



ELT RESEARCH

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Researching language teaching and learning in a classroom setting

Special Conference Issue, edited by Mirosław Pawlak and Sarah Mercer

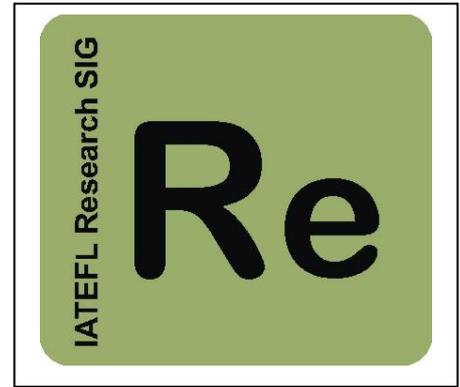


Summer 2012 Issue 27

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This special conference issue was co-edited by **Mirosław Pawlak** and **Sarah Mercer**. Layout and formatting were undertaken by **Gosia Sky**, *ELT Research* co-editor.

Introduction

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The papers included in this special issue of *ELT Research* all originate from the conference *Classroom-oriented research: Achievements and challenges* that took place in Kalisz, Poland, between October 14th and 16th, 2011. The conference was organized by the Department of English Studies, Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts of Adam Mickiewicz University in Kalisz in cooperation with State School of Higher Professional Education in Konin, the University of Łódź, and IATEFL Research SIG, which supported the participation of three of the plenary speakers. The event brought together over a hundred teachers and researchers from Poland and abroad who delivered over eighty papers dealing with the researching of different aspects of foreign language learning and teaching in a classroom setting, some of which have served as a basis for the contributions contained in the present collection. Whilst their authors discuss these issues in respect to different foreign languages, all the papers share a common interest in ways of researching different dimensions of foreign languages which are of relevance across linguistic domains.

On account of the diversity of the topics covered and the methodological choices made, we have opted to adopt an alphabetical order rather than divide the papers into sections that would deal with similar issues. In the first contribution, Reza Barzegar and Rana Azarizad look at the effects of dynamic assessment, operationalized as explicit feedback on erroneously used language forms, on the acquisition of English tenses (i.e., simple present, simple past, present continuous, past continuous and present perfect). In the second paper, George Cremona analyzes textbooks used in teaching German as a foreign language in relation to the extent to which they satisfy the criterion of multimodality, or reliance on different units through which the message is presented and transmitted. In the following paper, Anna Czura sets out to explore the use of mixed methods research in empirical investigations of learner autonomy, focusing in particular on the role of different forms of self-assessment, the effects of which are explored by means of a combination of quantitative and qualitative research procedures. Methodological issues are also the focus of the next two papers, with Katarzyna Hryniuk considering

the application of eye-tracking research in gaining insights into the processes of reading in a second language, and Sarah Mercer exploring the ways in which the concept of the self in second language acquisition can be investigated from a complexity perspective. In the next paper, Anna Niżegorodcew concentrates on the criteria for evaluating BA and MA research projects focusing on the incorporation of cultural elements into foreign language instruction, placing particular emphasis on the need for student writers' autonomy and creativity. The paper by Mirosław Pawlak shifts attention to the nature of classroom interaction by investigating the degree to which the quantitative and qualitative aspects of pair and group work can contribute the creation of conditions conducive to language development. Next, Simone E. Pfenninger examines the value of an early start in language learning on the acquisition of English morphology. Jennifer Schumm Fauster then reports the findings of a pilot study which drew on the principles of exploratory practice to determine the utility of young adult literature in raising intercultural competence and which also explicitly investigated the participants' attitudes towards the use of this technique. The paper by Elżbieta Szymańska-Czaplak describes an international project conducted with Polish and Spanish learners with the help of an e-learning platform and its contribution to raising their cultural awareness. Then, Olga Trendak presents the results of a study which investigated the effects of training in cognitive and memory strategies on the frequency of use of these strategies as well as the acquisition of English emphasis. In the following paper, Anna Turula examines the attitudes of students towards and online TEFL course, adopting both a macro and micro perspective. In the last two contributions to this special issue, Aleksandra Wach provides data on teachers' experience in conducting action research as part of their MA seminar program, and Magdalena Witkowska uses think-aloud protocols to tap novice teachers' knowledge and understanding of language teaching methodology.

We hope that thanks to the breadth of topics covered, concrete guidelines on how methodological choices can be made, as well as illustrations of how classroom-based research can be carried out in practice, the papers included in this issue will encourage more research into the teaching and learning of foreign and second languages as it happens in real classrooms. Such well-designed, context-sensitive studies are indispensable if our goal is to enhance the effectiveness of language instruction in a range of specific local contexts. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of the contributors for having invested the time in writing up their experiences and sharing them with us in this way. We hope you enjoy reading this special issue.

Using dynamic assessment to improve L2 learners' knowledge of grammar: Evidence from the tenses

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Background

This research is an attempt to examine the effect of Dynamic Assessment (DA) of speaking on better rule internalization through giving explicit feedback and focusing on form among Iranian EFL intermediate learners. Poehner and Lantolf (2005) define dynamic assessment as the interaction between assessor as intervener and learner as active participant with the aim of making cognitive changes in the learner during the process of learning and assessing. This study has focused on the interaction between assessor and learner in the form of explicit feedback on some grammatical forms. Unlike other skills, however, speaking has not received much attention as far as DA is concerned. More specifically, the focus on spoken grammar seems to have attracted minimal attention from the scholars in the field. The focus has been mainly on the reading skill because of the difficulties that students have been facing. Most students are aware of grammatical forms; however, they are not always successful in having an acceptable performance of their competence; therefore, this study is an attempt to help rules to be internalized better through the mediation of the assessor through giving explicit feedback which also helps learners to perform independently. In other words, DA, which is implemented with the help and mediation of the teacher, helps learners reach a well-formed performance and accomplish a task without the help of the teacher. Regarding DA, various studies have been conducted on reading and writing whose results show the effectiveness of dynamic assessment in comparison to the conventional forms of assessment. As a case in point, in previous studies, Anton (2003) used DA as a

diagnostic test on reading and writing of advanced learners of English whose native language was Spanish. She concluded that those with less knowledge had more revisions compared to those with higher knowledge. Therefore, she concluded that weaker students benefit more from DA.

Although little research has been conducted on the effect of DA on speaking, there is a study on Japanese students by Hill and Sabet (2009) which can be referred to here. First, they asked the students to speak about one of their previous experiences using the past tense. In the second phase, the students were given a more difficult test task (paraphrasing a story using the past tense). During this phase, the students benefited from the mediation of the assessor in the form of explicit feedback. Finally, in the third phase, the students were asked to rephrase another story in the past, in order to check how much of the mediation is transferred from the second to the third phase. The results showed a significant difference between the performance of the students who received DA and that of those who did not. All in all, the scarcity of research on the application of DA in improving learners' spoken grammar gave the researchers in the present study the impetus to embark upon a program of research which would explore the potential of DA in this area.

The Study

As the collected data were on an interval scale and the ultimate analyses made use of inferential statistics, we decided to proceed with hypotheses rather than the original research questions. Therefore, the following null hypotheses were proposed:

1. Dynamic assessment of speaking through giving explicit feedback and focusing on form has no significant effect on better rule internalization among the Iranian EFL intermediate learners.
2. There is no statistically significant difference in internalization rank of the five forms in question (namely, simple present, simple past, present continuous, past continuous and present perfect) through administering dynamic assessment of speaking among Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

Method

Participants

To accomplish the objectives of this study, sixty male and female learners of English at a Language School in Tehran were selected. The learners ranged in age from 17 to 24 and were all Iranians at the intermediate level of proficiency. They had all studied two books of Natural English in two levels of elementary and pre-intermediate; therefore, they had been exposed to all the five grammatical forms in question. The participants were

randomly assigned to two groups; one served as the experimental group, and the other as the control group.

Instrumentation

In order to carry out this study, a twenty item teacher made pretest of grammar was used for both experimental and control groups and the scoring was out of twenty (see Appendix A). This test consisted of four questions on each of the five forms in question. The purpose of administering the pretest in both groups was to ascertain that there was not any significant difference between the two groups in terms of their knowledge of grammar at the outset of the experiment. The same test functioned as the posttest in both groups at the end of the experiment.

The second instrument used in this study was based on a short anecdote (see Appendix A) which was chosen from the intermediate section of Hill's *Anecdotes in American English* (1980). The readability index of the anecdote was calculated beforehand, following the Lexical Density Test, to make sure that it is at the same level of difficulty as the texts in the learners' textbooks. Table 1 shows the results of the readability analysis.

Table 1. Readability Results of the Text Used for DA

The mean readability of five reading texts from Natural English book (Intermediate)	45
SD	4
Text readability used in the DA phase	43

The readability of the text used for DA phase had to be one SD above and below the mean, i.e., between 41 and 49. As can be seen, the readability of the DA text was 43, which was in the acceptable range.

Procedure

After ten sessions of instruction of the five forms in question, the experimental group went through DA as the mid-term exam, while the control group took the usual conventional mid-term exam of the institute. The DA which was administered in the experimental group took the form of an anecdote which was unseen by the learners, by giving them a checklist beforehand. During the DA phase, which took two hours, the learners were given fifteen minutes to go through the text and then they were asked to paraphrase it. They were told to use the same tenses used in the text, especially the tenses in the direct quotations, while they were paraphrasing the text. While the other learners were busy doing the task from their textbook, each learner was asked to come and sit next to the assessor and paraphrase the text. While the learners were being tested, the assessor had to provide the learners with explicit feedback on the five abovementioned forms. According to Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) explicit feedback can be more beneficial, because implicit feedback engages learners in heavy mental guess work. Whenever the learners made a mistake, the assessor gave them explicit feedback. The

whole process was recorded, so the following two transcripts may help clarify the process. In one interaction, the assessor said:

"There is something wrong with the grammar here", or "no, this is not the correct form"

As a last resort, the assessor said:

"No, you should use the past tense here...."

Here is another example of the interaction between the assessor (A) and a student (S):

S: Mr. Parker is going straight...

A: There is a mistake here.

S: Mr. Parker went straight...

A: No, it should still be continuous but in the past...

S: Yes, Mr. Parker was going straight...

Following Nassaji and Swain (2000), the explicit feedback that the learners were provided with had two important features: firstly, it was contingent on the needs of the learners, and secondly, it was graduated, i.e. whenever there was no need, the feedback was removed. After the paraphrasing was done, the learner had to leave the class. It seems crucial to explain at this point that the whole process of DA was recorded; however, the learners were informed only after the research was over and they expressed their consent with the use of the data obtained. As the recording was done secretly, it seemed to have had little or no effect on the performance of the learners. It is also crucial to bear in mind that the task which was given to the learners (paraphrasing a text) had to be beyond the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) of the learners in comparison with the pretest because, according to Haywood and Lidz (2007), there is no point in providing mediation for a task which has already been mastered by the learners. At the end of the course, the learners took the posttest and the results were analyzed. This procedure was done only once.

Results

In order to analyze the data obtained from the experiment, first a test of normality was run, the results of which are shown in Table 2. Two tests of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk were used to see if the score distribution was normal.

As shown in Table 2, the distribution is normal in the control group, because the significance value of 0.071 exceeds 0.05. However, in the experimental group it can be seen that the distribution is not normal because the significance value of 0.012 is lower than 0.05. Due to the lack of normality of distribution, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to test the hypotheses. The output of the analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Tests of Normality on Pretest Results

Treatment	Kolmogorov-Smirnov(a)			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Control Group	0.153	30	0.071	0.944	30	0.120
Experimental Group	0.182	30	0.012	0.927	30	0.040

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U Test to Compare Learners' Performance on the Pre-test

	Pre-Test
Mann-Whitney Statistics	428.500
Z	-0.323
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.746

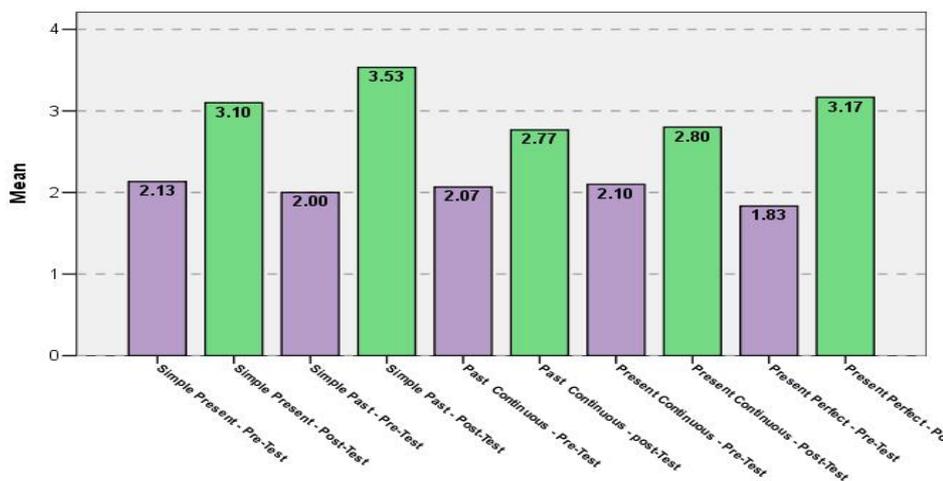
As shown in Table 3, there is no significant difference between the performances of the two groups on the pretest, because as it can be observed, the significance value of 0.746 exceeds 0.050. In other words, the two groups did not significantly vary in their knowledge of the five forms at the outset of the study. At the end of the semester, the learners were given the posttest along with the final exam. Since the distribution was not normal, again the scores obtained from each group were analyzed through the Mann-Whitney U test as depicted in Table 4.

According to Table 4, it can be observed that there is a significant difference between the scores obtained from the two groups because as it can be seen in Table 4, the significance value of 0.015 is lower than 0.050.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U Test to Compare Learners' Performance on the Post-test

	Post-Test
Mann-Whitney Statistics	290.000
Z	-2.426
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.015

Figure 1. The Development Rate of the Five Grammatical Form



Therefore, it could be concluded that there is a significant difference between the performances of the two groups at the end of the experiment, i.e. that the group undergoing DA improved significantly more than the group which did not undergo it.

Finally, the scores obtained from the pre-test and the post-test in the experimental group were analyzed to see which of the five forms in question was improved the best. To that end, the nonparametric test of Friedman was used to determine if each form was developed at equal intervals. The results are summarized in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Friedman Test on Development Rate of Five Grammatical Forms

N	30
Chi-Square	41.67179
Df	4
Asymp. Sig.	0.000

As shown in Table 5, the second null hypothesis of this research can be rejected as well, because the significance level of 0.000 is lower than 0.05. The following Figure illustrates the rate of development of each form.

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, simple past is the form which is developed the best, followed by present perfect, simple present, past continuous and present continuous respectively.

Discussion

The results of this study showed that the experimental group, which went through DA, outperformed the control group on the use of the five tenses mentioned above. This might partly be due to the effectiveness of the interaction between the assessor and the examinee in the form of explicit feedback, an interaction that might have helped the rules to be internalized better; a finding that would corroborate Hill and Sabet (2000). In addition, it was observed that simple past was the tense which was mastered the best. Again the probable explanation for obtaining this result can be its frequency in Persian which is mother tongue of the learners. Further, the number of verbs in the past tense in the text, which was used as DA, was more than the number of the other four tenses.

The positive washback of DA could also be another reason why learners in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group. It was observed, by the researchers, that learners in the experimental group were more eager and willing to have class participation, and weaker students were not afraid of expressing their ideas; they also appeared more motivated to the researchers compared to participants in the control group and tried to attend the class on time. This could ultimately have led to greater exposure to and hence better mastery of the forms in question.

The outcomes of this study may lend further support to Lantolf (2006) that what is being done with the help and mediation of the others is what can be done alone in the future. In the present study, the mediation provided by the researchers might have been effectively transferred to the new context such as that of the final exam, explaining why the learners in the experimental group performed significantly better. This could, in turn, transfer to even more naturalistic contexts, those in real life, and help the learners use the forms authentically and independently.

The results of this study are also in line with what Nassaji and Swain (2000) have argued regarding explicit feedback: the mediation provided through giving explicit feedback works better than that provided implicitly as implicit feedback engages the learner in a good deal of mental work in which they may not be able to locate the erroneous performance precisely.

As all the above mentioned studies as well as the present one suggest, DA can be an effective instrument in bringing about certain cognitive changes in learners and enhancing performance. Further, the learners' independent performance may be considered a significant achievement brought about the present study and the ones cited above.

Conclusion

From a theoretical perspective, the results reiterate the claim that according to sociocultural theory, what the learner can do with the help of the teacher is what they can do alone in the future. Therefore, it can be claimed that DA is not an instrument of power, but a democratic instrument of learning. In other words, DA may contribute to inducing cognitive development in learners and helping them to reach from other regulation to self-regulation and perform independently. From a pedagogical perspective, given that dynamic assessment involves the integration of teaching and assessing, this study could provide support for using explicit feedback as mediation during the process of dynamic assessment. It also implies that this technique can be used for teaching the use of grammatical rules in oral communication. Mediation, which is the integral part of the sociocultural theory, helps the rules to be internalized more effectively (Appel & Lantolf, 1994). Therefore, teachers can use DA as an independent exam or, at the very least, as a complement to a conventional exam.

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Appendix

Copy of Pretest, Posttest and DA Test

Pretest and Posttest (questions were not asked successively)

Simple present

Where do you usually go for summer holidays?
What do you do at weekends?
Where do you live?
When do you wake up in the mornings?

Simple past

Where did you go for Norouz holiday last year?
What did you have for lunch yesterday?
When did you wake up this morning?
When did you start learning English?

Present perfect

Have you ever been abroad?
How many terms have you studied English here?
Have you ever lost your mobile phone?
Have you ever played tennis?

Present continuous

What are you wearing now?
What am I doing now?
Do you know what your mother is doing now?
Who are you living with?

Past continuous

What were you doing when i entered the class?
Was it raining this morning?
Did you watch TV last night when you were having lunch?
What were you doing this morning at 8?

Dynamic Assessment text for paraphrasing as midterm exam:

Mr. Parker is a kind man who lives in a small town. One day Mr. Parker said to himself: "I haven't seen my brother David for a long time, and he is living in a new house now. I'm going to drive there and see him this afternoon." He took his brother's address, got into his car and started out. He was driving for a long time, but still couldn't find the house so he stopped and asked somebody to help him. "You have come the wrong way. Go straight along this road for two miles," the man said, "then turn left, and then take the second road on the right." While Mr. Parker was going straight along the road and he was trying to turn left after two miles, but he got lost again. He drove for another mile, and at last

he saw a road on his right and stopped. A woman was coming toward him, so he said to her, "Excuse me, is this the second road on the right?"

Adopting a multimodal German as a foreign language (GFL) coursebook approach

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Introduction

"Oh no ... I forgot my textbook at home". Experienced and novice teachers alike are familiar with such a statement. Students at times forget to bring with them in class what is frequently treated as the bread and butter of the daily teacher conduct. Textbooks indeed are the most popular tool used globally within the classroom (UNESCO, 2007). The Foreign Language (FL) classroom is no exception. In this case, textbooks together with other authentic texts (Widdowson, 1990) bring the learner closer to the target language being taught.

While acknowledging the importance of texts, this paper goes one step further and aims at analysing a number of German as a Foreign Language (GFL) texts multimodally. This will be done, initially by defining the terms 'mode' and 'multimodality', highlighting the conventional distinctions which often feature in literature, i.e., distinguishing between superordinate – subordinate modes as well as embodied – disembodied modes. Adopting a practical multimodal text analysis, the paper then moves on to analyse whether particular GFL texts are indeed multimodal, a question rarely tackled by literature.

Defining modes and their qualities

Texts – be it the textbook or other possible authentic materials used – are wholes made of parts. The text is made up of a variety of small units through which the message may be transmitted or presented (Kress, 2010). These small units are called *modes*. Each mode has a particular potential which Stein (2008) refers to as *affordances*. Thus, what the printed text mode can do is different from what may be achieved through other modes such as spoken text, clothes, colour, layout or music.

Since each text consists of a collection of these modes presented together, the text is considered to be multimodal i.e., containing more than one mode, thus consisting of an array of modes. As should be clear from

the different modes identified above, the latter (i.e., modes) vary in nature. Norris (2004, p. 65) highlights two major types of modes:

- *Embodied modes* including spoken language, gesture, gaze, or posture. These are bodily produced modes. Language here is not the only mode available. Instead, other embodied modes apart from language "can play a *superordinate* or an *equal* role to the mode of language in interaction, and therefore, these modes are not merely embellishments to language".
- *Disembodied modes* "include among others music, print, layout, colour, clothes and any other mode deriving from the setting or material world where the interaction is happening. These too can take a superordinate role in interaction and at times even 'overrule' embodied modes".

