such obvious notions here. It is also obvious that school plays a vital role in initiation to reading and shaping positive reading habits. By implementing particular social

duties, it is responsible for cultural education of next generations. The school is based on institutional coercion which is guaranteed by the state and functions within the conditions of mandatory education, which aims to ensure completion of educational tasks.

Reading at school is also conditioned by coercion mechanisms. It assumes education based on reading particular number of books, their titles being decided by governing bodies of Ministry of Education or teachers performing their educational duties. Such conditions do not necessarily facilitate reading as well as literary and cultural education which, in Polish system of education, is done during Polish language classes. The subject itself includes the knowledge of language, literature and other various fields of culture. One of the negative effects of such a situation is a gradual decline of reading in Poland, which can be observed both in students and adults. It is proven by routine research carried out as part of duties of National Library of Poland (Zasacka, 2014, 2008; Koryś, 2017) and by the level of overall literary knowledge of secondary or high school students. Obviously, there are many reasons for such state of things and this cannot only be ascribed to the negative impact of mandatory reading material at schools. Among out-of-school elements influencing such a situation one has to mention the influence of media and new media (Manovich, 2006), domination of paradigms shaped around mass culture and characteristic socio-cultural changes in postmodern world. Formation of new types of postmodern identities (Melosik, 2010, p. 295-312), usually opposing traditional cultural paradigms based on symbolic violence, by principle assumes turning away from this tradition, which uses language as its natural tool. Globalisation that has a direct influence on spreading such tendencies, obviously opposes cultural paradigms cultivated in educational institutions. These general problems and phenomena taking place in global environment condition the existence and intensification of such problems, which can be found at school itself. Their embodiment causes resistance towards school reading material which is usually connected with coercion mentioned above and axiology contradictory to the image brought by cultural postmodernity. It is worth examining these problems more carefully, as they already find their reflection in reading.

## "Old" and "new" reading material. Canon problems

The problem with reading described above stirs up a discussion about reading material at school. A dilemma constantly discussed in Polish cultural and literary education is the question of canon, which is most often referred to as the list of works having acclaimed ideological and artistic value that, at the same time, are the representatives of particular literary periods and trends, condition

cultural transmission of next generations, and allow understanding within the nation or European collectivity influenced by Mediterranean culture. The voices of canon supporters, who for many years have seen it as the point of reference for further cultural choices of young people (Janus & Sitarz, 2009, p. 61-64; Klejnocki, 2012, p. 305-307), the element requiring extension (Zając, 2014, p. 390-398) are mixed with justified fears of reading crisis which is a fact (for instance Bortnowski, 2009, p. 135-136). Its main victim is most of all classic literature. Its reading at school stirs opposition of underage readers and fear in teachers themselves, who are aware of their students' attitudes and realise the difficulties when reading great, although difficult and demanding books from the canon chosen as reading material at schools. The problem becomes the question of existence of classical literature at school and, when assuming its integral part in education, the choice of books which are vital as well as mentally and psychologically available to students. Finally, it is the question of ways of confronting students with such works.

Another problem related to the issue of reading material is the existence of modern literature at school. I am referring here to acclaimed works which have not been discovered for school. Secondly, the works written within the last twenty or thirty years, which are close to modern reality. Finally, the works which are chosen by students themselves and are/ could be proposed by them as reading material for classes. These are sanctioned by *Core curriculum* to a very small degree. In addition, their presence at school, which could meet the reading demands, would be at the expense of desirable classical literature. Nonetheless, as surveys from 2015 conducted by the Polish Ministry of Education show, such works have the power to draw young readers (Dąbrowska, 2015). Another problem is the variety of such works in terms of their artistic quality, especially books proposed by students, which can stir up justified doubts related to their use at school. However, they can be the foundations for the dialogue at school, can break the unwillingness to read and give hope to stimulate reading motivation and consequently, provide the chance to mature towards more serious, culturally meaningful literature.

The situation pictured above complicates the considerations regarding cultural and literary education at school. It presents it as being torn between tradition and modernity, subject duties and the needs of students, and finally, between coercion and freedom (Kłakówna, 2003). This is the area where educational process among notions takes place, where interpersonal relationships take shape and the process of personality formation of both the teacher and the student happens.

**A positive programme – the principles of reading at school and reading material selection criteria**

It is possible to propose a positive programme in relation to the problems described above. One that is connected with literary and cultural education, and above all, with reading/lack of reading at school. Agnieszka Kłakówna, in accordance with the concept of anthropocentrically-oriented education promoted by her and which aims at subjectivity of both teacher and student, pointed out a different way of looking at the matter. Instead of canon of reading material, she highlighted the need to think about universal issues, problems which are present regardless of times, which stimulate thoughts of young readers in terms of existential "here" and "now" (Kłakówna, 2003, p. 109-147). However, selecting basic topics worth introducing at literature classes, despite highlighting different notions the teacher bears in mind, does not end his eternal dilemmas – what to read in order to combine ministerial/curriculum requirements, duties towards literary tradition (domestic and foreign), the needs, interest and capabilities of students, and finally, personal passions, interests of the teacher who has autonomous view on the value of culture surrounding him, including old and modern literature. Thereby, there is the need to think about distinguishing useful and justifiable criteria referring to the selection of language material. They should be both general and contain precise guidelines which can be applied to different levels of education and in a practical way help the teacher to decide about the reading texts to use at school. Selection of those texts should include at least few issues such as:

- the significance of the chosen book, its relation to real life situations of a modern man and the area of interest of young readers;
- taking into account the pleasure of reading, related to ludic function of literature, as well as matters connected with an emotional aspect of reading, which should engage readers' feelings, evoke a personal attitude towards it and the events and characters presented
- the importance of the artistic value of the work, which by representing various styles and conventions, allows to cherish it, gives aesthetic pleasure and, at the same time or above all, is the key to "reading the world", understanding the reality surrounding the man.

It should also be assumed that such consideration, being the result of observation of modern world and recognition of students' needs in terms of literature, would limit the significance of historical and theoretical-literary categories at school. Furthermore, university principles of linear presentation of cultural phenomena ought to be limited, and as a result, the text analysed in class

could be treated as examples of cultural, literary and historical processes connected to a particular literary activity from different periods or times. What is more, literature should not be perceived in categories of ready-made cultural syntheses, which only require being illustrated at school and can threaten the individual reception and unique interpretations of the students.

Taking into account objections above and including socio-cultural context in which young readers function, as well as assuming the significance of reading material in the process of forming personality, we can distinguish following criteria of text selection for classes about literature (Sporek, 2015, p. 89-102):

1) **Psychological criterion.** It is based on the conviction that the book should be adjusted to the intellectual and emotional capabilities of a student of a particular age. This idea is supported by developmental psychology, especially the knowledge of stages of forming the way people think (Schaffer, 2009, p. 181-2014), and the changes experienced in the area of emotions and feelings. Following this criterion means relating to the thought about composition and the plot structure of the work. It is important that the main characters of books read by students are ones who are the same age, have similar intellectual or emotional capabilities, and ones the readers could see themselves in, their own joy and worries, similar views on the world. Using such a criterion influences the choice of works which would emotionally engage young readers, provoke them to thinking and involvement in the events and situations described as well as the choices of literary characters.
2) **Criterion of attractiveness.** Its foundations should include above all reading motivations related to the content or shape of particular works. Thereby, such criterion values literature which is close to the students in terms of e.g. defined writing convention, possible references to the student's knowledge of e.g. popular culture, or referring to modern culture – events, facts, phenomena that allow to be updated in student's experiences. Thereby, it is preferred to use texts which are rather new or rediscovered in a new way, for instance in screen adaptations or in computer games. The latter being legitimised by mass culture, even if they put various reception barriers in front of the student (Uryga, 1982) can evoke high reading motivations, which will allow to neutralise difficulties of their reception.
3) **Language criterion.** The basis of distinguishing this criterion is the conviction that there is a language barrier that influences reading attitudes and the reception process in a negative way, as well as it complicates the possibilities of reaching meanings included in the text and makes it difficult to identify matters regarding composition. This is supported by past research (Uryga, 1982, p. 105-148) as well as observation of school practice now

(Kaczyńska, 2014, p. 319-328). This barrier can also include lexis, word formation and inflectional shape of text, syntax organisation or, on the level of style, the devices used that refer to knowledge of poetics or theory of literature. Accepting this criterion has to include the works which are available for the students in terms of language and the idea of neutralising potential language difficulties, which can occur while reading or during class discussion. It can be assumed that the choice of text for reading material should include such texts that are written in language close to the modern reader or such that are written from the perspective the students can relate to today. The second possibility can cause such a high reading motivation that it might limit the influence of language barrier on the reading process.

