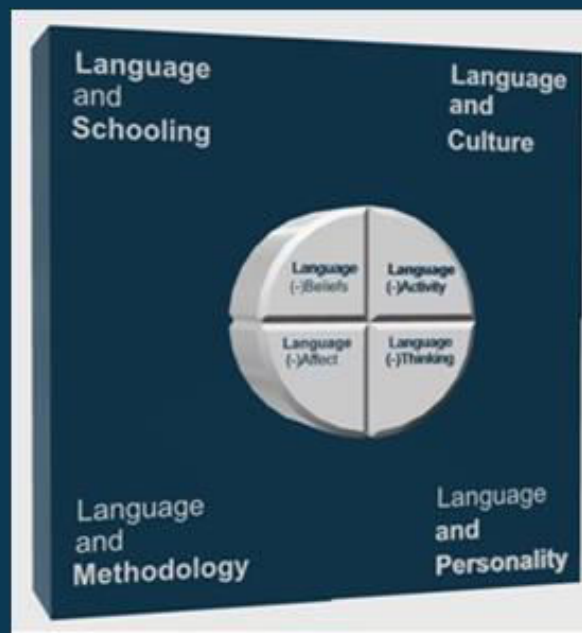


EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF LANGUAGE JOURNAL

Volume 2024-2(12)
**BELIEFS IN
LINGUISTIC EDUCATION**

Volume Editors: Michał Daszkiewicz, Dragana Božić Lenard



Journal issued under auspices of
the International Association for
the Educational Role of Language

EDITORIAL TEAM

Michał Daszkiewicz (Poland, University of Gdańsk), editor-in-chief
Dragana Božić Lenard (Croatia, University of Osijek), lead editor
Anna Babicka-Wirkus (Poland, Pomeranian University in Słupsk)
Anna Basińska (Poland, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)
Monika Kusiak-Pisowacka (Poland, Jagiellonian University in Kraków)
Linda Lin (Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)
Isabel López Cirugeda (Spain, University of Castilla-La Mancha)
Tess Maginess (Northern Ireland, Queen's University Belfast)
Slađana Marić (Serbia, University of Novi Sad)
Gerda Mazlaveckiene (Lithuania, Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences)

ERL JOURNAL STRANDS

Strand 1-1: Language & Schooling
Strand 1-2: Language & Culture
Strand 1-3: Language & Methodology
Strand 1-4: Language & Personality
Strand 2-1: Language(-)Beliefs
Strand 2-2: Language(-)Activity
Strand 2-3: Language(-)Affect
Strand 2-4: Language(-)Thinking

ADVISORY BOARD

Ewa Filipiak (Poland, Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz)
Çiler Hatipoğlu (Turkey, Middle East Technical University)
Eva Reid (Slovakia, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra)
Ruperf Wegerif (England, University of Cambridge)
Olga T. Yokoyama (USA, University of California)

©Copyright by the International Association for the Educational Role of Language
Peer reviewed (double-blinded) journal

The list of reviewers of the papers included in this volume is included at its penultimate page.

The journal's complete list of reviewers is available at its website shown on the back cover.

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
-------------------	---

BELIEFS THROUGH EXPLICIT LENSES

1. Ervin Kovačević - Beyond exclusive perspectives: re-envisioning language learning beliefs through five lenses..	6
2. Agnieszka Suchomelová-Połomska - Privileged foreign language, bilingualism or “Englishisation”: Czech youth preferences for English language use outside of school.....	18
3. Georgi Dimitrov - Focus projection as a means of improving fluency: practical tasks reflecting a teacher’s theoretical beliefs about an intonational phenomenon.....	33
4. Slađana Marić - Communicating the language of music: professional (young) pianists beliefs in linguistic and music education, development and wellbeing.....	40
5. Sunny C. Li, Louise C. Wilkinson - Novice teachers’ beliefs about teaching academic language with English-speaking and English-learner students.....	57
6. Gisi Cannizzaro, Renata Emilsson Peskova - Rethinking incentives: how to bolster the motivation of students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders in heritage language education.....	61
7. Erina Iwasaki, Carol Benson - Framing matters: transfer vs. transition in language policy and planning.....	63
8. Federico Piccolo - Teaching Ukrainian language in the Italian context.....	68
9. Sonja Kitanovska-Kimovska - Teaching in pandemic times, inspiration for change.....	72

BELIEFS THROUGH IMPLICIT LENSES

10. Eva Mikuska, Andre Kurowski - The impact of gender diversity on expression- the language of sexuality- how Early Childhood Studies students understand the semantics of gender dysphoria.....	75
11. Anna Dąbrowska - Teachers' initiatives in youth literacy education – from beliefs to activities.....	90
12. Mirzana Pašić Kodrić - The educational role of children's literature and bibliotherapy in primary schooling (towards new beliefs about healing education).....	98
13. Nadira Puškar Mustafić, Nejira Mulahmetović - Shaping perspective through narrative and visual language: a comparative study of Beauty and the Beast.....	106
14. Chenkai Chi, Xiaojun Kong - Students’ belief in reading boosted by reading camp: towards effective English learning - a report.....	116
15. Emina Jelešković - International youth conference on language, literature and education: joining forces to build a better world - a report.....	118

List of Volume 2024-2(12) Authors.....	121
---	------------

List of Volume 2024-2(12) Reviewers.....	126
---	------------

ERL Journal – Scope Major.....	127
---------------------------------------	------------

ERL Journal – Scope Minor.....	128
---------------------------------------	------------

INTRODUCTION

Providing grounds for one's own learning and one's use of language

The axiological dimension of linguistic educational and, practically, all forms of educational applications of language **tends to be grossly neglected**. In other words, how we value the language(s) we use and what specifically we appreciate in it will generally fall outside the area of educators' and students' reflection. Instead of – explicitly – posing questions concerning what vocabulary we hold in high esteem or which language structures we view as crucial to the way we think (with such questions actually sounding amusing or odd to many language users not accustomed to this type of reflection), schools and educational stake-holders tend to that the language(s) for granted and just keep using it/them, without being bothered by assigning and discussing the significance of the particular items or characteristics of the language(s). Such a neglect is indisputably detrimental as it takes away from us a potential boost provided by our realised (and externalised) beliefs as people naturally learn more effectively and durably the issues they value and – for whatever private, educational, or professions reasons – hold firm beliefs in. As we have already observed throughout the sequence of ERL Journal's volumes, the learning and the use of language(s) are best comprehended and developed if seen as comprising various domains, one of which are our beliefs.

Continuing this year's focus on beliefs (as the second theme of Cycle 2 of ERLA's trajectory), following and complementing affect (dealt with in Volumes 9 and 10 published in 2023), we can observe in the volume how **axiological facets chime with and relate to feelings and emotions**. Although, rather obviously, these two dimensions of our linguistic (and overall) functioning are not the same, **there is a clear interplay between them and one never exists without the other**. Moreover, without resolving here the issue of which of them comes chronologically first, our beliefs and our emotional approach to language(s) affect each other: in, for instance, one values a particular language, or any lexical or structural issues in it, one is far more likely to have a positive emotional attitude to it/them rather cherishing any form of dislike to it/them. Conversely, if one naturally feels "warm" towards language(s) or particular components and characteristics, one is fairly unlikely to disregard them and not to consider worthy of one's attention. By the same token, ERLA's Premises presented by the graphic below this text can be read as directly applying to beliefs (just like they proved relevant on the level of affect, which was shown in the introduction to Volume 10): our beliefs concerning language(s) determine our views on the world (as the items we hold in high esteem pertain to particular dimensions of the world), which direct our choices as to what and how we choose to learn, which, in turn, imposes certain language-oriented obligations on our teachers – all of which shows how significant a role is in the entire education played by language(s).

The focus on linguistic beliefs gave rise to the 7th International Pedagogical and Linguistic ERL Conference subtitled 'Links between Beliefs and Language', hosted by the International University of Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) on 27-28 June this year, during which the majority of the papers included in this volume were presented. The event showed the **extensive and complex nature of language beliefs** and numerous facets they relate to. Specifically, the conference sessions addressed beliefs through sociolinguistic, cultural, literary, semantic, and instructional lenses, and, additionally, covered personal, interpersonal, and inter-linguistic dimensions. They all built up the picture of the omnipresence of words, which also constituted the subject matter of the conference workshop (initiated as one of the two novel components introduced – beside the project-oriented slot – into the sequence of the ERL conferences).

On the level of its structure, the volume remains consistent (particularly with the second 2023 volume relating to language affect) and covers two parts – Part 1. **Beliefs through explicit lenses**, where we re-envision language learning beliefs and relate axiological aspects to such dimensions as bilingualism, intonation, or music, and Part 2. **Beliefs through implicit lenses**, dealing with beliefs in their "hidden" nature on the level of gender, youth, and – more extensively – literature (which made up a very strong module during our last ERL conference mentioned

above). Additionally, and also traditionally, the two parts include what we sometimes refer to as “non-papers”, meaning a set of papers and reviews on issues relevant to the volume’s theme. Talking of beliefs, we can empathise one firm belief of ours with respect to these additional pieces of text, namely that their inclusion adds to the life-oriented direction of our entire sequence of volumes, with the reports and reviews in question provide us with a much wider context and world-wide settings in which the eponymous issues are discussed and respective work falling into the ERL scope undertaken. We hope that with this volume to contribute most positively to ERL Journal’s language (learning) beliefs and encourage them all to reach out for the subsequent volumes in which our discussion of affect and beliefs will be followed and completed by papers on actions and thinking, as the other two dimensions making up ERLA’s Scope Minor (reflecting students’ overall identities).

Michał Daszkiewicz

Educational Role of Language – 4 Fundamental Premises



Beyond exclusive perspectives: re-envisioning language learning beliefs through five lenses

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.01>

Ervin Kovačević

International University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; ekovacevic@ius.edu.ba

Abstract

Several decades of research on language learning beliefs have reached a point where a macro perspective could enhance the positioning of our research and educational practices. Instead of reviewing everything written about the topic extensively, this study reviews five perspectives that can be utilized in a complementary and integrative approach informing our research and educational tasks. Derived from well-established lines of research on the human learning process, the behaviorist, constructivist/social constructivist, humanistic, experientialist, and cognitivist/neuroanalist perspectives offer insights that are not mutually exclusive but supportive. The review shows that language learning beliefs, like any other beliefs, can be assigned arbitrary stimulus or consequence roles employing associative reasoning, reconstructed by encoded knowledge influenced by third-party mediation, affected by experience that can lead to biased forms, stored and assembled per request with available cognitive resources influenced by emotion dynamics, and can be embraced, promoted or challenged for the sake of cultural and individual growth. The study presents the arguments for not viewing every held belief equally valid, encourages educators to collect and act on their learners' language beliefs if necessary, and puts forward that it is not the learning belief as a construct that is complex; the human information processing system is complex and susceptible to various factors ranging from the automatic neurotransmitters' dynamics to already stored amount and type of knowledge. As beliefs are operated by the cognitive systems, they are conditioned by their operating nature. Therefore, diagnosing an embraced learner's belief is not enough; what drives it is what equally matters. As key contributors to belief formation, educators and schooling systems are responsible for reinforcing, challenging, and developing learning beliefs.

Keywords: *language learning beliefs, educational practices, behaviorist theory, constructivist theory, humanistic education, experiential learning, cognitive processes, neuronal networks*

Introduction

Language learning beliefs continue to attract researchers' attention but cannot be regarded as a central focus in the field of applied linguistics. For example, de Bot's (2015) *A History of Applied Linguistics* does not refer to language learning beliefs as a research construct in the investigations of individual differences in foreign language education, although the construct has been studied since the 1980s (Pawlak, 2021; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Kalaja et al., 2015). In contrast to constructs like motivation, beliefs failed to assert themselves in second language studies, yet their presence has been consistent since Horwitz's (1985; 1987) pioneering work. Prioritizing research on motivation may have seemed justified; if we knew how to elevate or sustain motivation levels, we could facilitate and secure learning achievement (Vu et al., 2022). Proponents of belief research also argued that knowing about learner beliefs could inform us about learner strategies, approaches, and satisfaction and that this information could be applied in instructional decisions (Horwitz, 2013; 1999). Although both constructs were associated with language learning proficiency levels, the available findings were described as partly inconsistent,

and there have been recent calls for more nuanced research design solutions (see Vu et al., 2021; Kovačević, 2019).

Inconsistencies commonly inspire research efforts, and the overall findings may be complementing. Integrative ways can facilitate the identification of common results, review particularities from multiple perspectives, and raise awareness about potential challenges. Today, it can be presumed that such a task is necessary for language learning beliefs. Recent research on beliefs, utilizing Horwitz's Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory, continues to emerge (BALLI; 1987; see Cubillan et al., 2024; Sayeh et al., 2024; Liu & Rutledge, 2020), despite the author introducing the instrument forty years ago and publishing an updated version over a decade ago (see BALLI 2.0; Horwitz, 2013). We grapple with clarifying our understanding of the relationship between beliefs, motivations, and actions without prioritizing the results obtained within the field of cognitive psychology with state-of-the-art technologies (see Teng & Wu, 2024; Teng, 2021). In addition, we continue to encourage language teachers to diagnose and respond to learners' beliefs, although we are quite aware of their complexities, varying forms, and limited compatibility with actions (Cubillan et al., 2024; Sayeh et al., 2024).

This study provides a framework for versatile definitions and descriptions of the phenomenon of language learning beliefs. It will situate findings obtained with BALLI, a traditional tool, and consider them alongside contemporary results. This will be achieved by reviewing several findings across five perspectives on the learning process. For this purpose, the following perspectives will be utilized:

- i. The Behaviorist Perspective
- ii. The Constructivist/Social Constructivist Perspective
- iii. The Humanistic Perspective
- iv. The Experientialist Perspective
- v. The Cognitivist/Neuroanalist Perspective

After reviewing the perspectives on language learning beliefs and learning beliefs in general, we will examine the likelihood of teachers' abilities to accommodate, challenge, and facilitate the acquisition of learning beliefs. This will be accomplished by addressing three questions:

1. Are all learners' beliefs about language learning equally valid?
2. How realistic is it for a teacher to act on or with learners' language learning beliefs?
3. Why do teachers and the systems in which they teach hold significance in formulating, challenging, or reasserting learning beliefs?

Learner beliefs across five perspectives on the learning process

Human learning cannot be comprehensively elucidated with one general learning theory. All content-, context-, and subject-inclusive models interpreting the learning process are likely to prove inadequate (Bruner, 2004) and are unnecessary. A complementary approach has the potential to contribute to the generalist reasoning efforts; it does not dismiss any established lines of research and looks for arguments developed by all. If beliefs are learned, relearned, unlearned, or forgotten as any other content will likely be, analyzing them from different perspectives will provide an integrative stance. The following paragraphs review five perspectives and offer multiple positions for contemplating and defining beliefs.

The behaviorist perspective - *beliefs are established on consequences and lead to them*

Behaviorists define learning as a habit formation with varying roles of conscious experience recognized by different behaviorist camps (Rilling, 2000; Windholz, 1992). They also see learning as a process driven by exchanges between consequences and operants—actions that generate consequences (Nevin, 1992). Operants do not have to be solicited and target a specific consequential result; an exchange can still happen between two

context-bound subjects (Skinner, 1938). This operant-consequence relationship is especially important for understanding the behaviorist perspective on learning beliefs.

Shermer (2011) invites us to imagine being in a savanna three million years ago. Suddenly, we hear rustling in the grass behind us. Is it the wind or a dangerous animal? We need to decide. If we conclude that it is an animal and start running away, but it turns out to be the wind, we have committed an error— a false positive for which there are no life-threatening consequences. If we say the wind and stay calm, but it was a predator hunting us, we made a fatal error, a false negative. The ability that we inherited from our ancestors to benefit from finding patterns compels us to identify a meaningful pattern, regardless of whether a noise is meaningful or meaningless. Shermer (2011) calls this human tendency patternicity. In behaviorist terms, attaching the noise to an operant role correctly or incorrectly has the potential to generate a type of consequence: no outcome, a mild inconvenience, a serious inconvenience, a fatal error, or a desired outcome. Thus, a belief we hold is a result of an applied patternicity, an arbitrary association between a hypothesized or potential operant and consequence. To illustrate how a behaviorist interpretation may work, one finding obtained with the original BALLI (Horwitz, 1987) and confirmed with the BALLI 2.0 (Horwitz, 2013) will be analyzed. A BALLI item *It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language* receives more than 80% of the respondents' agreement (Kovačević, 2016; Horwitz, 1999). What implications does this finding hold? A dominant belief does not necessarily mean a fact. Seventy-five percent of Americans believe in Heaven, 72% in angels, and 71% in soul survival after death. Actually, Stebber and Rossi (2021) discovered surprisingly high levels of neuroplasticity in thirty-four adults' brains after a short semantic training. Ozfidan and Burlbaw (2019) review many studies comparing children's and adults' language learning capacities and conclude that children may excel in pronunciation and morphosyntax. However, adolescents and adults bring other advantages, such as life and schooling experiences, motivation, and cognitive capacities, which help them master reading and writing skills. Lichtman (2016) reports more similarities than differences between children and adult language learners regarding the benefits of explicit instruction. Regardless of these findings, the maturity hypothesis (see Lichtman, 2016) remains appealing; associations between younger age and inflated benefits of learning a foreign language seem dominantly shared. Are we making a false positive error? Are there consequences, and what or who takes the role of operant?

One of the consequences is the mushrooming of pre-primary curricula that integrate foreign language to respond to parental expectations, even though foreign language progress at such a young age can be slow (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2023). Primary schools also abound in programs with foreign language as a medium of instruction and content and language-integrated instruction solutions, although they are aware of concerns regarding L1 and content teachers' foreign language varying proficiencies (Bentley, 2020). These consequences further reaffirm the belief that the young learner is a gifted foreign language learner by default. Thus, the consequences and the belief share the role of the operant, an agent that maintains the belief.

If parents and school administrators hold this belief, they can act on curriculum preferences and direct young learners toward foreign language learning opportunities. However, if language instructors hold this belief, they may overestimate young learners' and underestimate adults' foreign language acquisition skills. These false patterns can lead to errors in decision-making in instruction. What if potential adult language learners hold this belief? It can be assumed that they can reject learning opportunities. Smith et al. (2019) report that 14% of their 3,660 UK survey participants believed they were too old to participate in learning activities.

To conclude, the behaviorist perspective recognizes a belief as an operant, consequence, or both. In these terms, beliefs anticipate a consequence and are marked by consequential dynamics. *Noises*, whether they lead to false positives or negatives, elicit our responses because we tend to rely on the patternicity mechanism. However, the operant-consequence relationship takes a final form in the patternicity-forming individual; false positives, negatives, or neutral outcomes manifest primarily on the individual but also on the collective level.

The constructivist/social constructivist perspective - *beliefs are the results of socially mediated individual efforts to reconstruct encoded knowledge*

We do not merely receive knowledge in its decoded or intended form; we reconstruct it. This principle summarizes the constructivist perspective on the learning process (von Glasersfeld, 1998). Piaget (2003/1947) argued that achieving equilibrium between a person and immediate context through interaction manifests applied intelligence. The interaction can assimilate or accommodate the person's cognitive and affective characteristics. Accommodation recognizes the person's characteristics; assimilation does not.

Nevertheless, both seek adaptation, an equilibrium between an object (i.e., knowledge unit) and a subject (i.e., knowledge interpreter or seeker). Equilibrium will secure a reconstruction of knowledge or understanding of it. Social constructivists additionally recognize the role of the third party, someone, or something that facilitates the reconstruction (Beliavsky, 2006; Vygotsky, 1986/1934). Piaget agreed that socially supported knowledge interpretation affects social contexts, and social contexts affect knowledge interpretation (Piaget, 2003). This perspective can help interpret beliefs as results of socially mediated individual efforts to reconstruct encoded knowledge. This implies that our beliefs may be biased, and the biased reasoning is socially mediated and individually embraced.

Cialdini (2007) reports that physically attractive individuals enjoy social advantages influencing our perceptions in elections, hiring, legal outcomes, and everyday interactions, due to our biased reasoning that being attractive equals being talented, kind, honest, or intelligent. A study reports that attractive students are also falsely perceived as more capable (Talamas et al., 2016). Is our tendency to form biased associations evident in our language learning beliefs?

The belief about the importance of pronunciation is noteworthy. Horwitz (1999) reports moderate levels of agreement among respondents with the BALLI item *It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent pronunciation* in the case of American students learning German, French, and Spanish, and high agreement of Taiwanese, Korean, and Turkish students learning English. Kovačević (2016) also reports moderate agreement among Bosnian students learning English. Nguyen et al. (2021) found that Vietnamese university students and teachers believe pronunciation deserves explicit instruction in tertiary education. In a study conducted at an American university with mainly Chinese students, McCrocklin and Link (2016) discovered that the students desired a native accent, attributing it to positive values and certain benefits such as blending in. Thus, there appears to be a broadly shared belief among Asians, including geographically proximate Turkish students, that pronunciation matters. In contrast, Swedish students believe foreign language accents are overappreciated and less important than communication (Norman, 2017). While this continental difference in attitudes towards pronunciation may be speculative, it is worth asking whether the constructivist/social constructivist perspective can provide an explanation.

A subject, in this context a foreign language learner, brings with them a belief that native or excellent pronunciation (however defined accounting for dialectal variations) matters. Possessing this cognitive and affective disposition can provide an appreciation for pronunciation drilling exercises or instruction delivered by an instructor who speaks with a native or native-like accent. Using constructivist language, it will facilitate achieving the sought equilibrium and accommodate the learners' expectations. However, disregarding the expectation may require that the learners deprioritize or devalue excellent pronunciation. The third party, whether we refer to the instructor, curriculum, or textbook as mediators, can deliberately act on the already constructed understanding of the role of pronunciation or facilitate its construction. If preexisting biased belief is present, a constructivist will not overlook it regardless of it being a product of biased reasoning.

The humanistic perspective - *beliefs can be promoted for the sake of cultural or individual growth*

The essence of the humanistic perspective in education can be overlooked. Aloni (2007: 2) argues that seemingly humanistically oriented educators are not interested in the essence; their practices are rather driven by ideological banality and ethical nihilism. Instead of rendering the humanistic perspective to the student-centered approach, the author calls for committing to humanizing humankind and freeing it from the chains of shallow human experience and arbitrariness (see Aloni, 2007: 62). Different humanistic schools define the essence in their own ways: the Cultural-Classical Approach seeks to ennoble humanity by prioritizing virtue and wisdom; the Naturalistic-Romantic Approach is concerned with facilitating the inner self; the Existential Approach celebrates and utilizes freedom; and the Critical-Radical Approach aims to changing the world and fighting oppressing ideologies (Kovačević, 2021: 31; Aloni, 2007). An integrative approach can empower quality cultures, promote critical and cultural literacy, and develop authentic personalities (Aloni, 2007: 77-104; Kovačević, 2021: 32). This implies that beliefs can be promoted for the sake of cultural or individual growth if they are aligned with humanistic reasoning. They can also be challenged if they undermine the humanization of humankind or perpetuate superficial life philosophies.

Acknowledging the interwoven nature of language and culture, contemporary foreign language teaching guidelines recommend language learning experiences through which awareness of otherness is raised, and cultures are contemplated and compared (Chan et al., 2015). Developing intercultural communication skills is encouraged because it can foster an individual's empathy and capacity to connect with members of other cultures (Gandana, 2015). Crozet (2015: 146) offers a model for dealing with culture and language differences comprising four levels: rejection, enjoyment, embracing, and transcendence of difference. Each level shapes owned cultural identity; *I am my language and culture* (rejection), *I am my two or more languages and cultures* (enjoyment), *I am not my languages and cultures* (I use them to interact with others; embracing), *something in me is free from all linguistic and cultural boundaries* (transcendence) (see Crozet, 2015: 146). If learners hold beliefs at one of these levels, it can be argued that beliefs rooted in enjoyment are more likely to humanize us than those rooted in rejection. In the same logic, embracing is more powerful than enjoyment, and transcendence is superior to embracing in making us more culturally and critically literate. In other words, a move from mono- and multi-, across inter-, towards trans-culturalism has a support in the humanistic perspective on education.

When asked whether they agreed that in order to speak English, it is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures, only 3.3% of the Bosnian, English proficient, undergraduate respondents strongly agreed, and 16.4% just agreed; 30.3% disagreed, 5.9% strongly disagreed, and 44.1% were undecided (Kovačević, 2016). This finding shows that foreign language learning outcomes can be a result of linguistic rather than cultural literacy educational priorities. If the students' university instructors decided to act on this belief for the sake of encouraging cultural literacy and fostering inter- or trans-culturalism, it could be falsely assumed that the Existential Approach that promotes freedom and authentic reasoning (see Aloni, 2007: 46) would recognize the students' right to reject collectively aspired goals and adhere to their own interpretation of or associative reasoning about the relationship between foreign language and culture. Paradoxically, the humanistic perspective requests that educators act towards promoting a humanizing or higher ideal, but it also allows a learner to reject a proposed value. Suppose the rejection of the value is not subjectively reevaluated so that a novel and superior perspective is discovered. In that case, there will be no personal growth, and this violates the principle of existential reasoning in education: freedom is to be exercised so that a person can aspire to a more humanized self. Rejecting socially or culturally aspired must be backed up by an ideal humanistic principle. Otherwise, it can be disregarded. The humanistic perspective justifies accepting learners' language learning beliefs in their current form as long as they do not contradict the culture- and self-enhancing ideals.