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) also distinguish further between the *superordinate* and the *subordinate mode*. The superordinate mode – what I call the leading mode on which all other modes depend and thus the one transmitting the main message – is therefore supported by other *subordinate modes*, which eventually help to form a fuller picture, complimenting the *superordinate* mode opted by the designer of the text.

The Study

Research question

The study reported below addressed the following research question: Are the texts used to teach GFL actually multimodal? This might appear to be a question with a straightforward affirmative answer. However, since very little multimodal research has been conducted till now in the GFL field, I felt that before exploring further avenues about the effects of different modes on GFL students (as I am currently planning to do in the near future), it would be worth analysing and getting familiar with the multimodal nature of commonly used GFL texts.

Methodology

When selecting the GFL texts to include in the study, I have selected three GFL textbook series proposed and promoted by the Goethe Institute, the institution promoting the learning of GFL around the globe. The series selected are:

- the *Schritte International* series published by Hueber;
- the *Magnet* series published by Klett;
- the *Geni@I* series published by Langenscheidt.

This selection was done with the intention to analyse texts used by a wider audience and consequently larger number of GFL students. Each text was analyzed in

great depth with the help of the following step-by-step procedure:

1. Initial reading of text focusing on the general qualities of each text.
2. Identifying the modes distinguishing between superordinate and subordinate modes.
3. Analyzing the modes individually distinguishing between embodied and disembodied modes,
4. Conducting an intermodal analysis – looking at modes as a whole.

Research findings

The above chronological process produced a list of modes. The compiled list was later analysed in detail. The outcomes of the detailed analyses of modes indicates that:

1. The GFL texts analysed are indeed multimodal.
2. The superordinate-subordinate and embodied-disembodied distinctions apply to all GFL texts analysed.
3. A third additional distinction needs to be added when categorizing modes, i.e., that between easily perceived – less easily perceived modal arrangements.

The discussion below intends to elaborate on the three findings above. The analysis of the data shows that while some texts clearly entail multimodality, others although still entailing the multimodal element, manifest it in 'silent' ways. Due to space constraints, the explanation of this point will be illustrated with examples derived only from one of the three series analysed, the *Schritte International Series*. I opted for *Schritte International* since it is the set textbook proposed for GFL Maltese classrooms. Thus, this article can hopefully also offer Maltese GFL teachers and students a further source of reflection about the texts they are using and about the benefits those able to identify modes may obtain.

Easily perceived arrangements

At times, as soon as the reader views the text for the first time, the reader may easily realize that there are various modes playing their role in transmitting a particular message. For example, an analysis of each DVD track which the book offers to supplement chapter content clearly indicates how the designers amalgamate a variety of embodied modes including speech, gestures and gaze with other disembodied modes such as music, colour, clothes and layout to transmit the message.

Less easily perceived modal arrangements

At other times, however, this clarity is absent from the GFL text. Instead, other texts at first glance seem to offer just one or few modes; however, a more in depth analysis of the same texts provides evidence that the

text is composed of a complex array of modes. Such is the case of the *Photo Story* section opening each chapter of *Schritte International*. The superordinate mode of the Photo Stories is spoken speech. A dialogue between different participants sets the context of the chapter. Eight pictures presenting eight snapshots from the dialogue make the image the 'more easily perceived' subordinate mode used in this particular modal arrangement.

Stopping at this level, however, would mean being satisfied with a very shallow analysis. In fact, a closer inspection reveals that other, less easily visible modes are also present in this text. These include, among others:

- the layout of the participants in the picture;
- the perspective of the photos;
- the colours used;
- the different picture levels including the background and the foreground;
- the layout of pictures themselves;
- the different levels of speech including rhythm and intonation.

To give one more example of the role that such less easy to perceive modes may play, it is worth stating that *Schritte* includes also a *Zwischenspiele* which concludes each chapter. In each *Zwischenspiel*, images represent the superordinate mode, which is in fact easy to perceive. Furthermore, this image mode is aided by other less visible modes which include:

- colour of objects or clothes;
- posture of people featuring in the pictures;
- the layout and arrangements of the objects and people featuring in the pictures;
- the gaze of people featuring in the pictures;
- the gestures one observes of those seen in the pictures.

Although very 'silent', all of these work hand in hand with the superordinate mode to convey to the reader messages which complement the messages presented by the *superordinate mode*.

Conclusion

Modes, i.e., channels through which GFL texts transmit their messages, are not always very clear to identify. At times as evident from the investigation conducted and the examples presented above, some of these channels are difficult to identify since they invisibly reside at the background because of the effect(s) of other more predominant, more obvious modes (i.e., the superordinate modes).

The findings of this paper are a very preliminary attempt in the analyses of modes. Indeed the main aim here is to encourage other similar GFL text analyses exercises

and to whet the appetite for further practical questions investigating visible and less visible modes in GFL learning contexts. Indeed, this is not the end ... it is just a beginning.

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Mixed methods research – An appropriate methodology for researching autonomy?

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Introduction

According to frequently voiced opinions, learner autonomy can be enhanced when appropriate pedagogical measures are introduced into the classroom. It is believed, for example, that self-directed use of resources (Fenner, 2000), training learners in self-assess use (Sheerin, 1997) or individualisation of popular classroom tasks (Dam, 1995) have a positive impact on learner autonomy. Still, there is surprisingly little empirical evidence that would support these claims. As Benson (2011: 201) points out, “researchers draw conclusions about the nature of autonomy and the practices associated with it from reflection on their own and others’ experiences of practice. Systematic collection and analysis of data has been less frequent.” This article sets out an attempt to employ a more systematic approach to measuring autonomy in a research study investigating the impact of assessment method on the development of autonomy in adolescent language learners. It should be underlined here that the main aim of the article is not to present the research results but to discuss and evaluate the adopted methodological approach.

Measuring autonomy

Benson (2011) indicated three main aspects of autonomy which pose a problem in researching this construct and, consequently, need to be considered before designing any empirical study:

- *Complexity of practice.* All teaching practices, such as language assessment or strategy training, embrace different elements that might be applied by teachers at different stages of classroom teaching. Therefore, it might be difficult to indicate with precision which aspects of classroom practice affect learner autonomy.

- *Complexity of autonomy.* Due to the multi-faceted nature of autonomy, there have been numerous attempts to formulate a definition embracing all aspects of this construct. Benson (2010, 2011) claims that a coherent definition should pertain to three interdependent levels of control, that is control over learning management, cognitive process and learning content. As autonomy has to be interpreted at different levels of control, any research should approach autonomy as a set of aspects, rather than a coherent and uniform entity. The success of research depends on accurate selection of aspects of autonomy the researcher wants to focus on.
- *Context.* Research on learner autonomy should not disregard the immediate context in which the study takes place. Such factors as the subjects’ age, social and cultural background or educational traditions of a particular education setting need to be taken into consideration to obtain more in-depth data.

Mixed Methods Research on Learner Autonomy

Aims of the study

In response to the calls for a more systematic approach to researching autonomy, a number of empirical studies have been conducted over the last decade. This article aims to evaluate a methodological approach applied in a study designed to determine whether the application of different assessment methods, such as language portfolio, project work, formal classroom observation and peer-assessment, affects the level of autonomy in lower secondary school learners. Additionally, the research was intended to establish the most effective assessment method which would encourage the learners in this age group to make independent decisions concerning their own learning process (Czura, 2010).

Methodological approach

To accomplish the research objectives, a year-long quasi-experiment involving 4 experimental and 1 control groups was conducted. The total of 116 subjects were assessed according to uniform regulations imposed by the school, and each experimental group was additionally subjected to one alternative method: portfolio (group 1), project (2), peer-assessment (3) and observation (4). To ensure comparability, all groups followed the same syllabus and were exposed to the same amount of language instruction, i.e. 3 hours per week. Each group consisted of 1- and 2-grade learners (aged 13-14). The 3-graders were eliminated to minimize the impact of maturational differences and a possible washback effect of the external examination taking place at the end of school.

In order to overcome the limitations of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, mixed methods research

was implemented. The combination of several research methods (both qualitative and quantitative) in a single research study was hoped to help in obtaining a clearer, more comprehensive and reliable picture of research findings. Three research instruments were applied in the study: a questionnaire on learner autonomy (applied before and after the treatment), monthly classroom observation, and semi-structured interviews with the learners. All these instruments were constructed on the basis of descriptions of autonomous behaviours (Boud, 1988; Breen and Mann, 1997; Dickinson, 1992; Legutke and Thomas 1991; Sheerin, 1997), and acknowledged autonomy questionnaires used in the Polish educational context (Michońska-Stadnik, 2000; Pawlak, 2004).

Additionally, all these instruments focused on seven aspects of autonomy, i.e. selection and implementation of relevant resources, collaboration with peers, ability to establish learning aims and objectives, engagement in outside classroom learning, learners' ability to evaluate their own learning process, implementation of appropriate learning strategies and learners' attitudes toward teachers and their role in education. The questionnaire consisted of 35 items in which the answers were graded according to a Likert-type scale where 1 indicated 'strongly disagree' and 5 'strongly agree.' To enhance the validity of the observations and interviews, the researcher consistently used a specially designed observation sheet and interview scheme. The research groups were observed once a month in a variety of classroom situations involving language instruction, practice, production, as well as assessment-related procedures. Finally, at the end of the research, a semi-structured interview with selected subjects from each research group was conducted. The researcher was an objective observer and did not participate in the process of instruction.

Let us now discuss how the problems with researching autonomy outlined by Benson (2011) were dealt with in the research design.

- *Complexity of practice.* As language assessment is a broad and multi-faceted category of classroom practice, different assessment methods involving some elements of self-assessment were used in the experimental groups. Moreover, monthly observation focused on different aspects of assessment applied in the classroom, such as the development of self-assessment skills or the ability to set and apply assessment criteria.
- *Complexity of autonomy.* Due to its complexity, learner autonomy should not be interpreted as an absolute entity. The research instruments designed for the purposes of the research did not focus on learner autonomy as a whole, but aimed at analysing seven areas of this construct, which constituted the basis of all the data collection tools and were

consistently referred to in the process of presenting and analysing the results.

- *Context.* The conducted study offers a wider perspective on the nature of autonomous behaviours exhibited by lower secondary school learners in the classroom and in self-study situations as well as diverse teaching practices used to promote self-direction in a given context. It is understood that the obtained results are limited to a specific educational tradition and setting in which the research took place.

Evaluation of the applied methodology

The analysis of the data obtained through the questionnaire and qualitative instruments reveals that some responses to the former were to some extent overstated. For example, the subjects' overall level of autonomy can be described as moderate, and the scores on the subscale pertaining to their ability to cooperate with peers indicate that the learners highly evaluate their collaborative skills. In the meantime, in the interviews, a large number of subjects openly expressed their unwillingness to take responsibility for the task. Additionally, in pair and group work the subjects tended to overuse the mother tongue, failed to distribute their work equally and did not attempt to evaluate the quality of their own work. Such overstated opinions in the questionnaire comply with a natural tendency of human beings to present themselves from a better perspective in order to maintain a sense of self-worth (Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2010).

The second reason for such exaggerated estimations is learners' limited awareness of the nature of language learning. The analysis of the questionnaire responses showed that the highest scores were obtained on the subscales describing self-assessment skills and the ability to apply appropriate learning strategies. During interviews it turned out that the subjects' perception of their strengths and weaknesses was limited to grammar and vocabulary only, and they were not able to explain how they self-assess their progress in language learning. When asked about learning strategies, the subjects enumerated a large number of techniques, such as memorisation of grammar rules, learning vocabulary in isolation or reading new words according to their spelling. As Oxford (2002) underlines, both more and less effective learners are able to recall and describe the strategies that they use in language learning. The subjects in this study can therefore be characterised as less effective learners, and the strategies they listed are unlikely to promote the development of communicative competence.

Despite these discrepancies, the questionnaire helped to observe certain trends and characteristic patterns in the research groups. For example, in comparison with other groups, group 3 and 4 obtained lower results across all

the subscales, and this result was confirmed during observations and interviews as the learners tended to be more reliant on the teacher, exhibited ineffective collaborative skills and used fewer resources or learning strategies. Additionally, observations and interviews helped to interpret some statistically significant differences in results obtained on the basis of the questionnaire. In group 1, the ability to implement learning resources increased and this finding was supported by observations and interviews. This situation might have stemmed from the fact that, unlike in other assessment methods, almost all items included in the portfolio exceeded the content of the coursebook and compelled the learners to look for information in other sources.

When it comes to qualitative tools, monthly observations proved particularly useful in researching such aspects of autonomy as cooperative skills, learners' attitudes to the teacher, their interest in their own progress and grades, as well as a number of important phenomena, such as class dynamics and discipline, which seemed to have exerted a considerable influence on the results of the experiment. These findings as well as numerous incidents observed in the classroom played a crucial role in supplementing the analysis of the quantitative data obtained on the basis of the questionnaire. Although autonomous behaviours constituted the focal point of the research, monthly observations additionally helped to gather data concerning assessment-related teaching procedures, such as setting assessment standards and criteria or the self-assessment process.

Finally, the interviews proved to be a particularly valuable data collection tool as they offered important insights into non-observable aspects of learner autonomy as well as different strategies or techniques the subjects implemented in self-study situations. Despite their young age, adolescent learners provided surprisingly honest and sensible answers, deprived of bias and negative feelings towards peers or teachers. Initially, the subjects' responses tended to overstate their level of autonomy, which resulted from their willingness to supply a desirable answer or from their insufficient knowledge regarding language learning. The semi-structured form of the interview allowed the researcher to ask for clarification or examples of autonomous behaviours. Being aware of the need to provide further explanation and instances of their self-directed actions, with time the subjects started to provide more objective and insightful responses.

Conclusions

Mixed methods research offers an interesting alternative to purely qualitative or quantitative approaches to measuring autonomy. In the presented study, the applied methodological approach helped to obtain insightful information not only about individual students but also about language teaching in the selected

educational setting. Although the results obtained by means of the questionnaire were not entirely accurate, they indicated certain trends, which were later supported by qualitative methods. The questionnaire provided insights into the aspects of language learning which cannot be directly observed in language classroom, such as learners' attitudes or outside school learning. Moreover, the quantitative data supplemented the information collected on the basis of the qualitative methods and enabled the researcher to understand certain behaviour patterns or different observed occurrences with greater accuracy. It can be stated that a questionnaire can serve as a useful instrument of measuring autonomy only when it is supplemented with a qualitative tool, such as regular observation, interviews, focus group interviews, learning log (diaries) or open-ended survey.

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The use of eye-tracking research methods in the exploration of the process of reading in a foreign language

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present basic research results concerning eye movements whilst reading, which scientists have gained through the use of eye-tracking methodology, and to suggest new directions of research. Eye trackers are nowadays used in many areas such as neuromarketing (i.e., exploring people's perception of advertisements and products), website ergonomics, aviation medicine, driving, human-computer interaction, etc. (Duchowski, 2007). They are also beginning to attract the interest of scholars in the area of applied linguistics as, via the use of this equipment, it is possible to carry out large-scale research and vast amounts of highly-detailed data can be gained.

Until the 1960s the equipment used for such research was relatively uncomplicated and the methods applied were usually invasive. Significant progress in eye-tracking research took place in the second half of the 1970s with the introduction and use of computers on a larger scale and large technological advancement all over the world. Contemporary eye-trackers consist of measuring systems connected to, or integrated with, a computer. A miniature video camera is attached to a computer monitor (or in the case of mobile eye-trackers – to special glasses), and registers movements of the eyes at as much as 300 times per second (Richardson & Spivey, 2008). It registers at which points in a text, displayed on the screen, the eyes stop, for how long and in what order. This data can be presented in the form of gaze plots and heat maps or the recorded film showing the movements can be played. The question of why carrying out eye-tracking research is important was probably best answered by Duchowski (2007, p.3): “we move our eyes to bring a particular portion of the visible field of view into high resolution ... Most often we also divert our attention to that point so that we can focus our concentration (if only for a very brief moment) on the object or region of interest. Thus, we may presume that

if we can track someone's eye movements, we can follow along the path of attention deployed by the observer. This may give us some insight into what the observer found interesting, that is, what drew their attention, and perhaps even provide a clue as to how that person perceived whatever scene she or he was viewing”.

Therefore, in this article I will argue for more extensive use of eye-tracking methodology to explore the process of reading in a foreign language.

Eye-tracking and the process of reading

In publications discussing the subject of the reading process, this complicated cognitive activity is most often explained by the use of three metaphors. They indicate the type and direction of text information processing while reading and the models of reading process are named after them. These are: “bottom-up” models, in which text information *decoding* is emphasized (i.e., lower level process), “top-down”, where the reader's *knowledge* and *interpretation* of the information from the text plays a key role, and “interactive” models (Dakowska, 2001; Grabe, 1988, 1991; Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

The importance of lower level processes while reading, such as the skill of automatic word recognition or the accurate recognition of grammatical structures, is nowadays emphasized as a prerequisite for the development of fluent reading and text comprehension ability (see: Chodkiewicz, 2009; Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Particular importance has been attributed to the “bottom-up” direction of information processing in interactive models of reading as a consequence of the development of eye-tracking research (Grabe, 1991). Highly technologically advanced eye trackers allow easy measurement of large amounts of data, and ensure highly-accurate results. This, in turn, allows microanalyses to be carried out, which provide insights into the cognitive processes underlying the activity of reading. Some of the research results, especially those which are important for foreign language didactics, will be discussed in the following part of this article. However, one must bear in mind that this basic data concerning eye movements while reading comes from studies in which English texts were used. Using texts in other languages would probably provide us with different results.

Results of eye-tracking research

There are a few important figures (i.e., basic data) concerning eye-tracking research, which have been obtained from in-depth studies. Most sources indicate that the duration time of a *fixation* (i.e., a short stop of the eyes) is 200-250 ms (e.g., Rayner, 1998; Richardson & Spivey, 2008). The visual span while reading is considerably limited – it is approximately 3-4 letters to

the left of fixation point and about 12-15 letters to the right (Grabe, 1991; Rayner, 1998). This asymmetry is reversed in languages where the direction of reading is the opposite – from right to left, as, for example, in Hebrew (Rayner, 1998; Richardson & Spivey, 2008). The length of a *saccade* (i.e., a movement to another position in a text) is 7-9 letters on average, and during this movement information is integrated in the reader's mind, while new pieces of information are gained only during fixations. About 67.8% of words are fixated upon while reading texts in English (Paulson & Goodman, 1999); it is reported in many sources that 80%-85% of *content words* are fixated upon compared to 35%-40% of *function words* (e.g., Grabe, 1991; Paulson & Goodman, 1999; Rayner, 1998; Richardson & Spivey, 2008).

As has already been mentioned, other data are found with reference to reading in other languages than English. For example, as Grabe (1991) claims, research shows that, while reading in German, more attention is focused on function words; thus, information concerning grammar is more important in that specific language. In research where English texts were read, a direct relationship was observed between the length of a word and the probability of fixation on it (see: Rayner, 1998). Because in this language most function words are short, they are fixated upon much more rarely. In general, only 25% of all fixations fall on 2-3 letter words, while 8- and more letter words are almost always fixated upon. Thus, the length of a word is an important variable. Durations of fixations also depend on the frequency of appearance of a word in a text. Eye fixations on low-frequency words in a text are longer, while in the case of high-frequency-of-appearance words they are shorter, or they are skipped completely, especially when there is a high probability of their appearance in a given context (Rayner, 1998).

Apart from *fixations*, *regressive saccades* and so-called *refixations* are very significant because on their basis conclusions can often be drawn, concerning the process of text comprehension. *Regressions* (i.e., eye movements to the left in the same line or to the previous lines) constitute 10%-15% of all saccades (Rayner, 1998; Richardson & Spivey, 2008). Although it is not clear in all cases what causes them, as it is not easy to provoke them for experimental purposes, there is a high probability that these types of saccades (about 10 letters long) are caused by difficulties in understanding a word, grammatical structure or generally part of a text. However, sometimes they are caused by too long a saccade forward and then additional fixations (i.e., *refixations*) on the same word take place. Hence, about 15% of words in a text are fixated upon again, very often due to insufficient processing of a word during the first fixation. There are numerous studies from which the above conclusions have been drawn (e.g., Vauras, Hyönä, & Niemi, 1992, etc.).

Most studies show that using eye-tracking method, as was mentioned before, it is possible to carry out analyses of cognitive processes while reading at a micro-level. Even at this level, however, sometimes unambiguous interpretation of eye-tracking research results or making broad generalizations about information processing while reading is impossible (see: Paulson & Goodman, 1999). Some research requires the use of other additional methods. Therefore, in many studies, in order to investigate the process of reading and text information processing at a micro- and macro-level, eye-tracking research methods are not the only ones used (as is the case in the examples described below).

