

M. Daszkiewicz

Compose your own English

Theoretical foundations and practical aspects of a personalized speaking-oriented EFL approach

Presented is new approach to teaching and learning of English referred as Compose Your Own English. With the (markedly interdisciplinary) theoretical foundations presented in the first section delineating the room for learners' language composition, the approach is then executed by means of eight steps made in construction of respective practical method (One Touching). By demonstrating and studying relationship between language and personality, the paper draws on initial research conducted with (Polish) language learners and shows how, due to it's flexibility to different cultures and nationalities, the approach is capable of superseding the now-essentially-invalid communicative approach. The observance of social context constitutes one of the greatest merits of the approach, also driven by pedagogical, psychological and purely linguistic findings. The paper encourages research across nations pertaining to differences in acquisition of what it refers to as "foundations" and "additions" and in how different nations and individuals (personally) experience the learning of English. This experience proves to be determined by how language learners compose their own English, i.e. by their personal choices, preferences and novel topical and lexical combinations achieved.

Keywords: *new approach to teaching and learning, learners' language composition, practical method.*

Сформируй свой собственный английский

Теоретические основы и практические аспекты персонально разговорного языкового EFL подхода

Представлен новый подход к обучению и изучению английского языка, представленный как «сформируй свой собственный английский». Обоснованы теоретические основы процесса преподавания персонально ориентированного разговорного английского языка, а также показаны практические аспекты языковой композиции обучения. Отмечено, что подход реализуется восемью шагами, составляющими конструкцию соответствующего практического метода. Исследована связь между языком и личностью, базу чего первоначально составили польские студенты, изучающие язык. Показано, что благодаря своей гибкости по отношению к различным культурам и национальностям, новый подход в состоянии превзойти ныне практикуемый компетентностный подход. В статье выявлены национальные и индивидуальные различия в процессе овладения английским языком. Сделан вывод о том, что этот процесс обусловлен тем, как изучающие язык формируют собственную композицию английского, т.е. посредством их личностного выбора предпочтений пополняют свой словарный и лексический запас.

Ключевые слова: *новый подход к преподаванию и обучению, языковая композиция обучения, практический метод.*

DOI 10.20339/PhS.2-17.037

Approach. Room for composition

Theories and practice of foreign language instruction appears to be in dire need of an approach that might successfully supersede the communicative approach, once glorified for depriving FL instruction of the shortcomings of former approaches but yet no longer valid in the light of recent findings. This text outlines **an approach, based on today's knowledge of human psyche, applied linguistics, educational processes and sociology**, which all take into account and emphasise the role of widely understood context strongly determining the situation of learning individual. To present the approach in a systematic and cohesive fashion, we shall follow here organisational hierarchy, narrowing the perspective from the approach, the method and techniques, down to specific teaching and learning tools.

Let us start with the following graph, which represents the essence of the approach and which naturally follows from theories, supporting a personalized perspective at foreign language learning (figs. 1 & 2).

It is best to imagine right-ward progress with the bottom layer and the four triangular components to represent a cone turning around its axis as language elements belonging here can be acquired by learners at any point of mastering the "foundations".

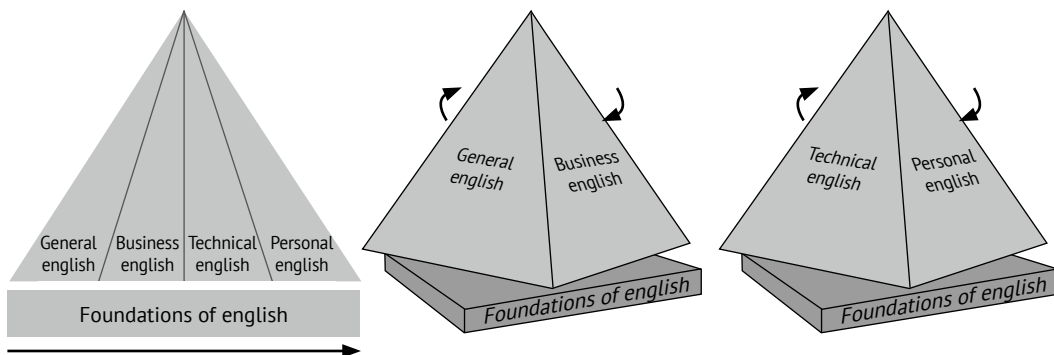
The graph demonstrates two-trackedness of the approach to what needs to and what tends to be acquired by learners from the semantic point of view, that is:

- ♦ **foundations of English**, meaning all thematic and grammatical topics that can be claimed to be necessary for learners regardless of what their individual interests or language aspirations are. The obvious examples of such topics will include grammatical issues, such as auxiliary verbs or present tenses and thematic fields pertaining to relationships, weather or health. Putting aside for the time being discussion on which topics can or should be included here, we shall only note at this point that certain topics are undoubtedly universal enough not to be neglected by any individual language learner, even if one chose to envisage communication in English without words such as "be" or "have", or talks without any mention of issued such as the three examples given, such mastery and use of language would need to be deemed as unnatural, unusual or incomplete;
- ♦ **additions**, encompassing all thematic and grammatical topics that can be viewed not to be universally indispensable and to fall under the scope of the learners' individual choices. Again, putting aside discussion on how such secondary topics can or should be classified, we might safely assume that in everyone's individual experience there are topics of greater or lesser significance from the perspective of one's needs and pursuits. The classification proposed here (which has already proved to be appealing and attractive) distinguishes "General English", i.e. topics, such as *Urban Life* or *Materials*, that is topics which all learners need to know basics of but only some of them will be keen to learn in details, "Business English", encompassing topics such as *Assessment* or *Advertising*, "Technical English", including topics like *Engineer's World* or *Power Plants*, and "Personal English", covering disciplines (*Chemistry*, *Sociology* etc.), language-related topics (*Proverbs*, *Similes*, etc.) and other miscellaneous issues (*Jokes*, *Traditions*, etc.)¹.