The experientialist perspective - *beliefs are in a dynamic relationship with experience*

According to the experientialist perspective, individuals learn through a transformation of their experience (Kolb, 2015). Transformation is a phased process offering opportunities for learning, relearning, or unlearning.

Transformation is also a cyclical process that can start at any point between concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, or active experimentation (Kovačević, 2021: 35). As constructivists do, experientialists argue that knowledge is constructed. Educators embracing this perspective can focus on the process rather than the outcomes, facilitate any of the transformation stages, and integrate learners' preferences in the task of learning experience design. The teacher's facilitation exemplifies the social constructivist theory and practice, yet the emphasis is on the experience itself, with or without the third party's mediation. Overall, these principles imply that learning beliefs stem from and progress through the stages of the experienced transformation process. They can be perceived, discovered, evaluated, tested, reinterpreted, reevaluated, or hypothesized and are thus in a dynamic relationship with experience.

Adult learning theories validate the potential power of experience in transformation (see Mezirow, 1978; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The prefix potential comes from the evidence that experiences do not always lead to reflection, abstract hypothesizing, or experimentation; in other words, not every experience can transform. For researchers such as Jarvis (see Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), an individual must go through contemplation or reflection for a conscious growth or change in reasoning. The reflection system can be manipulated or set aside when we are exposed to input from an authoritarian source enhanced by title or clothing, in the case of a person, or when content is characterized by an authoritarian style. For example, Cialdini (2007) reports an experimental study in which the majority of study subjects were willing to inflict maximum levels of pain caused by electrical shocks to their fellow study participants while obeying the chief experimenter's instructions to release gradually increasing voltage whenever the fellow participants failed to know an answer to the received questions. This disturbing finding was explained by our "deep-seated sense of duty to authority within us all" (Cialdini, 2007: 160). BALLI respondents significantly agreed that *Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects* and that *Some languages are easier to learn than others* (Kovačević, 2016; Horwitz, 1999). Hypothetically, these beliefs are based on the respondents' overall learning experience. Therefore, they denote collectively shared and experienced conviction that mastering language compared to mastering math or physics or becoming proficient in Arabic compared to acquiring Italian can require different paths and be more or less difficult. Thus, when validated through an experience, a belief can take on a seemingly factual form. In terms of language complexity, languages can indeed be described as more and less complex (see Joseph, 2021; Kovačević, 2019). Learning math may not require learning pronunciation or benefit overall communication abilities. Grounded on schooling experiences, these language learning beliefs are almost verified facts. As such, it is worth asking whether they can be transformed. For example, facilitated perception, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation could further reinforce them if the overall experience and evidence support the existing ones. A prerequisite for transformation is a novel experience, the one that has not been processed before. Even then, human beings are likely to dismiss evidence contradicting their existing conclusions, as they are predisposed to employ cognitive biases, which "almost always distort percepts to fit preconceived concepts", and confirmation biases that drive us to "seek and find confirmatory evidence in support of already existing beliefs and ignore or reinterpret disconfirming evidence" (Shermer, 2011: 279-280). In other words, existing experience can mislead the one who is supposed to reevaluate a belief. Previous experiences make us search for familiar patterns, acquire inflexibility, and end up cognitively entrenched (see Epstein, 2024: 28-35).

The cognitivist/neuroanalist perspective - *beliefs are stored or assembled on-demand units of information existing in neuronal networks*

Primarily interested in cognitive information processes, cognitivists are concerned with how the human brain perceives, discerns, selects, filters, decodes, stores, and recalls information (Reed, 2007: 3). Our information-processing abilities vary; we have different attention and memory-forming capacities that oscillate depending on our capabilities and willingness to invest our mental efforts (Lindsay, 2020). We recruit varying strategies to remember different types of information and tend to succeed and fail in retrieving them fully and correctly (Vlach

& Sandhofer, 2012: 19). How information is presented and in what amount will affect our memory storing and utilizing results (Aben et al., 2012). Cognitivists teach us that healthy human brains share cognitive hardware and software systems, but their operating capacities and performances seem to be conditioned by brain usage patterns.

The neuronalist perspective on the learning process describes learning as a process manifesting itself in the physical changes in the brain at the level of neurons and synapses, i.e., neuronal networks (Zull, 2002; 2011). An act of successful teaching is supposed to generate such changes. The physical changes in the brain happen in the different parts responsible for information sensing, interpreting, synthesizing, and executing. Unlike experientialists, neuronalists recognize the crucial role of the limbic, i.e., the emotion system, which is intertwined with each part of the brain tasked with different processes. Therefore, the limbic system can either disrupt or facilitate information processing and its aftermath manifested in the brain's neuronal pathways. Overall, it can be argued that the neuronalist perspective sees beliefs as either stored or assembled on-demand units of information existing in neuronal networks.

The process of information synthesis depends on dopamine levels and the way our brain utilizes the prefrontal cortex, the part in charge of executive decisions, and the anterior cingulate cortex, the part that mediates and resolves the conflict between the novel and existing information (see Beliefs Formation in the Brain). Dopamine, a neurotransmitter that helps regulate pleasure, identify rewarding experiences, and trigger motivation, boosts neuronal wiring and starts the process of suggesting or reinforcing patterns, beliefs, and behaviors, while the two cortices are tasked with cognitive control and error detection. If there are errors in the aspects of cognitive control, recognizing patterns where they do not exist can be linked to schizophrenia; with cognitive control, associative processing can result in creative reasoning (see Shermer, 2011: 125-143). However, a recent study reveals that lower levels of dopamine in the right brain hemisphere compared to the left hemisphere may result in associative processing facilitated by remote parts of the brain, which can support both convergent and divergent thinking and elevate creativity (Aberg et al., 2017). Relying on other parts of the brain, such as the hippocampus, which is crucial in forming and storing memories, or the amygdala, which adds an emotional charge to information (Beliefs Formation in the Brain) shows that the whole brain is tasked with information processing, yet specific neurons and neuronal networks are fired by specific triggers. Regardless of the belief content, “the feeling of conviction is what we rely upon as consumers of beliefs—but clearly this feeling can become uncoupled from good reasons and good evidence in any domain (mathematical, ethical, etc.)” (Shermer, 2011: 154). Thus, language learning beliefs do not have an exclusive status in our beliefs processing at the neuronal level. Modifying, acquiring, or rejecting them depends on the whole brain, its stored and retrievable knowledge, and emotional dynamics.

It seems that it is not the complexity of belief dynamics that makes beliefs a “messy construct” (Pajares, 1992), it is the information processing system itself that is complex and messy. Beliefs exist in memories, emotions, and biases as dispersed, organized, retrievable, and remote units of information. A teacher or researcher interested in learning about them is more likely to collect meaningful sets of data if they identify their students' beliefs and find a way to obtain information that drives them. Therefore, it is not only about what the learner believes is true and to what extent, but also about why they believe that something is true or why they partly believe or do not believe it. More importantly, it is about what they know and how they make associations based on everything they hold to be true. The neuronalist perspective suggests that we examine the quality of information, or the nature of emotion underlying the belief, and make sense of the entire system driving it.

A study about the relationship between language learning beliefs and lexical complexity levels measured with the corpus collected during freshman English undergraduate written exams shows that the students who produce less complex lexical units hold stronger beliefs about self-regulation and accuracy and practice (Kovačević, 2019). An analysis of the same data sample reveals that the students who hold stronger motivation beliefs about language learning produce less complex syntactic formulations (Kovačević, 2017). The cognitive/neuronalist perspective validates these results; proficiency levels, overall knowledge about language learning, and the

characteristics of language learning experiences are likely to influence the degree to which a learner can embrace a specific language belief. In simple terms, as is the case with the four other perspectives, this perspective also makes us consider various details about the source of a particular belief when establishing further conclusions about the belief.

An integrative perspective on language learning beliefs

Language learning beliefs, like any other types of beliefs, are attributed arbitrary stimulus or consequence roles through associative reasoning, reconstructed by encoded knowledge influenced by third-party mediation, affected by experience that can lead to biased forms, stored and assembled as needed with available cognitive resources influenced by emotion dynamics, and can be embraced, promoted or challenged for the sake of cultural and individual growth. Choosing to interpret them from any of the five perspectives or combining two or more of them for the purpose of a working definition may not be wrong; there is a line of research supporting each of the perspectives. Yet, it can be argued that the cognitivist/neuroanalist perspective is the only one able to address the biology of belief. The humanistic perspective empowers educators to promote humanization and address counter-productive learners' beliefs, and the other three, the behaviorist, constructivist/social constructivist, and experientialist, add unique values to our understanding of the relativity of individually and socially produced associations. How can foreign language instructors benefit from an integrative perspective? This question will be evaluated from the three following concerns:

1. Are all learners' beliefs about language learning equally valid?
2. How realistic is it for a teacher to act on or with learners' language learning beliefs?
3. Why do teachers and the systems in which they teach hold significance in formulating, challenging, or reasserting learning beliefs?

Are all learners' beliefs about language learning equally valid?

No, they are not. Although this answer may be interpreted as coming from the teacher-centered or traditional educational practice and philosophy, this is a philosophical trap. Knowing what learners hold to be true differs from reinforcing or validating flawed reasoning. For example, believing that appreciating other cultures is not necessary when mastering communication skills does not help our collective efforts to the humanization of humankind. Believing that one is too old to study a foreign language undermines the behaviors leading to improving somebody's communication skills. Believing in the necessity of excellent pronunciation, error-free speech, or the importance of learning a target language in a target language-speaking country can emotionally drain and demotivate us when we communicate in our imperfect languages learned from non-native teachers in non-native countries. In addition, the relatively limited amount of language learning experience is likely to result in biased reasoning and, at times, more entrenched positions. Varying beliefs can be identified, documented, and assessed. However, it can be argued that some beliefs are more valid, and some are less valid.

How realistic is it for a teacher to act on or with learners' language learning beliefs?

Let us answer this question by asking another one: Why should a teacher know about their learners' language beliefs if they are not going to utilize the findings? The constructivists teach us that what students bring with them matters as they use it to reconstruct the content they face. However, language instructors should not simply accommodate all expectations uncritically, regardless of how rightly or wrongly established they are, especially when teaching in a group setting; they should promote the beliefs they know are facilitating language learning outcomes and communication results. They can help their learners develop new beliefs without imposing any of them, even though their authoritarian roles give them such an advantage. The teacher can design a potentially transformative experience aligned with the learners' temporary cognitive and affective resources. Overall, beliefs are not only shared, but they are also discovered, and therefore, a change is possible and sometimes necessary.

Why do teachers and the systems in which they teach hold significance in formulating, challenging, or reasserting learning beliefs?

The cognitivist/neuroanalyst line of research shows that human learning is conditioned by the whole brain, by its neurochemical dynamics, stored and available information, and emotion dynamics. Teachers and the schooling cultures mediate the students' associative reasoning by providing novel input, modeling behaviors, and designing learning experiences. Associative reasoning depends on the whole brain's processed daily information, so the teachers and schools are not the sole agents responsible for the students' beliefs. However, this does not absolve the school of its responsibility to act on the belief system. Furthermore, it gives them greater responsibility to collect data about students' learning beliefs, reinforce the facilitative ones, and challenge the ones that undermine not only the students' own but also overall cultural growth. It pressures them to design positive cultures that can trigger self-reflective processes, reassess temporary arrived results of associative reasoning, and facilitate progress toward targeted academic and broader societal progress.

Conclusion

Exploring and acting on language learning beliefs with a complementary approach grounded in diverse theoretical frameworks of learning and information processing empowers educators to develop a set of practices that most align with their educational philosophies, teaching styles, and curricular objectives. It reminds researchers that adopting a singular perspective, which may overlook alternative modes of reasoning about belief systems, can result in incomplete or limited findings. If specific reasons prompt a researcher or instructor to choose one of the five available perspectives, choosing the cognitivist perspective can help focus on belief resolutions happening on the cognitive level. Adopting the social constructivist perspective will direct attention to the process of mediating information between society and individuals and the act of reconstructing it. If A leads to B, and B is either rewarding or undesirable, beliefs can be interpreted in behavioristic terms, and A and B warrant further examination. The humanistic perspective is concerned with the values encoded in the beliefs we embrace and identifying in what ways some of them are needed or not for collective and individual growth. Experientialists ask us to prioritize learning processes over outcomes and offer a framework for evaluating the phases through which beliefs are formed. Arbitrary research or educational goals can utilize any of the perspectives. The only question that they should answer is how the outcomes of the goals would be perceived from an alternative viewpoint.

This study is intended to help researchers and educators contextualize their research agenda related to beliefs and learning beliefs, using the case of language learning beliefs. The analysis stems from the author's inclinations toward viewing research constructs from a macro perspective. Consequentially, the focus was on offering a complementary and integrative framework for reasoning about learning beliefs. The limitations are recognized in the extent to which each perspective on beliefs as a construct was addressed. More elaboration and argumentative reasoning could have been integrated. Thus, the reader is encouraged to benefit from additional research effort and evidence.

The construct of language learning beliefs seems to be positioned in competition with other research constructs helping us know more about our learners, so that we can tailor our teaching services better. As such, it should probably receive proper attention and benefit from regularly updated instruments and recent findings. Otherwise, it will continue to struggle to maintain its relevance in the field of foreign language education research.

References

Aben, B., Stapert, S., Blokland, A. (2012). About the distinction between working memory and short-term memory. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 3: 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00301>.

- Aberg, K. C., Doell, K. C., Schwartz, S. (2017). The "Creative Right Brain" revisited: Individual creativity and associative priming in the right hemisphere relate to hemispheric asymmetries in reward brain function. *Cerebral Cortex*, 27(10): 4946-4959. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cercor/bhw288>.
- Aloni, N. (2007). *Enhancing humanity: The philosophical foundations of humanistic education*. Springer.
- Beliavsky, N. (2006). Revisiting Vygotsky and Gardner: Realizing human potential. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 40(2): 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jae.2006.0013>.
- Beliefs Formation in the Brain. NeuroLaunch editorial team. (2024, September 30). Belief formation in the brain: Neuroscience behind our convictions. *NeuroLaunch*. <https://neurolaunch.com/belief-formation-in-the-brain>. 30 November 2024.
- Bentley, K. (2020a). Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in primary schools. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 23(2): 123-140.
- Bentley, K. (2020b). English as a medium of learning in primary. Part of the Cambridge Papers in ELT and Education series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. cambridge.org/pedagogy. Accessed on 28 November 2024.
- Bruner, J. (2004). A short history of psychological theories of learning. *Daedalus*, 133(1): 13-20.
- Chan, W. M., Bhatt, S. K., Nagami, M., Walker, I. (2015). Culture and foreign language education: An introduction to the book. In W. M. Chan, S. K. Bhatt, M. Nagami, & I. Walker (eds.), *Culture and foreign language education: Insights from research and implications for the practice* (pp. 1-36). De Gruyter Mouton.
- Cialdini, R. B. (2007). *Influence: The psychology of persuasion*. HarperCollins e-books.
- Crozet, C. (2015). First, second, third place and beyond: Reflection on a philosophy of self & identity for intercultural language teaching. In W. M. Chan, S. K. Bhatt, M. Nagami, & I. Walker (eds.), *Culture and foreign language education: Insights from research and implications for the practice* (pp. 135-154). De Gruyter Mouton.
- Cubillan, Z. C. G., Dalupe, J. J., Linterna, J. P., Caballo, J. H. S. (2024). Beliefs About Language Learning among College of Teacher Education Students. *Journal of Tertiary Education and Learning (JTEL)*, 2(1): 27-32. [10.54536/jtel.v2i1.2462](https://doi.org/10.54536/jtel.v2i1.2462).
- de Bot, K. (2015). *A history of applied linguistics: From 1980 to the present*. Routledge.
- Dörnyei, Z., Ryan, S. (2015). *The psychology of the language learner revisited*. Routledge.
- Epstein, D. (2024). *Range*. Macmillan Business.
- Gandana, I. (2015). Critical thinking, (inter)cultural awareness and pedagogical dilemmas: Stories of three university teachers in Indonesia. In W. M. Chan, S. K. Bhatt, M. Nagami, & I. Walker (eds.), *Culture and foreign language education: Insights from research and implications for the practice* (pp. 107-134). De Gruyter Mouton.
- Horwitz, K. E. (1985). Using student beliefs about language learning and teaching in the foreign language methods course. *Foreign Language Annals*, 18: 333-340. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1985.tb01811.x>
- Horwitz, K. E. (1987). Surveying student beliefs about language learning. In A. Wenden, & J. Rubin (eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 119-129). Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall.
- Horwitz, E. K. (1999). Cultural and situational influences on foreign language learners' beliefs about language learning: A review of BALLI studies. *System*, 27(4): 557-576.
- Horwitz, E. K. (2013). *Becoming a language teacher: A practical guide to second language learning and teaching*. Pearson.
- Joseph, J. E. (2021). Why does language complexity resist measurement? *Frontiers in Communication*, 6: 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.624855>.
- Kalaja, P., Barcelos, A. M. F., Aro, M., Ruohotie-Lyhty, M. (2015). *Beliefs, agency, and identity in foreign language learning and teaching*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (2nd ed.). FT Press.
- Kovačević, E. (2016). *Language learning beliefs, strategies, and syntactic complexity: A case of Bosnian EAP students' writing* (Ph.D. Dissertation). International Burch University, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- Kovačević, E. (2019). The relationship between lexical complexity measures and language learning beliefs. *Jezikoslovlje*, 20(3): 555-582. <https://doi.org/10.29162/jez.2019.20>.
- Kovačević, E. (2017). The relationship between language learning beliefs and syntactic complexity. In S. Gudurić & B. Radić-Bojanić (eds.), *Jezici i kulture u vremenu i prostoru* 6 (pp. 455-464). University of Novi Sad.
- Kovačević, E. (2021). *Teaching adult language learners: Enhancing personal methodologies*. International University of Sarajevo.
- Lichtman, K. (2016). Age and learning environment: Are children implicit second language learners? *Journal of Child Language*, 43(3): 707-730. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000915000598>.
- Lindsay, G. W. (2020). Attention in psychology, neuroscience, and machine learning. *Frontiers in Computational Neuroscience*, 14: 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fncom.2020.00029>.
- Liu, J., Rutledge, D. (2020). Pre-service teachers' beliefs about language learning inventory (BALLI) on bilingualism: Getting insights to developing knowledge. *English Language Teaching*, 13(9): 30-39. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v13n9p30>.
- McCrocklin, S., Link, S. (2016). Accent, identity, and a fear of loss? ESL students' perspectives. *The Canadian Modern Language Review / La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes*, 72(1): 122-148. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.2582>.
- Merriam, S. B., Caffarella, R. S. (1999). *Learning in adulthood*. Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1978). *Education for perspective transformation: Women's re-entry programs in community colleges*. Teachers College.
- Nevin, J. A. (1992). Burrhus Frederic Skinner: 1904-1990. *The American Journal of Psychology*, 105(4): 613-619.
- Nguyen, L. T., Hung, B. P., Duong, U. T. T., Le, T. T. (2021). Teachers' and learners' beliefs about pronunciation instruction in tertiary English as a foreign language education. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 1: 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.739842>.
- Nikolov, M., Mihaljević Djigunović, J. (2023). Studies on pre-primary learners of foreign languages, their teachers, and parents: A critical overview of publications between 2000 and 2022. *Language Teaching*, 56(4): 451-477. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444823000095>.
- Norman, J. (2017). *Student's self-perceived English accent and its impact on their communicative competence and speaking confidence: An empirical study among students taking English 6 in upper secondary school* (Bachelor's Thesis). Akademin för utbildning och ekonomi, Avdelningen för humaniora.
- Ozfidan, B., Burlbaw, L. M. (2019). A literature-based approach on age factors in second language acquisition: Children, adolescents, and adults. *International Education Studies*, 12(10): 27-36. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v12n10p27>.
- Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(3): 307-332. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1170741>.
- Pawlak, M. (2021). Beliefs about grammar instruction and the mastery of the English passive voice. In M. Pawlak (ed.), *Investigating individual learner differences in second language learning* (pp. 173-188). Springer.
- Piaget, J. (2003). *The psychology of intelligence*. Routledge. (Original work published 1947).
- Reed, S. K. (2007). *Cognition: Theory and application* (7th ed.). Thomson Wadsworth.
- Rilling, M. (2000). How the challenge of explaining learning influenced the origins and development of John B. Watson's behaviorism. *The American Journal of Psychology*, 113(2): 275-301.
- Sayeh, A. Y., Razkane, H., Yeou, M., Mokhtari, N. (2024). Beliefs of Moroccan students about learning French: Variations according to gender, language proficiency, and major. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 21(1): 74-88.
- Shermer, M. (2011). *The believing brain: From ghosts and gods to politics and conspiracies—How we construct beliefs and reinforce them as truths*. Times Books.
- Skinner, B. F. (1938). *The behavior of organisms*. Appleton-Century-Crofts.

- Steber, S., Rossi, S. (2021). The challenge of learning a new language in adulthood: Evidence from a multi-methodological neuroscientific approach. *PLOS ONE*, 16(2). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0246421>.
- Talamas, S. N., Mavor, K. I., Perrett, D. I. (2016). Blinded by beauty: Attractiveness bias and accurate perceptions of academic performance. *PLoS ONE*, 11(2): e0148284. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0148284>.
- Teng, L. S. (2021). Individual differences in self-regulated learning: Exploring the nexus of motivational beliefs, self-efficacy, and SRL strategies in EFL writing. *Language Teaching Research*, 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211006881>.
- Teng, M. F., Wu, J. G. (2024). An investigation of learners' perceived progress during online education: Do self-efficacy belief, language learning motivation, and metacognitive strategies matter? *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 33(2): 283-295. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-023-00727-z>.
- Vlach, H. A., Sandhofer, C. M. (2012). Fast mapping across time: Memory processes support children's retention of learned words. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00046>.
- Vu, T., Magis-Weinberg, L., Jansen, B. R. J., van Atteveldt, N., Janssen, T. W. P., Lee, N. C., van der Maas, H. L. J., Raijmakers, M. E. J., Sachisthal, M. S. M., Meeter, M. (2022). Motivation-achievement cycles in learning: A literature review and research agenda. *Educational Psychology Review*, 34(1): 39-71. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-021-09616-7>.
- von Glasersfeld, E. (1998). Why constructivism must be radical. In M. Larochelle, N. Bednarz, & J. W. Garrison (eds.), *Constructivism and education* (pp. 23-28). Cambridge University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and language*. The MIT Press. (Original work published 1934).
- Windholz, G. (1992). Pavlov's conceptualization of learning. *The American Journal of Psychology*, 105(3): 459-469.
- Zull, J. E. (2002). *The art of changing the brain: Enriching the practice of teaching by exploring the biology of learning*. Stylus.
- Zull, J. E. (2011). *From brain to mind: Using neuroscience to guide change in education*. Stylus.

Privileged foreign language, bilingualism or “Englishisation”: Czech youth preferences for English language use outside of school

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.02>

Agnieszka Suchomelová-Pořomska
Masaryk University Language Centre; a.suchomelova@mail.muni.cz

Abstract

The available statistics regarding the use of English as a foreign or second language (EFL and ESL, respectively) in the Czech Republic reveal a significant and ongoing increase in both the number of users and their self-assessed proficiency across the population. The proportion of students learning English within the formal education system continues to rise, and, in the light of the Czech government's foreign language policy, this trend is expected to persist. In addition to its use in educational settings, English is increasingly prevalent in informal conversations among young people outside of school. English-language entertainment, particularly content available on the internet, appears to be one of the most popular—if not the most preferred—forms of leisure activity among this demographic. The aim of this study was to investigate the sociolinguistic phenomenon of the preference for English over Czech among Czech youth in their extracurricular activities. The results of a questionnaire administered to general upper secondary and tertiary students in selected schools across the Czech Republic demonstrate that the interest in the English language and its associated culture is substantial. Respondents report using English far more frequently outside of school than within it. This shift has notable implications for intergroup and intergenerational communication, as well as for attitudes toward the Czech language and its cultural identity. It has been observed to sometimes result in difficulties with recalling Czech vocabulary and applying Czech syntax correctly, leading to an internal conflict regarding the prioritization of either Czech or English. This phenomenon warrants further scholarly attention, as research in this area could offer valuable insights into the potential trajectory of communication within Czech society. Furthermore, such studies could provide more accurate projections regarding the future profile of university-level language learners, thereby informing the development of English language curricula and pedagogical strategies that are better aligned with societal needs.

Keywords: *English as a lingua franca, EFL, ESL, language status, cultural identity, cognition, emotions, translanguaging, sociolinguistics*

Introduction

Interest in English has been growing exponentially in countries where it is not an official language. It is difficult not to conceive of it as a lingua franca today, but yet in the 1950s, as Crystal (1997: ix) states, “*any notion of English as a true world language was but a dim, shadowy, theoretical possibility*”. For post-communist countries in Central Europe, like Poland and then Czechoslovakia, it was a reality until the turn of the century, when the political situation started to take a new shape, opening the borders and giving the rise to increased global mobility (Sherman, 2013). That was further reinforced by growing access to the Internet and the countries joining European Union in 2004. Since then, English has been used by Czechs as a means of communication in politics, in multinational corporations that started investing there, in mainstream education as a privileged school subject. It has become a way of catching up with the culture and lifestyle of the West, and been seen as a gateway to prosperity and success.

Such a sudden shift in policy making to the benefits of English and the countries of inner circle, i.e. the countries where English is spoken as a mother tongue and an official language (Kachru, 1986), gave rise to concerns on the part of some academics, who pointed to “far from subtle advocacy of English” (Phillipson, 2006: 66), which could lead to “imposing an alien monoculture” (ibid: 66).