For the exploration of the reader's level of text comprehension, a frequently employed method is recalling text content (and writing summaries). For example, in a classic experiment with an experimental and control group, carried out by Vauras et al. (1992), apart from using an eye-tracker, the influence of text coherence was also explored by recalling the text content from memory. In a study conducted by Hyönä (1995), the influence of sentences introducing a new subject into a text on text-processing was researched using eye-tracking methods and summaries of the texts. The same procedures were used in studies exploring the influence of headings on the process of text comprehension conducted by Hyönä and Lorch Jr. (2004), as well as in a study on the strategies used by readers, described in an article by Hyönä, Lorch Jr. and Kaakinen (2002). Eye-tracking methods and analyses of text summaries were also used in a study of the influence of the reader's perspective, imposed by task instructions and specified by the aim of reading, which was described in an article by Kaakinen and Hyönä (2007). In an experiment exploring strategies used while processing information from a text, described in an article by Kaakinen and Hyönä (2005), apart from the eye-tracking research methods and recall tasks, *think aloud protocols* were also used. In this last method, readers verbalized their thoughts concerning problems in text understanding, ways of solving them and decisions made. Finally, in an experiment on individual differences in using reading strategies, described in the article by Hyönä and Nurminen (2006), apart from the above-mentioned methods, a questionnaire was also used. Examples of studies supported with the use of eye-tracking methods are numerous. However, as can be seen, in order to explore the reading process thoroughly, researchers very often opt for a triangulation of methods which complement each other (Kaakinen & Hyönä, 2005).

The studies with the use of expository texts (i.e., texts used in order to inform or explain something to the reader) are also numerous (Hyönä, 1995; Hyönä & Lorch Jr., 2004; Hyönä, et al., 2002; Hyönä & Nurminen, 2006; Kaakinen & Hyönä, 2005; Kaakinen & Hyönä,

2007; Kaakinen, Hyönä & Keenan, 2002; Vauras et al., 1992), which testifies to a special interest in them caused by the need to investigate the features which facilitate their comprehension. This text type is particularly important for specialized foreign language learning and teaching, as these are the types of texts which are most often read in the professional and academic environment. They are characterized by a hierarchical structure so they are usually processed in a specific way and their perception is important for learners in terms of guiding their attention, learning new forms and comprehension. Studies on this text type could contribute to the creation of didactic materials which will facilitate the development of reading in teaching Languages for Specific Purposes, especially at lower levels of language proficiency, and therefore more research of this kind would be needed.

Conclusions

Beyond doubt, the possibilities offered by the use of eye trackers in research are enormous. The method has gained wide recognition mainly because of the precision of the results achieved and the great potential of the software that is used with eye trackers (possibilities of conducting statistical analyses, many forms of presenting results, etc.). Therefore, they have already been employed in many professions and scientific areas in order to obtain insights into cognitive processes, perception, attention, etc. Eye trackers are very often used in such areas as, for example: marketing, advertising, designing internet pages, psychology, aviation, driving, and so on. As far as reading is concerned, apart from research on the typical activity of reading, there are also studies into speed reading, musical notes reading or numeral reading with the use of eye-tracking research methods, and eye movements have been examined in many other information processing tasks (see: Rayner, 1998 for detailed review of studies). A comprehensive state-of-the-art overview of eye-tracking research exploring visual information processing, language production, human-computer interaction, as well as the media, communication and other phenomena, besides reading, can be found in Hyönä, Radach and Deubel (2003).

Summing up, my intention has been to highlight the potential of this advanced technology and suggest that it should also be applied to a larger extent in foreign language didactics research. The knowledge which has been gained from studies of reading in the mother tongue is relevant here (especially in situations of high language proficiency level), but the specific character of developing reading in a foreign language suggests the need for specialized research within this area using both eye-tracking alongside additional methods.

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The challenges of researching the self as a complex dynamic systemⁱ

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Introduction

In this article, I would like to consider some of the challenges facing researchers who wish to investigate the self in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) as a Complex Dynamic System (CDS). Given the current state of my own thinking, this article presents more of a series of reflections and questions, rather than proffering any concrete solutions. However, I hope that by sharing my thinking in this way to contribute towards furthering discussions of how best to engage in empirical studies from this promising and exciting theoretical perspective.

The self in SLA

Within SLA, research has examined a range of self-related constructs such as self-concept, identity, L2 linguistic self-confidence, self-efficacy or self-esteem. However, this array of constructs can be bewildering for anyone wishing to research the self given differences in definitions, overlapping terms and conflicting theoretical perspectives and discourses. In my own work, I have tended to focus largely on self-concept (Mercer, 2011a) as this is one of the least context-bound, broadest self constructs able to capture a more holistic view of the self whilst acknowledging domain-specific differences. Self-concept can be defined as a multidimensional construct composed of multiple layers of differently domain-specific self-beliefs and related affective self-appraisals. Whilst I have found self-concept an extremely useful construct to work with, I have more recently started to become interested in the value of conceiving of the self as a complex dynamic system (Mercer, 2011b, 2011c).

Space precludes a fuller discussion of the reasons for taking a complexity perspective and its implications for understandings of the self (see Mercer, 2011c), but, essentially, it means embracing an even more holistic view of the self, which makes the need to emphasise distinct constructs and their respective merits redundant. Instead, it represents an approach that recognises the combined value of different self constructs, and rather than seeking to prove the primacy and superiority of one over another, it is able to accommodate these various perspectives as differing, yet complementary dimensions of a global self system. In other words, the self as a

system encompasses constructs such as self-concept, self-esteem, identities, possible selves etc. as multiple interconnected parts of the same overall CDS.

Viewing the self in this way has enabled me to unite fragmented and traditionally conflicting research findings and has provided me with much-needed coherence in my reading about and understandings of the self. Nevertheless, whilst this perspective has made a significant contribution to my theoretical conceptualisation of the self, in empirical terms, it poses considerable challenges. In this article, I wish to discuss the nature of some of these challenges and consider possible ways of engaging empirically with them.

The challenges of researching the self as a CDS

As the term suggests, the essential characteristics of a CDS are perhaps the inherent complexity of the system and its dynamism. Therefore, I have chosen to focus on these two dimensions and some of the empirical difficulties they entail.

Researching the complexity of the self system

The self as a vast, complex and dynamic system stretching across time, place and domains involves multiple types and levels of self-related beliefs, emotions and motives. All of these are closely interrelated not only with each other but also with various contexts – social, cultural, interpersonal, physical and temporal – in highly complex and potentially changeable ways. Ideally, research would seek to retain as much of a holistic perspective as is empirically feasible. However, in practical terms, it is impossible to research the self system in its entirety. This means that one of the first decisions facing a researcher using a complexity framework is how to set boundaries for the focus of the study and what units of analysis to select when working with data and coding.

Definitions of constructs are crucial and decisions need to be made whether to retain traditional self-related constructs for analytical purposes (such as self-concept, self-esteem, identity, future selves etc.) or to switch the level and units of analysis to alternative constructs. One suggestion made by Dörnyei (2010) in respect to complexity in individual differences research is to focus on particular conglomerates or constellations of factors that function as wholes. For example, he proposes taking a tripartite view looking for clusters where cognition, affect and motivation come together – the self *per se* would be a perfect example. However, seeking to understand the entire self as a system requires an approach which can illuminate some of its composite complexity and internal structure and this means examining components of the self system and their interrelations.

Essentially, decisions about how to define components of the self system for research purposes require much more careful consideration than I can provide in this short article. It may transpire that research is most usefully conducted by examining the interrelations between different components of the self as defined in traditional terms such as identity, self-concept, self-esteem, possible selves etc., whilst retaining an explicit, conscious awareness of the partiality of such an approach. However, if we seek to explore the complexity of the self from a more holistic perspective, then research may need to also consider the potential offered by alternative units of analysis to take understandings beyond familiar conceptualisations.

One idea could be to combine a tripartite perspective with an examination of the function of different dimensions of the self as inspired by the suggestion made by Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008, p. 245). In other words, research could examine the function of various conglomerates of self-related beliefs, emotions and motives, such as the experiencing self, remembering self (Kahneman & Ris, 2005), narrative self, future self, ought self, group identity etc. In this way, examining 'functional wholes' of the self would enable an analysis that moves beyond traditionally defined constructs and could perhaps facilitate a more situated, holistic view of the self to emerge.

Any investigation of the complexity of the self also needs to consider the ways in which various dimensions of the self are interconnected. Once more, such a process must begin by identifying and defining what are conceived of as components of the self system. Clearly, it is unfeasible to research all possible relationships within a system, especially as these are likely to change, and researchers will have to select which relationships in the system to concentrate on. Logically, research should focus on those relationships which appear to be of particular significance for the behaviour and trajectory of the entire system. However, the inherent complexity and dynamism of a CDS means that the relative importance of relationships for the system may also vary. Therefore, one possible suggestion is to focus on relationships which are perhaps the most stable (not static) and enduring across time and place, as these are likely to be relationships of consistent significance for the system. Dörnyei & Ushioda (2011, p. 247) also suggest identifying and focusing on the most predictable aspects of the system. Whilst this could refer to individual components and dynamics, it could also imply a focus on relationships, which develop and interact in a more readily predictable manner.

Other relationships of particular interest involve relations of causality. In a CDS, causality is decentralised and non-linear, which means that not one factor at one point in time affects the system but rather change can be gradual, sudden, cumulative or differentiated. Further, a

multitude of possible individual factors and combinations of factors can combine to differing degrees of significance over time to create momentum which may in turn trigger change (Davis & Sumara, 2006). These complex processes of change suggest that research interested in causality in a CDS will have to examine various relationships within the system and gain a deeper appreciation of the nature, quality, intensity and durability of such relationships as well as consider how they co-evolve, their dynamic trajectories as relationships and ongoing, potentially variable significance for the system as a whole. Indeed, the dynamics of and within a system are one of the defining aspects of its complexity. Whilst each component of the system can develop along its own trajectory, its dynamics will affect the trajectories of other components in the system given the interconnected nature of the system. Together these different dynamics can combine and lead to emergent and often (although not always) unpredictable system behaviours.

Researching the dynamics of the self

This discussion takes us to the second key aspect of the self as a CDS, namely, its dynamics. There are many challenges to researching dynamics and the most obvious difficulty concerns how to capture the dynamics of the system as a whole and decisions about where to place the focus of any empirical study. Clearly, it is inherently difficult, if not impossible, to observe the system's trajectory and development in its entirety. Instead, it is more manageable to select components and/or relationships and investigate the dynamics of these smaller fragments and then ultimately piece together these insights in an attempt to create a fuller picture of the dynamics of the complete system. Whilst such an approach is not perfect given its need for selection, partiality and interpretation to fill in the missing links, it is hard at this stage to be able to offer a better alternative for capturing the dynamics of the whole complex self system.

Other key challenges concern our fundamental conceptualisation and understandings of dynamics. Especially in the context of a CDS, it is apparent that dynamics imply more than simplistic dichotomous ideas of change or stability from one fixed point to the next. Instead dynamics refer to processes which can potentially involve stability, dynamic stability, partial change, and degrees of change. There are also different types of dynamics such as in respect to changes in content, form, quality, quantity, intensity, significance, interrelations, role in the system, etc.

The second core consideration in any study of dynamics is how we understand time and its progression. Time should be viewed as contextual (Saldaña, 2003). This means that how it is defined, understood and experienced can vary across cultures as well as individuals. For example, consider the subjective speed

of time in the context of a rather dull, boring lecture compared to an exciting, stimulating class. The fact that individuals subjectively experience the quality and passing of time differently could be of particular significance in respect to the self and research of perceptions. Other temporal considerations in dynamics research concern the potential for different dynamics across different timescales. For example, the self can be researched at the macro level across a timescale of years concentrating on the development of the self across an individual's academic life path, but it can also be investigated across shorter timescales, such as focusing on timescales of minutes as a person engages in a specific learning task. Decisions also need to be made about the spacing of data collection points, depending on the kinds of dynamics being researched and timescales involved, for example, whether to gather data at infrequent, predetermined points of time or continuously, and frequently.

At present, two main ways of researching the dynamics of various dimensions of the self have been taken – either a synchronous, concurrent or a retrospective perspective. One example of concurrent dynamic approach is to use traditional methods such as journals and interviews longitudinally in a way that enables multiple levels of dynamics across various timescales to be examined and combined to create a comprehensive picture of ongoing dynamics of specific components of the self such as self-concept at different levels. To this end, I have found case studies, which allow a detailed focus in depth on one bounded case, especially useful (Mercer, 2011b). Another form of analysis which has been used to investigate the immediate rather than long-term dynamics of an individual's Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is the idiodynamic method employed by MacIntyre and Legatto (2011). In this approach, an individual completes a task, then immediately afterwards whilst watching a video recording of this, using computer software, they mark at tightly spaced intervals their perception of their own WTC. A comparable method used in psychology in respect to the self is the 'mouse paradigm' in which an individual's sense of self is tracked during a particular task through the movements of their mouse cursor across a computer screen in relation to a central point representing a positive self view (Vallacher, Nowak, & Froehlich, 2002).

A retrospective approach to the dynamics of a CDS in respect to motivation has been employed by Dörnyei and colleagues who have developed a retrodictive qualitative modelling (RQM) approach (Dörnyei, 2011). It focuses on the self-organising nature of CDSs and uses prototype theory to establish recognisable patterns in the outcome states of systems. It then traces back through retrodictive analytical procedures the reasons why the system appears to have developed in these ways (towards the current end state patterns) and thereby

seeks to reconstruct the possible dynamics and trajectories of the system.

A third time perspective is prospective, future-oriented, predictive modelling which, to the best of my knowledge, has not yet been used in respect to the self or within individual differences research in SLA. From such a perspective, computer modelling and specialist simulation software (e.g., netlogo) can be used to visually portray and predict the dynamics and future trajectory of a system. Neither this approach nor the retrospective modelling witness the actual ongoing dynamics of the system, but instead they have to construct and interpret the dynamics underlying the system's trajectory.

Clearly, as indeed with any research, there are methodological drawbacks inherent in all of these approaches to investigating dynamics. However, the more I appreciate the appropriacy of understanding the self as a complex dynamic system, the less satisfied I am with traditional, more reductionist conceptualisations of fragmented, isolated dimensions of the self. Instead, despite the challenges a complexity perspective poses, I feel that ultimately more useful, real-world-appropriate insights can be gained if we can engage systematically with this holistic, dynamic approach, rather than for empirical ease unduly oversimplifying a more complex reality.

Conclusion

Whilst I have chosen to explore ways of researching the self as a CDS and am excited by the potential of doing so, I do not believe everyone needs to research the self in this way. Indeed, if we truly wish to advance our understandings of the self in SLA, then it would be important to maintain a breadth of epistemological, theoretical and methodological diversity. Much can be gained from combining a range of research perspectives and methodological designs so that we can generate perhaps a fuller, more comprehensive picture of the self. Thus, we need to remain open to and appreciate the value of varied perspectives in each contributing another piece of the puzzle towards a greater understanding of the self in SLA.

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ⁱ I would like to thank Zoltán Dörnyei for his helpful, insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. All the shortcomings of this article are entirely my own.

MA and licentiate students' classroom-oriented research on EFL and culture teaching: A supervisor's perspective

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Introduction

This article is a follow-up on my paper on the process of supervising academic writing in diploma MA and BA projects (Nizegorodcew, 2010). Whereas in the earlier article I drew on my experience in supervising students' projects in various areas of applied linguistics, this paper focuses on one area: EFL and culture classroom-oriented research.

The first MA theses under my supervision combining EFL and culture teaching were written in the English Department of the Jagiellonian University in the 1980s. They were not strictly speaking classroom-oriented research papers since the students had no teaching experience at the time of their thesis writing. Those MA projects were fully *theoretical* in the sense that the authors were not classroom teachers and they only formulated some postulates about EFL classroom teaching. More practical MA projects have been completed in the English Department since the 90s. The reason for their greater authenticity resulted from the authors' familiarity with the EFL classroom since most of them were both classroom teachers and MA project researchers.

Apart from several MA projects combining EFL with culture teaching conducted in the English Department of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, about 40 licentiate projects dealing with teaching culture in the EFL classroom were completed under my supervision in the years 1998- 2001 at the Centre for Foreign Language Teacher Education of Warsaw University. Teaching culture combined with EFL teaching was one of the two main topics of my licentiate seminars at the Centre, the other being teaching EFL to young learners.

Sources of differences between Diploma projects

A typical licentiate project consisted of a *theoretical* part, including a survey of background literature on the role of culture in the foreign language classroom and a *practical* part, including a detailed description of 3-4 lessons with a specific cultural focus, designed, taught and reflected upon by the student author. The required minimum length of a licentiate project was approximately 15000 words without the appendices (7500 words of the theoretical part and 7500 words of the practical part). Since licentiate students were also required to provide documentation of their lessons, the attached appendices, including teaching materials and samples of students' assignments, covered approximately the same length as the main body of the licentiate projects (15000 words). Consequently, an average licentiate project could be described as a long paper based on students' own EFL classroom teaching experience, including at least partial documentation of the lessons taught and integrating relevant theoretical considerations on the role of culture in the foreign language classroom with attempts at their application in actual classroom teaching.

A more practical character of licentiate studies in comparison with MA studies was reflected in the licentiate projects, both as their strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, BA students, being teacher trainees, were familiar with the classroom environment, where they spent a few days a week in their final year of studies. They had been trained in lesson planning and teaching materials development. On the other hand, however, they had little experience in researching background literature and synthesizing their own observations with other authors' ideas, that is, they were novice academic writers.

Licentiate projects were not research papers in the proper sense of the word since the number of the exemplary lessons was limited and the teacher trainees were not free to design them on their own, having to follow their mentor teachers' recommendations. It seems that for the majority of the licentiate students being able to manage classes, cope with the pupils and implement prepared lesson plans were the main objectives of the lessons, which gave them a sense of satisfaction and success. It is true, however, that some of the students managed to gain some independence in their lesson planning, their implementation and own reflection on their experience supported by their readings.

The MA theses under my supervision have been twice as long as licentiate projects (approximately 30000 words) and they also consist of *theoretical* and *practical* parts, where theoretical parts include 2-3 chapters (approximately 15000 words), providing a survey of the background literature on the role of culture in the foreign

language classroom and on other relevant aspects of EFL teaching, for example, the role of authentic materials in EFL teaching, students' motivation in the EFL classroom, etc. The practical parts, approximately of the same length as theoretical chapters (15000 words), involve *action research* projects, that is, projects in which teacher trainees are both teachers and researchers. Their research includes a detailed description of the cultural aspects to be taught accompanied by lesson plans and post-lesson reflections. Some MA authors also include quasi-experimental designs focused on their pupils' cultural knowledge prior to a series of lessons, immediately after them and after a period of time, as well as their pupils' opinions on the lessons. Such pretest, posttest, delayed posttest formats provide information on the effectiveness of EFL lessons combined with culture teaching as well as on their attractiveness for the pupils, admittedly only in the described case studies.

An obvious difference between licentiate and MA projects lies in the latter being pieces of classroom-oriented action research, while the former constituting exemplifications of lesson plans with the accompanying materials and some post-lesson reflections. However, differences also seem to lie elsewhere – one of the roles that MA and licentiate students should play, apart from the roles of critical readers and researchers, is that of creative teachers. While some licentiate and MA projects take full advantage of lessons focused on culture, other projects testify to their authors' limited awareness of the opportunities offered to them by such lessons. In other words, it is not only the type of academic writing, MA or licentiate projects which makes the difference. Rather, the crucial difference seems to lie in the ability on the part of MA and licentiate students to be creative and autonomous in their classroom-oriented research projects.

In view of a growing interest in Poland in foreign language students' and teachers' autonomy (Pawlak, 2008, 2011), MA and licentiate students' creativity and autonomy deserve separate research studies. On the basis of a small scale survey study, I found that MA students held a considerable diverse range of opinions on their own independence in MA and licentiate project preparation. On the one hand, according to the respondents, the supervisor should "give students a chance to present their ideas", but, on the other hand, "the supervisor should not allow for too much independence" (Nizegorodcew, 2010: 232). Students' limited autonomy, however, is incompatible with a high degree of independence and creativity required of a student in a classroom-oriented research study. In consequence, MA and licentiate project proposals designed in a similar way and based on the same background literature, may be very different in their classroom implementation and written project outcomes.

To illustrate this, I provide some evidence from four MA and licentiate projects.