4) **Axiological-educational criterion.** It includes the axiological aspect of the book, which can fulfil educational tasks by inspiring the reader to discuss the questions of choice of values, life attitudes and certain life views. The works fulfilling this criterion include the ones that inspire thought on axiological preferences, and at the same time, they are free from intrusive indoctrination and naïve unambiguity. Valuable books here would include the ones that have the potential to uncover the complexity of the world, confront different attitudes and characters, and evoke intellectual and emotional activity in the readers. At the level of younger classes of primary school, we should chose the works showing affirmative model of upbringing. However, older readers should be confronted with such books that escape easy and obvious judgements and show the hardships of human life spread between extreme axiological qualities.
5) **Artistic-aesthetic criterion.** It mainly includes the artistic shape of a particular work, valorises it in terms of structure, composition, and language qualities combined with ideological surface. The work meeting those demands could be a catalyst evoking various aesthetic experiences and could facilitate the emergence of axiology related to its formal order. The text meeting this criterion should provide the reader with pleasure, make him sensitive to literary creation, and at the same time, present qualities which are acclaimed by literary researchers. Verification based on this criterion would also include the originality level, which could be defined in relation to tradition or cultural modernity. A valuable work is considered the one which, by using complex means of artistic expression, is likely to cause an intellectual and aesthetic reaction in the students and it refers to cultural experiences the underage reader is familiar with.

The criteria mentioned above require a brief complement. Taking into account the individual character of reading material reception, which is connected with competences of the teacher and students, and includes receptive experiences of young people, it could be said that there is one more criterion – **the criterion of single – individual didactic situation**. It could be influenced by a particular historical and geographical area (related to the students place of living), which conditions a specific cultural sensitivity and reading motivations. It could also be influenced by the competences and passions of the teacher himself, who if respected among students, knows how to motivate them and could open his pupils to interesting and valuable texts which do not meet the criteria mentioned above. Thus, including the last criterion would allow to use both new, modern texts as well as "old" and ones that are ingrained in school tradition.

**Students' *open interpretations* – place in classes in literature**

Verification of the reading material in relation to the criteria mentioned above minimalizes the risk of lack of interest in the text chosen, as well as it gives the possibility to engage the young reader on an intellectual and emotional level. The next step is a reasonable plan of in class work with the text chosen. The work with the book, which is supported by various forms of analyses (e.g. monographic or panoramic analysis) (Uryga, 1996), organised within the frames of various methods that activate students thinking, experiencing or inducing actions, should be preceded by independent and creative reflection of students, who have the possibility to express their own attitude towards the book, share their thoughts, opinions and emotions inspired by the text. Such possibility is given by *open interpretations* of students – an educational solution which has long tradition in Polish literature and culture classes. Such a way of doing things was described by Władysław Szyszkowski in *The Analysis of Literary Work at School* published in 1958 (Szyszkowski, 1958, p. 18):

> *If we want to include direct experiences of the youth in this process [teaching literature – P.S.], it is recommended to leave the students as much freedom as possible at the first contact with a literary work and ensure that they can freely express their opinions on the text. This condition can be met only if we have enough copies of particular work. Therefore, it relates to shorter works found in excerpts or separate publications.*

This means including students' introductory and intuitive reception in the process of book discussion at school, allowing them to present their initial thoughts on the work and giving the them the opportunity to exchange opinions

on particular book with their peers or the teacher. It seems that the procedure mentioned above, due to the accessibility to various books (which does not have to be related to "prolonging" reading the book in time, as suggested by Szyszkowski), could be used with longer texts, which give the possibility of discussion on at least couple of lessons. What is more, such assumption means that *open interpretations* could fulfil different educational functions and be treated as an important element of book discussion at school.

Until now, the practice at school recognised the importance of *open interpretations* but they were treated as the element that allowed to initially diagnose the reception which could lead to defining the subject of the work, as well as it was the way to start a conversation and gain the students' attention. Such procedure was usually treated as one of the elements (initial) of single lessons, which took no longer than 10-15 minutes. Treating *open interpretations* in such a way seems to limit their potential as a methodological solution. That is why it is worth looking at it in a wider perspective – as a trick that can organise the whole lesson, influence its shape and finally, animate its structure. The consequence of accepting such assumption is the possibility to design the model of the lesson which, in different variants, could be governed entirely by *open interpretations* and they could be used to fulfil the goals. Such proposal will be included in further part of this article.

## The functions of *open interpretations* in cultural and literary education

*Open interpretations* can have various functions which are important in terms of organising the work with the book and significant from the perspective of a widely understood cultural and literary education.

### Diagnostic function

***Diagnostic function*** seems to be the most basic here. Students' utterances provide the teacher with vital knowledge about the way young readers understood the literary work. This is the initial proof of general understanding or misunderstanding of the text and, in a wider perspective, gives the image of the students' level of thinking. It provides the teacher with the opportunity to define the types of students' interpretations, which were not preceded by educational activities. On their basis the teacher can discover which student understand the work on a symbolic level and which are still at the stage of factual interpretation (Guttmejer, 1982, p. 37-80). It also gives the chance for preliminary definition of reception styles in the class. Therefore, it allows to examine which students understand the book in an aesthetic or symbolical way, and which interpret the book in a mimetic way (Głowiński, 1975, p. 21-27). Finally, it allows to check

what attitudes are taken towards a particular work, or in a wider perspective, towards literature in general (Polakowski, 1980, p. 181-247).

**Interpretative function**

If we assume that *open interpretations* are the stage of reception, therefore they generate elements for analysis and interpretation, it could be said that they will allow to define initial claims that mark the field for understanding the literary work. That is why they can be a valuable source of forming not only the topics and problems which are evoked by the text, but also interpretational hypotheses – they should be included and verified during next literary classes. Intuitive character of such utterances makes it possible that they can define the areas of understanding the book, open the students to various contexts that could be referred to later on, provided the teacher ensures their proper shape in terms of thought and language. By implementing the interpretative function, the utterances from the introductory lesson could be the point of reference to different classes in literature which are clearly designed in terms of topics. The teacher and the students could refer to them. This lets us highlight holistic thought about the text and job done during the lessons. The students should be aware that the series of classes in literature constitute compositional unity, around which different elements overlap and deepen the understanding process.

**Axiological function**

It emerges from the conviction that the axiological level and conscious reflection on values should focus the attention of the teacher and students while discussing literary works in class. The fact that it appears in class might be the result of students' habits who feel the intuitive need to recognise and name values due to being directed by the teacher. Its emergence is also related to the form and character of the literary work chosen for analysis at school. The texts meeting the criteria mentioned above are surely placed within the area of axiological reflection valuable when students deal with literature. In practice, such function can appear at the assessment stage of the work itself (the matter of recognising and naming artistic and aesthetic values), as well as in relation to the plot of the work. It could be connected (usually directly) with naming the problems which the students notice while reading and while defining axiological terms that can be found in the text analysed. Initial answers of the students which are axiologically directed are also essential due to the observation of the world of values which the students come from, identification of hierarchy and axiological declarations. It also documents the students' sensitivity to literary creations in relation to which the students make their discoveries and more

importantly, to issues related to human existence in the world and people's existential problems. It could be the image of changes which take part in axiological thinking of future generations.