It follows from the above that the stratum of topics can and should constitute the **first and most general level of language (personal) composing** to be performed by FL learners. Arguably, if the said two-trackedness is consistently preserved throughout the course of learning, the *necessity* to master a number of universally valid topics and the potentially negative emotional strain resulting from such an obligation can be successfully compensated by the learner's *liberty* and exclusive *authority* over the range and character of topics providing a potential positive emotion of power. Quite undoubtedly, the latter topics shape the learner's individual profile as a language user far more noticeably than the former ones.

The concept of composing applied in this paper to several levels is intended to bring out similarities between the learning of language and the discipline of **music**: just as each composer draws on his or her familiarity

¹ Under the approach applied to the English language 500 topics have been recognised altogether. They cover 140 topics included in FOUNDATIONS (four Stages of increasing difficulty, the level of which is kept equivalent to PTE, FCE, CAE, CPE tests) and 360 topics building up ADDITIONS (nine Modules of a comparable level of difficulty as they can be employed in language learning at different stages, depending on learners' aspirations).



Figs. 1 & 2. Language progress under the approach

with the universally recognisable set of notes, on the basis of which she/ he can improvise later, a language learner, too, needs to master expressions and structures that “give life” to the language being learnt and resting on them, she/ he gradually expands the scale by adding more motifs and, at the same time, improves the use of themes already known. The similarity between the worlds of music and FL learning becomes even more telling and inspiring, if we bring to our minds other concepts exploited (somewhat unjustly) nearly exclusively to music such as conductor, choir, or lyrics, which can be defined to serve both disciplines as, respectively, a person who has more experience with themes and assists the less experienced in their performance, a group of vocalists who sound unique only when particular performers demonstrate varied combinations of themes and sounds, and words delivered by performers accompanied by differing tunes.

From the **epistemological** perspective, the rationale of the approach can best be presented inferentially with regard to its multiple facets:

- (a) theoretical grounding: the approach rests on the concept of *an individual who constructs his or her identity throughout learning and interpretatively seeks its consistence, without which s/he senses discomfort, especially in the company of others*. Accordingly, the focus is put on the personal experiencing of education in a social context and the role of language in it. Hence, pedagogically-wise the approach rests heavily on the learner’s subjectivity and self-expression, which in FL didactics implies due attention to the learner’s language awareness, social anxiety and the skill of speaking, which jointly determine his or her language success. The approach has thus been created under clear influences of humanistic philosophy², psychology of personality³, the interpretative paradigm⁴, and a set of educationally relevant concepts such as a subjective definition of reality⁵, or innate drive for coherence⁶;

² Its influence is reflected in the approach presented here by its emphasis on: (a) the search for the learners’ “unique wholes”, (b) a pursuit of self-fulfillment, or (c) current events and personal experience (Cf. Koziol 1997, p. 244).

³ Or, more generally, the approach draws heavily on cognitive psychology in its: (a) treatment of knowledge as a hierarchized and individual structure, (b) construction of blends between topics and introduction of the so-called replacements, (c) view on human memory and its momentary and permanent limitations, or (d) dependence on emotional factors determining (the volume and effectiveness) of cognitive resources.

⁴ The approach rests heavily on the idea of viewing social reality as “little more than a network of assumptions and intersubjectively shared meanings” (Cf. Burrell 1998, p. 28). From this perspective, the personal experience of learning a foreign language is to be viewed as driven by one’s wish to interpret the world through — as many as possible — shared meanings.

⁵ Among multiple publications discussing the concept of subjective interpretations of reality, the reasoning that predominantly shaped this facet of the approach is that of Krzysztof Konarzewski, whereby pupils’ view of their school situation is three-dimensional and defined subjectively in terms of it being kind (as opposed to hostile), sensible (as opposed to senseless) and controllable (as opposed to lying beyond one’s control) (Cf. Konarzewski 1995, p. 95).

⁶ This concept, frequently applied to children (e.g. Meadows, p. 72), who “cope with the continual novelty of the world by seeking sense, bringing all they know and have already experienced to work out a meaning in what some-one says to them or in what they see happening, is viewed as valid in language education regardless of age and the volume of experience language learners hold.