Analysis of the classroom-oriented research parts of four Diploma (MA and Licentiate) projects

Four projects A, B, C and D¹ written under this author's supervision will be compared in this section. A and B are MA projects and C and D are licentiate projects. The common topic of A and C projects is teaching target culture using authentic songs, whereas C and D focus on developing pupils' cultural knowledge and awareness by introducing elements of American or British culture. Projects A, C and D were implemented at the secondary school level and Project B at the primary school level.

The question arises why projects A (MA) and C (licentiate) are better than B (MA) and D (licentiate). This question may seem too complex to answer in this short paper. There is, obviously, a multitude of factors which contribute to writing a good paper. However, from a supervisor's point of view, this question is of paramount importance because it impacts on the supervision process and its final point, when the supervisor decides to accept what the student has written and revised, frequently a couple of times. This final point is not the same for all students since the supervisor may accept projects which are not excellent or even which are not very good. Some students are not able either to logically express their ideas and/or to revise their academic English but their projects meet the basic requirements of MA or licentiate projects. Let me define such a minimum level of requirements for projects combining EFL with culture teaching in MA and licentiate projects.²

Firstly, both types of projects are based on EFL classroom teaching and research.³ The authors describe their lessons in detail, they provide lesson plans and post-lesson reflections. The lessons are focused on clearly defined and discussed aspects of target language culture/s. Secondly, there is an introductory part (*theoretical* part) in which a relevant literature review is presented in a coherent way. Finally, the student authors draw conclusions concerning the effectiveness of their lessons based on their research (action research, quasi-experiments, observation). Additionally, the academic English of the projects is acceptable, although not necessarily error-free.

While Projects A, B, C and D were approved of as meeting the diploma project requirements, they were

¹ Since the exemplary projects are critically assessed, their authors are kept anonymous.

² The requirements have been worked out during my long teaching and supervising experience. As far as I know, there are no standardized minimum requirements for both types of projects.

³ The term *research* is used here more broadly than before. It also encompasses observation of a small number of lessons.

assessed differently, A and C as very good and B and D as satisfactory. Let us focus on the quality mentioned before as one of the crucial factors in the successful completion of diploma projects based on classroom-oriented research, that is, student teachers' creativity in class as manifested in their written projects, and let us analyze the four projects under consideration with regard to this aspect.

Project A

The MA project aims at assessing the effectiveness of an innovative course combining EFL and culture teaching based on 5 songs. The student author managed to select appropriate English songs referring to social problems and historical events in Great Britain and the US, and to introduce them in class with a variety of EFL teaching techniques. The author also managed to compare them with Polish songs having some common elements with the English songs. As a result of the course, the students' knowledge and awareness about the selected aspects of target and native cultures considerably improved. The course also helped them to appreciate their own culture. The author was assessed as a creative teacher and researcher.

Project B

The aims of this MA project are the same as those of project A. The author designed a course combining EFL and culture based on some popular aspects of British culture, e.g., the royal family, famous people, places and monuments, customs and traditions, food, housing, education and politeness norms. The items chosen to be taught were similar to those included in the majority of EFL coursebooks, which may be considered as a lack of inventiveness. There were few references to aspects of Polish culture. The post-lesson reflections were very short and did not take advantage of the potential of the introduced cultural materials and activities. The main focus of the classroom research was on the quantitative comparison of the pre-test and post-test scores. The author seemed to completely depend on the supervisor's suggestions but in spite of a number of consultations and revisions, the final outcome was disappointing. The author's creativity and autonomy was assessed as limited.

Project C

The aims of this licentiate project are multiple and include, among others, the development of students' cultural awareness of aspects of American culture, tolerance and positive attitudes towards Americans and the ability of noticing differences and similarities between American and Polish culture. The author is aware of stereotyped ways of introducing culture in coursebooks and she wants to teach EFL combined with culture in an innovative way. The topics of her four lessons are: Ellis Island, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Martin Luther King. The student is self-dependent and creates her own activities. The lessons include numerous references to

relevant aspects of Polish culture, e.g., a comparison of Halloween and All Saints' Day. Post-lesson reflections and conclusions are well-documented in the lesson descriptions and carefully thought over. The author takes full advantage of the interesting materials she has prepared and classroom activities she has conducted. She also uses her own personal experience of visiting the US to bring insightful memories and observations to the classroom. In effect, the author has been assessed as highly autonomous and creative.

Project D

The aims of Project D are similar to those in Project C and its topic resembles the one used in Project A. The licentiate project aims at making Polish school learners interested in American culture through American music and songs. Although the author seems to be genuinely interested in using songs in the EFL classroom, the three lessons in which he introduces three American music genres and songs are disappointing. In spite of numerous supervisory consultations and revisions of the project, the uses of the songs in class and the activities based on them have been unimaginative and post-lesson reflections have turned out to be superficial. Consequently, the author's creativity and autonomy have been assessed as low.

Conclusion and pedagogical implications

Classroom-oriented research in MA and licentiate projects focused on EFL and culture teaching assessed from the supervisor's perspective provides interesting insights into student teachers' differences in lesson planning and implementation, as well as their post-lesson reflections. The analysis of the descriptions of the above stages of the classroom-oriented research in the final versions of the diploma projects enables us to conclude that the authors vary in terms of their degree of autonomy and creativity as classroom teachers. Those with higher autonomy and creativity need less guidance from the supervisor and, simultaneously, they demonstrate greater imaginativeness and flexibility in classroom teaching and post-lesson reflections. Others need more guidance and although they are able to focus on interesting cultural aspects and prepare adequate lesson plans with accompanying teaching materials, they manifest a limited ability to be creative and autonomous in class and reflective afterwards. Such differences have been observed both in MA and in licentiate projects. Students' creativity and self-dependence are psychological traits which may be stimulated by the educational process but they are also limited by a number of factors (cf. Wysocka, 2008). Supervisors may play the role of supporters of more autonomous students or they may be more directive (Gebhart, 1984). However, they are not able to modify student teachers' personalities and cognitive styles, as well as deeply ingrained behavioural patterns. Thus, there is probably a limited possibility of stimulating less autonomous and creative student teachers in developing their classroom-

oriented projects. A positive aspect of supervising ELT and culture teaching projects is that even less autonomous students are able to choose from a variety of cultural topics those that suit their interests and, consequently, to complete their diploma projects.

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Evaluating the use of group work in the foreign language classroom

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Introduction

Interaction in the language classroom is often contrasted with naturalistic discourse taking place outside an educational setting, with claims being made that in many cases it does not ensure the conditions necessary for successful acquisition, that is the availability of a sufficient amount of high quality exposure to samples of the target language (TL) and copious opportunities for interaction through the medium this language (cf. Gass, 2003). The reasons for this artificiality are related, among others, to the dominant role of the teacher who speaks most of the time in the majority of classrooms, the predominance of the IRF (initiation – response – feedback) exchange where the teacher asks the question, the learner responds and the teacher provides feedback and evaluation, excessive focus on aspects of the language code to the virtual exclusion of truly communicative tasks, or frequent reliance on learners' mother tongue in monolingual foreign language contexts (Majer, 2003; Pawlak, 2004; van Lier, 1996). It is clear that the nature of classroom discourse is a function of a number of variables, such as the goals of a particular lesson, the beliefs and preferences of teachers and learners, or the activity in hand, with the consequence that some classroom environments are more conducive to acquisition than others and some lessons conducted within a single class may vary widely in this respect. Nonetheless, reservations about the potential of classroom interaction to stimulate the growth of communicative competence seem to be fully warranted in many settings, which means that it is necessary to seek ways in which it can be optimized.

One way in which this goal can be accomplished is through shifting the emphasis from whole-class teaching to activities and tasks conducted in pairs and small groups, or, to use the labels introduced by van Lier (1996), to move from *transmission* to *transaction*. According to specialists (e.g., Brown, 2001; Harmer, 2007; Long et al., 1976), the use of this mode of classroom organization brings with it numerous benefits which make it superior to lockstep, as whole-class teaching is sometimes referred to. This is because

students have more opportunities for language production, the target language is used to express a greater range of functions than could ever be the case in whole-class teaching, such exchanges are more likely to trigger negotiation of form and meaning that has been shown to be beneficial to acquisition and, as a result of all of these, the interaction is more similar to naturalistic discourse. In addition, it is much easier in such an arrangement to cater to the needs of individual learners, more positive affect can be created, cooperation between students is promoted and learner autonomy can be fostered. On the other hand, however, group work activities can also suffer from a number of drawbacks such as, for example, poor quality of the interlanguage talk they generate both at the level of accuracy and appropriacy, the danger of learners' incorporating each other's errors, indexicality of the language used or unequal distribution of opportunities to speak. It should also be remembered that learners are likely to fall back on their mother tongue extensively in monolingual classes, discipline problems may arise, and teacher and learner resistance can be expected in some settings (Brown, 2001; Pawlak, 2004; Harmer, 2007).

Given such conflicting evaluations of the contributions of pair and group work, there is a clear need to conduct empirical studies that would hold assumptions concerning this mode of classroom organization to empirical scrutiny. While early research in this area focused in the main on providing evidence for the beneficial role of pair and groups work (e.g., Long et al., 1976; Porter, 1986), subsequent empirical investigations have looked at the contribution of group work to fostering negotiation (e.g., Doughty & Pica, 1986; Eckerth, 2009; Gass & Varonis, 1994; Pawlak, 2006a), the role of this mode of classroom organization in communicative task performance (e.g., Foster, 1998; Nakahama et al., 2001; Storch, 2007), the extent to which the use of group work promotes learner-initiated focus on form (e.g., Pawlak, 2009; Williams, 2001), learners' use of the first language (e.g., Chavez, 2007), and learner disengagement from interaction (e.g., Hellerman & Cole, 2009). The research project reported below combines some of these lines of inquiry by investigating the quantitative and qualitative aspects of pair and group work with a view to determining its utility in the foreign language classroom.

The Study

Research questions and procedures

The main aim of the study was to empirically verify the different claims that have been made about the role of pair and small group work in promoting second language development. More precisely, it set out to explore a number of quantitative and qualitative facets of this mode of classroom organization in order to appraise its pedagogical potential during foreign language lessons by providing insights into such issues as: (1) the amount,

accuracy, appropriacy and complexity of the TL employed by learners, (2) the incidence of negotiated interaction and output modifications, (3) students' reliance on their mother tongue, and (4) the predominant patterns of interaction.

The data were audio-recordings and transcripts of interactions between learners in pairs and groups that were made for the purpose of several studies conducted by the present author (e.g. Pawlak, 2004, 2006b, 2009). These interactions were based on a variety of tasks (e.g., decision-making, information-gap, such that required the use of a specific TL feature and such that did not), they were different in length (i.e., from 5 to 20 minutes), and involved different numbers of participants (i.e., from 2 to 4). The learners involved in the performance of these activities also differed considerably with respect to such variables as their age, proficiency level, the grade they attended, the amount of experience in learning English, as well as a wide range of individual factors. The data were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis, with the latter playing the dominant role. In fact, numerical analytical procedures were only employed in the case of the occurrence on negotiated interaction, while all the issues listed in points 1-4 above were investigated in a qualitative manner by identifying and scrutinizing the most common patterns of student-student interaction that arose in the data.

Research findings

The analysis revealed that there were considerable differences between the groups when it comes to the quantity and quality of the target language used, even in the data coming from the same study, obtained in the same learner group and originating from the same task. Major differences were also observed between students participating in those tasks, which testifies to the impact of individual variation on the quantity and quality of TL production. Furthermore, there were fluctuations in the students' participation in different stages of the same task, which constitutes evidence of the dynamic nature of their willingness to communicate and readiness to make contributions to the ongoing interaction. Although the reasons for such fluctuations were not investigated in the present paper, it can be hypothesized that a number of factors could have been responsible for these changes, for example, the design features of a task, the topic discussed, the time limit set, or the characteristics of the interlocutors. Some of these issues are illustrated in Excerpts 1 and 2 below. The first exemplifies a situation in which students manifested very negative attitudes towards the task in hand, with the effect that the amount of interaction in the target language was minimal, while the other is reflective of a high degree of learner involvement in the same task, which not only led to far greater amount of TL use but also resulted in superior quality of that language, as evidenced by longer turns, mutual support, self- and peer correction, more

accurate output and greater complexity of the lexis and grammar employed.⁴

Excerpt 1

L1: *I hate talk about this*

L2: *Ok... but we have talk must to talk*

L1: *yes we must to talk*

L2: *OK... so the house is big ... and, and it was builded in 1987 and I don't know*

L1: *Nie wiem [I don't know]... He sell it when she die*

L2: *yes he sell czy [or] buy?*

L1: *he sell it his sister*

L2: *OK... to chyba wystarczy [I think this is enough] (and they continue in Polish for the remainder of the activity)*

Excerpt 2

L1: *OK. I start ... the house is very big, it has eight rooms, it was builded, it was built in 1987 and it has redecorated five time since then*

L2: *yes ... and it is the most beautiful house in town and everybody want o have it*

L1: *everybody wants... chyba [I guess]*

L2: *yes, yes, everybody wants to have it and it was destroyed by a fire in last year and...*

L1: *Would you like to live in this house? I don't*

L2: *I don't know, I need to change... I will change it (and they mostly in English for the next five minutes)*

When it comes to negotiation of form and meaning, 89 such instances were identified in the data, which means that there was less than one case per task (0.74). In the vast majority of cases, the negotiations were conversational rather than didactic in nature, which means that they were triggered off by real communication breakdowns rather than errors in the use of the TL. Only in 45 cases did negotiated interaction result in changes to the original utterance, which is about 37.5 %, and even when this happened, the students seldom modified their output to make it more targetlike, choosing instead to repeat what they had said or switch to the mother tongue, with only 6 such instances being pinpointed in the transcripts. It should also be noted that the problems that arose during the interactions were frequently dealt with by means of the mother tongue rather than the first language (L1). Excerpts 3 and 4 below illustrate some of these points:

Excerpt 3

L1: *there... there a desk next the door*

L2: *next the door?*

L1: *yes next the door there a desk big desk*

L2: *OK*

Excerpt 4

L1: *(...) there is also some garbage and*

L2: *... what does it mean garbage*

⁴ Translations of Polish utterances are provided in square brackets.

L1: *garbage is the trash... trash (...) you know old things ... you do not need them*

In fact, the learners' mother tongue was used extensively in many transcripts subjected to the analysis, but reliance on it tended to decrease with the level of the learners' proficiency. It was often drawn upon to tackle communication problems, both those resulting from lack of comprehension, as has been shown in the discussion of negotiation, and those stemming from the inability to express the intended ideas, which indicates that it underlay the application of communication strategies. The students also fell back on their mother tongue to solve some language-related problems, such as when they explained to their peers why a given tense should be used. While such uses of the L1 are to some extent warranted, it is disconcerting that on some occasions it was employed to inquire about the aims of the task or teachers' instructions, and there were also transcripts in which it was utilized to talk about things totally unrelated to the activity performed. The following transcripts illustrate the typical uses of the first language:

Excerpt 5

L1: *the university was established in 1896 ... it is one of the best in the country*

L2: *establish? ... a co to znaczy?* [what does it mean?]

L1: *założyć... został założony* [establish... it was established]

Excerpt 6

L1: *she lives in Paris for five years*

L2: *she has been living bo to jest present perfect wiesz?* [because... you know]

L1: *aha i tutaj jest for five years no tak... she has been living dzięki* [and there is ... here ... thanks]

The analysis demonstrated that there were major differences in the extent to which the students participated in the tasks and it should perhaps not come as a surprise that the greatest amounts of output were generated by those who were the most proficient in a group. More balanced distribution of participation occurred in situations when students represented comparable proficiency levels, whether higher or lower, in pairs rather than groups, because the learners could not rely so much upon their peers to contribute, and in required rather than optional information exchange tasks, since the former could only be completed when the information held by individual students was shared with the other members of the group. Interestingly, the interactions did not yield much evidence for cooperation between learners, but it was clear that the participation patterns hinged to a large extent on individual variation. The two excerpts below illustrate some of the points made.

Excerpt 7

L1: *so.. the house build ... the house*

L2: *no dalej [come on] the house was built a long time ago and it has been redecorated many times, it has eight rooms and it is beautiful*

L1: *yes*

L2: *it was destroy by fire...*

Excerpt 8

L1: *I think that living in the country is better.... Nature is nice ... what do you think?*

S2: *I don't know... nie chce mi się* [I don't feel like talking]

Conclusion

The findings of the study reported above indicate that although group work is indeed a useful pedagogic tool and a viable alternative to whole-class teaching, its benefits can under no circumstances be taken for granted and its inadequate use can in fact generate a number of problems. What teachers should keep in mind is that, to be successful in promoting language development, activities conducted in pairs or small groups should be carefully planned, implemented, monitored and evaluated. It is also advisable to raise learners' awareness about the benefits of this mode of classroom organization and carefully prepare them for effective participation in such tasks by, for example, training them in the use of negotiation and communication strategies. There is also an urgent need for further research into the effectiveness of group work that should primarily explore the factors determining its value in terms of various facets, such as those examined in the present research project. Particularly promising seem to be case studies that would take into account a range of individual and contextual variables, which may in many situations prove to be of much greater relevance than teachers' decisions connected with the planning, implementing or monitoring of group-work activities.

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On the effectiveness of early implicit classroom learning – Evidence from morphology

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The research study

In 2004, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal of Education (short EDK) decided to introduce English as a second language (L2) into the primary school curriculum in order to foster multilingualism in future generations and to ensure more proficient L2 speakers of English. In the official policy directions, this decision was justified in terms of the idea that second language acquisition must occur within a maturationally-defined time frame. However, recent findings of early and late starters' L2 performance in an instructed setting run counter to the premises of a critical (or sensitive) period as has been observed in naturalistic studies. For example, the Barcelona Age Factor project (see Muñoz, 2006) has shown that with equal instructional time and the same biological age, learners with a late starting age outperform learners with an early starting age. While a number of researchers (e.g., Goldschneider & DeKeyser, 2001) have demonstrated that there is a large variety of mechanisms and processes operating in L2 learning, there are very few studies investigating the role of explicit vs. implicit learning and early vs. late learning in strictly formal instructional settings. The contradictory findings suggest a need for detailed analyses that examine inter-learner variation (e.g., early CLIL learners vs. late non-CLIL learners of the same age), with a reasonably large sampling in regard to one aspect of language, so that some generalization to at least that aspect of language is possible (for a discussion of this, see DeKeyser, 2010, p. 417).

My project investigates the impact of early classroom learning for later instruction at secondary school level, notably the question as to whether an earlier age of onset of L2 learning (and thus a longer period of instruction) is associated with higher L2 morphosyntactic accuracy, complexity and fluency at academically-oriented secondary schools in Switzerland. In a first step, 100 early classroom learners (ECLs), who were part of the first cohort of the new system, and 100 late classroom learners (LCLs) were tested six months into L2 English learning at middle school (at grade level 7).

Group inclusion controlled for L1, experience with foreign languages learned in an instructed setting⁵, and educational background, and all participants were in intact classes at the same state-funded middle school in the canton of Zurich, where ECLs and LCLs do not come together in the same L2 class. The two groups differ in the age of their first exposure to English as a school subject (ECLs: 8; LCLs: 13) and length of English instruction (ECLs: 5.5 years; LCLs: 6 months), but they have the same biological age at testing (13.5) and go to classes that follow the same curriculum. In the Early English program that the ECLs attended, they received on average 90 minutes of Early English per week in two 45-minute classes, starting from grade level 2. Based on the assumption that very young learners lack the analytic ability to respond to formal instruction in the same way as adolescents (cf. Singleton & Ryan, 2004), the Swiss EDK promotes an implicit learning approach at primary school level, with a focus on spoken English, particularly vocabulary (including formulaic language), leaving formal grammatical instruction to teaching at secondary school level. As such, the policy directions roughly follow a CLIL (content and language integrated learning) approach. Note that in Switzerland, the term CLIL refers to a situation where English may be the central focus of the lesson, but the teacher is free to incorporate it into, or combine it with, other subjects or conduct classroom business in the L2. The language content may also be organized in topics, corresponding to chapters in a course book.