**Discursive-argumentative function**

Its foundations are formed by the assumption that students can understand particular literary works in different ways and the difference can be the result of different intellectual and emotional level, various aesthetic sensitivity and various attitudes and reception styles towards the text. Finally, interpretative intuition declared by students can vary as well. It can be expressed in a creative discussion among students and the teacher, also while trying to be more precise when discussing the problems described in the work. It could be assumed that its implementation is possible in writing when the students can refer, either approvingly or disapprovingly, to a particular interpretative idea of the teacher or their own (which e.g. emerged in previous oral interpretations), or elaborate interpretation proposed by the teacher.

**Linguistic function**

Apart from the function presented above, it is worth mentioning the significance of students' *open interpretations* to the development of their communicative competence, both in speaking and in writing (assuming that students utterances could be practised by exercises and tasks which require editing various statements, as are the intention and aims of the lesson). They improve the abilities of expression in various linguistic paradigms, and they require creativity when expressing one's own opinion, interpretational judgments and they engage students rhetorically when confronting their own opinions with the ones of the peers, force practical application of different types of sentences which fulfil various functions, suggest the need to gather, classify and use the vocabulary connected with a particular book. Thus, they offer the possibility to develop stylistic and lexical competence through communication in relation to literary-cultural material. Linguistic aspect of *open interpretations* can be combined in thinking and practical solutions with the methods of developing students' linguistic competence designed by Anna Dyduchowa (Dyduchowa, 1988) – especially with the method of writing practice (it is worth mentioning here e.g. the method of intersemiotic translation, especially when the students' utterances are created in relation to a film because such possibility could also be assumed). Although linguistic function in open interpretation is not placed in the first place, it is worth noticing that it determines their shape, character to a large degree and is directly related to the implementation of remaining functions.

**Design function**

The implementation of this function is supported by other functions. It has a clear practical direction. Its foundation is the conviction that designing process of series of lessons based on literary works should include the needs, capabilities and interests of students and the teacher. These should be functionally connected with aims of the subject and core curriculum obligations. It assumes that *open interpretations* of students, more precisely, observations, conclusions, interpretative clues, topics and problems shown should be included in the series of classes focused on discussion about the literary work. Thus, it treats the student as a partner who can influence the course of lesson and present his view of perceiving the world. Such perception of the matter has a significant influence on the students' motivation, their attitude towards the book and consequently to the following lessons. As far as the organisation is concerned, when giving a lesson based on open interpretations, it is worth separating it from other classes which are devoted to discussing works of literature. The teacher needs the time to convert the students' proposals, own interpretation of the work and obligations emerging from the core curriculum into series of well-designed classes that meet the requirements mentioned above. It is worth remembering that by implementing design function of *open interpretations*, the teacher will not follow the same routine and it provides many opportunities to refresh his skills and opens his eyes to matters which he did not pay attention to while discussing a particular text over the years.

**Model (models) of classes designed around students' open interpretations**

It is natural that implementation of *open interpretations* does not guarantee that all the functions mentioned above will be fulfilled. If those interpretations are considered only as an introduction to the lesson, their role is clearly limited. It could be then assumed that the classes would fulfil only some of the functions discussed. However, if they are assumed to be the basic solution (despite being "dressed" in series of detailed actions) around which the classes are organised, then they provide the possibility to use their educational potential fully. This is how such a lesson could look like (also its alternatives), its dominant structure being students' *open interpretations*.

**I. Initial stage (introductory element)**

We can assume that this stage could have two alternatives.

**Alternative 1.** It is based on students' freedom to express their opinions and thoughts inspired by the text and on the intellectual and, above all, emotional reactions expressing their relationship towards literary work and including initial analytical and interpretative actions, as well as the original assessment of the text. At this stage, the students can point out the issues chosen by them that they found interesting while reading the text or afterwards. These actions allow young readers to evaluate the text. It is important that the teacher require their assessment to be justified and explained. The student can express their opinions on the work's composition, plot as well as axiological area which allows to be identified in the text. The task of the teacher is to create conditions in which the students can express their opinions safely as well as classify the material gathered in such a way – especially if the students' expressions point out various aspects of the text and are related to different aspects of its reception. It is particularly valuable if, at this stage, the students open themselves to each other's arguments, critical thinking and, as a result, refer to opinions of other members of the class. It is vital that this part of initial stage would not end with chaotic exchange of opinions on various issues. The teacher should group this material, keep the conversation in order and emphasise important issues which can be recognised in students' expressions. Closing this introductory element in such a way facilitates further activity at next stages of the lesson. In order to keep the proportions of the lesson, we should assume that this stage should not last longer than 10 – 15 minutes.

**Alternative 2**. Similarly to the first alternative, it is based on students' initial recognition, although at the beginning it assumes stronger classification of the actions and directing their way of their implementation. It would be useful if it started with a writing exercise which could constitute the starting point towards further activity. In order to do this we can offer the students several examples of written assignments which, if properly complemented and developed, would help them to express their thoughts about a particular work of literature. The examples of how to begin sentences which can be used to express students' opinions are shown below:

*I like this text because…*
*I don't like this book because…*
*I find this work interesting because…*

*I don't find this work interesting because…*
*I have mixed feelings about this text because…*
*I really enjoyed the text because…*
*The text disappointed me because…*
*What I found interesting in the text was…*
*The text seems important to me because…*

The students' task is to choose two or three examples which they find the best and which will be the most appropriate to express their opinion about the text. The ultimate goal here is to create such written expressions that would constitute the first evidence of reception. After editing the works and reading them aloud, the students should comment on their expressions. The teacher could also express his opinion and comment on the works. The important thing here is the fact that ways of expressions proposed open the students to reflection both on the meaning of the literary work, its artistic value and aesthetic qualities. It would be useful if the teacher could confront the whole spectrum of opinions, especially the extreme ones which would stir up conversation, and introduce argumentative discussion. It is important, similarly to the first alternative, that this stage of the lesson ends with introductory classification. Such role can be played by rough notes which could be taken at the same time the student express themselves and could close the initial element. Such note could include key words which would be pointed out by the students or the teacher while commenting on pupils' opinions. The first solution would be more appropriate because it could influence students' focus on listening to their peers' opinions. The note could also include words that would point out the direction of further analytical-interpretative actions, main problems which should be explained in greater detail (at least some of them) at the main stage of the lesson or elaborated even further during the next lessons on literature.