Nearly twenty years after, there are 17% of Czechs aged 50 - 69 and 35% of those aged 25 - 50 who know English well or very well (Czech Statistical Office, 2016). The statistics concerning younger population do not reflect on self-assessed proficiency, still, in 2021 (European Commission, 2023) circa 80% of primary students and almost 94% upper secondary school students learnt English as their school subject. This figure is significant and warrants further consideration. Currently, English is a mandatory subject in Czech mainstream education from the third grade (age 8). However, in December 2024, the Czech Ministry of Education approved revised Framework for Education Programmes (in Czech: RVP), due to which, in year 2027 English classes will be compulsory from the first grade of primary education (Ministry of Education press release, msmt.gov.cz). These developments indicate that the number of English learners will continue to increase.

English vocabulary has extensively permeated the Czech language. Whereas in communication of adults, English borrowings (e.g. *crucální* - crucial) appear still sporadically and are rather reserved to mass media (TV and radio news, discussions or reportages), the language of youth deeply consists in translanguaging (for more on the phenomenon of translanguaging see English & Marr, 2023 or Moore, Bradley and Simpson, 2020). It overflows with words and phrases like *meeting, upgrade, random, beef, slay, chill, skincare, pick-me girl, fake, for real, no cap* or *flex*, or their Czech morphological variants (e.g. verbs: *flexovat, chillovat*, or adjectives: *fejkový* - fake). These are used on daily basis, often rendering young people’s conversations little comprehensible even to their parents. Clear preferences of Czech youth to use English over their mother tongue can be observed in many contexts (Sherman & Siegllová, 2011; Sherman, 2014; Kaderka and Prošek, 2014). When asked about its reason, the individuals in question often give an enigmatic answer: “it simply sounds better”.

What factors contribute to English’s status as a highly valued language today? Is it fashion or necessity? What are Czech young generation’s stances and beliefs about English, and do they change with their age? Will they lead to “*Englishisation*” (Bourdieu, 2001, as cited in Phillipson, 2006) or bilingual society? Or will they normalise in time, maintaining English as a privileged foreign language? The paper will attempt to answer these questions.

Its first part will provide selected background information on English and its international status in a socio-political context, with a specific focus on English Language Teaching industry. Next, the paper will describe the results of a questionnaire conducted among general upper-secondary and tertiary students, whose aim was to establish the frequency, purpose of and extent to which Czech youth use English in their outside-of-school activities. Young people’s general attitudes and beliefs about the language disclosed in the questionnaire will be also described. The last two parts will conclude the questionnaire results and discuss socio-economic significance, impact on cognitive faculties and emotions, and pedagogical implications.

English, its status and its socio-political aspect

The status of English as a lingua franca is indisputable. With 1.46 billion users, it is spoken by nearly one-fifth of the world’s population, including approximately 380 million native speakers (Statista, 2024). As of today, more than half of all websites use English as their primary content language (ibid). However, as Crystal (1997) aptly observes:

Why a language becomes a global language has little to do with the number of people who speak it. It is much more to do with who those speakers are. (...) Without a strong power-base, whether political, military or economic, no language can make progress as an international medium of communication (Crystal, 1997: 5).

Additionally, significant efforts have been made by native speakers and institutions to actively promote English. In *The English Effect* report published by the British Council in 2013, Mark Robson, then Director of English and

Exams, acknowledged that English has played a key role in maintaining the United Kingdom's global influence and has contributed substantially to its economic prosperity (British Council, 2013). He also highlighted its connection to technological advancement, stating that "those who are not online or cannot speak English are left behind" (ibid: 2). Furthermore, Robson emphasized the role of English as a crucial communication tool in addressing major international challenges such as climate change, terrorism, and human rights. His assertion that English is "the UK's greatest gift to the world" (ibid: 2) underscores the ideological and economic dimensions of language promotion. Further in the report Robson states:

Thanks to the internet, the rise of social media, the speed and spread of global communications technology and the increasingly globalised and interdependent global economy, English now allows the rapid cross-pollination of ideas and innovation around the world, and the development of a new kind of supranational single market in knowledge and ideas. (British Council, 2013: 4)

The British Council's influence on English education in the Czech Republic has significantly expanded over time. While its initial focus was on university students and professionals, its initiatives now extend to secondary school students. Cambridge English preparatory courses have been incorporated into grammar school curricula, and Cambridge English examinations are administered on-site. Students who achieve a B2 level or higher on the CEFR scale in these exams are exempted from certain components of their *maturita* (school-leaving) examination. In some cases, they may also be exempted from compulsory English courses at the university level. These policies create significant incentives for Czech students to pursue English proficiency.

However, how do young people in the Czech Republic perceive English? This study seeks to examine Czech youth's attitudes towards English, exploring whether they consider it an essential skill, a marker of prestige, or an encroaching force in their linguistic and cultural landscape.

The reasons why Czech youth use English out of school – questionnaire

To address these questions, an anonymous online questionnaire was administered to Czech secondary and tertiary students (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Online questionnaire on attitudes and beliefs towards English.

The screenshot shows a web-based questionnaire interface. At the top, the title is "Language and beliefs / Představy o jazyku". Below the title, there is a header area with the email "agnieszka.suchomelova@gmail.com" and a link to "Přepnout účet". The main content area contains several sections:

- Sex / Pohlaví:** A section with three radio button options: "Male/Muž", "Female/Žena", and "Other/Jiné".
- Age/Věk:** A section with a text input field labeled "Vaše odpověď".
- Question 1:** "How many foreign languages do you speak? Please list them from the one you know best to the one you know least." Below this is a text input field labeled "Vaše odpověď".
- Question 2:** "Knowing English means..." Below this is a text input field labeled "Vaše odpověď".
- Question 3:** "How/For what purpose(s) do you use English apart from school? Write your answers in 3a - 3f below." Below this is a text input field labeled "Vaše odpověď".

At the bottom of the form, there is a note in Czech: "Jak/k jakému účelu používáte angličtinu mimo školu? Zaznamenejte své odpovědi v 3a-3f níže. (Prosím, zkuste být konkrétní, pokud je to možné, např.: (denno-denně) Divám se na youtube/komentuji TikTok (jednou za rok) mluvím anglicky na dovolené v zahraničí)"

A printscreen of an online questionnaire asking Czech students about their attitudes and beliefs about English

The study participants were students from four grammar schools and one university. Three of the grammar schools were located in Brno, while one was situated in the small town of Mikulov. University respondents were Bachelor's students from the Faculty of Arts at Masaryk University in Brno. Data collection took place during the spring term of 2024.

A total of 44 responses were received from grammar school students, the majority of whom were female (31 female, 12 male and 1 identifying as another gender). Their ages ranged from 15 to 19, with a median age of 17. At the university level, 73 responses were collected, again with a predominance of female respondents (47 female, 25 male and 1 identifying as another gender). The participants' ages ranged from 17 to 24, with a median age of 21.

The questionnaire consisted of ten open-ended questions (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The full list of questions of an online questionnaire on attitudes and beliefs towards English.

1. How many foreign languages do you speak?
2. Knowing English means...
3. How/For what purpose(s) do you use English apart from school (every day, every week, every month, a few times a year, once a year, even more rarely)?
4. Are there topics which is easier for you to discuss in English than in your mother tongue?
5. Are there things/topics you would be willing to reveal about yourself in English but not in your mother tongue?
6. Are there words in English that you think are more suitable than Czech (or your mother tongue) words to describe the things you are interested in?
7. Are there words in English that in your opinion are more suitable than Czech words (words in your mother tongue) to describe your everyday life?
8. Do you associate English with a specific country and its culture?
9. Are there values coming from this country that you specifically appreciate? If so, what are they
10. Are there areas where you think the Czech Republic does better, compared to that country?

Open questions mapping Czech youth's attitudes and beliefs about English

First, the questionnaire inquired about the foreign languages spoken by respondents to assess the relative position of English compared to other foreign or second languages. It then examined the ratio of English to Czech usage, as well as the purpose and frequency of using English outside of school. Additionally, it explored language preferences in various contexts, such as discussing personal matters, hobbies, and generation-specific topics, along with perceptions of linguistic adequacy in terms of available vocabulary. Furthermore, the questionnaire investigated students' perspectives on the ownership of English, examining whether they associate the language with a specific country, its people, values, and culture.

The questionnaire results

The use of English - frequency and purpose

The results indicate that for both university students and secondary students, English is the most frequently spoken and best-known language apart from their mother tongue. Other significant foreign languages include German, French, and Spanish. These findings reflect the outcomes of language learning policies implemented in the Czech Republic and align with the geopolitical and economic landscape, clearly indicating which countries—and consequently, which languages—hold prominence in the global arena. Spanish, however, represents a notable exception. Its continued popularity may be attributed to historical factors, particularly the legacy of colonial expansion during the Renaissance (Crystal, 1997: 7). Additionally, it may reflect ongoing UK-Spain relations, such

as the British territory of Gibraltar and the high number of British residents in Spain (37% of British citizens living in the EU, according to 2018 statistics [www.ons.gov.uk]).

Regarding the perceived significance of English, responses from both groups were remarkably similar. The most frequently mentioned reasons for learning and using English include: the ability to communicate globally, increased career and life opportunities, functionality in the modern world, ease of travel, access to English-language media (films, books, and music), integration into international communities, and a general sense of freedom. Some respondents also described English as a necessity. These findings align with the British Council's statements on the role of English in international communication (2013) and corroborate existing research positioning English as the preferred language for multilingual communication (Seidlhofer, 2011; Jenkins, 2015; Ishikawa, 2022, cited in Fang, 2025).

In terms of frequency, nearly all students in both groups use English on a daily basis, with a slightly lower percentage among university students (93%) compared to secondary students (98%). The primary platforms for English use are social media, with TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube being the most frequently mentioned by secondary students, while university students primarily engage with YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. Additionally, secondary students use English to watch films on Netflix and play PC games. A notable finding is that some secondary students report using English to text or converse with Czech friends and family members, an uncommon practice in foreign language use. University students provided broader responses, mentioning various types of English-language online content, including stories, films, series, songs, video games, and online chats with people worldwide.

When interpreting these results, it is essential to consider the broader impact of technology on communication. As English and Marr (2023) observe:

Since the advent of the smartphone, it has become almost impossible to escape from the demands that social media put on us, or rather, that we put on ourselves to keep up with social media. (...) The digital world (...) is more than just a means to connect with other people, it enables us to interact with a raft of different forms of information and activity. It is a free-time resource, a knowledge-gathering resource, an entertainment resource and more. (English & Marr, 2023: 228)

Thus, the widespread use of social media and online platforms is not necessarily a conscious choice among young people but rather a reflection of the digital era in which they live.

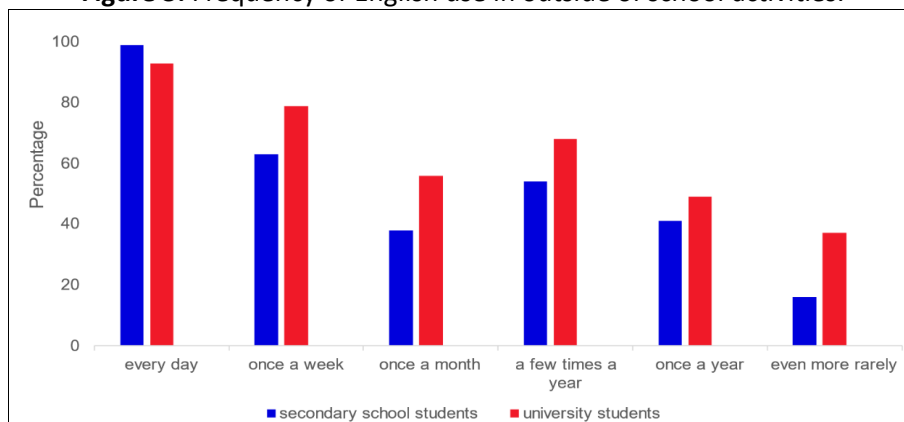
Outside of digital spaces, Czech youth report using English in the workplace, learning additional languages through English, and assisting their parents in learning English. Some students mention unintentionally communicating in English with Czech speakers due to difficulty expressing themselves in Czech; this phenomenon appears more common among secondary students than university students.

Less frequent use of English is also reported. Weekly use of English relates to academic purposes and is higher among university students (79%) than among secondary students (63%). Monthly use primarily involves interactions with foreign visitors, with a higher occurrence among university students (56%) compared to secondary students (38%). English is used several times per year for travel-related purposes (university students: 68%, secondary students: 54%), with respondents frequently assisting their families in booking accommodation, arranging transportation, and managing other holiday-related affairs. Some secondary students report that their families rely entirely on them for these tasks. Other occasional uses include reading books or watching films in English, a trend more prominent among university students.

When asked about English use on an annual basis, university students struggled to provide specific examples, with 49% responding: "nothing comes to mind." Some mentioned holiday-related communication, public speaking, or presentations. Similarly, only 41% of secondary students could identify annual English use, citing summer jobs, summer camps, or completing forms in English. Only 17% of secondary students use English less than once a year, typically for occasional interactions with foreigners or form-filling. In contrast, 37% of university

students use English at this frequency, primarily for updating CVs or participating in Erasmus exchange programs. The data corresponding to this section of the questionnaire is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Frequency of English use in outside of school activities.

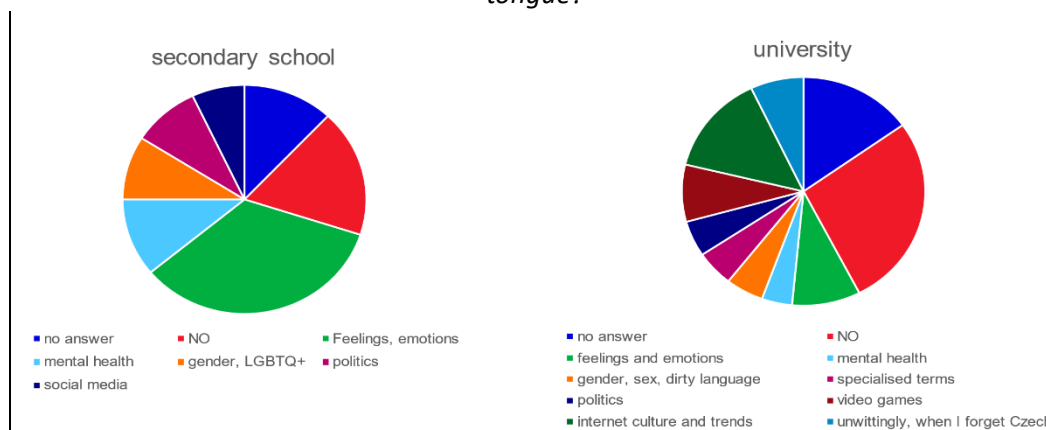


Language preferences in discussing certain topics

As illustrated in Figure 4, 70% of secondary students consider English more suitable than their native language for discussing specific topics. The most frequently mentioned areas include emotions and feelings (34%), mental health (11%), gender and LGBTQ+ issues (9%), politics (9%), and social media-related topics when conversing with friends (7%). Additionally, a small number of respondents reported using English when they could not recall the corresponding Czech words.

At the tertiary level, the proportion of students who prefer English over Czech is lower but still significant (57%). Among university students, the most commonly cited topics for English use are related to internet culture and trends, including music, fashion, films, ecology, social media, and memes (14%). Discussions about emotions and feelings rank second (9%), followed by video games (8%). A notable proportion of respondents (7%) indicated that they sometimes switch to English unconsciously, regardless of the topic. Discussions related to gender, sexuality, and explicit language account for 5%, the same percentage as those using English for specialized academic or work-related subjects and political discourse (5%). In contrast to the secondary student group, only 4% of university respondents reported using English to discuss mental health issues.

Figure 4: Answers to question: Are there topics which is easier for you to discuss in English than in your mother tongue?

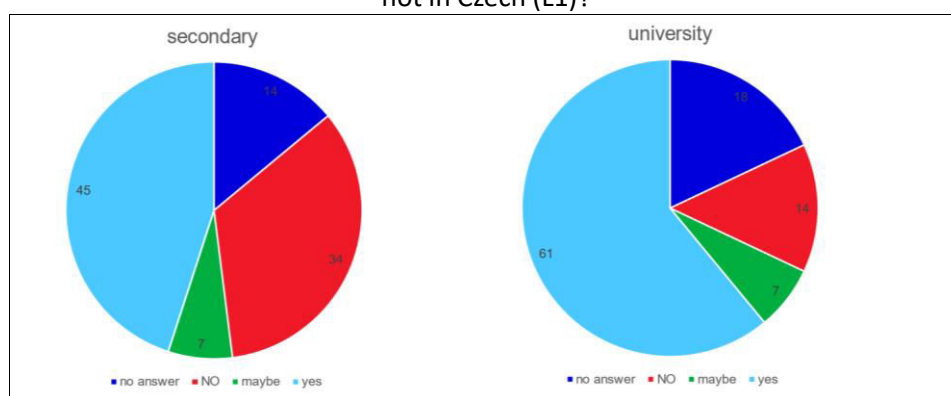


As the questionnaire revealed, the topics of greatest interest to Czech youth — emotions and feelings, gender, and politics — are issues traditionally associated with adolescence: self-discovery, managing emotions and social engagement. As could be also presumed, the prevalence of these topics declines with the respondents' age, gradually giving way to discussions centred on entertainment, hobbies, and career-related matters. What distinguishes the researched groups, however, is the language they choose to discuss the topics. This linguistic preference might be largely influenced by the dominant mode of communication and information access in contemporary society: the smartphone.

Language choice in revealing personal information

The tendency to use English when disclosing personal information is notably higher among university students (61%) compared to secondary students (45%). However, both groups are generally reluctant to specify the exact nature of the information shared. Among those who do provide details, university students most frequently mention personal life, generation-related issues, emotional states and feelings, as well as sexual preferences and intimacy. In the secondary student group, feelings and emotions are the most common topics, followed by discussions on gender, mental health, and personal challenges. The results of this section of the questionnaire are presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Answers to question: Are there topics that you would be willing to reveal about yourself in English but not in Czech (L1)?

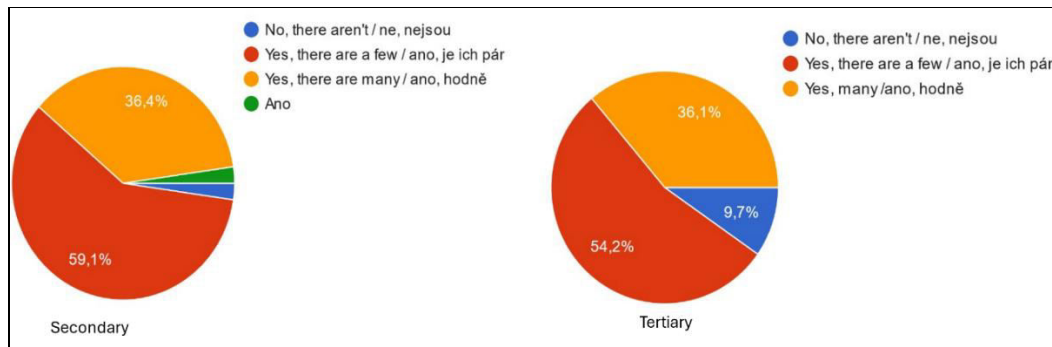


The results of this section align with the findings of the previous one, as feelings, emotions, intimacy, and gender-related topics are fundamental aspects of identity formation. While the choice of language is largely influenced by technology-based communication, it also reflects a psychological mechanism. As Pavlenko (2005: 158) suggests, avoiding one's mother tongue can serve as a means of emotional detachment, allowing individuals to distance themselves from painful memories or anxieties. The increased use of English among university students may also result from their greater opportunities to travel abroad or form relationships with foreigners through Erasmus or other exchange programs.

Lexical adequacy

The extent to which English lexicon replaces Czech in the communication of both groups is remarkable. Over 90% of students in both categories report that English words are more suitable than their Czech counterparts for expressing topics of their interest (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Answers to question: Are there words in English that you think are more suitable than Czech (L1) words to describe things you are interested in?



Young people have always had their own jargon, or sociolect they used at a local level, but with the rise of internet media consumption and increased mobility, many sociolects have become global. Consequently, this has led to the phenomenon of translanguaging, examples of which were presented in the introductory part of the paper. Through translanguaging young people (consciously or not) identify with transnational social communities centred around specific identities (Castells, 2000, as cited in English & Marr, 2023: 229).

English language ownership, culture and values

Although English functions as a lingua franca (ELF) and is primarily understood as a means of communication among non-native speakers (Seidlhofer, 2011, cited in Fang, 2025; Sherman, 2013), the majority of students still associate it with the UK (university students – 60%, secondary students – 43%) and the USA (university students – 49%, secondary students – 39%). Fewer respondents (university students – 27%, secondary students – 29%) perceive English as an independent linguistic entity, detached from any specific country.

Half of the secondary students group recognize certain American and British values as worth appreciating. These include pop culture, literature, politeness, willingness to help, friendliness, and open self-expression. Among tertiary students, 40% identify higher-order values, such as freedom of expression, democracy, individual rights, equality, acceptance of diversity, and tolerance.

At the same time, both groups express appreciation for values represented by their own country (secondary students – 60%, university students – 54%). These include high-quality and free-of-charge healthcare and education, lower crime rates, gun control, and overall safety. The findings described in Part 5 are illustrated in Figures 7, 8, and 9.

Figure 7: Answers to question: Do you associate English with a specific country and its culture?

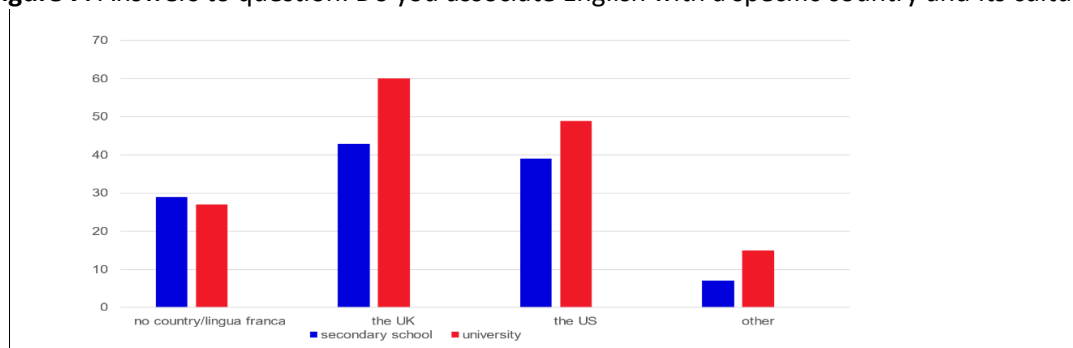


Figure 8: Answers to question: Are there values coming from English-speaking countries (mostly the UK and the US) that you specifically appreciate?

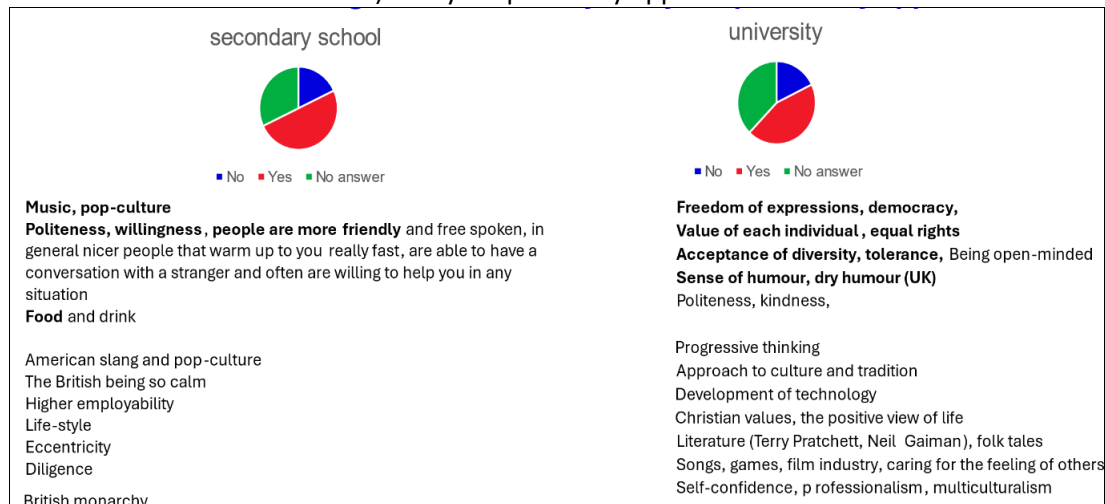
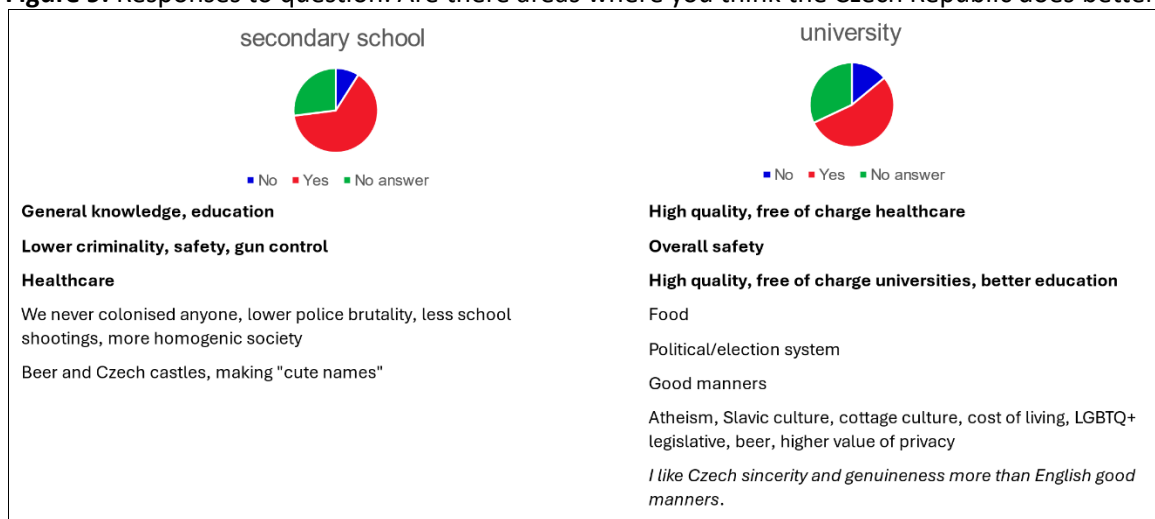


Figure 9: Responses to question: Are there areas where you think the Czech Republic does better?



