

CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE

Digest

Dragana Božić Lenard conducts research in several fields which can be put under the ERL umbrellas and four **scope minor** domains, namely **affective** (how do we FEEL about language), **axiological** (what do we THINK about language), **cognitive** (how do we PERCEIVE the world through language) and **psychomotor** (what can we DO with language). Since she teaches **English for Specific Purposes** (ESP) courses at Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Computer Science and Information Technology Osijek, she primarily carries out research in the field of ESP and finds out the **dominance of students' focus** being on the axiological and psychomotor domains over the affective and cognitive domains. Her research focus both on students and their prospective employers thus giving a complete overview of one's educational and linguistic **needs, issues** and **expectations** eventually proposing approaches and methods to be carried out in classrooms.

Key words:

educational role of language / students' learning preferences / students' exam results / teaching methodology / experiments / interactive materials / vocabulary acquisition / writing skills / error analysis / computational linguistics / students' success prediction / soft skills / communication skills / students' attitudes / employers' expectations / gender differences / ESP teachers / pedagogical content knowledge

Description

Dragana Božić Lenard's scientific work can be categorized under the **educational role of language framework** and three **ERL scope majors**. She looks at language in education from the perspective of all higher education participants/interested parties, i.e. students, teachers and prospective employers as follows.

[1] LANGUAGE AND SCHOOLING

One line of Dragana Božić Lenard's scientific work is related to examining **students' in-class studying preferences** and comparing them to their **exam results**. In ESP classes, students study both upper-intermediate level grammar and specialized vocabulary. *"Teachers generally do not question the importance of grammar instruction; they only debate about whether it should be taught in a traditional or communicative way. Students, on the other hand, frequently perceive grammar instruction as a necessary evil and an English teacher as a grammar Nazi whose life goal is to point to students' mistakes"* (Božić Lenard et al. 2018: 2). That being said, two-fold research was conducted. First, 230 students studying at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Computer Science and Information Technology Osijek, Croatia were surveyed as to whether they prefer studying **grammar** or **vocabulary** and then their revision exams were examined as to whether they do better on grammar or vocabulary-related exercises.

Key findings:

- 72% of the students say that they prefer to study new specialized vocabulary;
- 86% of the students believe mastering technical vocabulary is more useful for their future careers;
- 53% of the students claim that they devote more attention to studying vocabulary for their revision exams;
- the percentage of the correct grammar-related exercises is 66.27;
- the percentage of the correct vocabulary-related exercises is 59.08;
- even though they recognize the importance of vocabulary acquisition and claim they prefer to study it, the students still score better in grammar-related exercises due to the fixed logical grammar rules.

Issue further elaborated in:

Božić Lenard, D., Ferčec, I., Liermann-Zeljak, Y. (2018). Grammar or vocabulary - students' friends or foes? In N. Stojković & N. Burkšaitienė (Eds.). *Establishing Predominance of English for Specific Purposes within Adult English Language Teaching*, 1-26, ISBN: 1-5275-1159-6.

The second line of Dragana Božić Lenard's scientific work is associated with computational linguistics and employing **predictive analytics** in **assessing students' success** in ESP courses. Tradition evaluation of students and prospective employees based on their grades is neither satisfactory nor does it provide a complete picture of an individual so employers and faculty management are looking for more time-saving and efficient ways to **profile** candidates. Upon carrying out longitudinal corpus-based research, Dragana Božić Lenard and her colleagues

designed an **application** which, when provided with adequate essay-based computational results, calculates a candidate's grade in ESP courses.

Key findings:

- the higher-performing students were more elaborative in their essays; they used more examples and clarified their arguments thus using longer sentences;
- the higher performers used more complex, academic and obscure vocabulary;
- the lower achievers were more other-oriented (used more pronouns);
- the higher achievers used the informational category of articles and nouns thus conforming to the stereotype of higher achievers being categorical thinkers talking/writing about events and things and lower achievers being dynamic thinkers focusing on others.

Issue further elaborated in:

1. **Božić Lenard, D.**, Chmelikova, G. (2019). Applying predictive analytics in ESP courses based on students' writing. *Zbornik radova Filozofskog fakulteta u Prištini*. (forecoming). ISSN: 2217-8082
2. **Božić Lenard, D.**, Liermann-Zeljok, Y., Ferčec, I. (2018). A redefined approach to student assessment based on essay writing in ESP. *Zbornik radova Filozofskog fakulteta u Prištini*. 48 (3), 5-36, ISSN: 0354-3293.