One of the first hypotheses tested was whether early classroom learning and late classroom learning yield different levels of accuracy in the area of morphology, measured by a variety of contextualized offline procedures (video re-telling, story completion, spot-the-difference task, argumentative and narrative essays, and a grammaticality judgment (GJ) task) which elicit different morphological structures. All the tasks were pilot-tested with a total of 40 students (mean age 13.4, mean number of years of learning L2 English: 6.1) for the production tasks and 60 students for the GJ task (mean age 13.7, mean number of years of learning L2 English: 6.5). The main reason for choosing inflectional morphemes as a case study was that they have been found to be particularly susceptible to age effect in a range of naturalistic studies (see, e.g., Jia & Fuse, 2007; McDonald, 2006). Every subject produced between 450 and 900 written words and between 200 and 300 spoken words, of which the first 200 of each task were selected, thus amounting to 400 written words and 200 spoken words per student. Following McDonald & Roussel (2010), morpheme productions in obligatory contexts were coded as correct, irregularized, regularized, omitted, misformed, overused, substituted, or 'other' forms (for a more detailed description of the data scoring, see Pfenninger, 2011). After each context was

⁵L1= Swiss German; L2= Standard German; L3= English; L4= French.

scored, the score values were added applying Pica's (1983) suppliance in obligatory context (SOC) analysis, according to which learners can score 1 point for the correct form; 0.5 point for a morpheme misformation and 0 points for no morpheme. Since SOC analyses have been criticized for focusing too strongly on the grammatical aspects of L2 acquisition and thus ignoring functional use of the L2 (Muñoz, 2006, p. 109), I also analyzed the learners' production of each of the error types described above. In the following, I will briefly outline the first results from this study and explain how they can shed light on the effectiveness of the learning situations of the two starting age groups.

First results of the study

Considering the ECLs' pre-puberty age of first exposure, their 5-year head start in L2 learning, and the fact that they had attained a state of cognitive development that is similar to that of the older starters with whom they were being compared at testing time, their accuracy scores on L2 morphemes after the first semester at middle school was initially hypothesized to be superior to the LCLs' performance. However, the analysis of the learning outcome of 5 selected English bound morphemes (past regular, past irregular, plural regular, plural irregular, and third person agreement) in the L2 production and perception of the two tested starting age groups yielded no overall significant differences in either the SOC scores or in a finer-grained analysis of different error types (see Pfenninger, 2011). The same picture emerged in an as yet unreported analysis of bound morphology (production and perception of definite and indefinite articles). Interestingly, while an earlier age of first exposure and a longer instructional period was not associated with higher accuracy scores, the findings suggested distinct patterns in the productive and receptive knowledge abilities of inflectional morphology. The LCLs always scored higher than the ECLs in tasks that might cause semantic difficulties, i.e., the ECLs seemed to suffer from poorer lexical knowledge and more L1 interference in production as well as reception tasks. When it came to phonological difficulties, some modest but inconsistent advantages for an early starting age were observed in two areas: the LCLs' production of unmarked forms of the third person singular morpheme (non-syllabic allomorph, as in *he walks*) and their underuse of the variant *an* in its obligatory contexts (e.g., as in *an apple*) were significantly higher than those of the ECLs. Furthermore, both groups showed variability in their use of bound morphology, with similarly high standard deviations in the area of the third person singular and the irregular plural morpheme, yet clearly higher standard deviations in the LCL data for the past regular and irregular and the plural regular marker. Besides not being subject to the same linguistic constraints, the two groups did not seem to employ the same strategies either: while the ECLs had a greater tendency to inflect all possible forms, possibly hoping some would match the target, the LCLs were more

selective and produced significantly less overused forms.

Discussion of results

There are, of course, many possible explanations for the lack of relevance of an earlier onset of L2 learning (and thus a greater amount of exposure and input) on the acquisition of morphology in a classroom. Besides cognitive factors (e.g., both learner groups began learning the L2 after the establishment of L1 phonetic categories, cf. Flege, 1991; Pfenninger, 2011) and social-psychological factors that "may mediate or interrelate with age effects in SLA" (Muñoz & Singleton, 2011, p. 11), for instance, the slightly different motivation levels reported in Pfenninger (in print), one explanation can be provided in terms of the learning situation at primary school level. That is, the ECLs might not have reached a proficiency level beyond the initial stage of beginners after the 5-year period of learning English because of the amount and implicit nature of the input they received. To my knowledge, there are (at least) two main issues reported in the literature that are associated with an implicit teaching approach in a classroom: firstly, it has been proposed that children are only able to "reach full native speaker competence through *long-term implicit learning from massive input*" (DeKeyser, 2000, p. 103, my emphasis). Accordingly, evaluations of programs with rich L2 exposure, such as immersion programs, have found that an implicit approach improves students' receptive skills in their L2 (see de Graaff & Housen, 2009, p. 735). It is questionable whether the terms "long-term learning" and "massive input" apply to a classroom situation, where input is usually rather poor and the number of years of learning limited. Secondly, evidence for the effectiveness of an implicit approach in a classroom is mixed. For instance, de Graaff & Housen (2009) hypothesize that explicit comparison processes might be required for the mediated form-meaning associations to be learned, which was also found in a multitude of other studies (e.g., Ellis, 2006; Goldschneider & DeKeyser, 2001):

The effectiveness of instruction is operationalized psycholinguistically, in terms of input-processing enhancements that help learners extract relevant linguistic structures from the L2 input and store them as linguistic representations in memory, and in terms of knowledge retrieval enhancements that help learners maximize access to their L2 knowledge for language performance. (de Graaff & Housen, 2009, p. 731)

Concerning morphology, McDonald and Roussel (2011: 446) recommend that learners should learn explicitly how to extract phonological information from the ends of words in order to improve the comprehension of regular past tense, third person singular verbs and plural nouns. Consequently, since the teaching approach in the Swiss primary school classroom is of an implicit nature, the lack of explicit grammar instruction in primary school in

combination with the small number of instructional hours per week might slow down the processes involved in morphological acquisition in an instructed context. This has also been observed by numerous teachers at secondary school level. In a letter-to-the-editor to a Swiss newspaper (*ZüriseeZeitung*), the head of the coordination panel of Zurich high schools and the University of Zurich, Michael Roth, outlined his opinion of the implicit teaching and learning approach at Swiss primary schools as follows:

The concept of CLIL is not appropriate for beginning learners. [...] The [middle school] teachers who have been working with these students for six months predominantly agree that the results are so disappointing that they are forced to basically start over from scratch. The students are not able to conjugate verbs or to use basic grammatical structures without producing numerous errors. (my translation)

It is also often suggested by secondary school teachers that since the primary teachers in Switzerland are advised not to engage in explicit grammatical instruction, the students acquire and internalize erroneous forms over the years, which are then difficult to eradicate at middle school level afterwards.

In conclusion, even though this study does not directly compare the effectiveness of implicit and explicit learning procedures for pre-puberty and post-puberty learners, it still sheds light on the question of the long-term effectiveness of instructional procedures after years of instruction. In this sense it can be interpreted as qualitative evidence for the hypothesis that early learners do not have enough time and exposure to benefit from their alleged advantages of implicit learning (e.g., Muñoz, 2006, pp. 33, 122). However, the relationship between the learners' age, the amount of instruction and explicit vs. implicit instructional techniques still needs to be analyzed in detail in order to understand the sole impact of various types of L2 instruction for pre-puberty vs. post-puberty learners.

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Practitioner research: Giving voice to EFL learners through guided reflective papers

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Introduction

This paper will report on a pilot study which draws on the principles of Exploratory Practice (EP) (Allwright, 2003; Allwright, 2005; Allwright & Hanks, 2009). The study was conducted at the tertiary level and used guided reflective papers as a research tool to investigate how effective EFL learners found young adult literature (YAL) in enhancing their intercultural competence. As I had the dual role of teacher/researcher, I decided to apply the principles of EP. Since EP does not include a set of steps which must be followed, but instead global principles which practitioners can apply, I felt that it could be easily incorporated into my teaching while at the same time providing my learners and me with an 'understanding' of what was happening in the language classroom. The emphasis of EP on 'mutual development' for everyone involved is particularly appealing because it meant that my students would also profit since the experience of working with me in this manner would be relevant for their learning as well (Allwright, 2003, p. 129). After providing a brief theoretical framework for my study, I will present my pilot study as well as the findings of my research approach and conclude with some thoughts about incorporating an EP perspective into research and teaching.

1. Theoretical Framework

Before I present the empirical stages of my pilot study, I would like to provide a brief theoretical framework of the rationale behind the study in order to define certain terms as well as explanations for the choice of literature used. This section will also outline my understanding of intercultural competence and the criteria I used in order to select the young adult literature for the study.

1.1 Byram's Model of Intercultural Competence

As with all research, in order to investigate intercultural competence, I began by defining key constructs that I wished to investigate. The principle construct under

investigation is learners' intercultural competence and my understanding of intercultural competence is based on the model proposed by Byram and Zarate for the Common European Framework (1994). This model identifies 5 dimensions of intercultural competence, namely,

- a. "Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.
- b. Knowledge: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.
- c. Skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own.
- d. Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.
- e. Critical cultural awareness/political education: an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries." (Byram, 2000, p. 9)

I have chosen this model because it has been designed for language teaching where "both culture-general and culture-specific dimensions, are equally important" (Risager, 2009, p.27). In addition, the model encompasses a wide range of factors that play a role in intercultural competence, as Risager notes:

... it draws on the social psychological tradition of wanting to cover knowledge, skills and attitudes (and the relations among them) in models of the individual in social life. Secondly, it emphasises the interpretation of texts and events as an important part of intercultural competence. Moreover, it includes an ethnographically inspired component: discovering and/or interacting with the foreign culture, and last, but not least, it places at the centre – especially when applied to education in schools – political education and critical awareness (2009, p. 27).

For my particular study, Byram's model seemed appropriate because it not only involves the interpretation of texts about other cultures and the knowledge which can be gained but also involves reflection on and critical evaluation of other cultures as well as one's own. Considering other cultural standpoints as well as one's own is fundamental in the development of one's 'intercultural learning' (Kaikkonen, 2001, p.79).

1.2 Selecting the Literature

The focus of my study was concerned with using a certain type of literature to enhance intercultural competence, namely Young Adult Literature (YAL). YAL can be defined simply as literature written specifically with a teenage audience in mind. I decided to work with this type of literature as most of the advanced language learners in my course are attending literature and culture courses on the classics and are not always interested in reading similar texts in their EFL courses. In addition to the novelty of the reading experience, I also felt that the short length of the texts as well as the everyday language used would motivate them to engage with the texts. With fewer linguistic barriers to overcome, advanced language learners would have the chance to concentrate more on the cultural content (Schumm, 2009, p.115).

The specific texts I chose to work with are inspired by criteria proposed by Bredella (2000) and Ghosn (2002). According to Bredella (2000, p. 378), the literature should represent 'post-colonial and minority texts because these often dramatise intercultural conflicts and reveal causes for misunderstanding and misrecognition of others'. The texts I used also fulfilled two other criteria that Ghosn (2002, p. 177) recommends, namely, that the characters are presented 'in contexts that accurately reflect the culture of the English-speaking world today' and that the stories 'mirror the prevailing cultural values and traditions of a people, and avoid stories that portray outdated customs and beliefs'.

2. Why Exploratory Practice?

As already stated in my introduction, I decided to draw upon EP for my pilot study because it provides a framework that allows for teaching and researching where I, in my dual role as researcher and practitioner, as well as my learners can profit from the research process. EP is essentially a set of principles which can be used to understand 'teaching and learning' or 'puzzles' (Allwright, 2003; Allwright and Hanks, 2009) where the emphasis is on '*understanding* rather than '*problem solving*' (Allwright, 2005, p. 360). The puzzle I was interested in understanding concerned whether learners found YAL effective in raising their intercultural competence. Another core characteristic of EP approaches is that learners are not seen as 'objects of research but as fellow participants' who work together with the practitioner for 'mutual development' (Allwright, 2003, p. 129). Since I was both teacher and researcher, it was important for me that my students felt integrated into the research process and that this participation was also beneficial for their learning. This included explicitly explaining to them the purpose of my research, providing them with feedback on their contributions to the study and making outcomes accessible to everyone. Finally, EP-informed research seeks to be a continuous process that becomes a regular way of working using classroom

activities in the process of understanding what is happening in the language classroom. According to Allwright "[t]he point of EP is not to get the research done, but to get teaching done well, in a way that fosters the development of understanding in and among all of the participants" (2009, p. 154).

The benefits of reflection and the increased awareness that comes from it can be very useful in the development of one's intercultural competence. Therefore, I decided to use guided reflective papers, which I had experience using with students, in my pilot study as a research tool. In doing so, my intention was that the students would benefit from having the opportunity to reflect on what they had learned/experienced concerning intercultural competence and YAL, while at the same time gain practice in expressing their thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and feelings in written English. For me, as the researcher and as the teacher, the guided reflective papers provided written documentation of learners' perceptions, allowed for rich data and a wide range of responses which could be further explored and involved learners 'in the work for understanding' about the role of YAL in enhancing their intercultural competence.

3. Pilot Study

The pilot study was carried out in an EFL course on intercultural competence at an Austrian university. There were 28 students (21 females and 7 males) from Austria, Bolivia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Greece, Russia and the USA. The students had advanced English language skills (CEFR B2/C1). The purpose of my study was twofold: to answer my EP 'puzzle' concerning the learners' perception of the effectiveness of YAL in raising intercultural competence and to find out whether reflective papers are a useful tool for evaluating learners' attitudes towards YAL and the development of their intercultural competence. The study took place across a 15-week semester. The students were required to write their guided reflective papers in week 2 before they began reading YAL and at the end of the course in week 14 in order to evaluate whether they felt that working with YAL had indeed raised their intercultural competence. They wrote their papers at home and the length was about 1-2 pages. For both papers, the students were provided with 5 open-ended questions on how they felt about reading/analyzing YAL to enhance their intercultural competence. I decided to use open-ended questions because I thought they would provide some support for students who find it more difficult to reflect on their learning. A few examples of the types of questions students were asked for the first guided reflective paper are:

- What was your initial reaction to hearing that you would be asked to read and analyze a novel written for young adults?

- Do you think you will be able to identify/empathize with the characters and the situations/problems they encounter? Why/Why not?

These questions were followed up in the second guided reflective paper with additional questions designed to explore possible changes in learner attitudes and perceptions such as:

- Did the reading experience meet your expectations? Explain.
- Could you identify/empathize with the protagonists?

The students' guided reflective papers were analyzed for content using Byram's dimensions of intercultural competence as guidelines. The dimensions were applied to evaluate how much YAL had contributed to the intercultural competence from the students' perspectives.

4. Findings on the effectiveness of YAL to raise intercultural competence from the learners' perspective

After evaluating the guided reflective papers, it was possible to see that three dimensions of Byram's model were most frequently addressed in the learners' papers. Firstly, 20 out of 28 students expressed a change in attitude or openness to other ways of viewing a situation after reading and working on YAL. Secondly, 14 out of 28 students mentioned the cultural knowledge they gained from reading about other cultures. Finally, 14 out of 28 students called into question their understanding of their own cultural identity and their national culture(s). Two aspects that were not explicitly asked but which they addressed in their papers concerned the language level of the literature and necessity for developed storyline and characters. Eight out of 28 students commented that they found the language in YAL easy to understand which helped them in analyzing the literature for cultural aspects. However, 7 out of 28 students stated that an oversimplified storyline providing very little background knowledge and/or flat characters did not contribute to their intercultural competence. These final two aspects raised by the students provided insights that were not expected but useful as far as choosing YAL that would better suit students' needs in future.

5. Findings on the usefulness of guided reflective papers

Working together with the students on my 'puzzle' not only contributed to my research but also to my teaching, which is, according to Allwright, the main purpose of EP (2009, p. 154). The guided reflective papers proved to be a useful tool for generating data while at the same time serving a valuable pedagogical purpose. They allowed me to gain greater understanding concerning the 'puzzle' I was trying to explore because they

provided depth and detail about my EFL learners' attitudes and feelings concerning YAL and intercultural competence. In addition some unexpected issues arose which provided me insights for my teaching and researching. In line with EP, the learners were also involved in the process of understanding their intercultural competence. The guided reflective papers gave them the opportunity to reflect on their learning while providing them with a forum to express themselves. Although the task was guided, the suggested structure did not restrict students from giving additional information that they found relevant. For example, many students included personal stories from their youth or examples of how they have come to terms with various cultural issues in their lives. Thus, students had the opportunity to explore in more detail experiences and factors related to their intercultural competence.

Conclusion

To conclude, I found the research process based on the principles of EP very rewarding. The very fact that both practitioner and students were involved in 'understanding the puzzle' concerning the use of YAL for intercultural competence and that the outcomes would have an immediate impact on our particular context meant everyone benefited. Although the students were aware of the fact that their responses in the guided reflective papers were also being used for classroom research, the fact that a pedagogical activity was being employed underlined their involvement. The students were no longer seen as the object of a study but became part of the research process since the writing task also expanded their own understanding of the intercultural issues at hand. In addition, the guided reflective papers proved to be a good investigative tool to help me to answer my 'puzzle' as they revealed subtle nuances and some unexpected responses that a more structured approach such as a questionnaire would not have generated. Based on my experiences during this pilot study using practitioner research, I look forward to exploring other areas of my classroom teaching in this way.

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Raising students' cross-cultural awareness as a way of enhancing learning English as an international language (EIL)

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Introduction

English, as the language used in many spheres of global activities, has recently been introduced as a compulsory subject into many European schools. Raising the level of competence in English has become an important objective in all educational policies. However, students' success cannot be guaranteed merely by making the subject compulsory. The paper discusses the way in which raising students' cross-cultural awareness may contribute not only to developing attitudes of tolerance and openness but to gaining higher competence in EIL as well. Student's motivation is commonly considered to be influential in achieving high levels of proficiency. Thus, triggering motivation by developing cross-cultural awareness seems to be the right way to ensure steady progress in developing student's foreign language (FL) competence. The article reports on the achievements of Polish and Spanish teachers implementing a cultural project in secondary schools, as well as further challenges they face after completing the first phase of the project.

Culture in FL teaching and learning

There are various terms used to describe the process of teaching a foreign language together with foreign culture. Some of them include *cultural knowledge*, *awareness* and *competence*, while others differentiate between *cross-*, *socio-*, *inter-*, and *multicultural* aspects in FL teaching and learning. Some researchers refer to the same or similar ideas using different terminology. The confusion is mainly caused by the fact that frequently research into sociocultural factors influencing SLA is an example of a bottom-up approach, from teachers who originate it by observing, to researchers who analyze it and bring the issue one step further (Kramsch 2002). In many cases, the teacher is both the

observer and the researcher publishing the results of his or her research. Moreover, the achievements of classroom-oriented research frequently become challenges both for researchers to interpret the results and for teachers to implement the results into everyday FL classroom practice. Regarding education as development and personal growth, Fenner (2000: 142) postulates that the aim of teaching foreign languages should be to "give the learner opportunity to develop cultural knowledge, competence and awareness in such a way that might lead to better understanding of the foreign culture, the 'other' as well as the learner's own culture, the 'self'". What follows is a brief review of the basic concepts in the field of teaching and learning culture together with a foreign language.

Cultural knowledge can be defined as structured and systematically presented information about the other culture which provides a necessary framework for understanding it. *Cultural awareness*, on the other hand, is based on knowledge of the other as well as one's own culture. Byram (1997: 60) enumerates the abilities which are involved in developing cultural awareness: the ability to reflect on one's own cultural identity, the ability to question taken-for-granted values and beliefs, and the ability to compare one's own culture with that of the interlocutor's. He considers comparison to be a basis for understanding, which helps learners perceive and cope with difference. Tomalin and Stempleski (1993: 5) view *cultural awareness* as "sensitivity to the impact of culturally induced behaviour on language use and communication". It comprises the awareness of one's own culturally-induced behaviour, the awareness of the culturally-induced behaviour of others and the ability to explain one's own cultural standpoint.

Byram and Zarate (1998) claim that every learner should do his/her best to use a foreign language in as near-native a way as possible. In order to master a foreign language, learners need to understand that there is a substantial difference between their own native system of values and beliefs and the one displayed by the native speakers of the target language. Byram and Zarate (1998) emphasize the fact that in many cultures, similar, if not the same, categories appear. They may seem to be universal, but if we analyse them carefully, we realize they are not. Systems of values and beliefs create sociocultural experience that determines the perception of any other culture. Thus, recognizing the similarities and differences between a native and a foreign culture should be an integral part of language learning. Byram and Zarate (1998) suggest that for better understanding of foreign language and culture sociocultural and linguistic knowledge should be developed together.

Motivation in FL teaching and learning

Winke (2005) points out that motivated students are every teacher's dream. They are willing to work hard, add their own goals, focus their attention, persevere

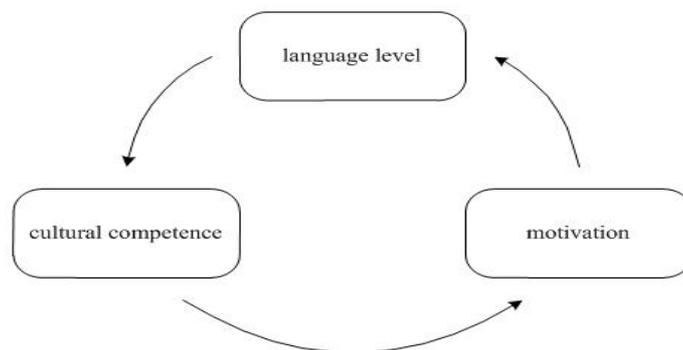
through challenges, do not need continuous encouragement, and may even stimulate others. That is why triggering student's motivation may help achieve expected results faster.