- (b) **empirical base:** the approach draws on findings demonstrating *the hierarchical (semantic and syntactic) build-up of human languages and those showing that an individual learns best when seeing language elements in a wider (social and linguistic) context and when favourable mental conditions are secured*. Accordingly, crucial language divisions and subdivisions are brought to the learner's attention through multiple channels so that FL learners experience control over the content learnt at the stage of planning, learning and assessing educational outcomes. Therefore, the approach shows influences of cognitive linguistics⁷, transformational grammar⁸, double coding⁹, or educational measurement¹⁰;
- (c) **instructional experience:** the key teaching-oriented premise of the approach is that *language education is inextricably bound with general education, which implies their mutual reinforcement, which, in turn, means that the motivation to learn a foreign language is inevitably affected by how the FL studies address issues of personal appeal*. This interdependence speaks in favour of life-long education and the so-called conscious bilingualism, both organised around and driven by language development. Didactically-wise, the approach draws from such theoretical concepts as the probabilistic theory of measurement with its intention of meeting pupils' cognitive needs, elicitation strategies¹¹, directed utterances¹², Bruner's rationale concerning scaffolding¹³, and the well-known Vygotskian concept of the zone of proximal development¹⁴ applied to four language skills;

⁷ The influence of cognitive linguistics lies behind what Tomasz P. Krzeszowski refers to as the myth of experience, whereby the world is seen not as objective reality but, instead, we see it as it occurs in our personal experience (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 7). In the EFL approach described here this personal edge of reality is reflected in room being left for learners' own classifications of things (topics, sub-issues, etc.). It needs to be emphasised that the division shown by Figures 1&2 constitutes the author's proposal, not being the only option.

⁸ Notwithstanding the note on cognitive linguistics above, the set of structural principles in a language remains limited and as such can also be categorized. Therefore, the approach advocates explicit introduction of general principles (very practical when it comes to e.g. omission of relative words in English sentences), which is reminiscent of the Chomskyan linguistics (Johnson & Johnson, p. 38) yet in no way does it exclude personal experiencing of it.

⁹ Allan Paivio's concept of double coding manifests itself in the approach through regular returns to language content in new contexts and formation of multiple (linguistic and non-linguistic) representations of the lexis and grammar learnt (Cf. Sadoski & Paivio, p. 3).

¹⁰ The concept of the so-called patterns of achievements is particularly important here: given that different components (topics, sentences, phrases, words etc.) will pose different levels of difficulty to various pupils, the division into topics postulated under the approach is bound to generate less or more typical profiles (i.e. some topics will inevitably be better mastered than others). Such a variety of achievements patterns may be caused by cognitive or emotional factors (Cf. Niemierko 1999, p. 254).

¹¹ Elicitation is viewed here from two perspectives: (i) cognitive – to be successful, it requires teachers to be aware of which elements of pupils' expected utterances are novel to them, and (ii) affective – to work best, elicitation techniques must anticipate and avoid the experience of failure and demotivation caused by co-occurrence of several elements novel to pupils. From this follows the idea of 'replacements' (see above).

¹² This concept, developed in a separate paper by this text's author, refers to "language content uttered by language learners in which two or more elements combined together are ready given by the teacher, textbook or any other source" (Daszkiewicz 2016). Seen as a source of learners' substantial satisfaction with their intellectual (and physical) effort, directed utterances help them develop the ability to speak and thus constitute a very important step on the way to "seamlessness" between reception and production.

¹³ In the approach we scaffold pupils' learning (i.e. provide aids enabling their utterances) in a number of ways, for instance — by application of 'directed utterances' (see above), reliance on 'replacements' (see below), references to topics (and blends of topics) familiar to pupils, simultaneous introduction of Foundations and Additions so that language learning continuously relates to topics and issues of personal interest (appeal).

¹⁴ The ZPD is observed under the approach through diligent attention paid to context in which novel language elements appear. Their subjective proximity may follow from novel structures, novel lexis or novel meanings, and the method proposed under the approach helps avoid situations in which language learners need to overcome two or more such difficulties at a time.

- (d) **operational know-how**: the approach humbly acknowledges the fact that *changes to the learner's cognitive structure remain latent and so cannot be directly observed, which means that in practice we can only draw inferences on the latent on the basis of the observable, which requires the teachers' or researchers' skills in operationalisation and attribution*. Accordingly, questions like "Do you understand?" lose sense as they prompt the learners' negation or confirmation, neither of which is sufficiently credible, but, instead, questions that do need to be posed comply with the rationale of the following question: "When can we say that a person can speak or talk about a certain topic?" Thus, the approach has been shaped by the logic behind educational diagnostics, the psychology of personal constructs, attribution theory, classroometry¹⁵, and such concepts as taxonomies of educational objectives¹⁶, seamlessness¹⁷, the reception-production gap, and ... common sense.

Putting together the four dimensions above, the approach proposed here can be described most concisely as one resting on *individual construction of hierarchically organised components, which supports learners' general education and requires their articulation of things*. This essential characteristic of the approach shows its interdisciplinary foundations, through which I daresay there lies the unique nature of the approach: not only does it draw on how much pedagogues and psychologists now know about what best serves individual construction of knowledge and learning, but it also seriously takes into account the social and language-dependent nature of our overall education.

The question mentioned (d) above as to "when we can say that a person can speak or talk about a certain topic" pertains to **the second level on which we can see room for composing**. That is, just as with topics learners acquire the necessary set of them alongside an individually selected suite, within topics they can and should (be free to) do exactly the same: firstly, acquire expressions which might be considered to form a necessary core of a given topic, and, secondly, master other language elements concerning the same theme which tie with their personal interests and aspirations.