Although both groups exhibit strongly positive evaluations, the older students display slightly more criticism, which may indicate their already formed identities and a greater awareness of national or local allegiances. The findings also suggest that, despite referring to the English variety they use as a lingua franca, non-native speakers, in general, still strongly associate the language with the culture and values of two inner-circle superpowers: the UK and the USA.

Additional students' comments on attitudes and beliefs about English

Drawing from additional comments made by secondary students, it can be ascertained that their reaction to the omnipresence of English is overwhelmingly positive, with criticism or ambivalence being rare. Moreover, proficiency in English and its frequent use is occasionally regarded as a source of pride and even a point of boasting. Selected comments illustrating these perspectives can be seen in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Examples of secondary students' additional comments on beliefs and attitudes towards English

<p><i>I personally like English a lot and I wish to become better at it eventually.</i></p> <p><i>English is beautiful and a very useful language, and I think it should be taught in every single country. That way we can keep all the mother tongues but are also able to communicate everywhere</i></p> <p><i>I probably speak better English than Czech and I am proud of it.</i></p> <p><i>We have a beautiful language and people don't speak it. It's true that we don't have words for new terms like podcast, etc. but that doesn't mean that people should replace Czech terms with English ones. Even though I personally lag behind in some areas of grammar, I don't see any reason to say meeting and notsjezd, sraz, porada, especially in formal speech. Of course, as a nation we have gone through Germanization and subsequent revival, and we have retained some German terms, but I certainly do not see the employees of national television saying sehr gut or zu viel. So, my problem is not with a personal conversation, but with a public speech. We should remember that we are our own nation. Central Europe is not the West, it is a gateway between two worlds, day and night.</i></p>
--

The analysis of university students' comments in this section reveals a continued overall positivity towards learning, using, and being exposed to English. However, alongside statements such as *"English is nice, more people should speak it,"* there is also a noticeable increase in concern about English's influence on their mother tongue (Figure 10).

Figure 10: University students' concerns about negative influence of English on Czech.

<p>•</p> <p>Conversational English and slang are increasingly intertwined with mother tongues around the world, and language and understanding, especially among generations, can (and will) become more challenging.</p> <p>•</p> <p>I am concerned that the more I consume media and social networks in English, the worse I can manage active vocabulary in Czech and the harder it is to construct coherent sentences in Czech. I am also concerned about my frequent thinking in English, as if I am losing contact with my mother tongue.</p> <p>•</p> <p>My overall relationship with English, especially in the last two years or so, has been very ambivalent. English sounds perhaps the most beautiful of all languages, because it has a special "singing-floating", kind of voluptuous mood. It has many personalities: it can sound kinder than French, sometimes cooler than German, still other times very curt and educated or condescending. I admire it for its terse aptness, "cool" would-be carelessness, as well as her ideal and unrivalled speech for singing or recitation. I really enjoy being able to understand English. Moreover, I find a pleasure in learning it. But alas, I have the feeling that it is extruding and distorting in my memory the Czech, my native language and the language I love the most. So, I still like to learn it, but sometimes I have a fit of some kind of "revivalist" mood, and I feel like I have to fight it to protect the Czech language in me. I don't think I have a developed sense for a sufficient distinction and separation of the two languages, and therefore their struggle is brewing inside me. What can I do? Maybe it will evolve in time, maybe their white flag will fly.</p>
--

One respondent anticipates that the interaction of English as a lingua franca (ELF) with other languages will create linguistic challenges on a global scale. Another notes difficulty in constructing coherent sentences in Czech, attributing it to the dominance of English-based social media. Yet another describes their relationship with English

as ambivalent, offering a poetic reflection on an inner struggle: while they find English beautiful and enjoyable to learn, they also recognize that it is simultaneously distorting and displacing the language they love most—their native tongue.

The difference between the two researched groups in their critical stance towards the extensive use of English may once again be linked to age. While younger respondents are still in the process of forming their identities—remaining open to everything the world (and their smartphones) offer—university students, having a more established sense of self, become more conscious of and reluctant to abandon the cultural and linguistic heritage they grew up with.

The impact of English on cognitive faculties and emotions

Being proficient in multiple languages offers significant cognitive benefits, enhancing perception, thinking, learning, and comprehension. Extensive research has demonstrated that bilingualism and multilingualism contribute to increased empathy and improved memory (Hamers & Blanc, 2000; Grosjean, 2008). Similarly, studies have established strong correlations between English language proficiency and academic success (Rudd & Honkiss, 2020).

However, as the questionnaire results indicate, proficiency in a dominant second language (L2) such as English may have a negative impact on retention of the mother tongue. Among Czech youth, this phenomenon is evident in the gradual regression of first-language (L1) processing, with 90% of respondents reporting a preference for substituting Czech words with English equivalents or experiencing difficulty recalling the appropriate Czech terms. The influence of English on the Czech language is also apparent in syntactic changes observed by the respondents.

For some individuals, this linguistic shift extends beyond vocabulary and syntax, affecting emotions and behaviour. The internal conflict between prioritizing English or Czech can lead to anxiety and self-doubt. Some respondents expressed embarrassment over their diminishing proficiency in Czech, while others resented the increasing reliance on English where Czech could serve the same communicative function. These findings align with research on second-language acquisition and emotions. As Pavlenko (2005) observes, "Most often, language learning trajectories are accompanied by ambivalent and contradictory feelings" (p. 215). Such sentiments were particularly pronounced among university students.

On a societal level, the emergence of translanguaging among Czech youth is noteworthy. This new linguistic variety, heavily influenced by conversational English and slang, has the potential to reduce mutual intelligibility between generations within the same linguistic community by the time it is fully adopted into its L1.

A key question remains: to what extent will the widespread use of English lead to permanent changes in Czech, and to what extent will linguistic and cultural preservation efforts intensify with age? Drawing on personal observations of immigrant communities and existing research (Pavlenko, 2005), it may be hypothesized that the language most closely associated with early-life socialization and strong emotional connections—the mother tongue—is ultimately prioritized. Nevertheless, the pervasive role of the internet in disseminating English and the concepts it conveys cannot be ignored. Unlike the historical influence of French on English following the Norman Conquest, the global reach of English through digital media suggests that its impact on other languages and cultures is unlikely to diminish.

English also plays a significant psychological role for Czech youth. The most frequently discussed topics in English among respondents include feelings and emotions, gender and sexuality, and mental health. These findings support the argument that for bilingual and multilingual individuals, discussing intimate or deeply personal experiences in an L2 can reduce anxiety (Pavlenko, 2005). Using a second language allows for a sense of detachment from emotionally charged subjects and fosters a greater sense of control when articulating personal experiences (ibid; Tvrtković-Hasandić & Başer, 2024). However, it is also important to consider the broader context: psychological topics are being widely promoted and frequently discussed in online and social media spaces, much like English itself. The prevalence of such content may explain why young Czechs associate these subjects with the

English language. Thus, a critical question remains: does the preference for English when discussing these topics reflect an inherent suitability of the language for such discussions, or is it primarily a consequence of the media environment in which young people are immersed?

English and its socioeconomic significance

English serves as a crucial tool for accessing economic resources and securing an established social position within society. With the growing number of English-proficient individuals entering the workforce and the increasing mobility of labour, English is becoming a necessity rather than a privilege. The global landscape appears increasingly oriented toward English users, and Czechia follows this trend. For instance, Indian and other Asian restaurants where staff primarily speak English and have limited proficiency in Czech are now commonplace in Czech cities.

As statistical data indicate, however, it is predominantly young Czech people who possess proficiency in English, enabling them to benefit from such environments. The questionnaire findings further suggest that generational disparities in English proficiency, coupled with differences in technological literacy, contribute to a widening gap between Czech youth and older generations in their access to goods and services. This linguistic and technological divide results in older adults relying on younger family members for assistance. Young Czechs frequently help their parents and grandparents with tasks such as planning family holidays, organizing trips abroad, translating product labels in stores, and searching for information online.

Ultimately, the significantly higher English proficiency and technological literacy among young Czech people appear to be reversing the traditional pattern of knowledge transfer, shifting the flow of information from younger to older generations.

Pedagogical implications

As a university teacher, my analysis will be confined to the university environment.

At my institution, an increasing number of students approach me at the beginning of each semester to request exemption from the compulsory Academic English course for Bachelor's students. Holding an international certificate such as Cambridge, TOEFL, or IELTS allows them to do so. It can be assumed that this trend is not unique to my university but is occurring across other Czech universities as well. Consequently, the number of students enrolling in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses may decline, especially given the growing ease with which grammar schools facilitate examinations for these internationally recognized certificates.

The questionnaire findings indicate that Czech general upper-secondary and university students use English far more frequently in their private lives than for academic purposes. This raises the question of how relevant the existing course materials are and how engaging and effective our teaching methods remain. University syllabi must continually adapt to offer relevant and appealing courses. This need has already been acknowledged by university authorities, as evidenced by the increasing number of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) courses. While language teachers with a linguistic background may play a more limited role in delivering specialized content, their expertise is crucial in preparing students for EMI courses taught by non-linguist academics.

One valuable resource that could be leveraged more effectively is students' existing knowledge of everyday English and their experience as active users of the language. This linguistic familiarity could serve as a foundation for classroom discussions and critical analysis of socially relevant topics such as culture, communication, human rights, and politics. In this way, language learning could become a more collaborative and student-driven process, encouraging meaningful engagement with contemporary societal issues.

Another potential direction for university-level English instruction is to adopt a model similar to that used in countries like Sweden or Germany. In these countries, English has been a compulsory subject in elementary schools for many years, and at the university level, language teaching has evolved into a form of academic counselling.

Here, language instructors work with smaller groups of students, providing personalized guidance and addressing their individual linguistic needs.

A key challenge, however, lies in determining which variety of English should be taught. In recent years, there has been a shift toward promoting English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) rather than adhering to a native-speaker model (see CEFR Companion Volume, 2020). However, as Fang (2025: 3) argues, "ELF is beyond codification, as it is too fluid and dynamic and transcends boundaries in terms of its use." This raises important pedagogical questions about how to approach English instruction in a way that accommodates the dynamic nature of ELF while still providing students with a structured and consistent framework for language learning. If ELF is inherently fluid and context-dependent, then traditional approaches to teaching grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation may need to be re-evaluated. Moreover, this lack of standardization may create uncertainty among both students and educators about what constitutes proficiency in an ELF-based paradigm. While an emphasis on communicative competence over rigid adherence to native-speaker norms is beneficial, it is crucial to strike a balance between flexibility and linguistic clarity to ensure students can effectively navigate both academic and professional contexts.

Ultimately, it can be argued that in the long term, an increasing number of university students in Czechia will use English as a second rather than a foreign language. However, the teaching methodologies adopted should ensure that English and Czech—both as languages and as cultural frameworks—are not positioned in competition with one another but rather function as complementary elements in students' linguistic development. Striking this balance will be essential in fostering both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness in an increasingly globalized world.

Conclusion

The process of discovering one's identity and personal preferences is particularly significant during adolescence and early adulthood. The Internet, which offers a sense of anonymity, serves as an ideal platform for exploring these topics. Moreover, as much of the online content is in English, it is unsurprising that an increasing number of young people exhibit high proficiency in the language.

The findings of this study confirm that Czech youth are highly engaged with topics related to identity, personal preferences, and popular culture, and they spend considerable time consuming social media and other online content. As anticipated, their self-assessed English proficiency is high. Young Czechs perceive English as both useful and attractive, incorporating it into their daily lives for activities such as online shopping, watching movies, pursuing hobbies, and engaging in discussions about intimacy, sex, and gender-related topics. This phenomenon, further reinforced by language policies in Czech schools, suggests that English may increasingly function as a second language in Czechia in the future. However, a significant number of older respondents emphasize the importance of maintaining and cultivating their mother tongue. Consequently, the likelihood of Czech society becoming entirely "Englishised" or subjected to an imposed monoculture (Phillipson, 2006) remains low.

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge the scope and limitations of the study. The questionnaire targeted grammar school and university students—arguably the most academically successful representatives of this demographic in the Czech Republic. If the study were extended to include students from technical or vocational schools, the overall preference for English might be less pronounced. Additionally, given the relatively small sample size, the findings may not fully capture the linguistic behaviours of Czech youth as a whole. A more comprehensive, longitudinal study, incorporating a larger and more diverse population sample, would be necessary to provide a more accurate projection of linguistic trends across Czech society.

References

British Council. (2013). *The English Effect* <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/english-effect-report-v2.pdf>.

- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- [Conversation] with Francois Grosjean: Life as a Bilingual. (2024, June 20). [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ky4nzxpeNAU&t=4s>
- English, F., Marr, T. (2023). *Why do Linguistics? Reflective Linguistics and the Study of Language* (2nd edition). Bloomsbury Academic
- European Commission. *Education & Training Database* <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/education-and-training/database>. Accessed 20th July, 2024
- Fang, F. (2025). Multilingualism and English as a Lingua Franca. In *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* (pp. 1-7). Wiley. doi:10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal20397.
- Grosjean, F. (2008). *Studying Bilinguals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Hamers, J. F., Blanc, M. H. A. (2000). *Bilinguality and Bilingualism* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kachru, B. (1986). *The Alchemy of English*. Oxford: Pergamon
- Kaderka, P., Prošek, M. (2014). English in the Czech Republic: Linguists' Ministerstvo Školství, Mládeže a Tělovýchovy (n.d.) *MŠMT schválilo nové Rámcové vzdělávací programy pro předškolní a základní vzdělávání*. Retrieved February 6, 2025, from <https://msmt.gov.cz/ministerstvo/novinar/msmt-schvalilo-nove-ramcove-vzdelavaci-programy-pro>.
- Office for National Statistics (n.d.) *Living abroad: British residents living in the EU: April 2018*. Retrieved February 7, 2025, from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/livingabroad/april2018#where-are-british-citizens-living-in-the-eu>.
- Perspectives. *Sociolinguistica*, 28(1): 173-198. <https://doi.org/10.1515/soci-2014-0014>.
- Moore, E., Bradley, J., Simpson, J. (eds). (2020). *Translanguaging as Transformation: The Collaborative Construction of New Linguistic Realities*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Pavlenko, A. (2005). *Emotions and Multilingualism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Phillipson, R. (2006). Figuring out the Englishisation of Europe. *British Studies in Applied Linguistics: Reconfiguring Europe*, 20: 65-85. x
- Půbalová, B. (2017, October 17) Čtyři z pěti Čechů se domluví cizí řeči. *Statistika& My. Časopis Českého statistického Úřadu*. <https://statistikaamy.csu.gov.cz/2017/10/17/ctyri-z-peti-cechu-se-domluvi-cizi-reci/>.
- Rudd, M., Honkiss, L. (2020). Analysing the Correlation between English Proficiency and Academic Performance among Thai University Students. *Athens Journal of Education*, 7(1): 122-138. Correlations between English proficiency and academic success.pdf
- Statista. (n.d.). The Most Spoken Languages Worldwide in 2023 [Infographic]. Retrieved June 20, 2024 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/266808/the-most-spoken-languages-worldwide/>.
- Sherman, T., Siegllová, D. (2011). Perceptions of ELF in Czech secondary schools: National identity and social differentiation. In: A. Archibald, A. Cogo & J. Jenkins (eds.), *Latest Trends in ELF Research* (pp. 229-249). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars' Publishing.
- Sherman, T. (2013). O jazycích v roli lingua franca (se zvláštním zřetelem k angličtině). *Časopis pro moderní filologii*, 95(2): 129-140.
- Sherman, T. (2014). The Position of Czech and Other Languages at Universities in the Czech Republic: Some Initial Observations. In F. Vila & V. Bretxa (Ed.), *Language Policy in Higher Education: The Case of Medium-Sized Languages* (pp. 43-63). Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783092765-005>.
- Tvrteković-Hasandić, S., Mustoo Başer, L. (2024). *Identity expressions and bilingualism: how the language we speak influences cognition and emotion*. [Conference session] International Pedagogic and Linguistic ERL 2024 Links

Between Beliefs and Language, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. <https://educationalroleoflanguage.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/ERL-VII-Sarajevo-2024-Conference-programme.pdf>.

Focus projection as a means of improving fluency: practical tasks reflecting a teacher's theoretical beliefs about an intonational phenomenon

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.03>

Georgi Dimitrov

University of National and World Economy; gmdimitrov89@gmail.com

Abstract

The intonational phenomenon of focus projection has received extensive attention in the literature, both from a theoretical and empirical point of view. In Dimitrov (2023a), I argue that focus projection can be applied in the process of teaching. In this paper, I offer a model based on my beliefs about focus projection that can be used for the generation of practical tasks whose aim is improving learners' fluency.

Keywords: *focus projection, fluency, practical tasks, theoretical beliefs, intonational phenomenon*

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to establish links between theoretical and applied linguistics. There is a difference between proving a theoretical model empirically and applying such a model when teaching. In the case of focus projection, the former is exemplified by Gussenhoven's (1983a) theoretical approach and the empirical evidence in its favour given particularly in Gussenhoven (1983b), also in Birch and Clifton (1995) and Welby (2003). The latter is the aim of this paper. This means the following: first, I take Gussenhoven's interpretation of focus projection as a starting point – there are other models of focus projection that need not concern us here, for example Selkirk (1984, 1995) – and second, I will try to transfer the theoretical and abstract ideas, perhaps partially, to English language teaching.

The importance of intonation and the challenges that it poses are exemplified by the following two quotes. The first one comes from Marco Minkoff, a prominent scholar and professor of English Studies at the University of Sofia, who claims that intonation is “probably the most difficult chapter on phonetics, both for the *teacher* and the *pupil*.” (Minkoff, 1963: 60, emphasis mine). The second one is from a very accessible introduction to intonation: English speakers are able to make a good deal of allowance for imperfect sound-making, but [...], they are much less able to make the same allowance for mistakenly used tunes.” (O'Connor & Arnold, 1973: 2).

When children acquire language, the acquisition of segments does not precede the acquisition of suprasegmental phenomena such as intonation (Coates, 1995). As Phillipov (2019) points out, in the context of language evolution intonation was arguably a case marker. Even in languages with well developed case systems intonation can serve such a function. In the German sentence *Herr Müller schickte dir das Buch und nicht Anna* (*Mr Müller sent the book to you, not Anna* or *Mr Müller sent the book to you, not to Anna*), discussed in Phillipov (2019: 29-30), intonation is the only means of figuring out if *Anna* is the agent, if the name is accented, or the recipient, if *dir* is accented.

Brief literature review and preliminary remarks

The practical nature of this brief paper makes it convenient to do away with an extensive literature review. Since this short note the fields of intonation and focus projection, language contact and foreign language teaching, a detailed review of the literature would require a lot of space.

Focus projection as a theoretical concept emerged in the works of Schmerling (1976) and Ladd (1980) among others where the notion of broad focus is used to refer to language material of variable length, from a single word to an entire utterance. Such studies collectively belong to the Focus-to-Accent approach, a term introduced by Gussenhoven (1985). Such models share the view that there is no one-to-one correspondence between accent and focus. Two main approaches to focus projection may be singled out: Gussenhoven (1983a) and Selkirk (1984, 1995), but see also Buring (2006).

The reader will be referred to relevant sources and the concept of focus projection will be defined in a reader-friendly way. I mentioned the models of Gussenhoven (1983a) and Selkirk (1984, 1995) in the introductory section. For a discussion of focus projection rules, see Buring (2006); for an argument against rules that govern accent placement, see Bolinger (1972). A detailed literature review of focus projection is given in Dimitrov (2020, chapter 2 but also see chapters 1 and 3). For the sake of convenience, let us use the definition of focus projection as given in a simplified form in the theoretical counterpart of this paper, Dimitrov (2023a), without going into detail about notions such as *old information* and *new information* for which the reader is referred to, for example, Halliday (1967). Basically, I follow Gussenhoven (1983a, b) where one intonational accent falling on the object of a subject-verb-object sentence suffice to also mark the verb as part of the new information of the message.

Studies broader in scope dealing with intonation in general, not with focus projection in particular, include Andreeva (2007, 2009), among others, where the empirical results imply the presence of focus projection in Bulgarian. Dimitrova (2022) is an overview of the place of prosody in the acquisition of a foreign language. More generally, an overview of different descriptions of intonation is given in Lecumberri (1997). As for language contact, different degrees of contact are informally given in Thomason and Kaufman (1988).

The practical tasks offered are based on the empirical results in Gussenhoven (1983b), Birch and Clifton (1995), Welby (2003), Andreeva (2007, 2009), and Dimitrov (2020).

Theoretical considerations

Since focus projection occurs, according to the above discussion, in sentences or clauses which have a direct object, i.e. sentences with subject-verb-object word order which is typical of English (e.g. Dryer 2013), then step one in the methodological framework is to find or construct such sentences and/or texts. It is easy to find readily available sentences and use them; for example, consider the Structure A sentences in the appendix of Gussenhoven (1983b), which will also be discussed below, and intonation textbooks such as Bradford (1988), Brazil (1994), Hewings (2004), and Wells (2006) among others. Step two includes more details about such sentences and deserves more attention.

As discussed in the preliminary remarks section, both the verb and the object can be accented. Of course, our objective is to train the student to accent the object only. Thus, it is important to take into account the number of syllables that occur between these accents. This is important for two reasons. The first one is the difficulty level of the exercises: the more syllables in-between the two accents, the higher the difficulty. The second one concerns the behavior of such syllables: in general, they should be shorter, less loud and less distinct relative to the accented counterparts. If they are so pronounced, the speech tempo between the accents will be faster, and more natural, which in turn contributes to better fluency.¹

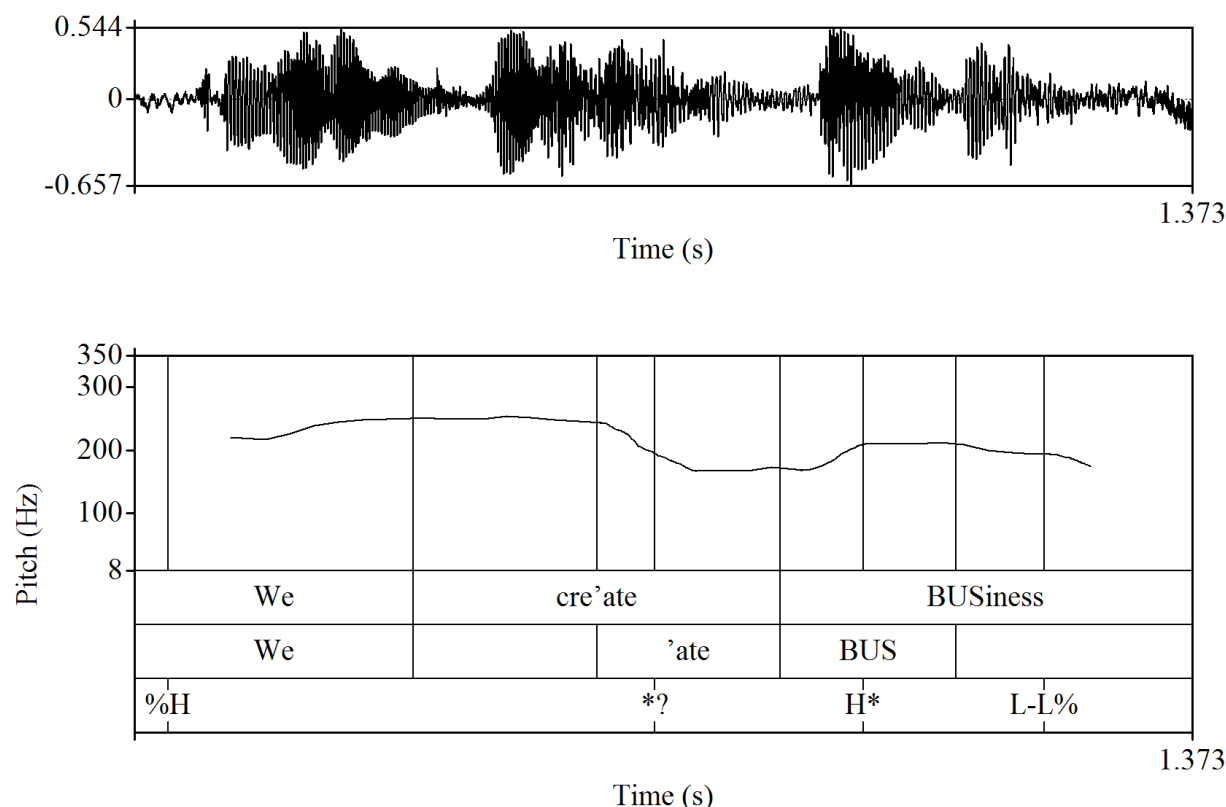
¹ It is convenient to turn our attention to the word *fluency* at this point since it is one of the key words in the title of this paper. According to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, one of the definitions of *fluent* is “fluent speech or writing is smooth and confident, with no mistakes.” In the *Cambridge Dictionary*, we find the following definitions: “When a person is fluent, they can speak a language easily, well, and quickly” and “When a language is fluent, it is spoken easily and without many pauses”. For the purposes of our discussion, the important words and phrases in these definitions are: *smooth*, *quickly*, and *without many pauses*. This is what I mean by improving learners’ fluency.