Definitions of *motivation* range from very simple ones (e.g. in educational psychology to be motivated means to be moved to do something) to more complex ones, where motivation in the context of FL learning is understood as a socially-and-culturally bound, long-term endeavour of foreign language learning (Gardner, 1985). Gardner's (1985) model places an emphasis on social aspects influencing motivation. However, FL classroom observation indicates that motivation is not constant and can be influenced by the syllabus, lesson plans, activities performed during the lesson and teacher's personality and actions (Dörnyei 1990, 2001). Dörnyei and Csizer (1998) present *ten commandments for motivating language learners*, four out of which can be achieved by developing students' *cross-cultural awareness*: make the language classes interesting, promote learner autonomy, personalize the learning process and familiarize learners with the target language culture. Similarly, Chambers (1999) presents *recommendations for motivating students at the school level*, where the following two can be directly linked to teaching language and culture: when cultural excursions or visits to the target language country are incorporated in the curriculum, more emphasis should be given to preparation and follow-up; in the other one, he postulates to emphasize culture more in everyday classroom practice.

Interdependence between developing cross-cultural awareness and fostering the process of language learning

The above considerations show that the same techniques can be used to raise cross-cultural awareness, to shape the attitude of openness and tolerance, to increase motivation, to develop learner autonomy or to work with mixed-ability classes. Dörnyei's (1990, 2001) approach to motivation, where the concept is seen as a variable influenced by many external and internal factors, seems to be closely connected with developing sociocultural competence in the FL classroom. Dörnyei (2003) recognizes three motivation stages (i.e. preactional, actional and postactional), which can be juxtaposed to three phases of any cultural project implemented in the classroom (i.e. anticipation, project proper, long-term influence). The relationship between developing *cultural competence*, triggering *motivation* and achieving high *language level* is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The model of developing students' language skills by including a cultural component in the FL teaching and learning process.



At an elementary level only some ways of developing cultural competence can be used; nevertheless, culture-marked elements embedded in the process of FL teaching can trigger students' motivation to study a foreign language further. The higher the level of proficiency, the wider the range of ways of developing cultural competence. Below, the author discusses the ways in which introducing culture projects in a FL classroom may develop students' cultural competence, at the same time triggering their motivation to achieve higher levels of proficiency.

Culture project

The author of the article participated in the bilateral project implemented in Polish and Spanish secondary schools in 2010/2011. With the use of *Moodle* learning platform and the concept of English as an International Language (EIL) as communication tool, the teachers expected to raise cross-cultural awareness of their students, hoping that they will also obtain better results on the end-of-school-year English test than students not involved in the project.

The Spanish participants were students of three official language schools in Majorca in the Advanced I and Advanced II groups, all of them over 16 years of age (Jacob 2011). The Polish participants were Opole secondary school students, aged 15-17, English being one of their majors. The study investigated the role of culture marked elements in the process of EFL teaching and learning. The research methods included a questionnaire and descriptive analysis of the course books used by the participants, followed by an essay-type question conducted for Spanish participants only (Jacob 2012).

The working hypothesis assumed that including the elements of culture will raise students' cross-cultural awareness and motivation to study English. With the above idea in mind, the teachers in both countries (teaching altogether 8 groups of 14-16 students each) introduced additional culture-content exercises in the form of hand-outs on cross-cultural issues to provoke

discussion. The central part of the project was the blog to which all the students contributed at a set pace and in a given number of entries. The contributions included setting a profile, commenting on other students' profiles, making films and presentations including both text and pictures. There were also videoconferences organized between the groups of cooperating students.

However, data analysis which followed the first phase of the project (one full school year) reveals that even if the first task of raising students' cross-cultural awareness was completed successfully, the students did not outperform their schoolmates in the final test. Surprisingly, they achieved even poorer results. Among students taking part in the project, the weaker students remained relatively weaker in comparison with the stronger ones. As a result, the teachers – both those implementing the project and those analyzing the results it brought – were faced with a challenge: Should they suspend cooperation within the framework of regular lessons because it does not bring immediate results and, as every project, is so time-consuming that there is no time left for thorough gaining knowledge? Or should they look for answers as to why the final test results fell short of their expectations and continue the project.

The possible explanation addresses three issues. First, the time for achieving expected results was too short. Developing students' cross-cultural awareness is a long process, which could only be initiated in a one-year project and the long-term benefits may in the future outweigh the short-term losses. Second, the content of the final test was knowledge- rather than skills-oriented. New tools have to be designed to assess the level of competences the students develop when participating in projects of this kind. And, finally, it is possible that the students developed communication strategies enabling them to exchange information with foreigners in EIL, without an immediate need to further develop their foreign language skills. With these challenges in mind, the teachers involved in the project decided to continue the next phase, hoping for long-term benefits in the sphere of developing learners' cross-cultural awareness, motivating the students to achieve higher levels of language competence.

Teaching culture is a challenging task, especially when teachers have limited time (e.g. two or three classes a week) but may become a powerful motivating factor (i.e. mixed ability classes, bored students). Teachers often do not want to teach the culture of the target language, although in surveys they report that it is very important, because they themselves do not feel culturally competent. However, it remains the teacher's responsibility to complement the coursebook in such a way so as to make students interested not only in the foreign language itself but also in the culture it represents.

The last issue to be addressed is the choice of *culture* to be taught together with a foreign language. Apart from many aspects of culture commonly recognized as important in foreign language education, the question remains which culture or cultures should be taught in English foreign language classes: English, American, the cultures of English-speaking countries or the cultures of the world. The author advocates adopting a multicultural approach to foreign language teaching but without neglecting L2 national culture. As always, keeping the balance seems to be the most reasonable solution.

Conclusion

The analysis of the data collected in the first phase of the project reveals that developing cross-cultural awareness shapes students' attitudes of sensitivity and tolerance towards other cultures. Being open, ready to explore, compare, contrast, analyse, and finally understand are the qualities which are invaluable in adult life. However, in a short-term project like the one described above, the hypothesis that students motivated by cultural elements introduced to the language classroom achieve better results in the sphere of general language development than their peers cannot be confirmed. Nevertheless, the teachers involved in the project strongly believe that developing students' cross-cultural awareness will bring long-term benefits towards the end of the two-year project. Thus, the achievements of the first part of the project also bring new challenges to be faced in the next school year.

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Strategic intervention in a foreign language classroom

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Introduction

Language learning strategies (LLS), defined by Oxford (1990, p. 8) as “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” have been of great interest to researchers for several decades. Rubin et al. (2007, p. 141) claim that “learners should be taught not only the language but also directed toward strategies they could use to promote more effective learning”. In other words, by introducing LLS into the foreign language classroom, teachers can show their learners how to become more autonomous. One of the most efficacious ways of making language learners cognizant of strategies is by means of strategy training, also known as ‘direct instruction’ which shows learners how to employ LLS (Cohen, 1998). The training is meant to encourage students to experiment with familiar and unfamiliar strategies. According to Drożdżał-Szelest (2004), another objective of strategy training is to bridge the gap between the knowledge about the target language and the ability to use that knowledge in practice. Furthermore, as a result of strategy training, learners have an opportunity to learn more about the value of the strategies that they are using. Training also facilitates learners’ selection of strategies appropriate to the performed task and encourages them to monitor and evaluate their own progress. The aim of the paper is to present the results of a study conducted into the LLS employed by advanced learners of English.

The Study

The aim of the fourteen-week study was to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of strategic intervention in the memory and cognitive group on the acquisition of the target feature operationalized as results on the immediate and delayed post-test?
2. Is the effect of the training, as measured on the immediate and delayed post-test, durable?
3. Did the training affect the frequency of general strategy use, operationalized as the results of the SILL introduced before and after the treatment?

The author, who was at the same time the researcher, wished to investigate the impact of strategic intervention on the acquisition of a certain grammatical feature. Before selecting the target form, the author wanted to make certain that it met certain conditions. Firstly, it had to be adjusted to the subjects’ level of language advancement. It also had to match the syllabus that the author was to follow throughout the course. After careful consideration, the author chose emphasis as the target feature. The author wanted to see whether providing extensive exposure to memory and cognitive strategies would affect the subjects’ acquisition of emphasis. Another objective was to examine whether the effect of the training, if there was any, was durable and whether the intervention exerted any impact on the the subjects’ frequency of strategy use.

The subjects

The participants were 40 Polish students who were divided into two experimental groups for the purpose of the study. One of the experimental groups consisted of 11 secondary school and 2 university students. The average age of these subjects was 17.9 years. The latter was composed of 6 secondary school students, 3 junior high school students and 2 university students with an age average of 17.6 years. Twice a week, both groups attended a CAE course at a private language school. The classes lasted 4.5 hours every week. The control group comprised 16 first-year students at the Institute of English Studies at a university in Poland. The control group attended an Integrated Skills course held once a week for 1.5 hour. Their age average was 19.6 years. There were 14 male and 26 female subjects participating in the project. The author included these subjects in the study as their level of language advancement was comparable. Since the author conducted classes with all the subjects in previous years, she was able to evaluate their linguistic abilities.

Procedure

In order to collect all the necessary data, the author employed a background questionnaire and the *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning*, also referred to as SILL (Oxford, 1990). It has been designed for English speakers learning a foreign language and also for those learning English as their second language (ESL). The author used the SILL as it is one of the most frequently applied instruments measuring students’ frequency of strategy use. It is perceived as reliable and effective. The results of the main treatment were computed by means of a pre-test, an immediate and a delayed post-test. The pre-test and two post-tests were administered to investigate the mastery of the target form in all groups and to show whether there were any gains in terms of target form acquisition. Apart from the means achieved on the pre- and post-tests, the author also measured the standard deviations (SD) to examine the inter-subject variation among particular groups. In order to establish

the statistical significance of the differences between the tests, the author administered *t*-tests.

There were two experimental groups in the study. One of them, containing 13 subjects, was exposed to memory strategies (memory group) and the other, composed of 11 participants, focused on cognitive strategies (cognitive group). The division of the groups was motivated by the fact that it would have been impossible to conduct a training among university students given the limited amount of time, 1.5 hours a week, the author had at her disposal.

The author started her fourteen-week project (Table 1) by introducing a questionnaire to collect background information about the subjects, such as their age, reasons for learning English, etc. The next stage was the administration of a pre-test and the SILL to know more about the frequency of LLS use before the training. Just after the end of the treatment, the subjects wrote an immediate post-test. One week later, in the ninth week, the subjects one more time completed the SILL to see whether any changes had occurred in the frequency of strategy employment. In the fourteenth week the participants completed a delayed post-test. The pre- and post-tests included the same types of tasks: transformations, gap filling, crossing out the unnecessary word and putting the words in the right order. The maximum number of points for each test was 35.

Table 1. Research timetable

TIME	ACTION(S)
Week 1	Questionnaire
Week 2	Pre-test, SILL
Week 3	Awareness-raising training
Week 4	Awareness-raising training
Week 5	Awareness-raising training
Week 6	Awareness-raising training, strategic intervention
Week 7	Strategic intervention
Week 8	Strategic intervention, immediate post-test
Week 9	SILL
Week 14	Delayed post-test

Prior to introducing strategic intervention, the author conducted eight awareness-raising sessions. The reason for this is that the metacognitive component is perceived as pivotal when boosting the effectiveness of strategic intervention (Chamot et al., 1999; Rubin et al., 2007). It is believed that learners who are aware of the learning process become more independent. Anderson

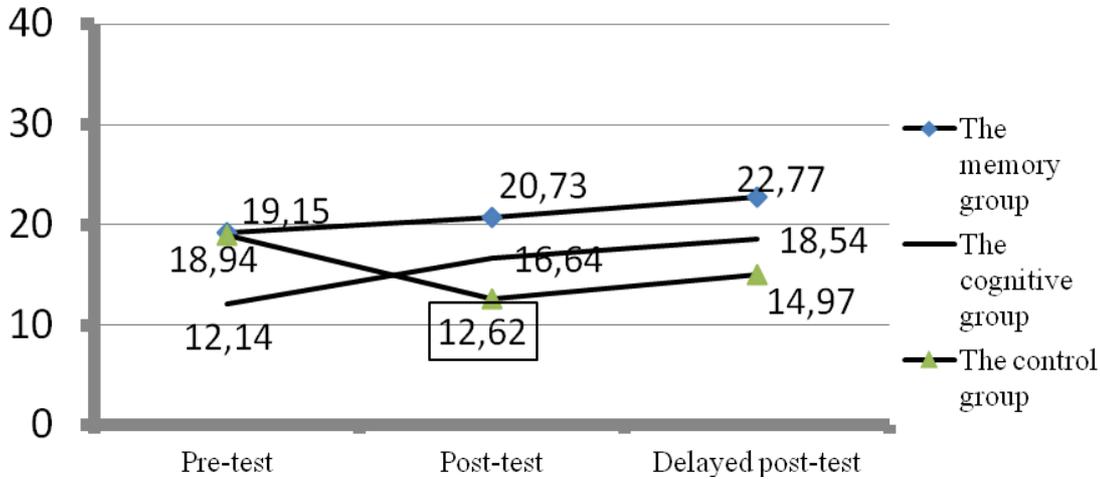
(2002) claims that developing awareness about one's cognitive processes is one of the most significant abilities a learner can acquire and develop in the foreign language classroom. During the sessions, the author conducted discussions on the notion and value of LLS. The subjects had an opportunity to share their experience connected with strategies with others. They were also provided with Oxford's (1990) LLS typology in the form of additional handouts. Each strategy type was analyzed and supported with numerous examples.

Once the awareness-raising sessions were over, all the subjects received handouts with information and tasks on emphasis. Every lesson focused on a different aspect, for instance fronting, cleft sentences, and was accompanied by the same exercises for each group. When students familiarized themselves with the theory and performed the activities, they received an additional set of tasks. The memory group did exercises promoting the target feature by means of memory strategies. Some of the tasks included creating a story with cleft sentences using the provided pictures or creating sentences with phrases containing emphasis (e.g. arrant nonsense, exorbitant prices). The cognitive group performed tasks devoted to cognitive strategies, for example underlining emphatic devices in the sentences, translation, repetition. The control group did not receive any additional exercises apart from those performed by all three groups.

Results

Examining the mean scores achieved by subjects on the pre- and post-tests (Figure 1), one can see that it was the memory group that scored the highest number of points. On the pre-test students exposed to memory strategies achieved a result of 19.15 points, surpassing the remaining groups. On the immediate post-test the memory group, again, outperformed the other groups and scored 20.73 points. However, it was on the last post-test, six weeks after the training, that they achieved the highest mean, 22.77.

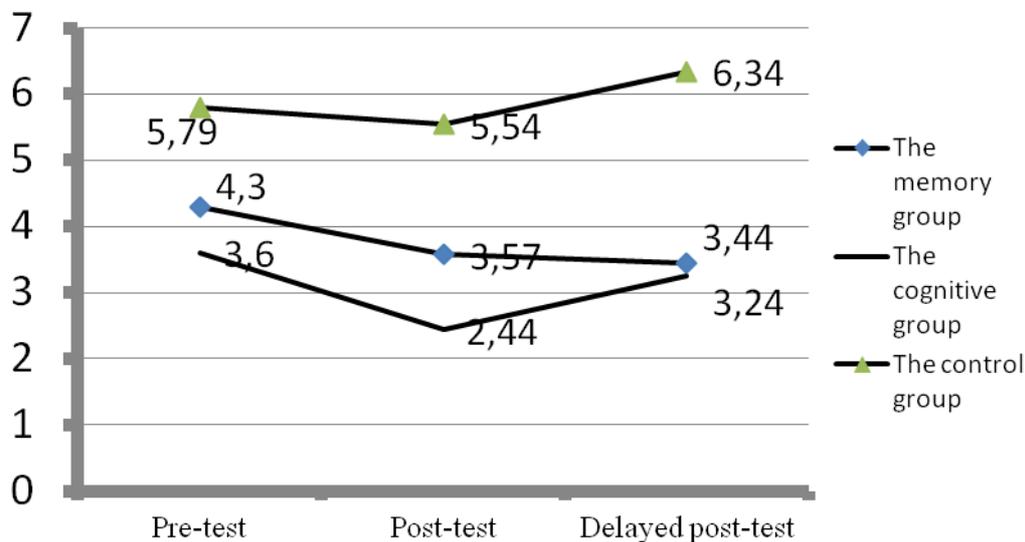
Figure 1. The mean scores on pre-tests, immediate post-tests and delayed post-tests measuring the subjects' mastery of emphasis (n = 40).



By contrast, the means in the cognitive group were much lower. However, the progress made is more noticeable. On the pre-test the group scored 12.14 points, which is the lowest score among all the groups. The results of the immediate post-test showed, however, a considerable increase which amounted to 16.64 points. As with the memory group, the cognitive one achieved the highest score on the delayed post-test, 18.54. This suggests that the strategy training appeared beneficial in terms of mastering the target structure. The control group scored

18.94 points on the pre-test. However, the group managed to score only 12.62 points on the immediate post-test and 14.97 on the delayed one. The score on the delayed post-test amounted to 14.97 points. The study shows that the memory group benefited most from the training as it managed to achieve the highest scores on the post-tests. Since both experimental groups managed to achieve higher results on the post-tests, the findings also demonstrate that the effects of the intervention proved durable six weeks after the training.

Figure 2. SD achieved on pre-tests, immediate post-tests and delayed post-tests measuring the subjects' mastery of emphasis (n = 40).



The author also calculated standard deviation (Figure 2). Its level in the memory group was rather high as measured on the pre-test. This could have resulted from the different level of advancement among the group members. This discrepancy decreased on the immediate and delayed post-test. The scores in the cognitive group did not represent such disparities, which means that the inter-subject variation was not

that conspicuous. Initially, SD amounted to 3.6 points, then dropped to 2.44 points only to reach 3.24 on the last post-test. The increase in SD on the post-test could have resulted from the fact that there were students who needed more time to acquire the target feature. Therefore, they achieved lower results, which in turn affected the value of SD in the whole group.

The author also conducted a *t*-test in the experimental groups (Table 3). Since the obtained values were higher than the critical value for *t* (2.074) and reached 3.19 on the immediate and 3.06 on the delayed post-test, the results achieved statistical significance. The scores also imply proficiency gains. In the *t*-test conducted in the memory and control group (Table 4), the values are also higher than the critical value for *t* (2.052), with 4.58 on the immediate post-tests and 3.98 on the delayed ones.

Table 3. T-test results achieved by the memory and the cognitive group.

	MEAN		SD		Significance (two-tailed t-test)	
	MG	CG	MG	CG	MG	CG
Pre-test	19.15	12.14	4.3	3.6	Pre→ Pre: t = 4.25, p < .05, df =22	
Immediate post-test	20.73	16.64	3.57	2.44	Ipost→ Ipost: t = 3.19, p < .05	
Delayed post-test	22.77	18.54	3.44	3.24	Dpost→ Dpost: t = 3.06, p < .05	

Table 4. T-test results achieved by the memory and the control group.

	MEAN		SD		Significance (two-tailed t-test)	
	MG	ContG	MG	ContG	MG	ContG
Pre-test	19.15	18.94	4.3	5.79	Pre→ Pre: t = 0.108, p < .05, df =27	
Immediate post-test	20.73	12.62	3.57	5.54	Ipost→ Ipost: t = 4.58, p < .05	
Delayed post-test	22.77	14.97	3.44	6.34	Dpost→ Dpost: t = 3.98, p < .05	

As for the cognitive and control group (Table 5), the value obtained on the immediate post-test (2.27) was higher than critical *t*. However, the result on the delayed post-test proved disappointing (1.73). One of the reasons for such a score could have been the difference in the values of SD. The subjects in the control group produced high SD values, which implied that they were heterogeneous and some of them needed more time to acquire the target feature.

Table 5. T-test results achieved by the memory and the control group.