For example, with the topic of *Sport* the ability to speak and talk about it will be found incomplete, if a learner has not its integral language elements such as "win a game", "score a point", "be a loser", etc., which are universal enough to be applied to many if not all disciplines. On the other hand, the ability in question becomes developed, expanded or improved when a learner adds new motifs to the core previously acquired and doing so renders their use of language far more pleasant to the ear as they employ language with expressions and their combinations sounding fresh and novel. Referring to the former (i.e. rudimentary) language elements as "conventions" and to the latter (i.e. arbitrary) expressions as "replacements", we can visualise the scope of any given topic in the way shown by the following figure 3.

Plain and obvious as it might appear, the naturally fuzzy border between two layers or components of language belonging to a given topic marks a stage which is important from the personal and social point of view: once a learner reaches beyond the conventional and to stick to music-related terms embarks on improvisation in and across topics by learning and acquiring the less common language elements, she/he

¹⁵ Seen as contrary to psychometry to serve everyday classrooms needs, it aids the approach by providing theoretical foundations for the integration of teaching with ongoing assessment. Classroometry offers a lot flexibility in establishing grounds for grading pupils' performance and stresses the priority of validity over reliability (for more contrasts with psychometry, see Daszkiewicz 2004).

¹⁶ The approach advocates such a use of taxonomies that combines cognitive and affective domains; pupils' emotions related to language learning differ across different elements of language; in other words, some learners may derive more satisfaction from memorising and using a lot of single words than from building complete sentences, whilst others – the other way round. This issue is no doubt strongly determined by culture and so pupils of different nationalities will show distinct achievements and preferences in this respect.

¹⁷ This concept, borrowed from the theory of educational measurement, is used in the approach as a concept expressing a most desirable (despite not being fully possible) situation in which what pupils can understand in other language users' speech they can use and articulate themselves. From a language teacher's perspective, the awareness of seamlessness and efforts aimed at achieving it should generate emphasis on elicitation.

undergoes a different personal experience of knowing and using what the others may happen not to use or know, which inevitably builds up their confidence and renders them language users who, in a sense — in the sphere of such successfully mastered topics — have crossed an imaginary line and have become those whose language competence is ahead of others that have not yet exceeded it, which means that they do not follow stronger language users but are themselves followed by others.

2. Method. Twofold experience of topics

To put the rationale above in practice, the method derived from it in the choice of vocabulary balances between *the ready given* and *the spontaneous* so as to enable learners to master the core of topics as well as language elements reflecting their personal profiles and preferences. This two-trackedness of the personal experience of topics can also be viewed as the method being poised between *the general* and *the personal*, *the objective* and *the subjective*, *the frequent* and *the rarer*.

For the time being, the method devised to operationalise the reasoning of the approach has been called *OneTouching Method*, which is a name reflecting the fact that a typical language lesson constitutes here one touch of one topic and thus creates a sense of a concrete achievement. The construction of *OneTouching Method* itself can also be seen as based on initial steps.

1. Recognition of general thematic modules making up the entire body of the language learnt, as presented by Figures 1 & 2 above.

2. Division of vocabulary into sub-issues comprising particular topics, which in the case of *Sport* might be exemplified by subdividing it into actions (e.g. winning, losing, scoring, etc.), disciplines (e.g. skiing, cycling, sailing, etc.), participants (e.g. a player, a referee, a swimmer, an opponent), equipment (e.g. skiing boots, a golf club, a net, etc.), and alike.

This division results in sub-issues, the names of which are ready given to learners so as to make them aware of what there is to be acquired and thus to maximise their personal experience of any given topic. This step may, again, seem not really innovative if not obvious, but it is not that common for language learners to consciously subdivide the language matter learnt. One premise of the method discussed is that this awareness of subdivisions renders it possible for a higher number of words or expressions to be introduced during one language lesson as they immediately belong somewhere and are thus provided with context aiding language learners in memorisation of the language content acquired.

3. The next step of the method construction rests on the concept of elicitation: by **formulation of questions** containing typical vocabulary representing particular sub-issues (which can be done on the basis of vocabulary frequency lists(s)), we arrive at a set of interrogatives to be answered by learners. The set of questions is, again, ready given to learners, be it in writing or by word of mouth, which will be discussed below who reply to them and thus demonstrate comprehension and application of items belonging to a given topic.

It is worth noting here, that if we consider what they do from the perspective of language production only (by pretending in a way not to hear the questions asked), they articulate a set of sentences related to one topic, which when considered together might be seen as a short topic-oriented speech. This can indeed be achieved during one lesson and provided that learners are familiarised with the division made within the topic, their personal experience of it is enhanced as they gain awareness of what has already been actively learnt (having been ready given) and what is yet to be productively mastered (remaining subject to more spontaneous language learning). In the fourth section of this text an example of questions pertaining to one topic is given.

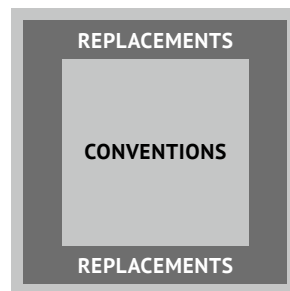


Fig. 3. Relationship between conventions and replacements within topics

4. The questions composed with reference to a topic are composed in a way enabling the next step of the method construction, which is **production of the so-called replacements**, which can be defined here as words or phrases suitable for previously devised ready-given-to-learners questions. From the perspective of an individual learner, the replacements have the potential of amplifying the sense of achievement in that what has been learnt earlier is naturally employed immediately afterwards, even if with only minor changes made to the questions and/ or answers. The motivational power of replacements stems also from the fact that they can be provided by the language learners themselves, who thanks to the sub-divisions within topics made earlier can easily come up with other items belonging to the same semantic sub-category. They may do so arguing that “their” items fit in particular questions better, which is highly desirable as such situations easily lend themselves to linguistically beneficial discussions.