## II. Main stage (developing element)

This part is essential due to both the diagnosis of reception and the course of further lessons to which planning the classes based on *open interpretations* is of fundamental significance. If the students followed the second alternative, then the starting point for the developing element could be the key words mentioned above. If they followed the first alternative, then it would appropriate to use conclusions that close the initial part of the lesson. Regardless of the alternative used, the aim of the main stage is to experience and name the most important problems and issues, which reveal themselves when the students read the text. It is essential that the topics pointed out would not only be noticed but also the

problems they refer to discussed thoroughly, their complex structure revealed and the mental complications they generate stated. Therefore, if the point of reflection is noticing particular qualities related to the character, then we should aim to relate the problems to the situation presented in the book, his motivations, and view on the world or relationships with other characters. This stage is not about a detailed discussion but about explaining a particular issue e.g. the shape of various interpretational hypotheses which require verification on later lessons. It is important that the teacher monitors the shape of such forms, and through questions tried to induce students' reflections, and at the same time, limit his influence on the independent conclusions drawn by the students. For the purpose of further course of the lesson, the students' opinions should be written down and, if necessary, they should undergo stylistic or semantic correction which is worth being done in class. If there were many such notes and they would relate to various aspects of a particular literary work, then it would be worth grouping them according to e.g. the significance of the issues, their relation to form or content, the connection with the main idea of the literary work or marginal character in relation to the main topic. It is also possible to group them according to the problems they tackle, e.g. social, historical, philosophical and other. The way of grouping may depend on the decision made by either the teacher or the students. However, the type of text discussed may have a significant influence on it. It is worth adding comments when noting down problems which are considered the most important. It could be of lesser significance to the understanding of the work, but those remarks are the image of individual preferences of the students. They could serve as a way of expressing the students' thoughts, manifesting their own originality and a way of perceiving the book which is different from the rest of the class. These remarks could turn out to be inspiring to the other members of the class and could strengthen the feeling of individual interpretation's significance.

### III. Ending stage (final – closing element)

The last element of lessons planed in such a way consists of two clearly marked stages. The first one relies on the teacher who builds his own reflection on the basis of thoughts and opinions formed by the students during initial and main stages. The aim here is that the teacher adds or elaborates the issues which were not mentioned in the students´ interpretations to the problems discussed during the lesson. These problems are considered important from the teacher's point of view or in the opinions of literature experts and authors of scientific papers on particular literary works. These issues could turn out to be interesting and insightful for the students, could be the starting point of intellectual

disagreement and the beginning of various arguments. They are worth adding (e.g. using a different colour) to the notes from the lesson. The second stage that finishes the closing element is written or oral assignment produced by students, who chose one or two problems they would like to discuss on next lessons from the list. They are also obliged to justify such a choice. The texts produced in such a way, collected by the teacher, could not only be a reflective summary of the classes but also a valuable material that could be used to plan further classes devoted to discussions about literature.

**Summary**

Students' o*pen interpretations* characterised here and used as the path to organisation of classes in literature could be the key that gives the opportunity to efficient and valuable reading of works of literature at school. Their implementation through various functions provides the possibility to deepen the knowledge of a particular book that includes, on the one hand its character and on the other, it respects students' subjectivity and the independence of their own interpretations. The success of implementation of this way of work with the book requires great care in choosing works of literature for school and thoughtful lesson planning which takes into account students' intuition, updates their experiences which influence the perception and interpretation of chosen texts. Accepting such a perspective does not exclude educational failure. However, it considerably lowers the risk of it by evoking reading motivation and participation that can verbalise itself in oral and written assignments. Not only does it provide the opportunity to achieve immediate success, i.e. valuable discussion about the reading material perceived from the anthropocentric perspective, but also offers hope that the students will become interested in reading which will be a pleasurable process and give the possibility to make the reception of a particular literary work more intellectual. Implementation of *open interpretations* limits the process of instrumentalisation of book reception, reduces excessive controllability of educational process, and gives students the sense of freedom and independence. The teacher is allowed to plan the lesson in a creative way, and at the same time he can build a dialogue in a way that treats students as partners and gives the sense of mutual respect. Furthermore, it allows students to see the teacher as a wise guide in the world of literature who is not valued for his knowledge but for the way he treats other people, the way he lets them gain knowledge independently and shape humanistic sensitivity.

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JoLaCE
Journal of Language and Cultural Education, 2018, 6(1)
ISSN 1339-4584
SlovakEdu

sciendo
DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2018-0010

# Book-Talk: An Activity to Motivate Learners to Read Autonomously in a Foreign Language

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**Abstract**

In the last decade, extensive reading (ER) had been incorporated into English as a foreign language (EFL) education in various Japanese institutions. It restored the once broken balance of accuracy and fluency in traditional English education, and assisted reluctant EFL learners to start reading. However, ER required rather longer term for elementary learners to enjoy its benefits and the learners needed an extra encouragement to continue ER for the longer term. Book-talk was such an activity to encourage learners to read voluntary and to improve their language skills additionally. In a book-talk, several learners sat around a table, introduced the books they had read during the week, and accepted questions and comments from the others in turn. It also fitted well in lessons because 3-minute talks and 2-minute Q&A of six members took only 30 minutes. We will report how the activity motivated elder students, who had three or more years' experience of ER, to continue their reading outside the class, and how it encouraged autonomous ER of adult EFL learners, who were reading English books borrowing from the college library. A combination of few talks and many readings worked well in EFL settings.

**Key words:** book-talk, extensive reading, encouragement, longer term, English as a foreign language

## ER in Japanese EFL settings

Japanese people learned English for six years or more in school but as a foreign language without using it daily outside their English lessons, and English education in Japan had long dedicated to educate students preparing for entrance examination to colleges, which required grammatical knowledge of English and translation skill of English texts into Japanese but not much communicating skills. Because English was a far distant language grammatically and phonetically from their mother language, and also because they had almost no opportunity to actually use it in life, many lacked the fluency to use the language including receptive skills such as reading and listening even if they had enough vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. The institutional program of the TOEIC showed that

62% of the test-takers belonged to the score zone of beginner or elementary levels (10-490) (IIBC, 2017).

A major reason of Japanese students' lower TOEIC scores was their lower fluency in reading and listening, which prevented them from using their knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary in any language activities. Because Japanese learners did not use English in daily life, they had little experience of actually reading English texts without translation or of listening English narrations with instant comprehension. Their *reading* often meant translating English texts into Japanese ones word by word, and they did not believe it possible that they were able to comprehend English texts without translation. Conversation in English was often disturbed because they hardly comprehended what they were told. When they needed to *speak* in English conversation classes, they simply repeated the known patterns or struggled to translate their idea from Japanese into English on the spot, resulting mostly in uttering a few words but not a sentence. Stephens (2015) had observed the mental struggle of her students when responding to her in English, and speculated that this was because of the preponderance of the *yakudoku* (grammar-translation) method in their formative years of learning English. Lower fluency of typical Japanese EFL learners is caused by their lack of actual reading and listening experience. Because translating while reading was a demanding activity that needed concentration to handle two languages simultaneously and consumed a large part of reader's mental resources, it was not easy to relax doing it or enjoy it. Only few Japanese read English books for joy and many books were kept in major public libraries without being read for a long time.

ER employed by some adult EFL learners and educational institutions has been changing the situation gradually after Sakai (2002) proposed to start ER from very easy-to-read picture books according to his three golden rules of ER for EFL learners: dispose dictionaries when you read, skip unknown words, and stop reading the texts you cannot enjoy. Sakai's golden rules encouraged adult learners to transform their reading style from translating every English word into Japanese counter part, to trying to comprehend the English texts for grasping the main idea directory. The rules also helped EFL learners of elementary language skills to start their ER from picture books with short and easy-to-read sentences, so the learners did not need to translate the texts to comprehend the stories.

ER itself was not a new approach then (Day & Bamford, 1998), as it had decades of history among European learners, and graded readers (GR) had been well organized as reading material. Studies in EFL settings showed various

benefits of ER, such as higher reading comprehension (Robb & Susser, 1989), improving attitude to reading (Yamashita, 2013), and improving reading fluency (Beglar, Hunt & Kite, 2012). However, the bigger obstacle for Japanese EFL learners was that even the easiest GR were not easy for them to read without English-Japanese translation because of larger linguistic distance of English and Japanese than the ones of English and European languages. Sakai's proposal and the practice of Starting with Simple Stories (SSS) method (Furukawa and et al., 2005) paved the road to ER for Japanese EFL learners. Japanese practitioners of ER had also pointed out the importance of periodical Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) in regular lessons for elementary EFL learners, who did not have the habit to read English books continuously (Takase & Nishizawa, 2010).