Depending on the level of the teacher, i.e. his/her competence in phonetics and intonation, one can take into account the type of syllables and the segments building the syllables, particularly the syllables to be accented. It should be admitted that such details do not constitute the most important criterion in preparing the sentences of texts. We have to prioritise sentence structure and the number of syllables between the potential accents.

Still, if the teacher is willing to be able to track students' progress in more detail, then the segments in the syllables should be considered. This is very difficult, if possible at all, to achieve for all syllables; that is why we will focus on accented syllables only. It is important that the consonants in such syllables have the feature specification [+ sonorant]. Vowels are by definition [+ sonorant]. The class of sonorants excludes obstruents, that is plosives, affricates and fricatives, which in English are the following, grouped in voiceless-voiced pairs except for /h/ and exemplified by the first sound in each example except for *beige* where the final sound counts: /p/ *pet* – /b/ *boil*, /t/ *ten* – /d/ *dog*, /k/ *cat* – /g/ *gold*, /f/ *fish* – /v/ *van*, /θ/ *think* – /ð/ *that*, /s/ *set* – /z/ *zero*, /ʃ/ *ship* – /ʒ/ *beige*, /tʃ/ *chop* – /dʒ/ *job*, /h/ *hop*. For more details on distinctive features, see Chomsky and Halle (1968, chapter 7) and Giegerich (1992, chapters 4 and 5).

There are two components in the pronunciation of obstruents – noise and tone – whereas sonorants are pronounced with tone only. This means that in the case of sonorants the pitch curve will be uninterrupted. In the case of obstruents, particularly voiceless ones, pitch curve interruptions are observable since pitch, i.e. fundamental frequency, indicates the presence of vocal fold vibration. Let us illustrate this argument with figure 7.1 from Dimitrov (2020: 148) reproduced here as figure 1.

Figure 1: ToBI analysis of the broad focus version of 'We create business.'.



This is a ToBI analysis of the sentence *We create business*. The figure was produced with Praat, a computer program (Boersma & Weenink, 2016). ToBI is a system for transcribing intonation whose details need not concern

us here. The evolution of ToBI is succinctly given in Beckman, Hirschberg and Shattuck-Hufnagel (2005). Broad focus means that the context of the sentence is such that both the verb and the direct object represent new information. The context is *And what is your contribution to society?*. The upper rectangle gives the oscillogram, that is a visual representation of the relationship between amplitude and time. The lower rectangle shows the pitch curve and how it is synchronized with the words and syllables that can potentially carry an accent. This is given in the first two lines below the pitch curve. The third and final line is the ToBI transcription or labelling.

The figure shows clearly that the first syllable of *business* is accented. This is indicated by the greatest amplitude in the oscillogram and an upward movement of the pitch curve within this syllable. No such clear signs can be found regarding the second syllable of *create*. Thus, we are not sure if this syllable is accented or not, which is signaled by a question mark in the transcription.

Let us pay attention to how the sounds [k] and [t] in *create* and [b] in *business* are represented in the oscillogram. I am using square brackets to indicate a concrete phonetic representation rather than a phonological abstraction which is conventionally given in slants. We can see that these sounds have the lowest amplitude which is usually combined with an interrupted pitch curve. The latter is not shown in the figure as the pitch curve was modified for the sake of convenience and visual clarity.

Back to the original point, if the teacher wants to record some of the utterances of the students and has the necessary training, then obstruents in the accented syllables should be avoided to facilitate the study of the pitch contour with respect to the presence of an accent on the stressed syllable of the direct object. Whether the accentable syllable is open or close does not exercise significant influence on the shape of the contour. For a more detailed discussion of such criteria relating to the contrastive study of focus projection, see Dimitrov (2018, 2020 chapter 3).

Finally, a few considerations regarding the mother tongue of the learners are in order. Perhaps we, English teachers, tacitly assume that focus, hence focus projection, is expressed by accent. Not all languages use accent for this purpose. Even some European languages fall into such a category. For example, Grønnum (2022) argues that stressed syllables in Danish have equal prominence: we cannot rely on accent to signal prominence and focus projection. Attention should be paid to pitch-accent accent languages such as Swedish, Norwegian, Serbo-Croatian, Japanese, let alone tone languages which make a limited use of intonation. For details on the classification of languages based on how they use intonation, see Cruttenden (1986). Also, not all languages have a subject-verb-object word order, which complicates matters further or excludes completely focus projection in the sense discussed here if such a phenomenon is relevant to such languages.

The relevance of the mother tongue of the learners lies in the fact that if there is no focus projection in the mother tongue of the learner, then this may make it more difficult for the teacher to use focus projection as tool of improving fluency. For example, the experiment results in Dimitrov (2020) show that focus projection is more limited in Bulgarian than in English in the sense that projection occurs in Bulgarian only if the number of syllables between the penultimate accent and the final accent is not higher than two. This constraint was applied when the Bulgarian informants read the English stimuli, which is a clear example of negative transfer as a result of language contact. Language contact and interference should also be taken into account when teaching a foreign language, including the level of pronunciation and intonation. For more examples and discussion of language contact in the context of foreign language teaching, see Dimitrov (2023b).

Preparing materials and discussion

This section gives examples of sentences that satisfy the criteria given above. The following are based on the Structure A sentences from Gussenhoven (1983b: 77-78) grouped on the basis of the number of syllables between the accents. The accentable syllable of the verb is given in italics, and the accented syllable of the object – the one we are interested in – is capitalized as in the original. C stands for context, that is the question in response to

which the subject-verb-object sentences, indicated by *U*, are uttered. The second question focusing on the object only is omitted.

Zero syllables between the accents

C: What happened?

U: He *saw* PENguins.

C: What is your job?

U: I *collect* GARbage.

One syllable between the accents

C: How do you live?

U: I *bought* a HOUSE.

C: Why do you need the bag

U: I *love* the COLour.

Two syllables between the accents

C: Why was he in the theatre?

U: He *performed* in the PLAY.

C: What are they doing?

U: They are *moving* the FURniture.

Three syllables between the accents

C: Why is he there?

U: He is *writing* a rePORT.

C: Why do you need it?

U: I am *building* a hoTEL.

Alternatively, or perhaps at a later stage, a text could be adapted to serve this purpose. Any text could suffice; the teacher can even create their own texts where the criteria above can be more strictly applied. Dimitrov (2023a: 89) gives an example of a readily available text from Bratanova's (2021: 71) textbook for students of International Relations. At the end of the day, the obvious piece of advice is a lot of repetitions, say each of the sentence above is repeated a hundred times with the intonation patterns produced being constantly and consistently refined and improved. The ultimate goal is to make intonation, or rather its appropriate use, part and parcel of students' repertoire.

Conclusion

I conclude the paper by lending weight to the fact that intonation, including focus projection, poses a serious challenge for teachers and learners. This is so since intonation operates on different linguistic levels, including but limited to, morphology, grammar, and the textual level. The form of English intonation is well studied though its meaning is in need of further scholarly attention. Its multifaceted character serves as both a source for creating multiple meanings and a source of challenges, as well as a window to the past, demonstrating its potential as a possible case marker.

References

- Andreeva, B. (2007). *Zur Phonetik und Phonologie der Intonation der Sofioter Varietät des Bulgarischen*. (Towards the Phonetics and Phonology of the Intonation of the Sofia Variety of Bulgarian). PhD thesis. Saarbrücken: Institute of Phonetics, University of the Saarland.
- Andreeva, B. (2009). Towards the intonational phonology of the Sophia Variety of Bulgarian, in: G. Zybatow, U. Junghanns, D. Lenertová, and P. Biskup (eds.), *Studies of Formal Slavic Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics and Information Structure* (pp. 357-371). Proceedings of the Formal Description of Slavic Languages 7, Leipzig 2007.
- Beckman, M. E., Hirschberg, J., Shattuck-Hufnagel, S. (2005). The original ToBI system and the evolution of the ToBI framework, in: S.-A. Jun (ed.), *Prosodic typology: the phonology of intonation and phrasing* (pp. 9-54). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Birch, S., Clifton, C. (1995). Focus, accent and argument structure: Effects on language comprehension, *Language and Speech*, 38: 365-391.
- Boersma, P., Weenink, D. (2016). Praat: doing phonetics by computer [Computer programme]. Version 6.0.14, retrieved 17th March 2016 from <http://www.praat.org/>. [The latest version of the programme is 6.4.23, 27th October 2024].
- Bolinger, D. (1972). Accent is predictable (if you're a mind-reader), *Language*, 48: 633-644.
- Bradford, B (1988). *Intonation in context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bratanova, K. (2021). *Advanced English for International Relations and European Studies*. Sofia: Publishing Complex – UNWE.
- Brazil, D. (1994). *Pronunciation for advanced learners of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Büring, D. (2006). Focus projection and default prominence, in: V. Molnár, S. Winkler (eds.), *The Architecture of Focus* (pp. 321-346). Berlin/New York: Mouton De Gruyter.
- Chomsky, N., Halle, M. (1968). *The Sound pattern of English*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Coates, J. (1995). The tone unit in pronunciation teaching, in: A. S. Addison & W. J. Barry (eds.) *Phonus* (pp. 67-74). Institut für Phonetik. Universitaet des Saarlandes. D-66041 Saarbrücken, October 1996.
- Comrie, B., Corbett, G. G. (1993). (eds.). *The Slavonic languages*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Cruttenden, A. (1986). *Intonation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dimitrov, G. (2018). Methodology for the contrastive study of focus projection in English and Bulgarian, in: M. Kovatcheva (ed.), *Езикът отблизо. Сборник в чест на Христо Стаменов./ Ezikăt otblizo. Sbornik v čest na Xristo Stamenov*.² (*Language close up. Papers in honour of Christo Stamenov*) (pp. 256-264). Sofia: "St. Kliment Ohridski" University Press.
- Dimitrov, G. (2020). *The phonetics and phonology of focus projection in English and Bulgarian*. PhD thesis. Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".
- Dimitrov, G. (2023a). Linguistic effect of focus projection in the ESP classroom: some pedagogical implications. *Educational Role of Language*, 10(2): 87-93. <https://educationalroleoflanguage.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ERL-Journal-Volume-10-7-G-Dimitrov-Linguistic-effect-of-focus-projection-in-the-ESP-classroom-some-pedagogical-implications.pdf>.
- Dimitrov, G. (2023b). Foreign language teaching from the point of view of language contact. Yearbook of UNWE [University of National and World Economy], 2: 137-143. <https://doi.org/10.37075/YB.2023.2.09>.
- Dimitrova, S. (2022). Prosody in L2. *Bulgarian-Accented English*. Sofia: Polis.
- Dryer, M. S. (2013). Order of subject, object and verb, in: M. S. Dryer & M. Haspelmath (eds.) *WALS Online* (v2020.3) [Data set]. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7385533> (Available online at <http://wals.info/chapter/81>. Accessed on 17 November 2024.

² Transliteration from Cyrillic follows the system used in Comrie and Corbett (1993: xii-xiii).

- Giegerich, H. (1992). *English phonology: an introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grønnum, N. (2022). Modeling Danish intonation, in: J. Barnes & S. Shattuck-Hufnagel (eds.) *Prosodic theory and practice* (pp. 85-116), Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Gussenhoven, C. (1983a). Focus, mode, and the nucleus, *Journal of Linguistics*, 19: 377-417.
- Gussenhoven, C. (1983b). Testing the reality of focus domains, *Language and Speech*, 26: 61-80.
- Gussenhoven, C. (1985). Two views of accent: a reply, *Journal of Linguistics*, 21: 125-138.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1967). Notes on transitivity and theme in English. (Part 2). *Journal of Linguistics*, 3: 199-244.
- Hewings, M. (2004). *Pronunciation practice activities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ladd, D. R. (1980). *The structure of intonational meaning: evidence from English*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lecumberri, M. L. G. (1997). Traditional British analyses of intonation. *Atlantis*, XIX: 103-111.
- Minkoff, M. (1963). *An introduction to English phonetics*. 2nd edn. Sofia: State Publishing House "Naouka i Izkoustvo".
- O'Connor, J. D., Arnold, G. F. (1973). *Intonation of colloquial English*. 2nd edn. London: Longman Group Ltd.
- Phillipov, V. (2019). *Some aspects of intonational typology*. PhD thesis. Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".
- Schmerling, S. (1976). *Aspects of English sentence stress*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Selkirk, E. (1984). *Phonology and syntax: the relation between sound and structure*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Selkirk, E. (1995). Sentence prosody: intonation, stress, and phrasing, in: J. Goldsmith (Ed.) *The handbook of phonological theory* (pp. 550-569). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Thomason, S. G., Kaufman, T. (1988). *Language contact, creolization, and genetic linguistics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Welby, P. (2003). Effects of pitch accent position, type, and status on focus projection, *Language and Speech*, 46: 53-81.
- Wells, J. C. (2006). *English intonation: an introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/fluent#fluent__6 (16 November 2024).
- <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fluent> (16 November 2024).

Communicating the language of music: professional (young) pianists beliefs in linguistic and music education, development and wellbeing

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.04>

Sladana Marić

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad; sladjana.maric@ff.uns.ac.rs

Abstract

This research paper explores the beliefs in linguistic education and pedagogical interconnections between language and music learning in the lives of professional young pianists. The theoretical problematization of the topic was approached from an interdisciplinary point of view, uniting pedagogical and andragogical-musicological competencies. In that sense, the paper elaborates and supplements the existing theoretical and empirical research on beliefs in language education, with concrete examples, that is, interview narrative testimonies as possible research case studies. The corpus data includes 10 live-streamed interviews in the form of a video podcast (total of over two hundred minutes) entitled “Chopin Talk” published on the “Chopin Institute” YouTube channel. This digital media recorded material captures the post-pandemic era focusing on the important narratives of young international pianists and their life stories. The qualitative method of analysis was used, while the techniques applied included: 1) notetaking of specific information, 2) transcription and paraphrasing of English language discourse, 3) coding of the information included from the interviews into thematic categories (general information, languages spoken, role of classical music and Chopin’s music in education, career and participation in the competition, role of digital and social media in communication and education, and lifestyles in the pre-pandemic and pandemic time issues of relocation, physical isolation and wellbeing). The qualitative results obtained from the research, suggest that languages, music and media had an overall positive impact on the wellbeing of young professional pianists’ and their preparedness for the competition. Thus, the effects of continual linguistic, academic and musical engagement had an important role in their identity formation. In the following period, the aim is to further research the pedagogical intersections of language and music learning on personal linguistic wellbeing, perceived through musical behavior (music performance and/or music listening), in different arts-oriented contexts of education.

Keywords: digital media, language education, pandemic, parental engagement and support, the Fryderyk Chopin piano competition, wellbeing, young professional pianists.

Introduction

Whether and how one *studies* and *applies* languages is determined strongly on what one thinks of its importance, the level of his or her interest in it, the range of vocabulary seen as important – *beliefs* determine it all, and this link “between our linguistic beliefs needs to be constantly challenged” (Daszkiewicz, 2024: 4). Communicating in a foreign language is widely recognized as a highly challenging skill to master. *Beliefs* can be sounded in speech, though telling “with a particular purpose, to a particular audience, which shapes what one can want, or must share about themselves” (Barcelos, 2024: 95).

Therefore, the notion of language positioning within the personal realm of values of young professional pianists is approached through a discourse analysis of recordings of spoken interactions. In this research the focus is on the beliefs in linguistic education, revealed through personal life story narratives (information about developing

skills for managing emotions and behavior, maintaining a healthy body and mind before and during the competition, improving concentration in learning, energy levels and motivation for performance, etc).

This specific data corpus was chosen as a *research corpus* that included spoken interactions (life story narration) on the topic of Chopin's music and participation in the International Chopin Competition, by 34 young professional pianists aged from 17 to 30 (female – 12 and male – 22), coming from different countries, cultures, knowledge in languages, and educational backgrounds. These 10 audio-visual recordings of interviews titled “Chopin Talk”, from the “18th Chopin Competition (2021)” were broadcasted to the most distant corners of the world through the official website *Chopin2020.pl*, mobile application and *Chopin Institute's* YouTube channel. With the largest audiences gathered in Japan, South Korea, Poland, and the United States, these broadcasts attracted millions of viewers, who were able to experience and participate in the global community of music lovers through social media interactions during performances. In addition, before the competition in October 2021, the auditions were also live-streamed and the recordings were made available in open access, where the audience had the opportunity to hear the pianists and follow their progress in preparations for the competition. In addition, the “18th Chopin Competition” *resonated* on all the major social media websites, resulting in the pianists having the possibility to attract a great number of new followers on their personal social media accounts. Apart from offering the possibility to participate as an audience in the concert hall, the competition resulted in offering to the audience a remarkable number of recorded high-quality level performances of the piano solo and orchestral repertoire by F. Chopin.

Research methodology

In maintaining positive wellbeing in individuals, according to Sheppard & Broughton (2020: 12), it is important to focus on the ability to improve cognitive health through active *music (social) participation*. The gathered data included 10 live-streamed video podcast interviews (total of over two hundred minutes) led by pianists Rachel Naomi Kudo³ and Alessandro Tomassi⁴, in the title series “Chopin Talk”, broadcasted live during the “18th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition” and the official competition breaks on the social media site of the Chopin Institute on *YouTube*, during October 2021. This data represents a valuable resource of personal narratives of 34 young international pianist competitors (as inserts from their life stories) – in total 12 female and 22 male pianists. Additional information about the competitors was gathered from the official website (www.chopin2020.pl). In this paper, for partial anonymization, the names of the participants are given only by their first names, as all the video recordings are fully available in open access.

In this research, the method of qualitative analysis of spoken media discourse was applied. These “talks” represent a valuable resource of recorded language interactions of international pianist competitors speaking in English and other languages (Polish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian, etc.), with the help of professional consecutive translators. The analysis procedures included the following techniques:

1. *Notetaking* of specific information during the live streams or rewatching of the recorded sessions, and information checking about the competitor names and biographies was gathered from the official website;
2. *Transcription and paraphrasing* of English language discourse from selected recordings or inserts;
3. *Coding* of the information included from the interviews into the following categories:
 - 3.1. *General information*: a place of birth, living and studying, and knowledge of languages, the role of the family members and teachers in career development (“theme of the homeland” - nationality/place of birth/living/studying with connection to knowledge of languages);

³ Pianist, competitor in the “17th Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition” (2015) and Co-host of the “Chopin Talk” (2024).

⁴ Pianist. Co-host of the “Chopin Talk” (2024). Head of Artistic Administration of the *Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester* and Artistic Director of the *Bartolomeo Cristofori Piano Festival* and *Barco Teatro* in Padua.

- 3.2. *Language of communication* in the interview (English, other: Chinese, Polish, Japanese, Korean, Russian, etc.);
- 3.3. *Role of classical music and Chopin's music* in music education, career and participation in the competition (Chopin's music pieces played or listened to in early childhood);
- 3.4. *Role of digital and social media* in communication (listening to music, online classes, online recitals, online competitions, live streaming, chatting, etc.);
- 3.5. *Lifestyles* (food, travel, hobbies, arts, physical activity and sports), pre-pandemic and pandemic time topics or issues of relocation, physical isolation, preparation, study, reading, self-realisation, performances (online and in front of an audience), wellbeing.

Findings

"What you need to become a good musician is a question having as many answers as there are musicians and music teachers. There is one separation of musicians, at least, linguistic: amateur, student and professional" (Dahl, 2017: 4).

Students in learning settings can experience a rich diversity of emotions, which can significantly be related to their motivation, learning strategies, cognitive resources, self-regulation, and academic achievement (Peistaraitė & Clark, 2020). Furthermore, the learning experiences may be related to the (limited) proficiency, beliefs and expectations from the learning process, cultural knowledge, the culture of learning, the feeling of "pressure", planned priorities, the relationship with the teacher, the role of parents, available resources, ways of learning and resistance to the new ways of learning, as well as ways of perceiving the learning environment. According to Graham (2022: 199), self-efficacy is "at the core of models of self-regulation and self-regulated learning, in which it acts in partnership with the application of learning strategies, metacognition, and causal attributions". The mastery of experiences is needed, as individuals perceive and value only challenging tasks as those successful, those they achieved through actions, efforts, and persistence, and that leads them to more positive learning outcomes. Furthermore, it is "a strong predictor of performance in different language skills and tasks" (Raoofi et al., 2012: 60, as cited in Graham, 2022: 194). Thus, personal agency is at the centre of "self-efficacy", while, "success is understood to be caused by the actions the individual themselves has undertaken" (Ibid, 2022: 187).

Even though pianists can be very sensitive and emotionally vulnerable, and face different communication, learning and performance settings and environments, after years of traditional schooling and performing experiences, these young musicians have demonstrated a strong sense of autonomy, control and self-realisation. Even in terms of physical and visual appearance, all of the competitors were very appropriate and of normal psychological and physical health appearance, indicating the healthy lifestyles of this group of young people, promoting good health and wellbeing through active music participation.

Young pianists revealed that they speak *one* or *more* languages, with different levels of confidence in foreign (English) language use. However, during the interviews, some of the pianists felt more confident speaking in their mother tongue, rather than in English. Because of the international audience online, the main language of communication in the interviews was English, while in some podcasts, pianists from China were provided with the help of a professional translator. From the introductory parts of the interviews "Chopin Talk", participants usually were asked to introduce themselves, therefore, they mentioned their nationalities, countries of origin or studies, some even greeted speakers in other languages, apart from English and their mother tongue, e.g. in Polish (Huak – Korean). Fisher et al. (2018: 449), recognize that the development of a multilingual identity is "potentially important" for the future investment in learning and "maintenance of their languages" and for the "enhanced social cohesion", as part of the increasing mobility of students and experiences of diversity in different learning communities.

In terms of migration for studies, their place of past studies or current studies or current places of living, include, e.g. Alberto (Italy – USA), Alexander (Italy – Berlin, Germany), Huak (Korea – Russia – Germany), Kyohei (Japan – Moscow, Russia–Warsaw, Poland), Leonora (Italy– Germany), Lingfei (China – Canada), Martín (Spain – New York, USA), Miyu (Japan – Moscow, Russia), Yeonmin (South Korea – Germany), Yutong (China – Boston, USA), Ziji Zoé (Beijing, China – Hanover, Germany), and Zuzanna (Poland – Germany).

From the interviews, the following list was created of demographic information (nationality) and linguistic knowledge:

1. *American* – English (Evren, Talon, Lingfei (Stephan), Sarah, Chelsea);
2. *Canadian* - English (Victoria, Eric)
3. *Chinese* – Mandarin (Xuanyi, Hao); Mandarin, English (Yutong, Shunshun, Yuchong, Zixi, Yifan); Mandarin, English (German) (Ziji Zoé);
4. *Italian* – Italian, English (Leonardo, Leonora, Federico, Alberto); Italian, English (German) (Alexander);
5. *Japanese* – Japanese, English (Sohgo, Hayato, Aimi) Japanese, English, (Russian) (Miyu); Japanese, English, (Polish), (Russian) (Kyohei);
6. *Korean* – Korean, English (Yeonmin); Korean, English, (German), Russian, Polish (Hyuk);
7. *Polish* – Polish, German, English (Zuzanna); Polish, Japanese, English (Marta);
8. *Polish/Vietnamese* – English, Polish, Vietnamese (Việt);
9. *Russian* – Russian, English (Eva, Arsenii); Russian, English, (Polish) (Andrey);
10. *Spanish* – Spanish, English (Martín).

For example, Hyuk is a speaker of Korean as a mother tongue, but he learned English as part of his education in general, Russian after he moved to study in Russia, basic German during one year of study in Germany, and now he is learning Polish – “the mother language of Chopin” (Hyuk). The following is an insert from the transcript of the interview talk:

Alessandro: Did you also learn to speak German during that year?

Hyuk: Yes, I did learn somehow, but I forgot everything.

Alessandro: So, you speak, of course Korean, Russian, you are fluent, very well, also in English, and you are learning Polish?

Hyuk: A bit, a bit! Since Polish is very similar to Russian, so I started to learn. I am very interested in it, it is the mother language of Chopin.

As in spoken language, it is of most importance for pianists to be able to communicate *musical content* through expressing *thoughts* and *messages* through sound, or “specific medium of organized sounds”, but also seeking to convey *feelings* and *sensations*, which can be a challenging task of deciphering the nineteenth-century piano music by F. Chopin (Cintron, 2022: 19). Chopin, in his unfinished methodology book, “integrated metaphors of language in his applied piano lessons”, as a pedagogical tool (Ibid, 2022: 66). Therefore, pianists aim to establish the *connection between the music and spoken language*, understanding the relation between musical phrasing and human language. In Chopin’s unfinished piano method book, he wrote, among other, the following: “*We use sound to make music just as we use words to make a language*” and music, for Chopin, is “a type of language that transcends the physical bounds and departs into a metaphysical dimension” (Cintron, 2022: 74).

“Chopin's nickname is the poet of (the) piano” – Hyuk (Korean).