[2] LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Since her PhD thesis explored the issue of gender differences, they are frequently intertwined with other research Dragana Božić Lenard performs. While she was studying students' in-class studying preferences and comparing them to their actual in-class exam results, Dragana looked for potential **gender** and branch **differences** in **studying preferences** and students' **evaluations**.

Key findings:

- female students prefer to study grammar;
- both male and female students agree that widening vocabulary is more important than grammar;
- 69% of the male students believe that studying grammar is moderately or very important in comparison to 87% of the female students;
- the male students study vocabulary significantly more than the female students when preparing for revision exams;

- in grammar-related exercises, the female students scored significantly better than their male colleagues.

*“It can be concluded that the **female students** prefer and believe studying grammar is important more than their male counterparts. A possible explanation is in the **societal pressure** of using prestigious standard language forms women are frequently exposed to. When it comes to the importance of studying vocabulary, both genders and all branches agree that it is moderately or very important. In addition, a strong positive correlation pointed to the following – those students who have a strong positive attitude towards vocabulary have the same opinion on grammar. It seems probable that those are the types of students who are aware of the importance of the English language per se. Due to a still **subordinate position** of women, female students feel the pressure to be at their best and excel their male colleagues by using prestigious standard language forms. Moreover, that pressure is even more intense in the **field traditionally occupied by men** so women have to work much harder to be accepted into the men’s society”* (Božić Lenard et al. 2018: 205).

Issue further elaborated in:

Božić Lenard, D., Ferčec, I., Liermann-Zeljak, Y. (2018). Grammar or vocabulary - students' friends or foes? In N. Stojković & N. Burkšaitienė (Eds.). *Establishing Predominance of English for Specific Purposes within Adult English Language Teaching*, 1-26, ISBN: 1-5275-1159-6.

[3] LANGUAGE AND METHODOLOGY

Dragana Božić Lenard conducts **four lines** of research under the ERL scope major **Language and Methodology**. The first line deals with **employing experiments** and **interactive materials** in **teaching English vocabulary**. In order to keep students motivated and engaged, a teacher needs to keep up with technology and employ a variety of teaching techniques and activities thus catering for different learning styles and breaking the classroom routines. There are both advantages and disadvantages of using multimedia in classrooms. On the one hand, multimedia provides a creative and engaging learning environment and breaks the teacher-centered classroom. On the other hand, students might not be able to keep up with the information provided by multimedia and the teacher might focus on demonstrating the content, which eventually results in neglecting students and the communication per se. Nevertheless, different and livelier learning styles and preferred by students. However, Dragana Božić Lenard and her colleagues aimed to explore whether such learning styles have only entertaining or educational purpose as well. They divided students in two groups – **control** taught in a traditional way and

experimental group taught using different interactive materials. The students were **tested** on **specific vocabulary** prior, during and after the class.

Key findings:

- prior knowledge was equal in both control and experimental group;
- the delayed test results show that employing a traditional whiteboard-and-chalk method is more efficient in vocabulary teaching.

Issue further elaborated in:

Liermann-Zeljak, Y., Ferčec, I., **Božić Lenard, D.** (2017). Employing Experiments and Interactive Materials in Teaching Technical English Vocabulary. In N. Stojković, M. Tošić, V. Nejković (Eds). *Synergies of English for Specific Purposes and Language Learning Technologies*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 126-138, ISBN (10): 1-4438-5298-8.

The **second line** of research is focused on a **discourse and error analysis** in final paper abstracts written by students studying at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Computer Science and Information Technology Osijek. “Every EFL teacher is occasionally faced with a dichotomy between students’ knowledge and performance. The dichotomy becomes even more obvious when students are asked to translate their knowledge into a written composition. Being a creative and productive skill, **mastering writing** is quite a **challenging task** even for native speakers, let alone EFL learners. In addition to lexical items and morphological rules which have no meaning unless used in the proper way, students need to learn the function of each element of a sentence and the appropriate order of components due to a sentence being the simplest recognizable and the most usable element of written production. While writing, **errors** on all language levels are expected to occur providing teachers with a **valuable feedback** on their students’ progress and the possibility to pinpoint prototypical interlingual and intralingual difficulties” (Božić Lenard et al. 2015: 10-11).