ER in public libraries also became a trend in Japan (Nishizawa, 2015). More than 20 public libraries in Tokai region installed special bookshelves of easy-to-read English books for ER, and the number of such libraries was still increasing. Majority users of the books were adult EFL learners who had long graduated from schools and did not have professional need to use English but wished to enjoy reading English novels or using English for various purposes. This trend had a potential to reform lifelong learning of foreign language in Japan in the long run.

**How EFL learners were guided to read extensively**

Typical books collected in those libraries for adult EFL learners were graded readers (GR) from major English publishers, leveled readers (LR) for English speaking children, and easiest-to-read picture book series such as Oxford Reading Tree (ORT) series or Foundations Reading Library (FRL) series. GR of starter and beginner levels were found to be more important than the ones of intermediate or advanced levels, and ORT or FRL were the indispensable series for most Japanese EFL learners to start their ER. Without reading these easiest-to-read picture books, many EFL learners could not stop their translating habit from school days, and thus could not continue their ER for a long enough time to improve their reading skills.

ORT was the most popular series even for adult EFL learners who had graduated from schools or colleges a long time in the past and had not believed that they could really read English texts without translation. With the help of pictures, very few unknown words, and a whole new world told by more than 200 books, the EFL learners could transform their reading style gradually from word-for-word translation to direct comprehension of the stories.

When there were not any guidance how to start ER at first, typical adult learners tended to ignore the pictures, and tried to translate the English texts

word-for-word into Japanese sentences. Then they usually found a few unknown words, started to consult with a dictionary, and sometimes stacked in the middle of the story wondering what a certain word or expression really meant. It was not easy to enjoy the stories with this traditional "reading" style, so they must be guided to focus more on the story instead on the expressions.

In an introductory lesson to ER, for example, we usually asked ER beginners to look at the pictures closely, sometimes by hiding the English texts at the first round, and to try to have a visual image of the story. With this visual image in their mind, they were guided back to the first page, and to read the whole book again by paying more attention on the text this time to understand the story more in detail. After this introduction, many of they understood that the method was quite different from the "reading" they had learned in their old school days, started to read picture books with interest, and tried to avoid English to Japanese translation.

For this transformation of reading style, a large number of picture books, hopefully sharing the same background such as ORT or FRL, were necessary. We usually recommended elementary EFL learners to read about 100,000 words from 200 to 300 picture books when they started ER. Such a large number of picture books was not feasible for most learners to purchase by themselves, but recommended to be shared as the common assets in public libraries.

When an EFL learner felt it easy to read ORT (stage 8) or FRL (level 4), it was usually the right time for her to start reading GR of starter level along with more picture books, where each of those books told an independent story in a short text of 1,000 words with easy English of YL 0.8. Because of this independence, the reader must redefine the whole world of the story every time without the background knowledge supplied by the previous books in the same series.

For this second stage of ER, short and easy-to-read English texts were indispensable, and beginner and elementary levels of GR were suited for the purpose. We usually recommended EFL learners to read additional 100,000 – 200,000 words from GR of YL0.8 – 1.5. Starting ER from higher readability levels of GR by bypassing these two steps often caused typical failure of adult EFL learners. They could not unlearn their translating habit, tried too hard to tackle with difficult stories to understand, hardly enjoyed reading, and finally gave up reading any English books. The libraries that have GR but fewer easy-to-read books have the unintentional but large risk of inviting such failures.

In the third stage of ER, text length exceeded 6,000 words. It was longer than the texts read in the first two stages, where text length was from several hundred to 4,000 words, with the majority from 1,000 to 2,000 words per book, and could be read easily in an ER lesson of 45 minutes. Because longer texts read in the

third stage took more than an hour to complete, they were likely to be read not in one occasion but in plural separate occasions. Reading a book in separate occasions was naturally achieved in the mother tongue, but an EFL learner had to remember the former stories when she started to read the continuation, which required deeper understanding of the story and thus more difficult to achieve. We usually recommended EFL learners to read a million total words of texts of YL 3.0 or easier before graduating from this stage, which meant the end of ER beginners.

The third stage was the most difficult stage to overcome (Furukawa et al, 2007), and even the earnest EFL learners took slower average reading pace (40,000 words/month) than the first stage (136,000 words/month) or after reading a million words (134,000 or more words/month). Possible cause of difficulty in the third stage was expressed as "easy-to-read books become rather boring, but interesting books are still difficult to read". Finding favorite series, authors, or genres might be a general suggestion to the learners in this stage, but actual advice for each learner must differ from person to person. The reading history of a veteran learner of similar taste often helped, and thus periodical meetings of EFL learners and exchange of experience and information were found to be valuable.

**Promoting ER for lifelong learning**

ER books were complex mixture of English books from various types, genres, and publishers. At least two groups of books were widely used by EFL learners in Japan. One group was the books for English speaking children including picture books, chapter books, and literature for young adults. There were popular books for English speaking children, famous books and awarded books, and even classical stories for children. They were popular and interesting books for children, but they did not always attract adult readers. They sometimes included expressions common to English speaking children but hard to understand for EFL learners. The other group was graded readers (GR) published for ESL/EFL learners. Their readability was controlled by the vocabulary and grammar restrictions and they sometimes included rather artificial or monotonous expressions, but the topics such as murder mysteries or romance were selected to attract adult learners.

Because the ER books were so different in readability and genre, users needed some guide to select appropriate books for each of them. Aligning the books, for example, by the readability was one method but rather difficult one to manage because each librarian must have certain knowledge of ER books to maintain the condition. Alternative method was putting a information sticker, which displayed

readability level and text length, on the front or back page of each book to aid the book-selection of the users. Gathering the books in same group was easier than aligning them by readability.

Collecting ER books might be the first step for libraries but they also had to promote ER books in their second step because ER was rather new and not-well-known approach in Japanese schools, in where not ER but grammar-translation had been and still was the major approach. For most Japanese people from children to senior citizens, "reading" English texts meant word-for-word translation, and even most English teachers did not expect that their students could read English texts without translating them into Japanese sentences.

Introductory lessons were necessary to promote ER books in the library. Two types of guidance, telling how to read and how to select books, were also necessary in the introduction. Monthly circulation of Tahara central library clearly showed that such annual introductory lessons increased the number of checked-out books for the following three months (NIT, Toyota College, 2015). The lessons invited new users to ER books and also activated ER of veteran users. Several libraries hold such lessons several times a year for the promotion.

How to motivate elementary EFL learners for the several years' duration needed for them to get significantly higher scores at standardized tests was another serious issue for an ER program in Japanese settings if it were to be employed as a major educational practice. Furukawa's (2011) students increased their ACE scores after they joined the ER program for three to five years, and Nishizawa, Yoshioka and Fukada's (2010) students needed four years to increase their TOEIC scores significantly, and another students in the same ER program increased their TOEIC scores after they stopped English-to-Japanese translation and had read a million total words (Nishizawa & Yoshioka, 2015). The students who stayed in the ER program longer years from six to seven years scored distinctively higher average scores in TOEIC than the students who stayed in the same ER program only from 1.5 to 3.5 years even if both groups of students had read the same amount of a million total words (Nishizawa, Yoshioka & Ichikawa, 2017). As they could not expect instant effect from ER, they would need an effective encouragement to continue ER for the necessary duration.

Setting up the periodical meetings of library users was a method of encouraging ER users (Nishizawa, 2015). The meetings did not need instructors but the participants talked their experience of reading easy-to-read books and exchanged information related to ER books to each other. In these book-talks, a novice user often found a role model in one of the veteran readers and followed her reading record as the guide. Veteran readers also enjoyed sharing their reading experience with other users. They were sometimes lightly pushed to

start reading new books since they wanted to introduce the books in their next book-talks.