Since childhood, these pianists have been very devoted to Chopin's music and piano playing of Classical music repertoire. The quality of mental strategies children adopt when learning and performing music pieces (McPherson, 2005), may be connected with their first encounters with music. According to the memories shared, the first "contact with the music by F. Chopin" was *through personal discovery of sound* by playing music scores of Chopin's compositions. Then, by *listening to the live playing* at home or in school, and by *listening to the playing of recorded music* in different forms and contents.

Leonora (Italy) remembers listening to her mother playing Chopin pieces, and playing herself the Bolero at the age of 9, this "important piece", she "took it with great responsibility". Leonardo (Italy), evokes his memories of his first concert and performance with a piece by Chopin: Prelude No. 4 in A minor – "I was 8 years old, it was a very small competition but it was the first ever concert with an audience in my life". Moreover, the "hierarchical perceptions of success in music" (López-Iñíguez & Bennett, 2019: 5) were evident in the repertoire choices from the early career (mentioned by the majority of interviewed pianists), as possibly a means of affirmation of their creative development from an early age. Thus, in the following paragraph a summary of "the first Chopin pieces played", according to the conversations and memories shared during the talks, were:

- *Waltz in A minor, B. 150, Opus Posthumous*; Hayato (Japan) played at the age 5–6; Evren (USA) at the age of 5 or 6;
- *Waltz op.64 in A flat major* – Martín (he started playing at the age 5);
- *Waltz in E flat Major Op.18 ("Grande Valse Brillante")* – Talon (USA) (very young);
- *Easier etudes, Op.25 No.2* – Yuchong (young);
- *Mazurka in F Major* – Kyohei (Japan) played at age 8–9;
- *4th Prelude in E minor* – Leonardo (Italy) at the age of 8;
- *Etude op.10 No.4 C sharp minor* – Hyuk (China) at the age of 9-10;
- *Bolero* – Leonora (9 years old);
- *Waltz in A flat Major (Op.42)* – Yutong (China) (young);
- *Fantasy impromptu (Op.66)* – Andrey, played at the age of 12-14;
- Polonaise and Mazurka – Miyu (Japan)
- Waltzes and Nocturnes – Victoria (Canada).

Some of the pianists even remembered specific *emotions* connected to their playing of particular music pieces by Chopin, e.g. "My first piece was a Chopin waltz – the first time I *cried* when I played, it was a very special experience, the music is so touching" – Yeon-Min (Korean, speaks in English, she played as early as 8 years old). By dancing at a very young age to Classical music in the streets and in the playground, according to his mother's testimonies, Hyuk (Korean), explains that "his mother noticed his love for music and took him to the local music academy". However, there are those who only have memories of themselves through the medium of images, such as photos taken in their childhood, e.g. Marta (Poland), believes that the first time she heard Chopin's music was when Kristian Zimmerman had a tour and played at the Embassy of Poland in Japan, as she has a picture with the pianist.

Competitor Lingfei (Stephan), listened to Chopin's music first before he had a chance to play it. He believes it was a birthday present CD from his grandfather, with the performance of all nocturnes from the Chinese pianist Fu Zon, that made him "immediately drawn by the poetic and the amazing effects of Chopin's music". Another particular memory or belief is about the impression of first contact with Chopin's music was from the opportunity to have music score books, as Andrey (Russia), evokes his memories. After a competition in Poland at the age of 7, he "bought 3 books of Chopin's music, that he couldn't play at that time, but it was very important for him".

Interesting memory, that includes an introduction to Classical music through another type of media, was through an animated film or cartoon:

“The first time I heard about Chopin(s) music was actually in (the) cartoon “Tom and Jerry”, they have a lot of wonderful classical pieces, this was when I heard the music for the first time and later in life I realised – this is this, that is that – and I started to discover more and more depth in the Chopin music.” – Xuanyi (China) [spoke in Mandarin – consecutive English translation].

Musical achievement, according to (Knott, 2018: 54) “develops in response to more than parental and teacher impetus and that of the triangular *parent-teacher-pupil* relationship”. This report should be “flexible to allow for students’ extra-curricular circumstances” (Ibid). As in this research study, we learn that the connection to their parents and other family members as *musicians*, and other music students and teachers, had a significant influence on these young professional pianists. Their memories connected to classical music and Chopin's music include the following:

- 1) *“I was very young, about 7 or 8 years old, when my mom used to play a lot of classical music to me, and one of them was Chopin. And I remember how I liked the melody, I found it very beautiful and this is how I got in contact with Chopin and liked it even more”* (Hao, Chinese, spoke in Mandarin – consecutive English translation).
- 2) [Paraphrased] Five or six years old, studying in a local piano program, in the home town of Minneapolis. “A – minor Waltz” opus posthumous “he learned it – although told not to at that time – as an act of rebellion” (Evren, American).

In pedagogical theory, parental involvement is viewed as “a combination of commitment and active participation in children’s education” (Slijepčević et al., 2022: 1) in correlation with their (current or future) motivation, academic achievements and self-efficacy, as well as their social development. In terms of participation at The Chopin’s competition, the majority of these pianists were accompanied to Poland by their family members (mother, brother, etc.).

In their early childhood, these young pianists were usually very supported in their musical education by their family members (as professional musicians, or non-musicians) through early cultivation of the love for music, exposure to various instruments, encouragement in music participation, consistent good practice of habits formation, attendance in concerts, recitals, and performances, collaboration with educators to understand their child’s progress, to provide a good home learning environment, recognizing the importance of language and music education, investing their resources (time, effort, etc.), and finally, celebrating their achievements, and accomplishments.

Although presented two decades ago, a model demonstrating the interaction of human variables in music education (instrumental teaching), by Creech and Hallam (Knott, 2018: 58), may still be applicable today. The *outcomes of musical achievement*, enjoyment of music, professional and personal satisfaction, interpersonal growth and information sharing, are all dependent on the student’s age, personality, attitudes, values, role expectations and ecological transitions, as well as the interpersonal relationships between the learner, teacher and parent. As the two foundation pillars supporting the educational process, usually are, the *teacher*, with their specific professional characteristics and the concept of effective learning and teaching, and the *parents*, with their parenting styles, and their personalities, attitudes, values, resources, socioeconomic position, etc.

According to the participants, their parents usually provided time and care in listening to Chopin's music at home through different digital media (CDs, DVDs⁵), specifically through following “The Chopin's Competition” official TV broadcasts in 2010, 2015, 2019, and later social media sites. For example, Evren Ozel (USA) speaks

⁵ e.g. Chopin CDs (Arseni, Russian/speaking in English; “Parents, especially his Mom, liked the playing of Don Tayson’s and bought many CDs. (...)” (Viet Trung Nguyen, Polish/Vietnamese speaking in English)

about his *family of music lovers*, watching together and picking his favourite players and pieces, specifically the importance of watching the competition in 2010, when he was 11 years old, and when he wrote out a list of pieces that he would perform one day, although as seen now, “not according to the requirements”. In addition, Việt (Vietnamese–Polish), remembers that his parents, especially his mother, liked playing the CDs of Don Tayson’s performances, and he from the age of five/six had the opportunity to listen to these historical 1980s performances of Chopin’s music. His interest in participating in *The Chopin Piano Competition* was born at this early age and career stage in learning music. This was also the case for many pianists to describe this opportunity to perform at the stage of *The Chopin Competition* as “a close or distant dream, one that came true” (e.g. Hao, Arseni, and Andrey). The role of parental education by non-musicians, had also a deep educational influence on pianists Ziji Zoé, Sohgo and Talon:

1. “My parents love classical music and we have lots of CDs and DVDs. CDs of Rubinstein were my first impression of Chopin’s music. And my first Chopin piece was probably a waltz.” – Ziji Zoé (China)
2. “My mother loved Chopin very much. Her email address also includes Chopin. She always played Chopin in (the) car and in (at) home, and it [the music of Chopin] was (a) constant presence in my life.” – Sohgo (Japan)
3. “When I was very young my parents would often play classical music tapes, (and) recordings, on the TV. So, I grew up listening to this sort of thing, a lot. I think the first piece by Chopin I remember hearing specifically was the Waltz in E flat Major the Op. 18. I remember, it was a very striking rhythmic upbeat, sort of mood that this piece conveyed. And I remember noting that it was written by Frederic Chopin.” – Talon (USA).

The International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition is for the majority of pianists “a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity”, as it is happening every five years, the next being held in 2025⁶. For some pianists, it was a second chance, for example, Leonora, explains that this was her second time at the competition, in the 2010 edition, she was 18 at that time, “a child”, and now this time “it is like riding a bike, you know how to ride it but it is not the same, you are riding in different places. After 11 years you are more mature, exploring deeper into emotions, phrasing – you want to play naturally, but thoughtfully”.

The identity structure, according to Forbes et al. (2024: 2), is “regulated by two universal processes that operate at the intra-psychic, interpersonal, and societal levels”. The first process is accommodation–assimilation, “new identity information is absorbed and adjustments are made”, for example, “during the COVID-19 pandemic, some musicians took on different types of work requiring the assimilation and accommodation of new elements of the identity structure”. The second process is evaluation, giving “meaning and value for the individual of identity components”.

Emotions experienced within different performance situations (concerts, competitions, etc.), can particularly be stressful, including a sense of stage fright, or music performance anxiety. Thus, what were the pre-pandemic and during-pandemic experiences like, in terms of relocation, physical isolation, preparation, study, reading, self-realization, performances (online and in front of an audience), and wellbeing for these pianists. For example, Arseni (Russia), talks about his relocation from New York to his hometown St. Petersburg, and having online lessons with his professor in America. The *inability to perform live* as much as wished, and on the other hand, a lot of *time available for listening and rethinking*, resulting in the sense of competition preparations being characterized as “an interesting experience”. Furthermore, in analyzing the pros and cons, Việt (Vietnam–Poland), explains that “the sense of uncertainty was present because the competition was postponed, resulting positively

⁶ Due to a pandemic in 2020 the competition was postponed for a year.

in an additional year for preparation”. However, the pandemic affected the number of possibilities to perform in live concerts, but offered more time “to do research (about his life, to spend time with Chopin). To mentally prepare”. One of the youngest competitors in this competition, Hao (China), shared that at the beginning of the pandemic, it was “very challenging”, as many planned concerts were cancelled. In the first half of the pandemic, he played at home and tried online concerts, after which the situation was much better in China and they were able to get back to performing live and get the real experience.

“The professional performer’s concept of practice is somewhat more detailed than our everyday notion of it. The goal of practice is not merely to learn a piece of music but to develop complex mental and physical adaptations that, in turn, enable successful long-term skill building. This is because it is only through performances that the musician can contribute to developing more nuanced musical expressions and by that giving the listeners opportunities for many-faceted musical experiences” (Dahl, 2017: 3).

For Huanyi (China), as she explains in her mother tongue, it was “challenging”, and she practiced at home, and many concerts were cancelled. But she was able “to sit down and explore and research Chopin’s music and select pieces and practice the pieces for her repertoire”. In terms of repertoire, Evren (USA), kept the same repertoire, the same he played at the US Chopin competition, practicing in online lessons with his teacher for most of the year. Unfortunately, he lacked the opportunity to play live concerts in that period due to the pandemic, he played only concerts for family and friends. For these young musicians, it is common that they share a vision of bringing happiness, satisfaction, and joy to the audience in both on-site and online environments. Therefore, by “gaining pleasure and avoiding negative effects” (Sulis, 2021: 2) regulating social anxiety” in public performances, their wellbeing was well balanced.

“We were all focused on uncertainty in the world. I decided to change my repertoire, change my concerto. I was doing No. 1 and I changed to No. 2. And I also changed my polonaises, my waltz, (and) I decided to do a different repertoire. So it could still feel fresh, but at the same time learn more about Chopin's music. It's been a very interesting, growing experience to be just at home with my thoughts. Of Course, there were other projects that were postponed, and postponed and again and again and eventually happened and then others got cancelled, and it was a very interesting experience and definitely I've tried to get something positive from it.” – Federico (Italy–Switzerland).

Việt, born in Vietnam, moved to Poland when he was 9 months old. He shares his thoughts on the importance of this piano competition to the Polish people: *“It’s a big dream for Polish People! Even I experienced that feeling when in 2005 Rafał Blechacz won the competition, I remember the atmosphere. It was so electric! I was nine years old, so it was also the beginning of my dream to perform, to take part in this competition...(...)”*. About the Polish national pride, Zuzanna (Poland) testimonies that:

“When you are Polish you are kind of born with Chopin in your veins. Of course, I was introduced to Chopin(’s) music by my teacher in school when I was 8 or 9, but my parents are also musicians, that's also why I was always surrounded by Chopin's music. (...) Chopin competition was always here for me from the age of 3, it was always live streamed through television. My teacher in school made me participate as well as my parents, as I already participated when I was 18. ...It is not obligatory, but a great opportunity.”

The encouragement of the *teacher* was also very important for Hao (China), as he knew from a very young age about the competition, but “it was always a very distant dream for him”, until 2019 when his teachers encouraged

him to participate and “it was a dream coming true”. From the framework of social cognitive theory, *self-observation*, *self-judgement*, and *self-reaction* as subprocesses of *self-regulated learning* are interdependent and influenced by environmental factors (dos Santos Silva & Marinho, 2024). Self-regulated learning is defined as “the degree to which students are “metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their learning process” (Peistaraitė and Clark 2020). When aiming to learn and perform music effectively, learners usually set their goals by planning future events (daily practice, recitals, exams), enabling mastery of musical challenges (dos Santos Silva & Marinho, 2024).

The environment is crucially connected to and shapes health or artistic outcomes (relational), while the “individual or population perception of key concepts, such as what is *good health* or *good music*” (an aesthetic perception), and “both health and artistic states unfold in time within the context of people’s lived experience” (temporal element) (Sheppard & Broughton, 2020: 2). In this paper, we approach wellbeing, as a multidimensional construct, is a crucial aspect of health, according to Sheppard & Broughton (2020), where performing arts and healthcare through their practices share relational, aesthetic, and temporal features.

Classical music and Chopin’s music had a strong influence in the overall music education of these young pianists from an early age, as early as 5 to 9 years of age, when some of these pianists remember watching the competition and setting their highest goals of participating in the competition in the future. Music pieces played, or listened to, in early childhood (parents/teachers/students as pianists), had a great influence on their understanding of the language of music, experiencing deeper emotions and broadening their musical knowledge.

Reading Chopin's letters (even in Polish) and notes, as well as books about Chopin (e.g. Việt (Vietnam–Poland); Kyohei – Japan; Sohgo – Japan), then, *visiting and admiring the historical places connected to the life of Frederic Chopin* (Victoria – Canada, Shunshun – China), or even *moving for studies in Poland* (Kyohei – Japan) was highly motivating for further professional artistic development. Aimi (Japan), explains her personality as an introvert, and how it is important to understand the personality of Chopin, who communicated through his music or his writings, in terms of expressing his thoughts in an intimate form of a diary: “He wrote a diary a lot. Expresses his feelings in the music a lot – instead of talking to people.”

“Not all kinds of musical knowledge are possible to express in a language regardless of the many theories and metaphors available” (Dahl, 2017: 9).

Critical thinking refers to abilities of a person to think carefully and rationally, identifying issues, assumptions, and relationships, reaching thoughtful conclusions about what to believe and what to do (Okićić, 2024: 12). Digital and social media are a very important part of the lives of these young pianists, for presentation of their work to broader audiences (Alberto – Italy, Leonardo – Italy), but also for sharing personal views on music performances and music in general.

According to Dahl (2017: 65), “communication is bound to human activity”, and as the three main elements in the chain of music communication (i.e. Composer — notation — Performer — instrument — sound — Listener), it is “important to focus on the three human elements”, where they each have their ideas and knowledge of music: the composer – “the idea of a musical work” written in notation, the performer – “the way of interpreting a musical work” though reading and understanding the notation, and the listener – “the way of experiencing a musical work”, expressed through a *discourse*. Furthermore, the process of reading the notation and generating the interpretation is constructed based on the performer’s horizon of knowledge and performance skills (Dahl, 2017: 66).

López-Íñiguez and Bennett (2019: 10) note that “genre discourses have a significant influence on ‘musicians’ self-perceptions and attitudes towards music learning and teaching in higher education’. In answering the interviewer's question: “How do you approach the keyboard when playing Chopin as a pianist? Starting with Nguyen, because he lives and studies in Poland, (and) speaks Polish “like a Pol”, Nguyen, recognizes *the*

importance of knowing the native language (Polish) of the composer, the inflexion of the language as something that does help him when he plays music of Chopin. – “It really helps to read his letters. That’s the biggest difference, you can understand him better when knowing his language. (...)” – When playing Chopin he explains that he also tries to follow his heart and intuition. Grateful to his wonderful teachers for helping and guiding him through their experiences, and in searching for “the right sound in Chopin’s music”. The music of Chopin is, according to Marta (Japan-Poland):

“I also heard once Eco Endo explaining this very beautifully. The music of Chopin is like, to say it in Japanese: MONO-NOARA there is this hidden beauty that disappears in a short time. In Polish we also use the word ŻAL, it also there is this graceful elegance in his music.”

According to Dahl (2017: 26), “the link between content and context in a tradition is also the crucial momentum in establishing a genre (within a tradition)”. The pianist Ziji Zoé (China), explains *the need to understand the meaning of new vocabulary* – the word *mazurka*, and the importance of knowledge in different cultures, and researching in the learning process in playing, e.g. mazurkas:

“Researching history of the different form(s) of the music. Like when I was young, I never heard about this word, because I’m Chinese, and in our culture, we don’t dance mazurkas. So, I have to search it online to see what’s the history of it and looking for some videos of people dancing, really dancing mazurkas and also try to find some good recordings from the pianists and also from the other instrument just to feel this feelings of this special dance, so like (the) polonaise and everything else. (...)”

Their motivation for experiencing and learning, not only music but also languages and other subjects (e.g. medicine – Sohgo from Japan), in the context of psychological wellbeing was evident. *Music and languages* are essential parts of their lives (wellbeing) and education before, during and after the pandemic, in terms of learning and communication:

- 1) reading and doing research on Chopin and his life,
- 2) listening to music playing CDs and DVDs, or watching TV broadcasts and documentaries from the Chopin competition,
- 3) having online classes and recitals, and
- 4) having social media profiles for engaging their audience, communicating in different languages, etc.

The importance of cultural knowledge and cultural connections was also very important in the lives of these young pianists. Marta (Poland), grew up in Japan and participated in many activities of the Polish embassy in Japan. She is a speaker of Japanese, Polish and English.

“I’m not sure that I’m in the position to say in the name of all Japanese friends and pianists, Chopin music lovers, but I heard once Michia Koyama, she explained, answered very nicely this question, that in Japanese culture there is a cherry blossom season, which is like cherry symbolize total perfection and also, you know the flower is beautiful. The season is very short, so this feeling of this beauty that vanishes in two weeks, gives you the thought of time passing and beauty that disappears. In Japanese culture, in general, the beauty that is hidden is more appreciated than (the) beauty that is in the first row. And I think something like that you can also see in Chopin’s music, that his music is more hidden and nostalgic, for his memories of Poland when he was composing it, a little bit sad. I think all these feelings and emotions that are hidden in Chopin’s music are very close to the Japanese idea of the aesthetic of beauty and maybe that’s why Chopin’s music connects so well Polish and Japanese listeners...” (Marta – Poland).

A group of authors Martínez-Castilla et al (2021: 4) in their research notice that “perceived wellbeing through music performance or music listening is also positively related to individuals’ ratings of music’s importance in their lives” where lower emotional stability may be related to an emotional use of music, while the “music’s importance is associated to perceived wellbeing through musical behavior”. To some extent, this research paper analyses the emerging trends in the classical music industry, as it examines wellbeing in connection to entrepreneurial skills, “language use in career preparation, sustainability and development beyond musical abilities” (Sigler, 2021: ii).

As Sulis et al. (2021) notice, defining wellbeing can be very challenging, as it is regarded as “a multidimensional, dynamic, and context-dependent construct”, the term “linguistic wellbeing” would be referred to as “a complex, multidimensional and dynamic system of developing, perfecting and strengthening skills of caring, but also of responsibility for linguistic knowledge and use of language(s) in learning, education and different interactions between one’s experiences across all life domains.” In terms of wellbeing, according to Sheppard & Broughton (2020: 14), notes that “childhood and adulthood are critical periods of life in which to establish participation in activities that are going to assist people to maintain their wellbeing and health into old age”. The professional pianists and participants as narrators in the “Chopin Talks” were between 17 and 30 of age, students of music faculties and conservatories of music, pursuing academic degrees, graduates and early career professional piano teachers working in the field of higher education. In terms of lifestyles, pianists during the pandemic and physical isolation had the opportunity for deeper self-realization and self-reflection, in terms of wellbeing learning something new was both exciting and challenging, they practiced, apart from playing the piano, focusing on good nutrition, having hobbies, being physically active (chess – Hyuk, jogging – Zixi, etc.), doing different activities, playing music instruments, focusing on their language development and music repertoire, but also studying other subjects apart from music, and finally, having regular lessons and public performances live or online (solo, with an orchestra, or without), depending on the pandemic measures and recommendations.

Final remarks

“Music education is comparable to learning a second language, which is also known for its non-lingual effects” (Werner, 2007: 21).

Classical music professionals through their educational journeys acquire language skills at the proficiency level in one or more languages other than their native or mother tongue. This article focused on the pedagogical interconnectedness of language, music and digital media in the growth of young professional pianists’ musicianship and preparedness for “The 18th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition” (2021). The gathered data included 10 live-streamed interviews in the form of a video podcast (total of over two hundred minutes), entitled “Chopin Talk”, published on the “Chopin Institute” YouTube channel.

“Convictions are not about whether something is objectively true, but whether we believe it to be so, and the degree of certainty that we have about this belief” (Kalajdžisalihović & Mulalić, 2024: 108).

The “Chopin Talks” represented a valuable resource of personal narratives of 34 interviewed young international pianists and competitors, as inserts from their life stories and testimonials of their music and linguistic educational beliefs. Stories are viewed as an important medium in constructing beliefs about how these young human beings perceive their placement in the world, as well as their inner and outer landscapes of past, present and future interactions with languages, cultures, and music art.

Consecutive translation interaction was also present in the video recordings when pianists preferred to use their mother tongue for better communication (e.g. Chinese). Therefore, in this research, the method of

qualitative analyses of spoken discourse, or narrative in English was applied. The interconnectedness of the role of language, classical and Chopin's music, as well as the role of digital media in their education and lives as pianists, were identified and analyzed. The techniques included: 1) notetaking of specific information, 2) transcription and paraphrasing of English language discourse, 3) coding of the information included from the interviews into the following categories: a) general information, b) languages of communication in the interview, c) role of classical music and Chopin's music in music education, career and participation in the competition, d) role of digital and social media in communication and education, e) lifestyles in the pre-pandemic and pandemic time issues of relocation, physical isolation (wellbeing).

Classical music and Chopin's music had a strong influence on the overall music education of these young pianists from an early age when some of these pianists remember watching the competition and setting their highest goals of participating in the future. Music pieces played or listened to in early childhood (parents/teachers/students as pianists), had a great influence on their understanding of the language of music, experiencing deeper emotions and broadening their musical knowledge. Reading Chopin's letters (for some even in Polish) and visiting places connected to the life of F. Chopin, or even moving to study in Poland, was motivating for further professional development.

"Chopin likes to use our instruments like a human voice. Phrasing is so long, and it is without breath-taking. Melody is very important. It must be perfect legato and cantabile. Spirit of the nation, we have to sing it like proud people." – Ziji Zoé (China).

Digital and social media were very important parts in the lives of these young pianists, for the presentation of their work to broader audiences, and for sharing personal views on music performances and music in general. Furthermore, technology had an essential part in their lives (wellbeing) and education before, during and after the pandemic, in terms of *learning experiences* and *communication* (e.g. reading and doing research on Chopin and his life, listening to music, playing music, watching TV broadcast and documentaries from the Chopin competition, online classes and recitals, promotion and engagement through social media profiles, communication in different languages).

In terms of lifestyles, pianists during the pandemic and physical isolation had the opportunity for deeper self-realization and self-reflection, learning something new was both exciting and challenging, they practiced, apart from playing the piano, focusing on good nutrition, having hobbies, being physically active, doing different arts, playing music instruments, focusing on their language development and music repertoire, but also studying other subjects apart from music (e.g. medicine), and finally, having regular lessons and public performances live or online (solo, with an orchestra, or without), depending on the pandemic measures and recommendations.

It is important to acknowledge the study's limitations as the sample was deliberately *narrow* in scope, consisting of young musicians, interviewees of the "Chopin Talk", who had studied piano, and are developing their international soloist career through participating in the most famous international piano competition dedicated to the music of F. Chopin. The limitations of the study are in terms of the *number of participants*, and the *diversity of questions* within the interviews, therefore, not all the participants had the opportunity to equally answer and discuss the particular topic or theme in the interview. In conclusion, the results, cannot be generalized, they offer an important insight into many different themes and topics subjective to further research. Future studies might replicate the research with other young professional musicians and professionals in the field of music education, or through longitudinal studies follow the musicians' career development paths, focusing more in-depth on the language education processes within. Thus, after fostering changes or "shifts in learners' beliefs and practices towards music", learners become more "autonomous, motivated and skillful agents of learning" (López-Iñiguez & Bennett, 2019: 10).