	MEAN		SD		Significance (two-tailed t-test)	
	CG	ContG	CG	ContG	CG	ContG
Pre-test	12.14	18.94	3.6	5.79	Pre→ Pre: t = 3.5, p < .05, df =27	
Immediate post-test	16.64	12.62	2.44	5.54	Ipost→ Ipost: t = 2.27, p < .05	
Delayed post-test	18.54	14.97	3.24	6.34	Dpost→ Dpost: t = 1.73, p < .05	

Tables 6 and 7 present the two groups' strategy use before and after the training as measured on the SILL. Due to the limitations of the paper, the author will focus only on the general differences. The frequency of strategy use increased in the two groups with the means amounting to 3 and 3.2 points in the cognitive group and to 2.9 and 3.1 points in the memory one. Although the reported changes are far from impressive, they are an optimistic and encouraging sign and bode well for potential future studies. They point to positive changes in terms of strategy application. However, the reported increase in the frequency of use cannot be solely attributed to the implementation of strategic intervention. Since the study was conducted during the subjects' extracurricular classes, one cannot exclude the influence of regular school classes or the subjects' exposure to different strategies outside the classroom.

Conclusions

This paper has reported on a study investigating a strategic intervention with advanced learners of English in Poland. The results show that it was the memory group that achieved better results as measured on the pre-test, the immediate and delayed post-test. Furthermore, in both experimental groups the mean scores proved considerably high even six weeks after the intervention, which implies that the effect of the strategy intervention was durable across such a timescale. The frequency of strategy use increased after the treatment as measured on the SILL. Of course, the scores should be treated with caution as there are certain factors that could have affected the final results. Firstly, if a different target feature had been introduced, the results could have varied significantly. Moreover, it is possible that different groups, placed in a different setting and working over a longer period of time would have achieved much higher, or much lower, results on the post-tests.

Consequently, the results of this project are by no means conclusive but they show great potential and there is a need for more comprehensive research.

Such studies are important as they show how to boost learners' confidence and help them gain more autonomy in the process of language learning.

Table 6. Mean scores for strategy types achieved by the experimental groups on the SILL prior to the treatment.

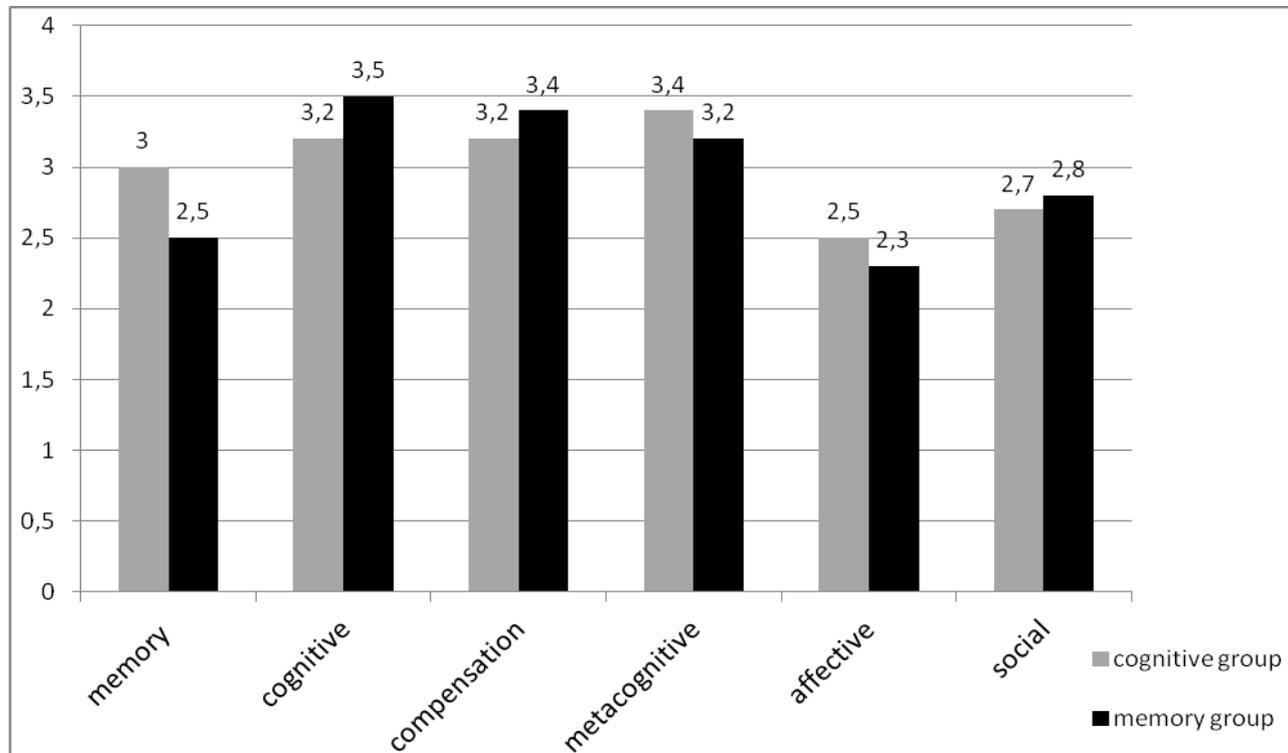
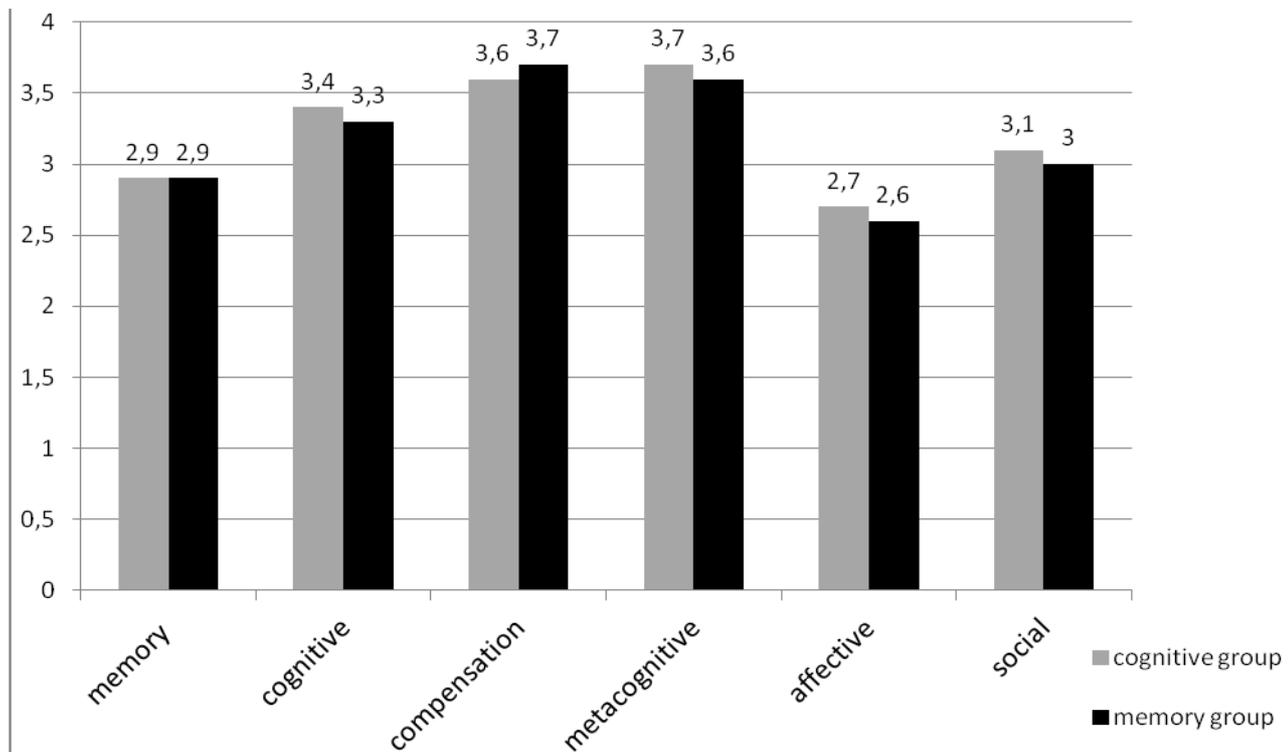


Table 7. Mean scores for strategy types achieved by the experimental groups on the SILL after the treatment.



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Micro- and macro-perspectives on students' attitudes to online classes

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Introduction

The article reports on research informing an online TEFL course writing concerning students' attitudes to e-learning as examined from two different perspectives: macro and micro. The macro viewpoint involved a large-scale study based on two student satisfaction surveys related to e-learning; the micro perspective was offered by a small-scale qualitative investigation of the students' opinions on a particular e-course in progress, based on regular feedback sessions with three student-reviewers.

The said students' attitudes were taken into account in the process of e-material writing. It was done in the belief that curriculum development should be learner-centred rather than centralized. In turn, the two-faceted research design was chosen based on the assumption that while large scale investigations provide data of invaluable statistical significance, it is the micro-scale which ensures more detailed, personalised feedback obtained from the prospective addressees of the course.

Discussing the issue of what makes a good learner-centred online TEFL course, the article starts by looking at learner-centredness *per se* (Part 1). Part 2 presents the data collected during the macro-perspective study and some interim observations based on these large-scale results. Part 3 introduces the micro viewpoint. Finally, what follows are a number of final conclusions and e-teaching implications emerging from both studies.

Learner-centred curriculum development

The idea of learner-centredness in curriculum development is frequently put forward in contrast to a more traditional, centralised course design. While the latter approach is aimed at creating a learning plan for mastering a body of knowledge, learner-centred curricula are process- rather than product-oriented, and they value skills over formal expertise. As Nunan points out, in relation to language learning curricula, "[p]roponents of learner-centred curricula are less

interested in learners acquiring of the language than in assisting [students] gain the communicative and linguistic skills they need to carry out real world tasks" (Nunan, 1988, p. 22).

All of this, which applies to EFL course design, is mentioned in the context of a TEFL course curriculum development for an important reason. The similarity between these two types of curricula is particularly striking: it seems that TEFL training – because it is practical by definition, similarly to language learning in the majority of contexts – should be learner-centred, skill- rather than knowledge-based, the knowledge component being ancillary rather than privileged. This, with a particular emphasis on the prospective *real world tasks* (cf. the quote above), is why it is important for the curriculum of a TEFL training course to be learner-centred in the sense proposed by Nunan (1988). This sense is adopted for the sake of the present article.

In addition to course-type-related arguments for curriculum decentralization, in the course of the writing of TEFL online lectures and classes (the process to be described in the present article), I have taken into account three other reasons for learner-centredness in material design: my own beliefs about adult/ tertiary/ university learning which should be skill-based and experiential; my perception of the autonomy-breeding potential of online education, which is particularly suited for the development of learner independence and personal responsibility, especially by giving the learner ample opportunities to acquire time-management and decision-making skills; as well as my personal preferences concerning teacher and learner roles, with the focus on knowledge construction (learner) rather than knowledge transmission (teacher) as well as facilitation and inspiration rather than instruction.

The development of the online TEFL training course which is the focus of the present article was initiated in January 2011. The course was written with all four of the above-mentioned arguments in favour of learner-centredness in mind, and the last question to be resolved was the one of how to be truly learner-centred before knowing one's specific audience.⁶ The answer was sought on two different planes: (i) through a large-scale student satisfaction survey, and (ii) qualitatively, based on the opinions of three student-reviewers who followed the process of material writing. Both parts of the study – which were carried out alongside each other between January and June 2011 – are described in the following two sections.

⁶ All of the online courses had to be completed before student enrolment started.

E-material writing: the macro perspective

The quantitative research was designed with the aim of ensuring learner-centredness of the designed online course by offering insights into college students' attitudes towards e-learning. It was based on the results of a student satisfaction survey carried out biannually at the College of Foreign Languages in Czestochowa, Poland. The data generated were the opinions on the e-routines of 119 college teachers provided in the autumn of 2010 and spring 2011 by 398 and 331 respondents, respectively.

As for the methodology of the survey is concerned, its participants expressed their opinions by answering the following three closed yes/no questions:

- 1) In what way are the e-campus materials useful?
- 2) What type of content/activities were the most useful?
- 3) Do you find e-materials attractive and effective?

as well as two open-ended questions, in which they were asked to enumerate the main strengths and weaknesses of the college e-campus. The answers to these questions form the research data, which have been subjected to analysis reported later in this section. As can be seen in tables 1-3, the closed responses are presented proportionally, while the open-ended answers (Table 4) have been classified and grouped under 6 major categories.

Based on the results of the investigation presented in tables 1-4, the following two course-writing recommendations can be put forward:

1. E-courses should offer revisions and serve as supplementation of face-to-face (f-2-f) classes; and
2. The most desired form of content are files (handouts)

Table 1. In what way are the e-campus materials useful?

Answer	Autumn	Spring ⁷
revisionwise	47.24%	58.45%
as extension to f-2-f ⁸ classes (same topic)	52.76%	60.32%
as f-2-f content outreach (other topics)	36.18%	38.34%
as self-study motivators and autonomy boosters	26.87%	26.01%
in the area of source availability/critical selection	23.87%	27.61%

⁷ The data are presented for two terms – autumn and spring – for the same reasons the satisfaction survey is held biannually: 1) in spring students will have had more time to experiment with different online techniques; 2) some courses are one-term courses.

⁸ face-to-face

Table 2. What type of content/activities were the most useful?

Answer	Autumn	Spring
Text files	55%	68.63%
presentations (ppt & others)	27%	31.37%
interactive quizzes	28.54%	29.76%
forum discussions	11.56%	15.01%
online assignments	19.6%	25.74%
audios	11.81%	10.46%
videos	7.54%	10.72%

Table 3. Do you find e-materials attractive and effective?

Answer	Autumn	Spring
yes	61.06%	67.02%
no	7.79%	10.99%
no answer/unfinished answer	31.15%	21.98%

Table 4. The main strength and weaknesses of the e-campus

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • availability • no time/place constraints • flexibility of use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • problems with Moodle technicalities and course organization • lack of f-2-f contact with the tutor • quality of materials (lack of key, technical problems)

However, we have to observe that the two interim conclusions based on the results of the quantitative study need to be considered critically. This is mainly because of the percentage/grade interpretation of the presented results. The overall ratings the survey participants offer when commenting on the attractiveness and effectiveness of the courses - 61.06% and 67.02% - translate, respectively, into 3.0 and 3.5, which are the lowest passing grades in Poland). In the light of this it is very difficult to see the respondents as truly satisfied with their online lectures and classes.

The level of actual satisfaction behind these scores may be easier to identify when we compare these results with the answers to open-ended questions: e-lectures and e-classes are evaluated only in terms of their availability – and not their *quality* – and the access is, in most cases, sufficiently easy, ongoing and flexible rather than difficult. Yet, access without quality apparently cannot guarantee a rating significantly above the passing band, because e-courses that are limited to knowledge provision cannot compete quantitatively (and, very often, qualitatively) with what is available in the entirety of the Internet. Keeping this in mind, we can enumerate only two reasons for taking part in an e-course – instead of simply browsing the

Web – when one is on a knowledge quest: 1) the course content contains Internet-based resources pre-selected and structured by the tutor, or 2) the course gives tools for critical evaluation of the said content. Neither of the two seems the case in this context as these two factors – online lectures/classes being helpful in the area of source availability/critical selection, or as self-study motivators and autonomy boosters – were rated quite low in the answers e-participants gave to the question concerning course usefulness (around 25% of ‘yes’ answers in both categories).

An important question which arises at this point is: Does the quantitative study offer a reliable answer to the question of how to write a good online TEFL course? This question is perfectly legitimate if we go back to the four arguments for learner-centring e-lectures and e-classes (cf. Section 1; following Nunan 1988). It also leads to another question, about the role of online courses not as much in catering to learner needs, potentially conditioned by their previous experience with traditional schooling, but rather in trend-setting, in which a fairly innovative tool can be used to shape new attitudes to learning. However, if these new trends are to be introduced, and a truly high-standard learner-centred, skill-based online course is to be designed, we still need a students’ voice to fine-tune the course to the needs of the respective addressee. This is where the micro perspective needs to come into play.

E-material writing: the micro perspective

As mentioned above, the TEFL course was planned as consisting of two components: an e-lecture and e-class, both written in a learner-centred – rather than centralised – fashion. This resulted in the following design:

1. A lecture course, prepared in one of the two presentation modes: (i) *Articulate Presenter* slideshows (+voiceover) interspersed with quizzes to simulate comprehension check questions asked by the lecturer in a traditional face-to-face auditorium; and (ii) *Moodle Lesson*: page-after-page organisation of material (each page with audio, video, quiz, essay or insert-link options in multiple combinations); individual parts of each *Lesson* were password-protected to ensure chronological coverage of content. In addition, lectures in both modes – *Articulate* and *Lesson* – included an introduction, in which topic objectives and content organisation were specified, as well as a student feedback-on-lecture section.
2. A fully interactive, task-based, skill-developing e-class, in which students were asked to complete assignments involving student-teacher, student-student and student-text interaction in individual as well as collaborative

task modes requiring, for example, showing understanding of a text on a TEFL-related issue, analysing and comparing two articles presenting opposing views on such an issue, evaluating the usefulness of a TEFL-informed text in one’s own teaching context, replicating a TEFL-related study, creating one’s own materials based on a read TEFL-related text, and others.

Three reviewers were recruited: one male and two female, all of them students of the first year of the TEFL MA programme in the College of Foreign Languages in Czestochowa. The recruitment criteria included interest in online education, some expertise in individual learner differences, and the ability to think critically together with the courage to express one’s opinions. Offered unlimited tryout sessions in the two courses-in-progress, they were asked to evaluate both its form and content, and to express their views during bi-monthly f-2-f meetings with the course tutor. The feedback prepared by each reviewer in the form of a written report, was read out at each session and subjected to discussion, in which all of the three students and the course tutor took part. These reports were later collected and included in the research data. The comments as regards both the e-lecture and the e-class were generally positive. The main advantages described by the reviewers were: the interactivity of the courses and choice of tasks with respect to their type, mode and level of difficulty. However, a number of concerns were also expressed as regards:

- the mode of presentation: aesthetics, voiceover switch on/off options, sound quality;
- the content: level of difficulty, list-item slides with no comments, text-heavy slides;
- student attitudes: password-protection of content, the requirement to write as many as ten essays out of which only two were to be checked (seen as demotivating), too little choice when it comes to tasks.

As a result, the following steps were taken to improve the course:

- 1) the material was subject to polishing and clarification: most list-only slides were given a voiceover comment explaining the enumerated ideas, and some of them were deleted;
- 2) *Moodle Lesson* with mp3 embedding was chosen over *Articulate Presenter*, as the former allows freedom as regards sound on/off options;
- 3) teacher control was relaxed: the password protection was removed from the lessons;

- 4) the mandatory 10-essay requirement was replaced by a 2-essay choice.

In addition to these changes, based on the earlier quoted macro study, participants of the course were given:

- 5) ample opportunities for revisions (quizzes; course glossaries, etc.);
- 6) multi-source supplementation of the lecture content, and
- 7) easy access to all handouts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, writing a learner-centred e-course – especially a course like TEFL training, practical and skill-based rather than centralised and knowledge-focused – requires taking students' attitudes into consideration. In doing so, we need to account for trends that are can be identified in large-scale investigations alongside paying attention to highly specific concerns expressed in relation to a particular course, possible to see only in micro-level research.

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Teachers as researchers: Benefits and challenges of action research

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Introduction

Action research is a way of helping EFL teachers find more effective ways of teaching within the communicative, learner-centered curriculum and more fully address learners' needs and expectations (Burns, 2009; 2010), and, as such, it can be a relevant teacher professional development option which fits well into the paradigms of the teacher as a reflective and inquiring practitioner and researcher, and professional development as a continuous, ongoing, life-long process, and a means of supporting teacher autonomy (Wallace, 1998; Gabryś-Barker, 2011).

One undeniable strength of action research as a teacher development tool is the inquiry, investigation and reflection that it stimulates in teachers. Improving one's understanding of teaching and learning is a major aim of action research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006), placing it within current trend in teacher development of pursuing increased critical self-reflection (Wallace, 1998; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Burns, 2009), which helps teachers to evaluate their practices and facilitates decision making. For example, Thorne and Qiang (1996) reported an increased awareness of the teaching and learning processes and a heightened sensitivity about the classroom situation in the participants of their study as a result of reflection derived from conducting action research.

Another benefit of action research for teachers' professional development is related to its practice-orientation (McIntosh, 2010; Philips & Carr, 2010), as it helps teachers not only to understand their own practice, but also to improve it (Richards & Farrell, 2005). As Burns (2010, p.142) says, "reflection on action is what gives rise to further ideas for practice" and this, in turn, can benefit both teachers and learners. In a similar vein, Richards and Farrell (2005) stress that teachers can develop their competence not only through implementing changes in their teaching as a result of research outcomes, but also through engaging in the process of planning and conducting action research. For example, participants in Cumming,

Shi and So's study (1997) reported having discovered new, innovative ways of teaching, and seeing improvements in their learners' learning strategies. They also developed research skills that would be useful in their future careers.