**Book-talk in English**

Book-talk is an oral activity in a small group of students (Nishizawa, Ho, Yoshioka & Ichikawa, 2016). They try to introduce to each other one of the stories from the books they have read in the recent weeks. Because of the topic, all the participants are required to read at least a book beforehand and to be ready to tell their reading experience. Successful book-talk in EFL settings is the opportunity to use the target language (L2) productively without the interference of their mother language (L1), as successful ER in EFL settings avoids translation from the L2 texts into L1.

Book-talk in English at NIT, Toyota college had started as a kind of stimulus for veteran users of the library. After reading more than a million words of English texts in several years, the veteran library users were ready to use their English skills productively without having such opportunities in their daily lives. Starting English book-talk among them was easier than expected possibly because they had already been talking about the books they had read in Japanese at monthly meetings of library users, and the only change was the language used in the talks from Japanese to English. Book-talk was also found to be easier activity than other English conversations maybe because the topic was what they had great interest and could share the joy.

Looking at the apparent success in the book-talks of veteran library users, we also started book-talks in regular English lessons (Table 1). If the activity could encourage veteran users to read continuously, it would also become an effective encouragement for other EFL learners who needed to stay in an ER program for a long time, we thought. We started to include book-talks in regular ER lessons, where the students' English skills were from elementary to intermediate levels.

One session consists of a three-minute talk of one member and the following Q&As among all the members, typically in three minutes. If a group has three members, one round needs 20 minutes or fewer. Typical EFL learner feels three minutes a long time to speak English sentences continuously at first, but he gradually starts to feel it too short to present a meaningful story. Anyway a talk is interrupted by the limited time, so the students are advised to start talking from conclusion and then to move towards the detail or circumstance for minimizing the damage from the interruption.

Tab. 1: Procedure of Book-talk

| Step | Time | Activity |
|---|---|---|
| Preparation | 5 min. | Participant writes a memo for the talks (optional activity) |
| Talk | 3～5 min. / session | The talker is not interrupted until the time limit |
| Q & A | 2～5 min. / session | The other members ask questions about the talk |

In the ER program, book-talk was tried in the lessons of from third to seventh year students in 2013. It was welcomed by the sixth and seventh year students, admitted by many of the fourth and fifth year students, but disliked by most of the third year students. For the third year students, whose TOEIC scores were lower than 450, it was too hard to utter a meaningful sentence in a limited time as a talker, and the listeners were frustrated for the long waiting time. According to the responses of the students in the former year, we adjusted the frequency of the book-talk to none for the third year students, once in a few months for the fourth and fifth year students, and every week for the sixth and seventh year students in 2014.

A feature of the book-talks was to try to talk without preparation or with as less preparation as possible because preparation meant for many Japanese EFL learners to write translated scripts from Japanese. We wanted the talkers to avoid Japanese-to-English translation at their book-talks, as avoiding translation was a major key to success for ER in EFL settings. Without preparation the talks became messy, but we sacrificed accuracy instead of fluency in our book-talks in a sense.

In a book-talk session, keeping equal session time for each participant had a vital importance for involving users of varied English fluency, because it stopped veteran readers who tended to forget their time limit and tried to keep talking, and because it also allowed novice readers to take their time struggling to pronounce just a few sentences. For that, we needed a timekeeper with a stopwatch to organize the sessions in control. In a book-talk session, a participant talked about the book he or she had recently read in a limited time, typically from three to five minutes, and answered questions from the other participants or received friendly comments. If a session used six minutes in total, ten participants could talk and answer in turn during an hour.

In regular lessons of 40 students, the students were divided into several groups so that every student had the opportunity to talk at least once in every lesson.

**Temporary results**

Veteran users of the college library were enjoying book-talks. The monthly meetings of library users in 2017 had more than ten regular members who wanted to talk in English. Many of them continued to read new books partly because they wanted to talk about the book in book-talks.

The sixth or seventh year students liked book-talks because they felt more reality than other conversation lessons as the talker. The talking content was more meaningful than just exchanging greetings or patterned sentences but their genuine ideas or unknown information to the listeners. They tended to recognize the limit of translation, and to start selecting easier books for deeper comprehension or searching more interesting books in their ER. Book-talk became a good motivator of ER.

They were reading at least a book for their book-talk at weekly ER lessons, and their anxiety for using English seemed to evaporate on the way. In such a way, book-talks allowed intermediate EFL learners to transform their in-class activity from receptive activity such as reading silently to productive one such as talking with each other without decreasing their amount of reading, because the students had to read books outside the lessons for their book-talks at the next lesson, even if they did not have time to read in the lessons anymore.

However, book-talks by younger students had limited impact on the learners. Elementary EFL learners could not compose meaningful talks in the limited time as long as they translated their ideas from Japanese to English on the spot. Book-talks did not promote much out-of-class reading and invaded their reading time in class because they needed to read only short texts out of the lessons for their next talks. Book-talk let them recognize the fact that they needed to read more to use English fluently. Occasional book-talk might be enough for that purpose. They only seemed to accept the fact that book-talk was a relatively painless transient activity from their ER to conversation in their future.

Since book-talk was confirmed to be a hard task for elementary learners, we have removed book-talk from mandatory work in regular lessons for the third year students, and have set it up as an elective out-of-class activity since the autumn semester of 2015. To this activity, we invited the students who had read more than a million total words of English texts in their ER and were ready to book-talks. Thus conducted book-talk confirmed that the students could enjoy and be benefitted from the activity as their elder students did. As they proceeded into the fourth year in 2016, they still continued to attend the book-talk activity in every Friday evening and started to invite their classmates to join the group. Book-talk is planning to be a main activity in the Student Exchange Program, too.

We also used book-talk in a students' exchange in 2017. The students in two ER programs in Japan and Vietnam did book-talks in groups of mixed students, with three Japanese and three Vietnamese students in each group (Ichikawa & Ho, 2017). The procedure was the same, and the only difference was the diversity of the participants. English was the common language to communicate to each other, and English books they had read were the common topic. These common features paved the road to fresh and meaningful conversations among the students in different cultures. Book-talk made a good introductory activity for the exchange of both groups.

As students' exchange could not be a regular activity, we invited instead several adult learners, who had rich experience of ER and read English books continuously, into the book-talks in the regular lessons of elder students. The students and adult learners were different in age, experience, and learning history of English but had common interest in reading English books. Book-talk with such different learners became fresh experience for both groups, and it activated heated discussions after each talk. All participants were happy because fluent talkers found earnest listeners and less-fluent talkers found kind atmosphere that accepted their slow talk and did not mind mistakes. Book-talk of mixed groups or divergent participants has two advantages: unexpectedly fresh experience and confidence upon the method, especially the long-term effect of ER.

As a productive activity by language learners, successful book-talk seemed to have the following features:

1) Learners of different reading skill in L2 were able to participate and enjoy the activity because they shared the interest to books written in the language or to the others' reading experiences. Because of the common interest, it also served the opportunity to meet divergent people.
2) Book-talk in L2 was easier than other conversational activities because talkers were able to use pictures and sentences in the books for the support.
3) Book-talk might guide the talkers to fluent speaking in L2 by their avoiding simultaneous translation from the mother language if they could already read the books without translation.
4) Regular book-talks nudged the participants to read beforehand as the material of the next talks.
5) Book-talk guided novice learners to read easier-to-read books with higher comprehension rather than to challenge harder-to-read books with lower comprehension, thus showing the appropriate readability levels for the leaners.

## Discussion

The authors asserted that successful book-talks improved participants' speaking fluency because the participants could avoid Japanese-to-English translation when they spoke. However, it is only supported by the participants' subjective remarks and the authors' observations. Further study is needed to confirm it.