As Barcelos (2024: 101) notes, “as for the methodological implications, being aware of all these factors may help researchers in designing their studies and choosing adequate and suitable methodologies for this complex relationship”, and for the educators, implication needed includes attending to the diversity of these young pianists as musicians by “supporting their personalized learning” (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2019: 10). In conclusion, this research paper may be useful to language teachers, educators and all included in the higher education work with musicians as young professionals, those actively included in the designing of learning and teaching curricula, and the preparation of students in a music career (student mobility, digitization, linguistic education and health and wellbeing) (Bartleet et al., 2019).

The findings obtained from the research presented in this paper, suggest that parental and teacher support for their children’s or student’s interests have an important role in linguistic and music education and professional development. As in research by Knott (2018: 55), “most parents seemed to have an interest in music and performing rather than expertise per se”. In the story narratives, parents were in majority of cases non-musicians, while there were those parents who were role models as amateur or professional pianists in the educational upbringing of these young musicians and professionals.

The academic and artistic research opportunities, mobility for studies, and encounters with new or different languages and cultures, may have a positive impact on motivation for learning, and further personal development as professionals. Languages, music and media may have had a positive impact on the wellbeing of young professional pianists’ and their preparedness for competition in the pandemic period of uncertainties.

In terms of linguistic wellbeing, these young professional pianists recognize the importance of knowing *the native language (Polish) of the composer, the inflexion of the language as something that does help when playing music of Chopin*. Furthermore, the need-to-know foreign languages in order *to understand the meaning of new vocabulary*, from a different culture as well. They recognize the importance of language education for further learning, studying and professional development and communication in international events, building relationships and personal career growth. Therefore, in the following period, the aim is to further research the intersections of language, media and the role of music on personal linguistic wellbeing and wellbeing perceived through musical behavior (music performance and/or music listening), in different arts-oriented contexts of education and living of young musicians, by involving the teachers and learners in further discussion on this topic.

Acknowledgements

We thank the musicians who participated and shared their learning and professional experiences in the “Chopin Talk” session interviews, and, to the *Chopin Institute* for providing the live streaming and open access to the recordings, important for data gathering of professional career narratives, important for this research.

References

- Barcelos, A.M.F. (2024). The relationship between beliefs and practice in language teaching education, *Educational Role of Language*, 11: 93-104. <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.01.08>.
- Bartleet, B-L., Ballico, C., Bennett, D., Bridgstock, R., Draper, P., Tomlinson, V., Harrison, S. (2019). Building sustainable portfolio careers in music: insights and implications for higher education. *Music Education Research*, 21(3): 282-294. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2019.1598348>.
- Cintron, P.A. (2022). *Frederic Chopin’s Life and Works and its Influence on Applied Piano Teaching*, A Doctoral Dissertation, Liberty University School of Music, Lynchburg, Virginia.
- Dahl, P. (2017). The Rise and Fall of Literacy in Classical Music. In *Music and Knowledge: A Performer’s Perspective* (pp. 25-38). Brill. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv2gix0b4.7>.
- Daszkiewicz, M. (2024). Introduction: Verbalising the un-verbalised, *Educational Role of Language*, 11: 4-5.

- dos Santos Silva, C., Marinho, H. (2024). Self-regulated learning processes of advanced musicians: A PRISMA review. *Musicae Scientiae*, 0(0): 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10298649241275614>.
- Fisher, L., Evans, M., Forbes, K., Gayton, A., Liu, Y. (2018). Participative multilingual identity construction in the languages classroom: a multi-theoretical conceptualisation. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 17(4): 448-466. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2018.1524896>
- Forbes, M., Goopy, J. Krause, A. E. (2024). Becoming singular: Musical identity construction and maintenance through the lens of identity process theory. *Psychology of Music*, 0(0): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03057356241267863>.
- Graham, S. (2022). Self-efficacy and language learning – what it is and what it isn't. *The Language Learning Journal*, 50(2): 186-207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2022.2045679>.
- Kalajdžisalihović, N., Mulalić, L. (2024). Stories we live and die by: 'salience' and 'conviction' in nature writing. *Educational Role of Language Journal*, 1(11): 105-116. <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.01.09>.
- Knott, E. (2018). How Important is Parental Involvement in A Child's Musical Education for the Achievement of Musical Success? *Durham University Undergraduate Research in Music & Science (DURMS)*, 1: 54-61. doi
- López-Íñiguez, G., Bennett, D. (2019). A lifespan perspective on multi-professional musicians: does music education prepare classical musicians for their careers? *Music Education Research*, 22(1): 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2019.1703925>.
- Martínez-Castilla, P., Gutiérrez-Blasco, I.M., Spitz, D.H., Granot, R. (2021). The Efficacy of Music for Emotional Wellbeing During the COVID-19 Lockdown in Spain: An Analysis of Personal and Context-Related Variables. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12: 647837. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.647837.
- McPherson, G. (2005). From child to musician: skill development during the beginning stages of learning an instrument. *Psychology of Music*, 33(1): 5-35.
- Okičić, M. (2024). Challenges in teaching Academic English to EFL students: a case study on writing beliefs, *Educational Role of Language*, 11: 6-17. <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.01.01>
- Peistaraite, U., Clark, T. (2020) Emotion Regulation Processes Can Benefit Self-Regulated Learning in Classical Musicians. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11: 568760. 1-16. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.568760.
- Sheppard, A., Broughton, M. C. (2020). Promoting wellbeing and health through active participation in music and dance: a systematic review, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 15:1, 1732526, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2020.1732526>.
- Sigler, S.Z. (2021). *A Survey of Literature on Entrepreneurial Experiences for Classical Musicians: Implications for Training Pianists*. Doctoral Dissertation, Ohio State University.
- Slijepčević, S., Zuković, S. Stojadinović, D. (2022). Roditeljska uključenost u obrazovanje dece tokom pandemije virusa korona. *Inovacije u nastavi*, 35(2): 56-70. – [Extended summary] Parental Involvement in Their Children's Education during Covid-19 Pandemic. *Teaching Innovations*, 35(2): 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.5937/inovacije2202056S>.
- Sulis, G., Mercer, S., Mairitsch, A., Babic, S., Shin, S. (2021). Pre-service language teacher wellbeing as a complex dynamic system, *System*, 103: 102642. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102642>.
- Werner, F. (2007). *Literature Study Preparing Young Musicians For Professional Training: What Does Scientific Research Tell Us?* Association Européenne des Conservatoires, AEC PUBLICATIONS.

Appendix 1 - The list of podcast/vodcast video interviews titled "Chopin Talk" (2021)

Chopin Talk (Chopin Institute YouTube) Playlist (222 min)

DAY 1, 18th Chopin Competition – CHOPIN TALK (MAO, MUN, TRUNG NGUYEN, OZEL, RAO), October 4th, 1st session broadcast, 23:56

DAY 1, 18th Chopin Competition – CHOPIN TALK (YEON-MIN PARK, LEONARDO PIERDOMENICO, SOGHO SAWADA), October 4th, 2nd session broadcast, 18:32

DAY 2, 18th Chopin Competition – CHOPIN TALK (PIETRZAK, SHINDO, SMITH, SORITA, SUMINO, SUN), October 5th, 1st session broadcast, 37:52

DAY 2, 18th Chopin Competition – CHOPIN TALK (TIE, TUAN, V. WONG, WU, XIE), October 5th, 2nd session broadcast, 36:13

DAY 3, 18th Chopin Competition – CHOPIN TALK (LEONORA ARMELLINI, ZIJI ZOÉ ZHAO, ANDREY ZENIN), October 6th, 1st session broadcast, 28:21

DAY 3, 18th Chopin Competition – CHOPIN TALK (FEDERICO GAD CREMA, ALEKSANDER GADJIEV, ZIXI CHEN), October 6th, 2nd session broadcast, 25:12

DAY 4, 18th Chopin Competition – CHOPIN TALK (ALBERTO FERRO, MARTÍN GARCÍA GARCÍA), October 7th, 1st session broadcast, 23:09

DAY 4, 18th Chopin Competition – CHOPIN TALK (EVA GEVORGYAN, CHELSEA GUO, ERIC GUO, YIFAN HOU) October 7th, 2nd session broadcast, 22:40

DAY 6, 18th Chopin Competition – CHOPIN TALK (AIMI KOBAYASHI, MARTA KARSZ), October 9, 1st session broadcast), 20:00

DAY 6, 18th Chopin Competition – CHOPIN TALK (HYUK LEE), October 9, 2nd session broadcast), 13:33

Appendix 2 - The list of interviewees in the videos titled “Chopin Talk” (2021)

	<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>g.</i>	<i>Languages</i>	<i>Countries</i>
1	Aimi	(26)	f	Japanese, English	Japan
2	Alberto	(25)	m	Italian, English	Italy (Sicily), USA, Italy
3	Alexander	26	m	Italian, English (German)	Italy, Germany (Berlin)
4	Andrey	(24)	m	Russian, English, (Polish)	Russia
5	Arsenii	(22)	m	Russian, English	Russia
6	Chelsea	19	f	English	USA (New York)
7	Eric	19	m	English	Canada (Toronto)
8	Eva	17	f	Russian, English	Russia (Moscow)
9	Evren	(21)	m	English	USA
10	Federico	22	m	Italian, English	Italy–Switzerland (Geneva)
11	Hao	17	m	Mandarin	China (Xinghai)
12	Hayato	(26)	m	Japanese, English	Japan (Tokio)
13	Hyuk	(21)	m	Korean, English, (German), Russian, Polish	Korea–Russia–Germany
14	Kyohei	(27)	m	Japanese, English, (Russian), (Polish),	Japan–Russia, Russia, studied Moscow Conservatory - Poland (Warsaw)
15	Leonardo	(29)	m	Italian, English	Italy
16	Leonora	(29)	f	Italian, English	Italy (Padova), Germany, Italy
17	Lingfei (Stephan)	(20)	m	English	China–Canada (presenting both)
18	Marta	-	f	Polish, Japanese, English	Poland–Japan–Poland
19	Martín	(25)	m	Spanish, English	Spain, USA (New York), Spain
20	Miyu	19	f	Japanese, English, (Russian)	Japan (Russia, studied Moscow Conservatory)
21	Sarah	(19)	f	English	USA
22	Shunshun	(21)	m	Mandarin, English	China
23	Sohgo	(23)	m	Japanese, English	Japan

2 4	Talon	(19)	m	English	USA
2 5	Victoria	(24)	f	English	Canada
2 6	Việt	(25)	m	English, Polish, Vietnamese	Vietnam–Poland
2 7	Xuanyi	(26)	f	Mandarin	China
2 8	Yeonmin	(31)	f	Korean, English	South Korea–Germany (Hanover)
2 9	Yifan	17	m	Mandarin (English)	China
3 0	Yuchong	(26)	m	Mandarin, English	China
31	Yutong	(26)	m	Mandarin, English	China, USA (Boston) – studying
32	Ziji Zoé	(22)	f	Mandarin, English (Germany)	China (Beijing), Germany (Hanover)
33	Zixi	18	m	Mandarin, English	China (Shanghai)
34	Zuzanna	(24)	f	Polish, German, English	Poland–Germany

Novice teachers' beliefs about teaching academic language with English-speaking and English-learner students

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.05>

Sunny C. Li*, Louise C. Wilkinson**

*Syracuse University, U.S.A.; sli226@syr.edu

**Syracuse University, U.S.A.; lwilkin@syr.edu

The focus of the research project

Despite a growing body of evidence from the research literature focusing on the preparation of teachers who work with diverse learners, there remains a notable gap about teacher beliefs and perceptions for English learner (EL), newcomer, and immigrant students (Blanchard & Muller, 2015; Allexsaht-Snider et al., 2013).

This report describes a work-in-progress regarding novice U.S. teachers' personal knowledge and beliefs about teaching *academic language* to all students, but in particular, English learner (EL) students. The oral and written language used for new learning that cuts across the different academic disciplines has been referenced as *general academic language*, which stands in contrast with the specialized versions of language focusing on the specifics of varied content areas (Nagy & Townsend, 2012; Bailey & Wilkinson, 2022).

This report describes a pilot study in progress that addresses the questions: What personal beliefs do novice U.S. teachers hold about teaching *academic language* for all students, but in particular, EL students? How might these beliefs affect the way that teachers report conducting instructional activities requiring *academic language* in their classrooms that include EL students?

Background and rationale

The academic struggles of EL students include their grappling with learning academic content, and importantly, the instructional language (*academic language*) by which content is taught (e.g., Sigley & Wilkinson, 2015; Monroy Ochoa & Cadeiro-Kaplan, 2004; Young et al., 2012; Yoon, 2023). These academic struggles have been referenced collectively as the *EL Achievement Gap* (Torff & Murphy, 2020). While numerous factors have been identified by prior research as contributing to the *EL Achievement Gap*, one potentially significant factor is teachers' beliefs about best practices in teaching both disciplinary content and *academic language* to EL students.

Teachers' beliefs about EL and immigrant students are critical for their success in school, as negative perceptions can perpetuate societal inequality by lowering expectations for these students, which in turn impacts these students' opportunities to reach the highest levels of academic achievement (Rizzuto, 2017). Thus, Blanchard and Muller (2015) regard teachers as the gatekeepers of the *American Dream* for EL and immigrant students, emphasizing that negative perceptions can lead to lower expectations for these students.

How might this work? Teachers' beliefs about EL and immigrant students are a critical factor in the teaching and learning process. One documented example is that pre-service and novice teachers express beliefs about being unprepared to teach culturally diverse students, associating those students' low achievement with cultural deficit models (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Ready & Wright's (2011) work highlights the findings that some teachers have lowered expectations for EL students, particularly underestimating their academic abilities based on certain characteristics, such as the preferred, or alternative languages that students choose to speak in school.

Prior research has established that teachers' beliefs determine to a significant extent how they conduct their classrooms (Adams et al., 2023; Anders & Evans, 2019; Haukås, 2016; Skott, 2015). Torff & Murphy (2020) references the example of how teachers' beliefs about the rigor of curriculum affect their decisions about the quantity and complexity of work assigned in their classroom to students. Research findings also have established that students typically achieve more when challenged by the curriculum, and that the rigor of the curriculum is a

significant factor impacting achievement gaps among a variety of groups of students (Beard, 2018; Crouch & DeStefano, 2017).

Over the past several years, Torff (2005; 2011) and colleagues pioneered examination of teachers' beliefs about academic rigor in teaching EL students and how these beliefs might contribute to their achievement gap in comparison with English-speaking students. For example, one study (Murphy & Torff, 2019) investigated to what extent teachers underestimated EL students' capacity to do rigorous academic work. The question was whether teachers offered EL students (in comparison with students who speak English as their first language) a less demanding curriculum, including *academic language*, than that required to master the content and attain high achievement. The findings revealed that, overall, teachers held beliefs that EL students would benefit from less rigorous classroom work, implying the acceptability of conducting educational practice with a less rigorous curriculum, including *academic language*, for EL students. Torff and colleagues have referenced this as indicating a *Rigor Gap*, which, in turn, potentially contributes to the *EL Achievement Gap*.

The focus of the initial study

Given the paucity of prior work specifically focused on teachers' beliefs about teaching *academic language* to all students with distinctions for EL students, we decided to explore how beginning teachers think about and approach the teaching of *academic language*, which includes the vocabulary and communication skills students need to succeed in school. The important distinction for the novice teachers in this study is between students who speak English as their first language and those students who are learning English (the language of instruction in most U.S. schools as an additional language---(EL) students. While mastery of *academic language* is a significant factor for all students' school success (Bailey et al., 2021), this is an especially significant for EL students, who do not speak the language of school (English) at home and/or who claim membership from diverse cultural backgrounds involving the use of multiple languages other than the language of instruction which, typically in the U.S., is English.

This pilot study reported here is being conducted with ten novice U.S. teachers, defined as individuals with fewer than three years of teaching experience, who are currently enrolled in a teacher graduate certification program at a private, research university in the North-Eastern United States. The novice teacher-participants complete a semi-structured interview-questionnaire to gather in-depth insights into their beliefs, views and report practices regarding *academic language* instruction in their classrooms. The live interviews address topics such as teachers' definitions of *academic language*, their instructional strategies with students who speak English as their first language and EL students, their perceived challenges, and any support or resources the teachers identified essential for effectively teaching *academic language* to all students.

We expect to find that the novice teachers who value *academic language* instruction are more likely to use specific teaching strategies that support *academic language* learning for all students, including EL students. However, those strategies may differ for instruction with EL students. Factors that could potentially impact how teachers approach the instruction of *academic language* may include the following: teachers' background, preparation, and access to resources such as continuing professional development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that by focusing on novice teachers' beliefs and perspectives, about *academic language*, this pilot study may identify and inform potential avenues of support for teachers in assisting all students, but EL students in particular, to build their *academic language* skills that are essential for academic success. If the results of this study align with prior work (e.g. Torff & Murphy, 2020) that teachers' beliefs, however well-intended, could increase the likelihood of a less rigorous curricula provided for EL students. This process may, in turn, contribute to the *EL Achievement Gap*. The work and interpretations of Torff and colleagues (2020) suggest that by making clearer distinctions between academic and linguistic skills, teachers may be able to re-evaluate

their beliefs about optimal instruction with *academic language* for EL students. Furthermore, professional development opportunities for both novice and experienced teachers can be informed by what's known about belief change in general, belief change among teachers, and teachers' specific beliefs about instruction for EL students. We concur with Torff's conclusion: *Whatever it takes, teachers need to set high academic expectations for students with developing English skills so that the academically rich do not continue to get richer and the poor poorer, purely on the basis of English proficiency* (Torff & Murphy, 2020: 7).

References

- Adams, B., Stevens, E. Y., Dussling, T., Li, S. C. (2023). Emotions, positive comparisons, and unexamined assumptions in novice U.S. teachers' perspectives on English learners" *Journal of World Languages*, 9(3): 482-504. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jwl-2023-0061>.
- Allexsaht-Snider, M., Buxton, C., Harman, R. (2013). Research and praxis on challenging anti-immigration discourses in school and community contexts. *Norteamérica*, 8(2): 191-217.
- Anders, P.L., Evans, K.S. (2019). Relationship between teachers' beliefs and their instructional practice in reading. In R. Garner & P.A. Alexander (eds.), *Beliefs about text and instruction with text* (pp. 137-153). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bailey, A., Maher, C., Wilkinson, L., Nyakoojo, U. (2021). The role of assessment in learning and teaching mathematics with English-speaking and EL students. In D. Varier & S. Nichols (eds.), *American Education Research Association Theory to Practice Series: Educational psychology for teachers and teaching: Teaching on assessment* (pp. 151-172. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing. <https://www.infoagepub.com/products/Teaching-on-Assessment>.
- Bailey, A., Wilkinson, L. C., (2022). Tracing themes in the evolution of the academic language construct: A review and re-conceptualization. *Linguistics and Education*, 71: 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2022.101063>.
- Beard, K.S. (2018). Standing in the gap: Theory and practice impacting educational opportunity and achievement gaps. *Urban Education*, 53(5): 668-696.
- Blanchard, S., Muller, C. (2015). Gatekeepers of the American dream: How teachers' perceptions shape the academic outcomes of immigrant and language-minority students. *Social Science Research*, 51: 262-275.
- Crouch, L., DeStefano, J. (2017). Doing reform differently: Combining rigor and practicality in implementation and evaluation of system reforms (*International development group working paper No. 2017-01*). Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International.
- Haukås, Å. (2016). Teachers' beliefs about multilingualism and a multilingual pedagogical approach. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 13(1): 1-18.
- Monroy Ochoa, A., Cadiero-Kaplan, K. (2004). Towards promoting biliteracy and academic achievement: Educational programs for high school Latino English learners. *The High School Journal*, 87(3): 27-43.
- Murphy, A.F., Torff, B. (2019). Teachers' beliefs about rigor of curriculum for English learners. *The Educational Forum*, 83(1): 90-101.
- Nagy, W., Townsend, D. (2012) Words as tools: Learning academic vocabulary as language acquisition, *Reading Research Quarterly*, 47(1): 91-108.
- Nieto, S., Bode, P. (2012). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education*. London: Pearson.
- Ready, D. D., White, D. L. (2011). Accuracy and inaccuracy in teachers' perceptions of young children's cognitive abilities: The role of child background and classroom context. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(2): 335-360.
- Rizzuto, K. (2017). Teachers' Perceptions of ELL Students: Do their attitudes shape their instruction? *The Teacher Educator*, 52(3): 182-202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08878730.2017.1296912>.

- Sigley, R., Wilkinson, L. C. (2015). Ariel's cycles of algebraic problem solving: An adolescent acquires the mathematics register. *The Journal of Mathematical Behavior*, 40: 75-87. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jmathb.2015.03.001>.
- Skott, J. (2015). The promises, problems, and prospects of research on teachers' beliefs. In H. Fives & M.G. Gill (eds.), *International handbook of research on teachers' beliefs* (pp. 13-30). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Torff, B. (2005). Developmental changes in teachers' beliefs about critical- thinking activities. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97: 13-22.
- Torff, B. (2011). Teacher beliefs shape learning for all students. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 93(3): 21-23.
- Torff, B., Murphy, A. F. (2020). Teachers' beliefs about English learners: Adding linguistic support to enhance academic rigor. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 101(5): 14-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721720903822>.
- Yoon, B. (2023). Research synthesis on culturally and linguistically responsive teaching for multilingual learners. *Education Sciences*, 13(6): 557. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13060557>
- Young, J.W., Lakin, J., Courtney, R., Martiniello, M., Adler, R., Blood, I., Burrus, J., DiCrecchio, N., Elliott, D., Miller, S. (2012). *Advancing the quality and equity of education for Latino students: A White Paper* (ETS Research Report Series). Princeton, NJ: ETS.

Rethinking incentives: how to bolster the motivation of students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders in heritage language education

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.06>

Gisi Cannizzaro*, Renata Emilsson Peskova**

*Heritage Language Education Network, Netherlands; hlenet.org@gmail.com

**University of Iceland, Iceland; renata@hi.is

FOHLC Europe (n.d.) is a collaboration between several groups involved with heritage language (HL) education. It organizes an annual conference and regular online gatherings for HL teachers, managers, and coalition leaders in Europe. The goal is to provide a platform for exchanging ideas, improving HL education quality, and mapping HL programs in Europe. FOHLC Europe offers professional development and networking opportunities.

On 15 and 16 November 2024, FOHLC Europe team organized its 4th successful conference with inspirational examples and practical strategies (FOHLC Europe 2024 Conference, 2024). This year, over 260 practitioners and academics registered for the conference, to gather virtually to discuss the motivation of those involved in the crucial work of preserving and teaching heritage languages. The event was truly international, with attendees from over 40 countries representing over 50 languages, all united by their commitment to heritage language education. FOHLC Europe showed yet again that it is unique in its platform to share real-world stories about the challenging work that goes into this form of non-formal education.

The theme of this year's conference was "Rethinking Incentives: How to bolster the motivation of students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders in heritage language education". Stakeholder are not only the students, teachers, and parents, but also the wider community like mainstream schools, sponsors, and government officials. It is not only the families who benefit from HL education, but society as a whole. Heritage language programs are more than just vocabulary and grammar lessons, as demonstrated by a quote from Prof. Terry Lamb's opening keynote presentation. A student in England explained, "I GREW UP in high school, however, I was RAISED by my supplementary school." Society benefits when multicultural children are supported in shaping their identities, with a space for them to explore their culture, language, and sense of belonging. Janica Nordstrom, the keynote speaker on the second day of the conference, discussed how to engage students in HL education and explored how different motivations of various stakeholders can enhance students' motivations. She referred to connections with imagined, distant communities, speakers' beliefs about them, and their motivations to belong to them and to learn their languages. To increase learners' motivation, Janica suggested to create an inclusive classroom atmosphere that reflects learners' goals and interests.

Sabine Little explored in her workshop parental motivation to maintain the heritage language and presented her Heritage Language Identity Questionnaire (n.d.) that helps people determine how emotional connections and practical issues influence their motivation and effort to sustain the heritage language at home. Anna Paap gave a workshop on strategies how to engage HL students. As motivation is the foundation of language learning, she discussed the key factors that drive motivation in young HL learners and showed effective strategies to engage and inspire them.

Workshop leader Zoe Kang of the Korean School in Eindhoven shared the story of a transformation in the classes for teenage students. Students were disengaged and Zoe was faced with a class where at one point only one student showed up. Determined, Zoe turned things around with the introduction of project-based learning and drama techniques. Over time, more students joined, bringing their siblings along, and one teenager even told his mother during the mainstream school exam period, "I'm going to Korean School. I can make up my study hours

later.” Thanks to the personal connections and fun activities, Zoe got her students inspired and taking ownership of their learning.

Throughout the two-day conference, speakers further explored the importance of digging deep into the "why" of students, their families, teachers and others. Once the motivations are understood, educators design learning environments that will work. The Pecha Kucha session was yet another highlight of the conference, with 10 presenters sharing within 3 minutes each their insights. This high-paced presentation showed examples how to engage teenagers, advocacy tools such as state policies, the Global Call to Action for HLE (Anderson et al., 2024), EU projects, human rights tools, or why students go back to teach a heritage language programs they graduated from and how to motivate volunteer teachers to stay and develop their professionalism. Each speaker added a layer to the conversation, showing the diversity of angles for thinking about motivation in HL education. The keynotes and the pecha kucha session can be viewed on the FOHLC Europe YouTube Channel (2024).

In the end, the conference was not just about exchanging ideas, but about strengthening a growing global community dedicated to heritage language education. FOHLC Europe 2024 was a reminder why this work matters!