Applying the third and fourth steps to the topic of *Sport* and its sub-categories we recognised above, we may (but, obviously do *not* have to) arrive at the following questions representing them.

How do you think a person feels when she/ he scores a goal? (possible replacement: *wins a game*).

What equipment does one need to practise skiing? (possible replacement: *cycling, sailing*).

In which discipline does a coach play an important role? (possible replacement: *a referee*).

How important for a sportsman's success is the quality of a golf club? (possible replacement: *a net*).

Another example comes from a much earlier lesson belonging to the set of topics making up the **Foundations of English**, namely *Eating Habits*. The questions below show how the rationale above can be realised with considerably simpler vocabulary and the reader is again encouraged to envisage a student who can deliver a short speech made up of answers to following questions (pertaining to the sub-issues of meals, meals-related actions, dishes, food).

What do you generally have for lunch? (possible replacements: *breakfast, supper*).

Who lays the table in your house? (possible replacements: *washes up, cooks*).

Do you eat from a plate nobody else uses? (possible replacements: *drink from a cup, eat with a fork*).

What is your favourite cuisine? (possible replacements: *soup, drink*).

And yet another illustration of how the four steps described above can be applied comes from the topic of *Games* belonging to the module called General English as a part of **Additions** (the topic has been classified owing to the fact that it encompasses vocabulary explicitly reaching beyond the basic words and expressions of the average language learner concerning games). The following questions pertain to the sub-issues of board games, games with small pieces, ball games, outdoor games.

In how big a group do you like playing Ludo the most? (replacements: *Scrabbles, snakes and ladders*).

What people would a set of tiddlywinks be a good gift for? (replacements: *marbles, knucklebones*).

Can you name any single rule of dodgeball? (replacements: *netball, futsal*).

How do adults generally react when asked to play hopscotch? (replacements: *hide-and-peek, touch*).

The approach advocates the same treatment of grammar as all major grammatical issues in a foreign language studied can safely be broken down into a set of sub-issues, which can all be trained – similarly to lexical fields – by questions the answers to which can best demonstrate the ability to apply particular grammar. As an example, we can refer to the Present Perfect (Simple) Tense in English, the full familiarity with which encompasses its use with typical temporal expressions (typically those relating to periods of time not finished yet), sentences without time expressions (frequently relating to one's experience or achievements), statements including phrases “It's the first/ second/ last time”, sentences with superlatives (customarily remarking on one's records), etc. This being the case, the learner's mastery of the tense can

be developed in similar fashion to that presented with the lexical topics above so that a learner practices comprehension and articulation of the sentences representing all the sub-categories comprising a particular issue. And again, it worthwhile envisaging a learner who construct a short speech built up of answers to the following questions pertaining to the Present Perfect components cited above respectively.

How many films have you watched this week? (replacement: books – read - this month).

Have you been to London? (replacement: met – any famous person).

Is it the first time we have come here? (replacement: the last time - we have met).

What's the highest mountain you have climbed? (replacement: the fastest – driven).

The simultaneous introduction of a number of sub-issues contained within a wider grammatical issue referred to jointly with an umbrella term (such as *Present Perfect Tense* here) and generally taught separately in a sort of cyclical fashion is a fully deliberate characteristic of the method rendering the approach markedly different from many other (if not all) approaches. This simultaneity is justified or even made desirable by several arguments:

- ♦ by elimination of all other potential difficulties (or, as specialists of educational assessment would refer to it, sources of outcomes variability) such as less familiar vocabulary, all the sentences representing particular sub-issues can easily be shown to present a nearly identical problem to learners, which adds to the impression of the second language being on the whole much easier than initially anticipated (all the sentences pertaining to the *Present Perfect Tense* sub-issues named do, in fact, even take a similar visual form and may begin with exactly the same few words);
- ♦ by presenting the read-made questions in both the spoken and the written form (in accordance with the rationale of Paivio's double coding) the gap between the learners' receptive and productive skills within a particular grammar topic can effectively be kept possibly minimal, with learners being enabled to visually and verbally follow the patterns provided and gradually develop the ability to construct other sentences representing the sub-issues in question;
- ♦ thanks to the learners' awareness of the scope of a particular topic — limited in grammar as opposed to lexical topics and highly demonstrable with a small set of terminological tags, learners quickly gain the sense of completeness of a topic and a better idea of how it relates to (the scope of) other similar grammatical issues.

5. This vocabulary-grammar two-trackedness, i.e. the same treatment of vocabulary and grammar enables application of the next rule followed in the method construction, namely **reciprocal embedding of topics**, meaning inclusion of minor grammatical issues in lexical topics and vice versa: incorporation of narrow sets of vocabulary in grammar covered extensively with a full set of representative questions. We can refer to two questions, representing the two cases respectively:

- ♦ within the topic called *Daily Routines* (quite naturally inviting an open conversation on an issue about which every single has a lot to say) there stands a question "Do you send many text messages?" with the word 'many' embedded in it as one that is used also by beginners and that does not call for a separate set of questions or a complete lesson to be devoted to it;
- ♦ within the lesson on *Present Simple Tense* (incl. sufficient variation to "deserve" more time-consuming treatment) there stands a question "How often do you eat?" intended to cover frequency adverbs incorporating the word 'time', with only two cases (i.e. the words *once* and *twice*) demanding memorisation (as higher frequency is expressed in the same manner by combining cardinals with the phrase 'a time'), which implies that they do not call for a separate lesson devoted to them.