Key findings:

- ten most common categories of the errors are articles, punctuation, missing words, poor word choice, use of unnecessary words, spelling, word order, verb tense, vagueness and pronouns;
- the majority of the grammatical errors result from the negative native language transfer;
- poor and simple word usage, occasionally being incomprehensible and difficult to follow, stemming from a lack of reading specialized literature in English in the respective fields.

Issue further elaborated in:

Božić Lenard, D., Liermann-Zeljak, Y., Ferčec, I. (2015). A Corpus-based Linguistic Analysis of Errors in Final Paper Abstracts. In N. Stojković, V. Nejković (Eds.). Synergies of Language Learning. Faculty of Electronics Niš, Serbia, 10-19, ISBN 978-86-6125-123-8.

The **third line** of Dragana's scientific work deals with developing **communication skills** in students studying electrical and computer engineering. "Due to dramatic changes brought by globalization, **curricula** are required to be constantly **upgraded** to keep up with current developments and industrial needs. There tends to be a growing expectation that **universities** should meet the **requirements** and **expectations** of the **industry** and educate global engineers who will not only be tech-savvy but also skillful in non-technical fields. **Engineering graduates** are required to possess an array of skills to be competitive and maintain relevance with the global environment. Communication skills are a salient component of ever-increasing skills recognized by the industry and academia alike. Engineers equipped with effective communications skills are assets to employers who are searching for employees able to play multiple roles to promote business and their company. Being multifaceted in its nature, communication comprises of listening, speaking, writing, presenting and teamwork skills. The expectations for the 21st century engineer do not solely include sitting behind a computer screen and using his technical expertise; rather, a modern engineer is required to actively collaborate with fellow engineers and the industry, virtually exchange ideas and information and confidently present his work thus crossing (inter)national, cultural and possibly personal boundaries with the final aim of carrying out business successfully and maintaining relevance on the global labor market (Božić Lenard and Pintarić 2018b: 12)."

Key findings:

- 88.5% employers think that developed communication skills are very important or absolutely essential;
- the employers demand that their employees are active listeners who will pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal messages of a speaker thus engaging themselves in the communication process;
- e-mail etiquette is a must;
- the employers demand a detailed preparation and confident work results presentation with a special emphasis on nonverbal communication used to attract and retain the audience's attention as well as establishing a rapport thus resulting in business success;
- the employers demand professionalism stemming from the use of the standard Croatian and advanced level English language, the students believe that the language use is on either-or basis;

- the students do not perceive using slang or jargon as problematic as the employers do;
- the students do not fully acknowledge the importance of straightforwardness;
- the students are completely oblivious of the teamwork skills their future employers will demand.

Issue further elaborated in:

1. **Božić Lenard, D.**, Pintarić, Lj. (2018a). Comparison of employers' and students' perceptions regarding communication skills. *Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*. 6 (1), 63-82, ISSN: 2334-9182.
2. **Božić Lenard, D.**, Pintarić, Lj. (2018b). Communication skills as a prerequisite for the 21st century engineer. *ELT Vibes: International E-Journal for Research in ELT*. 4 (2), 11-45, ISSN: 2395-0595.
3. **Božić Lenard, D.**, Pintarić, Lj. (2018c). Employers' Demands about the Communication Skills from Students' Perspectives. *Life and school: journal for the theory and practice of education*, 64 (1), 73-86, ISSN 0044-4855.

Finally, the **fourth line** of Dragana's research shifts its attention from students and prospective employers to (ESP) **teachers** and their playing the pivotal roles of course designers, material developers, researchers and evaluators. In order to examine ESP teachers' **teaching experience**, an anonymous survey was conducted.

Key findings:

- when deciding which contents to teach, the teachers prioritize and put more emphasis on teaching specialized vocabulary, speaking and presentation skills recognizing those skills as the most important for students;
- one of the challenges the teachers listed is material design;
- when compiling teaching materials, the teachers use multiple resources;
- a vast majority of the teachers do not cooperate with content teachers on material design even though they recognize the synergy as a productive relationship.

Issue further elaborated in:

Božić Lenard, D., Lenard, I. (2018). Examining pedagogical content knowledge of ESP teachers. *Journal of teaching English for specific and academic purposes*. 6 (3), 353-364, ISSN: 2334-9182.