Still another strength of action research as a teacher professional development option lies in its motivating function; doing research refreshes practitioners' interest in teaching and helps them avoid burnout. Burns (2010, p.7) notices that conducting research "can reinvigorate our teaching, lead to positive change, raise our awareness of the complexities of our work, and show us what drives our personal approaches to teaching". In their studies, Atay (2008) and Wyatt (2011), apart from other gains, reported renewed enthusiasm for teaching and a sense of feeling rewarded as a result of the experience of doing action research.

The Study

The study aimed to explore EFL teachers' opinions about their experience conducting action research projects within their MA-seminar program. More specifically, it aimed to investigate their perceptions of the usefulness of action research for themselves as teachers and for their learners, to gather their evaluative opinions of the process of conducting action research, and, finally, to find out what they had learned from conducting it.

Participants

The participants of the study were 51 (46 female and 5 male) teachers, who were also MA-program students (41 one of them in the extramural, and 10 in the regular program) at two universities in Poland. Forty-nine of the participants were Polish, and 2 were Moroccan teachers of EFL working in Polish schools. Their average age was 27.5 years, and their teaching experience ranged from 10 months to 8 years.

Data collection tool

The data collection tool was a questionnaire, which consisted of 4 closed-ended questions of the multiple-choice type (the options were: *yes, definitely; rather yes; it's hard to say; no, and other answers*), and 5 open-ended questions, to which the participants provided descriptive answers concerning their opinions about conducting the action research project within their MA program.

Results

As Table 1 indicates, the majority of the respondents (66%) expressed satisfaction with the fact that they had to conduct research in the course of their MA studies (*yes, definitely and rather yes answers*). Four of them (8%) answered negatively, and 13 (26%) had no opinion.

Table 1. The respondents' satisfaction with the experience of conducting action research.

Question	Yes, definitely		Rather yes		Hard to say		No		Other answers	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Are you glad that you had to conduct research for your MA seminar?	17	33	17	33	13	26	4	8	-	-

As can be seen from Table 2, a majority of the respondents believed that their students had already benefited or would benefit in the future from the action research, as 80% provided the *yes, definitely* and *rather yes* answers. Only three teachers could not see any benefits for their students and for four of them it was hard to decide. This shows that in general, the teachers could see a link between their own research involvement and their students' learning.

Table 2. The respondents' opinions about the beneficial effects of the research on their learners.

Question	Yes, definitely		Rather yes		Hard to say		No		Other answers	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Do you think your students benefited or will benefit from your conducting the research?	15	29	26	51	4	8	3	6	3	6

Despite the teachers' satisfaction with conducting action research and their conviction that it may be beneficial for learners, only 21 of them (41%) stated that they would conduct action research again; for the majority (51%), it was hard to decide. Four of them provided a negative answer (Table 3).

Table 3. The respondents' opinions about their future research involvement.

Question	Yes, definitely		Rather yes		Hard to say		No		Other answers	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Do you think you will ever conduct action research again, even if you don't have to?	3	6	18	35	26	51	4	8	-	-

As can be seen in Table 4, most of the respondents (71%), however, expressed the opinion that conducting action research should be part of regular teaching, with *rather yes* being the most frequently marked answer. Six teachers provided a negative answer, while for eight it was hard to say. One respondent expressed the reservation that research should be conducted by those teachers who want to pursue professional promotion.

Table 4. The respondents' opinions about the relevance of research as part of regular teaching practice.

Question	Yes, definitely		Rather yes		Hard to say		No		Other answers	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Do you think that conducting classroom-oriented research should constitute a regular part of every teacher's job?	8	15	28	56	8	15	6	12	1	2

The open-ended questions included in the questionnaire generated some interesting opinions about the relevance of action research in the respondents' development as teachers; the most representative answers which illustrate the trends emerging from the responses collected in the study will be provided here.

Question 1 was: *What did you like most about conducting the research?* Thirty-two of the 51 respondents mentioned the methodological aspects of doing research, e.g. *I found creating my own questionnaire really enjoyable; I really liked analyzing the data, which enabled me to perceive some patterns.* Enjoyment derived from the process of teaching while doing research was highlighted by a large proportion of the participants (17 out of 51), as seen in the following comments: *I liked preparing materials at home and conducting games with the children; The fun that we had during lessons.*

Question 2 was: *What did you find the most difficult?* More than half of the respondents (28) indicated issues connected with the methodology of conducting the study, such as designing tests and questionnaires, or analyzing and interpreting the data, and drawing conclusions on their basis. Sixteen of the study participants listed the considerable amount of time and heavy work load involved in the process of conducting research as major sources of difficulty.

One of the following questions was: *What did you learn from the experience of conducting the research?* A majority of the answers (28) indicated that the teachers felt that they had improved their teaching skills, and mentioned very specific aspects connected with implementing classroom procedures: *I learned how to use groupwork and pairwork efficiently; I discovered new ways of motivating my teenage learners.* Eight teachers provided more general responses, which revealed their enhanced understanding of the teaching-learning relationship, e.g.: *I think the study made me realize that a good classroom atmosphere is a key to success; I had the chance to realize that students can really become involved in learning if they are approached appropriately.* The knowledge of how to conduct research, e.g. how to prepare research tools and analyze data, was highlighted by another 8 teachers.

The final question concerned the perceived usefulness of action research on the participants' development as teachers. The responses provided by the teachers show their awareness about the role action research plays in teacher development. These are selected comments made by the respondents: *It certainly helped me realize that working with different age groups requires different teaching skills, sometimes very specific ones. As a result, I understood the importance of being open to learners' needs; Thanks to a careful analysis of the results of the observations, I am better prepared to teach very young children; I think now I will be more sensitive to my students' expectations.*

Conclusions

It is evident from the study's findings that the participants valued the experience of conducting action research as part of their MA projects. In their responses, they were able to list a number of benefits that they believed this experience had given them. According to the participants' opinions, it made them realize the need for reflection in teaching, it helped them improve their teaching skills and their understanding of the classroom, and it developed or deepened their sensitivity to learners' needs and expectations. On the other hand, half of the study participants were skeptical about their own involvement in action research in the future, which may be the result of the considerable time and effort investment which the experience entailed. They saw doing action research as an enjoyable experience, but one that was, at the same time, demanding.

What needs to be stressed, however, is that action research proved to be a valuable tool for professional teacher development, the relevance of which would be worth highlighting in pre-service teacher training and in-service teacher development courses. As McDonough (2006) states, in such courses, teachers

need to be reminded that research topics are not detached from their everyday teaching or distant from their and their learners' needs. Action research is conducted by practitioners themselves, and this is its main strength.

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Discovering teacher-trainees' understanding of TEFL theories: Results of research using think-aloud protocols

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The knowledge of language itself a foreign language teacher possesses is not enough to teach it effectively. There is a need for "specialist knowledge [that] is the first and basic condition of teacher competence" (Kwiatkowska, 2008, p. 55). This article discusses the value of teaching theories in the job of EFL teaching, and shares the results of an attempt to discover how pre-service teachers understand TEFL theories.

Theoretical background

The value of knowledge

Knowledge may refer either to theories or to experience. Teachers' experiential knowledge may be significant, but there must be some "exploration of new trends and theories in language teaching" (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 4). Richards and Lockhart (1996) state that "the teacher who has a more extensive knowledge [...] about the different components and dimensions of teaching is better prepared to make appropriate [...] decisions in teaching" (p. 3). Furthermore, as Porzak (1998, in Zawadzka, 2004) claims, without pedagogical and psychological knowledge a teacher can suffer from low self-esteem and a lack of confidence, and can have a negative attitude towards students and other teachers.

An important condition for the pedagogical and psychological knowledge to become useful is teachers' as well as novice teachers' understanding of it which can take place while applying it in the class. Kwiatkowska (2008) stresses the fact that "the value of knowledge is in its use" (p. 55-57). Applying teaching

theories in practice presumably makes the theories more comprehensible.

The two types of knowledge, i.e., theory-based and experience-based have become criteria for knowledge classification in teacher education models. The reflective model of teacher education focuses on *received knowledge* which includes "research findings, theories and skills which are widely accepted as being part of the necessary intellectual content of the profession" (Wallace, 1991, p. 14) and the knowledge of the subject (e.g., a foreign language), and *experiential knowledge* gained from practice and reflection, called 'knowledge-in-action' (Wallace, 1991, p. 15). The applied science model of teacher education focuses on the *scientific knowledge* that is "conveyed to the trainee by those who are experts in the relevant areas" (Wallace, 1991, p. 9).

The fact that pre-service teachers begin their education having their own experience as a learner, a student, but sometimes as a teacher too has an important influence on how they react to and interpret knowledge about teaching. Feiman-Nemser (1983, in Arends, 1991) observes that "a beginner's knowledge of teaching and school is limited to what he or she has picked up over the years as a student" (p. 15), thus teaching practice plays an important role in modifying students' 'personal theories' and helping them to discover the meaning of experts' theories.

How novice-teachers comprehend teaching theories has become an interesting issue for the author of the article who may use this knowledge while planning and conducting her didactics classes. The author got inspired by Richards and Farrell's (2005) questions: "What is the nature of teacher knowledge and how it is acquired? What cognitive processes do we employ while teaching and while learning to teach?" (p. 6). One may add: "How do student-teachers understand the knowledge their educators provide them with?". Students receive pedagogical and psychological knowledge and it seems worth discovering how they comprehend the knowledge as this fact may inspire educators to select more appropriate techniques of communicating the theories to students. In order to collect the data on novice-teachers' comprehension of teaching theories, the think-aloud protocol and video-recording were employed.

Think-aloud Protocol (TAP)

Think-aloud protocol is a method based on the assumption that "it is possible to instruct subjects to verbalize their thoughts in a manner that does not alter the sequence of thoughts mediating the completion of a task" (Ericsson, 2002,). Thus, it is an introspective method based on verbal reports, called "concurrent verbal reporting" (McDonough & McDonough, 1997, p. 193), where subjects express what they think while

performing a task, i.e., they name their action, express their feelings, however, they do not explain what they do and why. A researcher remains quiet but listens to subjects actively as any question or suggestion could influence subjects' thoughts as well as the result of a task. He/she may prompt when necessary by saying "Tell me what you are doing", "What are you thinking about?". The researcher's role is to create a positive and secure atmosphere (Lewis & Rieman, 1993).

Lewis and Rieman (1993) suggest audio- or audio-video recording of the subjects' utterances as well as taking notes simultaneously which raises the validity of data. Some researchers question the validity of the method as they claim that thoughts being expressed out loud become modified; if they remained silent, they would differ from the scripted ones (Ericsson, 2002). Ericsson and Simon (1993) claim that "cognitive processes are not modified by (...) verbal reports" (p. 19). Subjects do a task and think aloud at the same time, so there is no time for reconsidering one's ideas or reflection. The subjects, however, need clear instructions and practice thinking aloud in advance so to feel confident and understand that they are expected to "talk to themselves" about what they do without explaining (Ericsson, 2002).

The method was originally used in psychological research which was transferred to other research areas in the 20th century. New "technical innovations such as the computer [led] to the emergence of cognitive and information-processing theories of psychological phenomena" (Ericsson, 2002, p. 2). New studies of thought processes modified the use of TAP. Recording subjects' utterances and transcribing them enabled to "[preserve] the raw data in as 'hard' a form as could be wished" (Ericsson & Simon, 1993, p. 7).

TAP was used in research on translation (Kusmaul, 1995) as well as in studies of education including foreign and second language learning and teaching; for example, research on reading comprehension (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995, in Ericsson, 2002). McDonough & McDonough (1997) provide an example of using verbal reports to solve students' vocabulary expanding problems. Using TAP a teacher can "find out what [a] student normally does and [...] make suggestions on that basis for remedial strategies" (McDonough & McDonough, 1997, p. 199). The following research shows the use of TAP in a research on teacher education. TAP was applied to gain data on students' comprehension of TEFL theories.

Research

The research took place in April and May of 2010 and 2011 at the State Higher Vocational School in Gorzów Wielkopolski, Poland. It was conducted with 28 year 2 students (i.e., 20-22-year-olds) of English Philology

who had participated in a two-semester didactics course and gained some teaching experience during a 30-hour teaching practice observation at primary and secondary schools in Gorzów Wielkopolski.

Aim

The main aim of the research was to learn about the act of thinking of novice teachers of English, while doing a teaching task. The aim of the first analysis was to learn about students' knowledge and understanding of the teaching English as foreign language (TEFL) methodology provided in the didactics course. The main focus was how the received knowledge about teaching and learning was comprehended, and whether it was put into practice by the pre-service teachers. In order to collect the research data, TAP and video-recordings were employed.

Procedure

The students were asked to work in pairs and plan one 45-minute English lesson for beginners using a course book and any teaching materials they would find useful. They received a task instruction handout and a separate lesson plan sheet to fill in. They were told to express all their ideas and comments out loud while doing the task and were video-recorded simultaneously. There were 14 pairs (28 students) recorded, thus, there are 14 video-recordings to be analysed, and so far 5 recordings (i.e., the very first ones) have been transcribed and analysed.

Analysis

The first analysis was to seek evidence of the students' knowledge and understanding of teaching English theories. Some notions of TEFL methodology were used by the students and these may give an idea of what elements of the knowledge gained in the didactics course were acquired well enough to be put in practice. The notions helped to identify four areas of students' knowledge of teaching English didactics: *knowledge of learners, lesson structure and lesson models, the roles of a teacher, and teaching aids*.

Knowledge of learners

The first area of student knowledge identified in the TAP concerns students' knowledge of learners. Firstly, the students seemed familiar with the theories of learners' motivation and involvement in the process of teaching and learning. The student-teachers discussed the importance of motivating the learners, especially at the beginning of a lesson. They talked about creating an interesting context (as observed in recordings: 1, 2, 3, 5), involving students (1, 2, 4), using visual aids (e.g., pictures, flashcards, authentic invitations) (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), creating a friendly atmosphere (2, 3), preparing attractive tasks (3) and also an extra task (5) for more curious students. Furthermore, the novice teachers proved their knowledge of students' needs as they

considered writing down vocabulary on the board (1, 2, 3, 4), peer-feedback (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), short listening materials (3, 5), and simple tasks (4) for beginners as well as giving learners a choice of working individually or with a partner (1). Equally, the subjects showed their knowledge of interaction patterns. Four pairs included pair-work in their lesson (1, 2, 4, 5), mainly closed pairs, two of them were discussing group work (3, 4), and one pair considered learners' individual work (1).

Knowledge of lesson structure and lesson models

The evidence for students' knowledge of lesson structure and models can be found in the fact that all the students discussed the value of an introduction to the lesson, e.g., vocabulary work or a warm-up, and stressed the need for feedback after the activity, specifically, peer feedback (1, 2, 4) and chorus feedback (4). In three recordings, the subjects mentioned that after an introduction some controlled practice was needed first (2, 3, 5) and that providing a model text before students' individual writing was necessary (1, 4, 5). The students were familiar with the lesson model of teaching writing, i.e., guided writing, and putting their knowledge in practice (1). They planned a topic discussion, vocabulary pre-task, and analysing a model text (1). Moreover, the subjects proved their understanding of how to teach receptive skills as they included pre-listening tasks and feedback in their plan (4, 5). In addition, they discussed using a listening text as a base for students' speaking practice (4, 5) which gives the evidence for the students' understanding of post-listening, i.e., the final stage of teaching receptive skills model.

Knowledge of teacher roles

Another notion that was observed while students' were talking and thinking aloud was knowledge of teacher roles. Three roles were stressed: prompting, especially supporting learners and providing them with vocabulary, mentioned in three recordings (1, 4, 5); monitoring student work (1, 2, 5); and providing teaching aids (1, 2, 3, 5). Correcting mistakes, providing feedback and praising students were stressed once each. Overall, the main concern of the students was their role as an organiser of class activities.

Knowledge of teaching aids

Teaching aids was a TEFL methodology notion that all the teachers-students referred to. Using the board to take notes or write down vocabulary was the most frequently mentioned (1, 3, 4, 5) as well as using pictures (3, 4, 5), flashcards (1, 5) and realia (2, 3), e.g. a computer, to illustrate vocabulary on computers or a toothbrush, to introduce the topic of daily routines. In two recordings, the students were willing to use authentic materials, e.g., a computer magazine (2) and an invitation (1). The students discussed also the use of a dictionary (3) and a poster (1).

Terms

The TEFL methodology terms that the students used provide further evidence for their knowledge and understanding of teaching theories. Two terms appeared in four recordings and others less frequently, i.e., in three or two recordings or only in one (Table 1).

Table 1. The TEFL methodology terms that the students used.

4 recordings	3 recordings	2 recordings	1 recording
<i>brainstorm</i> <i>introduction</i>	<i>lead-in</i> <i>pair-work</i> <i>controlled practice</i> <i>warm-up</i>	<i>flashcards</i> <i>homework</i> <i>teaching aids</i> <i>feedback</i> <i>peer-feedback</i> <i>role-play</i>	<i>text plan</i> <i>skeleton</i> <i>vocabulary</i> <i>presentation</i> <i>monitoring</i> <i>error correction</i> <i>guessing</i> <i>game</i> <i>memory</i> <i>game</i> <i>realia</i> <i>peer-correction</i> <i>extra task</i> <i>writing a draft</i>

The notions were expressed both in English and in Polish, sometimes interchangeably. In addition, the student-teachers used some teaching notions properly, with a good understanding of what is meant but without naming them using the technical terms, for example, they discussed 'mutual correcting of students' written work in pairs', i.e., *peer-correction* (2) or 'providing answers by all the students', i.e. *chorus feedback* (4).

Conclusions

The student-teachers proved their understanding of some TEFL theories that they got familiar with. Some concepts, e.g., learners' motivation and needs, the structure and models of lessons, teacher roles, teaching aids, and patterns of interaction, seem to have been comprehended. The students discussed the notions directly and named many of them using proper terms, and, furthermore, they were able to apply them while doing a teaching task. TAP proved effective as it helped to evoke the students' ideas of planning an English lesson. Their utterances including numerous technical terms provided information of what TEFL methodology the students understood. The students' understanding showed in the results of the tasks, which means they were able to use TEFL theories. This gives hope that the knowledge of FL teaching provided in the didactics classes is comprehensible and novice students are able to make use of it.

In conclusion, the knowledge of teaching theories cannot be substituted by a teacher's experiential knowledge. Without specialist knowledge, teachers will not become competent. The theories will work effectively if novice teachers understand and put them in practice. Discovering students' understanding of

TEFL theories may raise teacher educators' awareness of how to communicate the theories in a more accessible way. TAP can be recommended as a reliable tool collecting data on students' thinking processes.

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Sarah Mercer and Miroslaw Pawlak, guest editors of this issue of ELT Research

And now (back cover) we look forward to the next conference ...



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THEME

The conference will be devoted to various aspects of classroom-oriented research, focusing in particular on the ways in which theory, research and classroom practice can be successfully reconciled. The event will provide a forum for disseminating latest research findings in this area, which is of pivotal importance to foreign and second language pedagogy, and it will be of relevance not only to academics, researchers, teacher educators or material writers, but also to language teachers wishing to enhance their instructional practices.

PLENARY SPEAKERS

The following scholars have agreed to participate in the conference and deliver plenary talks:

- **Anne Burns** (Aston University)
- **Jean-Marc Dewaele** (Birkbeck College, University of London)
- **Diane Larsen-Freeman** (University of Michigan)
- **David Nunan** (Anaheim University)
- **Norbert Schmitt** (University of Nottingham)
- **David Singleton** (Trinity College, Dublin)
- **Paul Meara** (Swansea University)

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

We welcome contributions related to the theme of the conference in the form of papers (20 minutes + 10 minutes for discussion), workshops (60 minutes) and posters which could, among other things, focus on the following areas:

- theoretical foundations of classroom-oriented research;
- teaching language skills and subsystems;
- developing intercultural competence in the language classroom;
- individual differences and language learning and teaching;
- learner autonomy and language learning strategies;
- classroom interaction and management;
- teachers' knowledge and beliefs;
- teacher education;
- coursebooks and materials;
- syllabus design;
- assessing second language knowledge;
- methodology of classroom-oriented research;
- disseminating the findings of classroom-oriented research.

Abstracts of papers, workshops and posters in the range of 250-300 words should be submitted by e-mail to classroomresearch2013@gmail.com by **May 31st, 2013**. The proposals should include the title, name, affiliation, e-mail address and a short biographical note, about 60-80 words in length. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by **June 30th, 2013**.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information about the conference will be available in October 2012. Queries regarding the event can be sent to classroomresearch2013@gmail.com or to Professor Mirosław Pawlak, Head of the Organizing Committee (pawlakmi@amu.edu.pl).