This idea of embedding one (wider) topic within another is not only highly recommendable in language learning from the technical and economic perspective but it is also an entirely natural quality of any language we may happen to study and/ or use. Consciously or not, we constantly acquire small sets of words and employ them following the grammar rules we already know, on the one hand, or "inject" newly learnt

sentence constructions into large lexical collections which we have been developing and making use of for a long time. Inseparable as they are, grammar and vocabulary do in fact fall subject to repeated separate reflection each time we encounter new words or constructions and make them a part of our individual system built up thus far. As such, they both can and should be trained with some degree of isolation, with their interdependence systematically brought to light, too.

6. The interdependence and simultaneous application of topics reaches far more beyond the grammar-vocabulary embedding addressed in the previous paragraph and as such it is reflected by the next rule of method construction — **blending of topics**. Its essence lies in that with the development of language proficiency, the learner's competence grows not only within but also across topics, which is yet another natural characteristic of language to be reflected in any semantically-oriented method. Most importantly, different topics get blended from a very early stage of language learning, which under the approach described in this text is a most powerful source of motivation to learners, especially if the teacher renders it explicit that not only have they learnt vocabulary related to, for example, clothes, furniture and daily routines, and grammar such as, say, the verbs "be", "have" as well as Present Simple Tense, but they have acquired the ability to put (or, blend) them all together, which adds to the entire outcome of learning.

To illustrate the thought, the following examples from the *OneTouching* method can be given:

how many shirts have you got? (preliminary stage; topics *Clothes* and *Numbers* blended);

who do you have lunch with on Sundays? (beginner stage: topics *Relative Words* and *Eating Habits*);

which jobs are suitable for shy people? (intermediate stage: topics *Personality* and *Jobs* blended);

is your mood at home easily affected by the atmosphere at work/school? (advanced stage: topics *Passive Voice* and *Happy – Sad* blended).

It is with the occurrence of blending that the **real composing** of foreign languages by learners begin: it is at and thanks to the intersection of topics that a learner's English gains a genuinely individual character, which can and should be done with his or her maximally substantial contribution driven by personal preferences and choices of topics, the hierarchy and arrangement of which can be seen as that in the game of chess¹⁸, with the number of possible "moves" in the case of language learning is multiplied within all the topics learnt and thus reaches — similarly to the arrangement of notes in music an unlimited number.

To complete the process of the method construction, two other steps have been taken, both of which serve additional assessment purposes (although both can and should be applied in the course of teaching and learning, too).

7. **Selection of words and phrases to define** by learners; with the ability to explain meanings being an important component of language proficiency, in the *OneTouching* method devised under the *CYOE* approach such a set of items to define has been collected for each lexical topic (as the last out of ten theme-related questions) alongside a set of idiomatic expressions drawing on words or phrases associated with it (on the penultimate position of the aforementioned ten-point list).

8. **Construction of behaviour-oriented questions and instructions** checking on the learner's sub-skills within topics and retaining a fixed form across different semantic fields. They comprise questions about different parts of sentence, instructions aimed at word-formation or eliciting collocations, sentences or learners' own interrogatives.

¹⁸ The well known multitude of moves in this game (estimated as, e.g. 318,979,564,000 in the case of first four played) is referred to here to create some sense of possible outcomes of blending, particularly at a more advanced stage of language learning, when the number of topics significantly exceeds number 32 (the count of all chess pieces appearing on a board (only) at the beginning of a game, decreasing — as opposed to language — in the course of time in most chess games). It is worthwhile to observe that if we take into account the division delineated above (language->topics->sub-issues->vocabulary), this multiplicity is comparable to that of topics rather than the lower levels at which that number is countlessly outnumbered.

For example, in the topic *Body & Senses* (beginner stage) this set can include a subject-oriented question “Which part of body has five toes?”, a question eliciting an object of a preposition “What can you suffer from after eating too much”, a paraphrase-oriented question “How to say in a different way that Peter uses his right hand when writing?”, or a question eliciting an adverbial of reason “Why is it difficult for most people to touch their chin with their tongue?”, etc. The idea here is to cover the entirety of possible utterances from the taxonomical point of view and, by rendering learners accustomed to the same form of questions and instructions, to make the new lexical items the only source of difficulty.

In the case of grammar-oriented lessons, such sets can and should also be used but they need to acquire a slightly different format. For instance, in the case of *Relative Words* covered as a single topic, they may include an instruction requesting completion “The man, whom”, a question calling for an explanation “When do we put a comma before the word which?”, an instruction demanding some degree of creativity “Say something about yourself using with whom, please”, or similarly to lexical topics a question, eliciting a paraphrase “How to say the same in one sentence using the word which: He brought two books, I read both of them”?