The long-term effect of book-talk on ER, especially if book-talks keep motivating lifelong learners of English to read continuously for a long term also needs to be confirmed, as the book-talk practices reported in this article only lasted a few years even if the participants had read extensively for longer years.

## Conclusion

Book-talk was introduced as an activity to encourage EFL learners to continue their ER for a long term so they could improve their language skills and enjoy the benefits. In a book-talk session, several learners sat around a table, talk about the books they had read during the week, and accepted questions and comments from the others in turn. It also fitted well in lessons because 3-minute talks and 2-minute Q&A of six members took only 30 minutes.

Book-talk motivated elder students, who had three or more years' experience of ER, to continue their reading outside the class, and veteran users of the college library, who had been reading English books for many years. However, its impact on younger students was limited because elementary EFL learners with less fluency could not compose meaningful talks in a limited time. Book-talk was also used well in exchanges of different cultures and multi-generations.

A combination of few talks and many readings worked well in EFL settings.

## Acknowledgement

This article is a result of the research project supported by Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C) of Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, No. 16K02913.

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JoLaCE

*Journal of Language and Cultural Education, 2018, 6(1)*
*ISSN 1339-4584*
*SlovakEdu*

sciendo

DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2018-0011

# Multicultural Education and Educational Process at Slovak Universities

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**Abstract**

Migration issues and the development of social relations to people of different cultures make multicultural education a frequently discussed topic in Slovakia these days. When it comes to culture, diversity, variety and plurality dominate because of the existence, as well as interactions, of different ethnicities, races or nations. School education focuses on drawing attention to the existence of such differences or specificities, therefore multicultural education is becoming more and more important. At higher education institutions, multicultural education is especially important in case of the students who are to become teachers themselves. Development of positive qualities and approaches, including the acceptance of cultural differences, should necessarily be a part of the pre-gradual preparation of teachers. The article presents a content analysis of student essays on the perception and understanding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as was one of the elements of multicultural education at HEIs.

**Key words**: multicultural education, content analysis of text documents, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## Introduction

Nowadays it is becoming more and more common to notice heterogeneity and cultural diversity of various groups of population within Slovakia. Regarding different ways of life that people lead, their conflicting values and different religions, it is necessary to teach children and young people to be able to accept and develop positive relationships to people who come from different cultures. It is important to carry out multicultural education not only at lower levels of education, but also within higher education institutions, especially when it comes to educating students who are to become teachers themselves (Kosová et al., 2012; Kučírková, 2016; Vavrus, 2010; O'Grady, 2012).

One of the methods of higher education as a tool for individual analysis and comparison of opinions and attitudes regarding current issues in society to the knowledge gained in class is writing essays (Hunt, & Chalmers, 2013; Sachs &

Parsell, 2014; Taylor, 2010). Within multicultural education carried out as part of the "Strategies and methods of personality development", class students were asked to write an essay on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Human rights have always been connected with certain obligations, since they have been exercised by people of different societies in which development was determined by economic factors, traditions, understanding of an individual, and many other factors that needed to be either abolished or built up. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was mainly supposed to create conditions for a way of thinking which activates all people as fundamental members of society with the same rights and obligations, so that they may live together with society and its structure without conforming to its system and passively waiting for room to be made for them (Višňovský et al., 2014, p. 8-11). For the first time, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights gave every person a chance to acknowledge his/her own dignity and power of personality, securing equality of all people and their rights. Every article of the Declaration, even if it is concise, holds power of thought and makes room for the true understanding of reality. Enforcing human rights as stated in the Declaration meant, and still means, a great extent of responsibility towards other people, as well as understanding law, equality, and protection as empathetic phenomena. Therefore, it appears to be appropriate to use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to teach multicultural education.

The past 69 years have shown that the Declaration has not become less important in time, its articles still staying up-to-date and compelling. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not only a political document, but also the document intended for wide population groups all over the world that should teach us how to live, not being just a source of knowledge to use for education on a wide range of matters. Several articles of the Declaration seem to present the ideal notion that lacks the ability to be enforced in everyday life. But it was the recognition and subsequent enforcement of new, progressive ideas that ensured the development of society and humanity, no matter if it appeared in the technical, ecological, social or political field. Only continuous efforts of individuals and groups managed to implement new ways and terms, if they benefited the well-being of all people. The same applies to the enforcement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where it is necessary to assess if the norms as idealistic notions fail to apply because people are unwilling to pass their privileges on to others, unempathetic in the understanding of the needs of other people, or because they are simply not educated enough (Danek, Sirotová & Frýdková, 2013). Education is a way how to change the reality and improve interpersonal relationships and, as the preamble to the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights states, "every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms" (Ruisel, 2010). It is necessary to bear in mind that the implementation of every idea is only successful if it is the focus of education, as well as a part of the overall formation of one's personality and learning process. Regarding this aspect, we examined the knowledge and understanding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights among the first-year students of the University of ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Arts, in Trnava by analysing their essays.

**Content analysis of student essays on the perception and understanding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Methodology of the content analysis of text documents**

An adequate method of analysing student essays is a content analysis of text documents. Such analysis of student essays focused on the perception and understanding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was carried out at the Department of Pedagogy of the University of ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Arts in Trnava. The aim was to learn how they perceive and understand the Declaration, as well as what they think about the inclusion of human rights classes in educational process. The content analysis as a research method is a procedure for an objective, systematic and quantitative description of the obvious content of communication (Švec et al., 1998; Scollon, Scollon, & Jones, 2011; Kim, 2007). Given that the counting and other forms of quantification of content units happen within their qualitative categories (terms, ideas, topics), a content analysis organically involves the qualitative side of the text as well.

The most often used quantification method is to detect the frequency of the occurrence of an analytic category in a text. Such a method seemed to be the most appropriate to use for the assessment of student essays. In the first phase, we established the analytical categories of a text content that created a system of fixedly set indicators, which we used to sort out the record units.

Most commonly, thoughts and ideas that took the form of the hyper-syntax parts of text served as the record units in our analysis of student essays. Students did not use the same words for the individual hyper-syntax parts of their essays, but their informative value and their meaning said the same. Subsequently we matched those with the analytical categories that we had previously set during the preparatory reading of the texts. The number of record units shows the consensus among students and their opinions on the perception and understanding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**Characteristics of the subject sample of the text documents analysis**

Our research sample consisted of 102 students of the "Teaching of academic subjects" study programme who were in the first year of their bachelor's studies and at the average age of 20 years old. The gender differentiation of our research sample only confirmed the observation that when it comes to students of the "Teaching of academic subjects" study programme, a prevailing feminization is obvious, given that women represented 73% of the research sample, while men represented only 27%. Such disproportion did not allow us to come to generalizing conclusions regarding the students' opinions on pedagogical praxis based on their gender. The presented comparison is therefore only informative. Regarding their previously completed type of education, the majority of our research sample consisted of secondary grammar school graduates (70%).

**Content analysis of text documents related to particular parts of student essays**

The text documents used for our content analysis were student essays in which we set the analytical categories of the content and matched them with individual record units.

Record units were being matched with the following analytical categories (an example of a record unit from a student essay is provided in each case):

1. I learned about the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the first time in the "Strategies and methods of personality development of a child" seminar.

- "A lot of people have never read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this is the first time that I am holding it in my hands."
- "I have heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a few times, but I have never learned about its content. I have read it for the first time in Professor Sirotova's seminar."

2. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights seems rather formalistic and idealistic to me.

- "When you read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, you find yourself confused as to what it actually says, it seems like it describes this fairy tale world, that someone made up in their dreams, it seems like we are running after something, but cannot catch up with it. Now that we have all these beautiful ideas, humane notions and rights on paper, we can all sleep well at night."

- "Adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was undoubtedly a huge step for humanity in the right direction. But I am worried that the Declaration is too idealistic and only formalistic."

3. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not being abided, the rights guaranteed by it are being violated.

- "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is here to lay the conditions for following justice at least partially. Unfortunately, there have been many cases of violating different rights, either intentionally or unknowingly."
- "For a lot of people this Declaration is a worthless piece of paper. People keep violating the fundamental human right, which is the right to life. Wars have been here since the beginning of time. Even though we manage to progress in many areas, this kind of evil remains to be one of the ways to solve political, religious and other conflicts. War is one of the best examples of how the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not being abided."

4. Article 3, which states that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person, is considered to be the most important article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

- "I find Article 3 to be the most important of all the articles. It is indisputable that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. Everyone who lives on this earth got his life from his parents and passes it on to his children. No one in this world, not the richest, the strongest or the smartest person is entitled to take somebody else's life."
- "The life of each person on this earth starts with his birth and ends with his death, which we consider to be our ultimate ending. Since every man is unique and irreplaceable, it is not possible to come back once somebody's life has been taken. The right to life and life itself is the most valuable and the most important commodity that we do not often appreciate enough."

5. Abortion is a violation of the right to life, therefore a violation of Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

- "Even the fundamental right, the right to life is repeatedly being legally violated. Since the beginning of time mothers have been giving birth to their children. Does that give them the right to take their child's life if they decide to? Nowadays every mother can make a free choice regarding the life of her unborn child. However, this right is often being exploited, and I think that it should not serve as a solution for an irresponsible behaviour of two people. It

should only be used in extraordinary cases, when the life of the mother or the child is in danger."

- "Everyone has the right to life – even an unborn child. Why say yes to abortions? A child's life is created the moment it is conceived. I do not agree with those people who say that in the early stages, it is purely a tissue and a mother has the full right to decide what she wants to do. Does she? Does not a child have the right to life? It exists from the moment the cells amalgamate and there is a new person, who only needs time and nutrition to be able to exist on its own. Unborn children should not be deprived of their right to life. To agree with abortions is deeply unethical and a negation of one of the most important rights – the right to life."

6. The social and economic conditions in Slovakia do not allow for individual articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to be fulfilled, most importantly Article 23, which states that everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

- "According to Article 23 of the Declaration everyone who works has the right to fair and sufficient pay that would provide him and his family with a living adequate to human dignity. Although this requirement is proportionate, society is unfortunately unable to fully accomplish it. Wages are low, but prices get higher. Many big families do not have enough money for food and clothing, no matter how hard the parents work in their poorly-paying jobs."
- "I think that Article 23 of the Declaration is regularly being violated in Slovakia. Job openings, wages, unemployment – those are the current problems that affect our whole society. The right to work belongs to natural human rights, however it appears that this right is slowly becoming a privilege. The reason behind that is the lack of job openings, as well as favouritism granted to relatives when filling free positions."

7. Women are being discriminated against and their opportunities to exercise their rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are limited.

- "Even though we live in the 21st century, in certain parts of the world women are considered to be inferior to men or even being abused and exploited in the worst possible way. Although the Declaration claims that both men and women are afforded equal rights, this wording seems to be insufficient. If someone was to object, I suggest they compare the number of abused women and abused men. Therefore, if we consider it in a serious and rational way, we must acknowledge the need for protecting women, who are often considered

to be "the weaker gender, unable to make a choice on their own or an accessory to the stronger gender."

- "Women are being discriminated against even in this contemporary progressive society. It happens quite often that a woman does not get chosen for a position solely because she is a woman. It may not be open discrimination, since the Declaration itself states that both genders are equal. However, we still have not managed to overcome the prejudice that a woman can e.g. successfully work in the top management."

8. It is necessary to include human rights classes in the educational process and start to teach students in elementary schools about the essential documents, which undoubtedly involve the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

- "It is important to teach children respect for these rules and freedoms by appropriately educating them. Because people are afforded both rights and obligations, and one of these obligations is to be a human."
- "The worst case is when people do not know their rights and they often end up backing down to their disadvantage. Therefore, we should teach children about their rights and start with the fundamental ones provided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

**Analysis of the results and their interpretation**

After setting the analytical categories of the content, the next step for us was to thoroughly read the student essays. After we discovered the occurrence of a record unit, we matched it with an analytical category on the record sheet.

Every text was provided with one line on the record sheet, which besides the occurrence of the record unit in a particular analytical category included the basic information about each respondent (the author of the essay), i.e. the age, gender and type of completed education.

In that way, we were able to establish the characteristics of each text and the frequency of the occurrence of record units in a particular analytical category for the whole sample of student essays. From all the texts (102):

- 52% of the respondents stated that they have learned about the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (hereinafter "the Declaration") for the first time while studying at university,
- 69% of the respondents consider the Declaration to be formalistic and idealistic, but do not deny its contribution to humanity,
- 98% of the respondents claimed in their essays that the Declaration is not being abided and the rights set forth in it are being violated,

• 91% of the respondents consider Article 3 of the Declaration to be the most important, since it states that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person,

• 46% of the respondents think that abortion is a violation of Article 3 of the Declaration, although they admit that it can be necessary if the life of the mother or the child is in danger,

• 79% of the respondents showed dissatisfaction with the social and economic conditions in Slovakia, which do not allow for individual articles of the Declaration to be fulfilled, most importantly Article 23, which reads that everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment,

• 52% of the respondents stated that even nowadays women are being discriminated against and their opportunities to exercise their rights under the Declaration are limited,

• 93% of the respondents expressed the opinion that it is necessary to include human rights classes in the educational process and that such inclusion should start at the elementary school level.

Besides the ideas presented in our analysis, students mentioned in their essays reflections on euthanasia, on whether all people are really considered innocent until proven guilty, on the war in Iraq and Syria, on humanitarian help for war victims etc.

The numbers listed above were, to a significant extent, influenced by the fact that 52% of the students have learned about the text of the Declaration for the first time. Therefore, it is not surprising that they consider the Declaration to be idealistic and formalistic, that they view its articles in the light of their own subjective impressions and often find themselves pessimistic about the society in which they do not see their future. For them life is the ultimate value, superior to everything else, including the life of an unborn child. Therefore, they consider Article 3 to be the most important and abortion to be a violation of the Declaration.

On the other hand, what is positive is that students usually came to a conclusion that it is necessary to include human rights classes in the educational process at the elementary school level. They are aware of the need for such education, because an individual aware of his/her rights also respects the rights of others. They are convinced that human rights classes can prevent sociopathological behaviour of children and adolescents.

## Conclusion

The results of our analysis showed that it is still necessary to pay attention to the issue of human rights. People's knowledge of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and human rights in general is neither complete nor complex, so it can come across as a collection of ideals without a real basis. To develop a positive relationship to the protection and enforcement of human rights, it is necessary to create a system of expanding knowledge starting at the elementary school level and all the way up to the higher education level. In an environment where the rights of both children and adults are being respected and exercised, the knowledge of human rights becomes less exceptional and rather becomes a common, everyday reality in the life of every individual. Our environment is a strong influence on developing relationships to different parts of the reality, and if a certain document is perceived as a natural part of the society's life, its value is not only motivational, but also practical. For that reason, the educational environment of every school or university should include multicultural education. Everyone evaluates the importance of protecting and exercising human rights from his/her own perspective that is affected by his/her knowledge, experience and actual performance. It is apparent that it is not enough to have knowledge of a certain issue, but one has to be able to analyse certain documents in the light of particular relations and circumstances, which applies to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well. Being aware of the content of important documents and safeguarding them is significant not only for knowing our own rights, but also for accepting the rights of others coming from different cultures.

This article was written under the project: APVV-15-0360 Dimensions of the revitalization of ethnic minorities in Slovakia: Interdisciplinary rescue research of the vanishing ethnic group of Huncokars.

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