3. Techniques. Towards fascination

In each lexical and grammatical topic the learner’s target competence can be envisaged as ranging from thematically homogenous abilities (i.e. familiarity with single words and their meanings or with the way of constructing sentences in a particular English tense) to those reaching across topics (e.g. using vocabulary related to sport and music at a time), binding lexical knowledge with grammatical know-how (e.g. using sport-related lexis in sentences formed in different grammatical tenses), combining the four language skills (e.g. writing a summary of a match report read), or relating the vocabulary or grammar learnt to one’s general knowledge (e.g. recognising the logic of rules discovered in a text on sport with those acquired earlier and pertaining to other disciplines).

In thus construed thematic competence multiple subskills have therefore been recognised, which have given rise to multiple teaching and learning techniques building up that comprehensive target. There is no fixed sequence of procedures, which is to be followed to reach that destination. Yet, they can still be classified according to different criteria, be it the learners’ independence from the teacher (i.e. teacher-driven vs. learner driven techniques), the degree of learners’ creativity (i.e. word- vs. expression- vs. clause- vs. sentence- vs. text-oriented techniques), or the facet of learners’ proficiency (i.e. form- vs. accuracy-oriented techniques).

Below, however, we shall apply a different criterion in the form of degree of thematic diversity, on the grounds that, as was suggested earlier, the fact of exploiting various combinations of topics in the course of language studies renders language learning reflect the natural character of learners’ own systems of lexis and grammatical rules (i.e. the so-called interlanguage) and, as such, can and should always be seen as the target of learning a language. It is through such thematic combinatorics that the learners’ personal experiencing of the foreign language they learn can be attained — hence the subtitle of this section.

Accordingly, the techniques employed in the method have been classified into four following categories, the differences between which are presented below and which will be exemplified by references made to the previously mentioned topic of *Sport*.

1. Uniform (i.e. monothematic) techniques (aimed at the development of abilities and sub-skills pertaining to one lexical or grammatical topic); in *Sport* these abilities will cover, among others, naming disciplines or equipment needed to train them; translating names of team games; replacing verbs denoting typical sport-related actions, etc.:

- ♦ setting boundaries: reading and answering a set of questions representing particular sub-categories within topics, with translation of as much content of the questions as necessary. In many case this involves translation of entire questions, which must be understood perfectly well for learners for further practice (including replacements, blends and the techniques below) to be viable. The boundaries of

topics are set through this (bilingual) procedure by equipping learners with the awareness of what sub-categories are represented by particular question and what kind of lexis or grammar is thus being elicited;

- ♦ brainstorming replacements: when the questions provided are understood by learners and when it is known to them which sub-categories are represented therein, learners are encouraged to come up with other words or expressions carrying the same lexical or grammatical tag. Thanks to this procedure, it is shown to learners that whilst they hold the necessary ability to speak and talk about a given topic, its further development entails acquisition of more vocabulary falling into the same sub-sets. Hence, the sense of control over the topic is promptly attained by learners.

2. Bilateral (i.e. two-thematic) techniques (aimed at the development of abilities and sub-skills pertaining to two topics at a time, lexical or grammatical or their intersection); in *Sport* these abilities will cover, among a large number of others, constructing sentences in *Past Simple Tense* presenting the sequence of a sport game, using comparatives to compare pieces of sports equipment, etc.:

- ♦ blended questions: learners form questions (as homework, for example) employing the content of two different topics and thus constructing interrogatives that can be posed to other learners in the same group. This technique adds to the learners' autonomy in the language learnt and it prepares them to understand other unheard-of questions encountered inside or outside classrooms. Naturally, students own work is preceded by models of blended questions built and shown by the teacher. It is highly advisable that no cross-topics blends are ever avoided;
- ♦ bi-thematic speech: learners compose a short speech in which they are requested to deliberately employ the content of two different topics; ideally, a time limit is set and it is calculated how much relevant vocabulary and/ or grammar they manage to apply within that limit. This procedure (inspired by BBC's *Just A Minute* game, in which the contestants speak on a selected issue for one minute without hesitation, repetition or deviation) prompts learners to focus on the form of what they articulate and to arrive at highly original speeches loaded with the words and expressions being acquired.

3. Multilateral techniques (focused on abilities and sub-skills pertaining to more than two topics at a time, lexical or grammatical); in *Sport* these abilities will naturally include a significantly higher number of them, be it describing a sportsman's appearance; forming questions about a sportsman's biography, comparing sportsmen to sportswomen across centuries, etc.:

- ♦ detecting themes: a type of listening comprehension exercise in which learners are told to recognise topics and grammar employed in the material played to them. Thanks to being put in context and subjected to such an analysis, the words and expressions used are personally experienced and thus effectively memorised. The learners' sense of semantic orientation gained by virtue of this technique contributes to their willingness to fill in their lexical gaps and to better grasp the cause of their difficulties in understanding the content listened to;
- ♦ translating amalgams: learners translate (in writing or in speech) sentences combining various topics at a time; ideally, they do so on a regular basis. This procedure has multiple benefits, of which the following can be prioritised: it shows language learners which topics they have acquired weaker, it presents language in its natural use, that is such in which topics are not deliberately (or artificially, we might say) separated, and it adds to the synergy-based effect of being able to comprehend much more than a sum of the words and expressions learnt, but also their countless combinations.

4. Personalised techniques (focused on abilities and sub-skills pertaining to the learners' particulars, personalities, preferences and passions); in *Sport* these abilities may happen to be only limited to those showing any degree of relevance, which in the case of people not interested in it may be confined to the metaphorical use of the expressions learnt:

- ♦ combining answers: learners put answers to a particular set of questions into a cohesive whole. This technique calls for a lot of creativity on the part of learners, who will inevitably construct very different wholes despite including often exactly the same answers. It may effectively demonstrate the learners' ability to play with the language they learn and also (perhaps, most importantly) provide insecure

learners with an opportunity to build up their self-confidence in that language as they precede from a sentence known (more confidently) to a new sentence (less confidently) and to a familiar sentence again, with the two sentences alternating a number of times and possibly the higher confidence reaching “onto” the newly-built content;

- ♦ sub-categorising themes: learners classify language content by themselves, be it within the topics already distinguished or altogether anew. By doing so, they demonstrate their personal perspective at things and thus open new paths for language composing.

The above classification of techniques organised according to the number of topics makes the range of abilities developed comprehensive. With the topic-oriented set of questions having been organised in such a way, that the set of respective sub-categories exhausts particular topics, we ensure that if the range of techniques are applied with regard them, all the respective abilities are acquired, both within and across different topics.

It must be added here, that the target of competence above is in fact unlimited as it may be employed in connection with one's competence, abilities, skills and expertise in other walks of life. In language learning, however, we may assume that boundaries of abilities do exist and all the words and expressions can thus be somehow classified. Such treatment of language abilities proves highly motivational and so beneficial.

4. Tools. Two-trackedness again (as a Conclusion)

The approach presented here has been driven by a collection of materials and instructional concepts, jointly viewed as our method's tools. The former let's refer to them as **physical tools** (despite their substantial existence in today's virtual world) are comprised predominantly of the sets of questions referred to above, i.e. the primary questions for lexical fields and grammatical issues, lists of replacements, sets of blended questions, and behaviour-oriented questions and instructions. The method has given rise, too, to a simple computer programme, one noticeable characteristic of which is its reliance on textual content as opposed to graphics heavily exploited these days in support of the written word.

Apart from the above, the method's inventory includes also an equally important set of ideas which we may refer to as the method's **conceptual tools**. They cover concepts, the author's realisation and study of which once gave rise to the approach in question and which have now become a driving force of the method devised in compliance with it.

The first one is humour, resulting from (sometimes very strenuous) attempts to cover a topic with a set of only ten primary questions, to include in them all the fundamental vocabulary, or, what is achieved most frequently astonishing examples borne at the intersections of topics when two (or more) respective words or expressions are used to form a single question. To provide an example, we may yet again return to the topic of *Sport*, which appears natural to be combined and discussed alongside topics, such as *Health*, *Money*, or *Entertainment*, but which seems much less typical to be intersected (in the same question) with *Books*, *Containers* or *Supernatural*. Such combinations may actually stem from personal trajectories, treated here as one of the other conceptual tools of the compose-your-own-English approach.

This last point brings us nicely to our concluding note: the approach, the method realising it, the techniques developed to apply the method, the sets of questions used – they are all socially determined and must always be considered in a specific social context. The topics, the ways, the techniques, or the blends which work fine in one culture may quickly fail in another culture. This social dependence we see as both a weakness of the approach (as it will make it necessary to be complied with by different means in different cultures) as well as its strength (as at the level of topics, questions or issues raised it does not claim to be universal but rather open to its various forms). There exist, in fact, general principles that need to be followed under the approach similarly to sound principles that need to be followed by every sound pedagogy or instruction but they leave enough room for others to build differently coined and/ or

arranged topics and their new structure one day may prove to better reflect human nature and the way humans acquire foreign languages.

References

1. Burrell, G., & Morgan, G. (1998) *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*, Hants, Ashgate Publishing Ltd.
2. Daszkiewicz, M. (2004) First Steps of Classroometry. In: *Niemierko, B. & Szaleniec, H. (Eds.) Requirement Standards and Test Norms in Educational Diagnostics*]. Kraków.
3. Daszkiewicz, M. (2016) A directed utterance as a personal educational event and a tool for seamlessness between (L1 and L2) reception and production. In: *Languages in Education*. Frankfurt am Main.
4. Johnson K., Johnson, H. (1999) *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Applied Linguistics. A Handbook for Language Teaching*. Oxford , Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
5. Konarzewski, K. (1995) *Uczeń*. In: *Art of Teaching*. Warszawa.
6. Kozielecki, J. (1997) *Koncepcje psychologiczne człowieka*. Warszawa.
7. Krzeszowski, T. P. (1980). *Wstęp do wydania polskiego*. In: *Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. Metafory w naszym życiu*. Warszawa.
8. Meadows, S. (1993). *The Child as Thinker*. London: Routledge.
9. Niemierko, B. (1999). *Measurement of the Outcomes of Education*. Warszawa.
10. Sadoski, M. & Paivio, A. (2004). A dual coding theoretical model of reading. In: *Ruddell, R.B. & Unrau, N.J. (Eds.), Theoretical models and processes of reading*. Newark D.E., International Reading Association.
11. Verhelst, N. (2009). Probabilistyczna teoria wyniku zadania. In: Szaleniec, H. (Ed.) *Teoria wyniku zadania IRT. Zastosowania w polskim systemie egzaminów zewnętrznych*. Warszawa.



Daszkiewicz Michał,
PhD
University of Gdańsk, Poland
e-mail: pedmd@univ.gda.pl