References

- Anderson, J., Argyri, E., Ashtari, N., Cannizzaro, G., Egnatz, L., Emilsson Peskova, R., Hristozova, M., Little, S., Mehmedbegovic-Smith, D., Nahodilova, J., Paulovicova, N., Wahlin, M. (2024). *Global Call for Action for Heritage Language Education*. Heritage Language Global Think Tank. <https://menntavisindastofnun.hi.is/is/global-call-hle>.
- FOHLC Europe 2024 Conference. (2024). <https://www.hlenet.org/events/fohlc2024>.
- FOHLC Europe YouTube Channel. (n.d.). <https://www.youtube.com/@fohlceurope1035>.
- Forum of Heritage Language Coalitions in Europe. (2024). <https://www.hlenet.org/fohlc-europe>.
- Heritage Language Identity Questionnaire. (n.d.). <http://hliq.group.shef.ac.uk>.

Framing matters: transfer vs. transition in language policy and planning

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.07>

Erina Iwasaki*, Carol Benson**

*University of Notre Dame; eiwasaki@nd.edu

**MLE International; worldcitizen0357@gmail.com

The purpose of this paper is to highlight how the concepts of *transfer* and *transition* differently influence the way language-in-education policies are developed and enacted. We are particularly concerned with multilingual countries and contexts of the Global South, but we would argue that the language-in-education policy implications are similar around the world.

Transitional bilingual education was an approach developed in the 1970s and 80s in global North contexts, mainly Canada and the U.S., in the context of immigration and second language learning (Ramirez et al., 1991; Nieto, 2009). It was seen as preferable to all-L2 approaches because it began with L1 literacy and promoted transfer of skills to the L2, but it involved an eventual switch or transition of the language of instruction from L1 to L2. In recent years, it has been established that transitional bilingual education models do not completely “close the gap” in that they do not fully support learners who are speakers of non-dominant languages in reaching their literacy and language learning potential - rather it is additive dual language programs that hold an advantage (Collier & Thomas, 2017: 206).

Unfortunately, much of the Global South including post-colonial countries have long relied on early-exit models, which have been consistently critiqued in the research literature for dropping L1 use long before learners can effectively transfer the skills needed to survive in their education systems (Heugh, 2011; Benson, 2016). Looking at low-income multilingual contexts, Heugh (2011: 120) extrapolated from Cummins’ (1984) findings to estimate that it would take at least 6 to 7 years for bi- or multilingual programs to build learners’ L1 literacy skills and 4 to 6 years to develop their L2 skills to promote effective transfer of literacy and learning. That means that learners’ L1s need to be developed throughout the entire primary education system, not just in the early grades. In contrast, language-in-education policies in the global South are still designed with the goal of “transitioning” students to a dominant language or L2, which is often a national or international language that is quite foreign to learners and their communities. The focus on transition to the L2 is reinforced by certain development agencies (Chimbutane, 2017), especially where early literacy programs –which may consider the L1 or a widely spoken lingua franca– only do so as a stop-gap measure until L2 acquisition is reached. Early-exit transitional programs seem to be the default model of bilingual education in African countries, with their rationale being that it is most realistic to what the country is able to achieve (Trudell, 2023).

There may be some truth in the idea that policymakers are “stuck” on early-exit programs, possibly because they involve minimal investment while acknowledging the benefits of L1 use. However, the framing of policies based on transition out of learners’ own languages is troublesome. Subsumed under the guise of pragmatism, this framing limits the scope and design of what is possible and needed in language policy and planning in most multilingual countries in the Global South. It still undeniably espouses a monolingual habitus (Gogolin, 2002) that forces many multilingual contexts and people into a monolingual mould where the dominant national or international language is considered the only legitimate language of education. It also discounts the time needed for students to transfer their cognitive and linguistic skills from one language to another.

We propose taking a critical approach to language policy and planning by applying the process of backward design in curriculum development. In backward design, educators design curriculum and lesson plans with the desired results in mind, which are stated as intended learning outcomes. Wiggins and McTighe (2005), founders

of this curriculum development framework, argue that backward design directs educators' focus on learning rather than teaching. In other words, in forward design, educators are often preoccupied with what to do, what materials to use, and what to ask students to do. Lesson plans and curricula are designed within the scope of the teachers' understanding, skills, and ideals. Instead, backward design shifts the educator's attention to what the learner needs in order to accomplish the set learning outcomes.

How the goal of transition affects language-in-education policy discourse

If we apply the concept of backward design to language-in-education policy, we see that a policy focused on transition to the L2 will lead to different policymaking and curricular implementation than a policy focused on transfer between L1 and L2. Educational policy with the goal of transition creates a system in which primary-level learners must switch to a dominant language at an early phase in their education and receive no further support for L1 literacy or learning. An assumption of policymakers is that the students will be able to switch to using a dominant language in the classroom, and that there is a "right time" to introduce an L2. This is a problematic framing because it implies that there is an optimal moment or threshold to *transition* (Nakamura et al., 2023) when it is well known that it takes at minimum 6 to 7 years for a child to develop L1 literacy skills and 4-6 years to develop L2 skills (Cummins, 2000; Collier & Thomas, 2017). The idea of an optimal moment to transition also implies that all students will be ready to transition at the same time, when, if one has been a teacher of emergent multilinguals, one knows that each learner progresses at her, his, or their own pace.

This type of linear thinking imposes unrealistic expectations for high L2 proficiency while failing to support learners in their home languages. Students, parents, teachers, and school systems become more concerned about L2 acquisition instead of students developing their L1 literacy and skills, and ensuring their learning. It is like insisting that a circular peg fit into a square hole. Assessment becomes oriented toward L2 acquisition, rarely assessing L1 skills at the school and national level. This creates a negative backwash effect on entire education systems, as demonstrated by Heugh et al. (2010) in the case of Ethiopia, where a strong L1-based policy is constantly undermined by unrealistic expectations for the L3 (English) at the examination, teacher education and university levels. Because educators and the general public "treasure what is measured," people become convinced that any time spent developing skills in the L1 or even in Amharic, the national language, is time wasted.

Similarly, large-scale assessments promoted by development agencies measure limited sets of skills that may not be applicable to low-income multilingual contexts. For example, the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) promoted by USAID measures decoding and reading speed based on the contested notion that fluency is a key indicator of early reading development (Hoffman, 2012). Even when applied in the L1, EGRA relies on accuracy rather than comprehension, and fails to measure levels of meaning-making, oral or written production, critical thinking or content learning— all skills that would demonstrate the importance of the L1 in teaching and learning (Benson, 2013). The results are now widely used to call for national curricula to attend to decoding, phonemic awareness and reading speed, again "treasuring what is measured" without seeing what is missing. Bartlett & Marino (2019) have called the current hegemony of EGRA *assessment imperialism* because it imposes one view of reading on national education systems while failing to recognize a wider range of literacy skills that would be supported by multilingual approaches.

Another factor in the concept of transition and focus on dominant languages is widespread discrimination toward speakers of non-dominant languages. Panda (2012: 240), analyzing policy discourse in the Indian states of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, has found that "the choice of MLE model is influenced by the construction of the problem of tribal children's learning as 'poor' or 'inadequate' bridging between the language and concepts used in everyday life and school." In this context, Panda notes that terms like 'bridging' to the L2 and 'exiting' the L1 phase become the key metaphors framing language-in-education policy, maintaining the hierarchy of languages and power in schools— and society instead of transforming them.

Further, just as donors are complicit in promoting assessments that work against promoting strong multilingual approaches, they may also be complicit in promoting transitional framing. For example, Willans (2016) describes the case of Vanuatu, where the adoption of an abrupt early-exit model appears to have represented “the first moment at which all players are moving in the same direction,” yet she rightly questions how this model came to be seen as the best chance of success by “curriculum developers, academics, technical advisors and donor partners” (pp. 3-4). This raises the concern that international evidence may be subverted by specialist stakeholders’ willingness to compromise, an attitude given credence by Trudell (2023) in multilingual African contexts. Trudell (2023) points out that “planning, resourcing and implementing a late-exit transition model in low-income contexts typically requires substantially higher institutional and community support from the start”, even while she acknowledges that it “yields significantly better learning outcomes” (p. 6). Specialists know that early-exit programs are not likely to demonstrate convincing results, running the risk that policymakers will later reject bi- or multilingual programs. By compromising, the international donor and specialist community is promoting a sub-par model that may not contribute to effective multilingual education.

Framing language-in-education policy based on interlinguistic transfer

The above section illustrated some of the ways that transitional framing works against effective L1-based multilingual education. Again, applying the backward design concept, we argue that a more appropriate framing of language-in-education policy in multilingual contexts would be to adopt *interlinguistic transfer* as the overarching learning outcome. The concept of *transfer* embraces both individual and societal multilingualism as well as current understandings of how education can best support emergent multilingual learners. In contrast to the deficit-based transitional models, *transfer* is rooted in an assets-based approach, which acknowledges and builds upon emergent multilingual learners’ cognitive and sociocultural skills and capabilities. By emergent multilingual, we expand upon Ofelia García’s (2009) definition of emergent bilingual to counter the image that multilinguals are limited or problematic with regards to their L2/Lx proficiency. Instead, the term “emergent multilingual” refers to the learners’ potential in developing their multilingualism. In order to promote and develop learners’ multilingualism, the concept of promoting transfer is a more relevant pedagogical and policy framing.

Transfer is a cognitive process that each learner goes through during which the skills and knowledge developed in one language— ideally the L1— gradually become available in the learner’s additional language(s) (Cummins, 2009). Often called interlinguistic or cross-linguistic transfer, the process can happen in any direction, but for young learners the most efficient choice is for them to be taught reading and writing in their strongest language, which then provides a foundation for basic and continuing literacy and content learning in multiple languages. According to Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008) the main linguistic aspects of transfer discussed in the literature are phonological, lexical, semantic and syntactic (see also Bialystok, 2002). Transfer can be facilitated by teachers through activities comparing and contrasting the L1 with any L2s they are developing. Maintaining and developing more advanced literacy skills in the L1, at least throughout primary education, is known to have positive effects on learners’ L2 development precisely because of interlinguistic transfer (Heugh, 2011; Collier & Thomas, 2017). Celedón-Rodríguez (2015: 64) explains that dual language approaches like two-way immersion have better results in reading and language arts because they foster more direct attention to language use; that is, they are “more aware of their different languages, and they are encouraged to use both regularly.”

Now, let us imagine a language-in-education policy planning context where the goal is to promote interlinguistic transfer. The skills and capabilities that learners bring with them to school, including their linguistic repertoires (Busch, 2012), metalinguistic awareness and intercultural funds of knowledge (González et al., 2006) would be documented and built upon. Teaching and learning would be designed to cultivate learners’ awareness and interest in all languages, and both/all languages would be used across the curriculum. New languages would be taught explicitly and used at appropriate levels for appropriate tasks, while skills in the L1 would provide a foundation for literacy, language and content learning. Most importantly, learners would not be expected to “exit”

or leave behind their L1 to learn additional languages and gain knowledge across the curriculum. They would have the time needed (6-7 years) to develop their L1 literacy skills and without being expected to transition in a specific grade. Schools would adopt an additive bi-/multilingual model where learners and teachers alike would flourish with their complete linguistic repertoires.

If language-in-education policy were framed by transfer, assessment forms would also be designed to document learners' language development in both/all languages, diagnose needs, and capture knowledge in languages that learners can use to express themselves. L1 development would be documented alongside L2 knowledge so that teachers would know what L1 skills will be available for transfer into L2 (Benson, 2024). The results of bi- or multilingual assessments would provide information about what learners know and can do as well as where they need help, allowing teachers to make well-informed decisions about skills to be reinforced or re-taught. In short, assessments would provide a more holistic picture of what the learner is capable of and what the teacher and the learner can both improve based on their existing language and literacy skills.

Conclusion

In this discussion, we demonstrated how an alternative framing of language policy development with the goal of transfer broadens the scope of bi- and multilingual programs to support emergent multilinguals' learning. We provided examples of how designing curricula and policies with the wrong goal in mind creates mistaken attitudes and understandings of how multilingualism can be appreciated and developed. As demonstrated above, the way the end goal is framed charts different trajectories and outcomes for teachers and learners. Depending on whether the end goal is transition or transfer, the pedagogy and assessment differ.

As scholars and practitioners in international educational development, we worry that a continued focus on transition in the Global South—or any multilingual context—is likely to promote the reproduction of exclusionary educational systems and neocolonial mechanisms, closing opportunities for equitable educational advancement among learners from non-dominant ethnolinguistic backgrounds. It allows early-exit transitional programs to dominate the language policy and planning discourse, limiting policymakers' consideration of programs whose effectiveness is supported by international research. It risks providing a second class and temporary solution to learners and teachers who are often misunderstood and deserve better. The narrow scope of transition also risks creating political backlash in the eventuality it does not produce good results, undoing years of advocacy and good will for teaching and learning in non-dominant languages. Therefore, we conclude by calling upon colleagues in language policy and planning and educational development to consider framing language-in-education policies in terms of transfer, generating more inclusive and equitable educational and linguistic solutions and practices that promote the flourishing of multilingual and multiliterate learners.

References

- Bartlett, L., Marino, J. (2019). Early grade reading in international settings. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*. Scholars Speak Out. JOLLE@UGA.
- Benson, C. (2013). L1-based multilingual education and EGRA: Where do they meet? PRAESA Occasional Papers No. 40. Cape Town: University of Cape Town. <http://www.praesa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Benson-Occ-Ppr-40-final-draft.pdf>.
- Benson, C. (2016). *Addressing language of instruction issues in education: Recommendations for documenting progress*. Background paper for Global Education Monitoring Report 2016 Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable futures for all. Paris: UNESCO.
- Benson, C. (2024). *Guidance for the classroom-based assessment of multilingual learners. Assessing languages, literacies and learning across the curriculum*. Bangkok: UNESCO & UNICEF EAPRO.

- Bialystok, E. (2002). Acquisition of literacy in bilingual children: A framework for research. *Language learning*, 52(1): 159-199.
- Busch, B. (2012). The linguistic repertoire revisited. *Applied Linguistics*, 33(5): 503-523.
- Celedon-Rodriguez, V. (2015). *Measuring Student Success: a Study of a Dual Language Program vs. a Transitional Late-Exit Bilingual Program*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Houston.
- Chimbutane, F. (2017). Language policies and the role of development agencies in postcolonial Mozambique. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 18(4): 356-370.
- Collier, V. P., Thomas, W. P. (2017). Validating the power of bilingual schooling: Thirty-two years of large-scale, longitudinal research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 37: 203-217.
- Cummins, J. (1984). *Bilingualism and Special Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. (2009). Fundamental psycholinguistic and sociological principles underlying educational success for linguistic minority students. In T. Skutnabb-Kangas, R. Phillipson, A. Mohanty & M. Panda, (eds.), *Social Justice Through Multilingual Education* (pp- 19-35). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- García, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Gogolin, I. (2002). Linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe: A challenge for educational research and practice. ECER Keynote. *European Educational Research Journal*, 1(1): 123-138.
- González, N., Moll, L. Amanti, C. (eds.) (2006). *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Mahwah NJ: Erlbaum.
- Heugh, K. (2011). Theory and Practice – Language education models in Africa: research, design, decision-making and outcomes. In A. Ouane & C. Glanz (eds.), *Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The language factor* (pp. 105-158). UNESCO and ADEA.
- Heugh, K., Benson, C., Bogale, B. Gebre Yohannes, M.A. (2010). Multilingual education in Ethiopia: What assessment shows us about what works and what doesn't. In K. Heugh & T. Skutnabb-Kangas (eds.), *Multilingual education works: From the periphery to the centre* (pp. 287-315). New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan.
- Jarvis, S., Pavlenko, A. (2008). *Crosslinguistic Influence in Language and Cognition* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203935927>
- Nakamura, P., Molotsky, A., Zarzur, R. C., Ranjit, V., Haddad, Y., De Hoop, T. (2023). Language of instruction in schools in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 19: e1351.
- Nieto, D. (2009). A brief history of bilingual education in the United States. *Perspectives on Urban Education*, 6(1): 61-72.
- Panda, M. (2012). 'Bridging' and 'exit' as metaphors of multilingual education: A constructionist analysis. *Psychological Studies*, 57: 240-250.
- Ramirez, J., Pasta, D., Yuen, S., Billings, D., Ramey, D. (1991). *Longitudinal Study of Structured English Immersion Strategy, Early-Exit and Late-Exit Transitional Bilingual Education Programs for Language-Minority Children. Final Report*. Volumes 1 and 2. Aguirre International.
- Trudell, B. (2023). *Early-exit language transitioning programming: The rationale, the benefits and the limitations*. Background paper commissioned for International Mother Language Day 2023. UNESCO.
- Willans, F. (2016). Another early-exit transitional model doomed to fail? Or is this the wrong model at the right time in Vanuatu? *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 38(8): 699-711.

Teaching Ukrainian language in the Italian context

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.08>

Federico Piccolo

University of Palermo, Italy; federico.piccolo@unipa.it

Teaching Ukrainian language in the Italian context

The teaching of the Ukrainian language in the Italian context is a topic of growing relevance, especially in a period marked by the intensification of cultural and academic relations between Italy and Ukraine. The importance of teaching and learning Ukrainian in Italian universities lies not only in fostering intercultural understanding but also in preparing students to navigate competently in an increasingly interconnected global landscape. Thus, analyzing the Ukrainian language textbooks used in Italian academic institutions is essential to understand how this language is taught and learned.

The study of textbooks represents a crucial element in language learning, as textbooks are not merely intended as teaching tools, but they also reflect theories and methodologies underlying language instruction. Focusing on Ukrainian allows us to observe how this language, with its unique features and challenges, is addressed in Italian educational contexts. This not only helps improve teaching practices but also offers insights into future adaptations that better meet students' needs.

In describing the Ukrainian language textbooks adopted in Italian universities, a rigorous methodological approach was applied, inspired by the principles of CEDILS (Certification in Teaching Italian to Foreigners at Ca' Foscari University of Venice), a training course specifically oriented toward teaching Italian as a foreign language. This methodological choice was made to ensure a systematic and comparable analysis of teaching materials, both highlighting the specific characteristics of each textbook and the pedagogical implications they entail.

Each textbook was examined using a series of key criteria reflecting the essential aspects of language teaching:

- **Target audience:** Refers to the intended readership for which the textbook is purposefully designed.
- **Language proficiency level:** Assessed according to the parameters of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).
- **Graphic design:** Evaluated in terms of readability, use of colors, diagrams, and visual aids, which significantly contribute to the effectiveness of the learning process.
- **Content density:** Refers to the amount of information per page and the availability of adequate space for note-taking, which determines how user-friendly and suitable the textbook is for active and participatory learning.

A specific focus was given to the treatment of **verbs of motion**, a particularly complex and distinctive aspect of the Ukrainian language. Verbs of motion are notoriously challenging for students of Slavic languages, requiring a deep understanding of nuanced meanings and usage differences that lack direct parallels in many other languages. Consequently, a dedicated section examines how each textbook addresses this topic, as my doctoral research focuses precisely on these linguistic structures. Analyzing how verbs of motion are presented in textbooks allows for the evaluation of the effectiveness of proposed teaching strategies and provides suggestions for potential improvements or adaptations to facilitate the learning of this aspect of the Ukrainian language.

This methodological approach provides a detailed overview of the textbooks in use as well as reflecting on how these tools can be optimized to promote a more effective and conscious learning experience of Ukrainian in Italian universities.

Below, we will analyze some textbooks summarizing CEFR levels (from A1 to B2) according to the previously outlined criteria.

- a. **Мазурик, Д. (2019). "Українська для іноземців. Крок за кроком." Фоліо ("Ukrainian for Foreigners. Step by Step." Folio)**
 - **Target audience:** Beginner students aiming to learn Ukrainian progressively.
 - **Level:** A1-A2.
 - **Graphic design:** Simple but effective, with clear fonts and spaces for notes. The textbook is illustrated with images and diagrams to aid comprehension.
 - **Content density:** Moderate, with well-divided text and visual aids. Pages are well-organized to encourage active student participation.
 - **Language teaching approach:** Communicative and progressive, ideal for beginners who require a step-by-step guide.
 - **Grammar:** Primarily inductive, with rules introduced through concrete examples.
 - **Texts and materials:** Constructed but accessible, featuring texts that reflect everyday situations and daily routine. The materials are appropriate for the intended level.
 - **Activities and instructions:** Simple yet effective activities such as fill-in-the-blank exercises, dialogues, and short translations. Instructions are properly structured.
 - **Extralinguistic elements:** Minimal, though some cultural references are included in order to provide context.
 - **Verbs of motion:** Covered at a basic level, with exercises introducing the fundamental concepts of verbs of motion, helping students familiarize themselves with the most common forms and uses.
- b. **Rumyantsev, O. (2017). "Lingua ucraina. Corso teoretico-practico." Aracne**
 - **Target audience:** Students with preliminary knowledge of the language wishing to deepen their skills.
 - **Level:** A2-B1.
 - **Graphic design:** Traditional, with a readable font and limited use of diagrams. The pages are dense but well-organized.
 - **Content density:** High, with rich text. Diagrams and tables are included.
 - **Language teaching approach:** Balanced, mixing both theory and practice.
 - **Grammar:** Deductive, with detailed grammatical explanations and corresponding exercises.
 - **Texts and materials:** Constructed but appropriately organized for the students' level. Texts are designed to reflect real language usage.
 - **Activities and instructions:** A variety of exercises, including grammar practice and language production. Instructions are clear and oriented towards in-depth comprehension.
 - **Extralinguistic elements:** Presence of cultural references, with a stronger focus on the language and its technical aspects.
 - **Verbs of motion:** Addressed in depth, with emphasis on understanding their various forms and uses. Exercises are designed to help students master the use of verbs of motion in different linguistic contexts.
- c. **Krychkovska, K. (2018). Ласкаво просимо! Corso di lingua ucraina. Livelli A1-B1 del Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento per le Lingue. Hoepli**
 - **Target audience:** Italian students who wish to learn Ukrainian, starting from a beginner level (A1) and progressing to an intermediate level (B1). It is suitable for those studying Ukrainian for academic purposes as well as for personal or professional interest.

- **Level:** The course covers A1-B1 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).
- **Graphic design:** Clear and functional, featuring a readable, modern font in an adequate size to facilitate reading and comprehension. Diagrams and tables summarize key information and offer support understanding of complex concepts. The use of color is moderate but strategic, helping to distinguish sections of the textbook and highlight important elements, such as grammatical rules or verbs of motion.
- **Content density:** The manual is well-structured, balancing text, images, and blank spaces for note-taking. Color-coded schemes and icons assist in memorizing grammar rules and guide students through the content. The use of arrows and other symbols further helps students follow the information flow and grasp concepts more easily.
- **Language teaching approach:** The teaching approach is predominantly communicative, emphasizing the integration of the four linguistic skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The course encourages students to use Ukrainian in real-life situations, fostering practical application of the language from the very first lessons.
- **Grammar:** The textbook employs a mixed approach to grammar. At the very beginning of the course, grammatical rules are introduced inductively, allowing students to deduce rules from context and examples. As the course progresses, deductive elements are incorporated, with clear explanations of more complex grammatical concepts, particularly verbs of motion.
- **Texts and materials:** The course provides students with a combination of authentic and constructed texts. Listening and reading exercises feature authentic passages that reflect everyday situations and Ukrainian cultural contexts, while grammar and vocabulary exercises are constructed to facilitate gradual learning. The materials are appropriate and varied, ensuring comprehensive coverage of topics required for A1-B1 levels.
- **Activities and instructions:** A variety of activities aim to stimulate all linguistic skills, including listening, reading, fill-in-the-blank exercises, translations, writing short texts, and dialogues. Instructions are precisely structured, with proper guidance on how to complete tasks and defined learning objectives for each unit.
- **Extralinguistic elements:** The textbook incorporates numerous extralinguistic elements that enrich linguistic learning with cultural context. Flags and specific icons mark sections dedicated to Ukrainian culture, such as information about customs, holidays, traditions, and aspects of daily life. These elements help students better understand the language and use it more authentically and contextually.
- **Verbs of motion:** Introduced gradually and addressed in greater detail as students progress. Exercises include both practical activities and analysis of grammatical rules, supporting students in mastering the use of verbs of motion in various linguistic contexts.

d. **Макарова, Г.І., Паламар, Л.М., & Присяжнюк, Н.К. (2010-2012). Розмовляймо українською. Let's speak Ukrainian. У трьох частинах. ІНКОС**

- **Target audience:** Students with a basic knowledge of Ukrainian whose aim is that of improving conversational skills.
- **Level:** B1-B2.
- **Graphic design:** Clear and straightforward, with a readable font and some diagrams. Not heavily colored but still functional.
- **Content density:** High text density with few images. However, there is sufficient space for annotations, and the pages are not overly crowded, allowing for smooth reading.
- **Language teaching approach:** Mainly communicative, emphasizing conversational practice.
- **Grammar:** Inductive, focusing more on communicative contexts than on formal grammatical rules.

- **Texts and materials:** A mix of both authentic and constructed materials, featuring texts that encourage dialogue and oral practice.
- **Activities and instructions:** Activities include conversation practice, role-play, and active listening. Instructions are thought to promote student's participation and interaction.
- **Extralinguistic elements:** Some cultural elements are included to enhance deeper understanding of spoken language.
- **Verbs of motion:** Addressed in specialized contexts, focusing on their appropriate use in formal and professional situations, such as goods transportation or logistics.

Conclusion on Ukrainian language textbooks and teaching methodologies

The analysis of Ukrainian language textbooks highlights the diverse approaches and methodologies employed to teach the language effectively within different contexts and levels of proficiency. Each manual caters to specific target audiences, ranging from absolute beginners to intermediate learners, emphasizing various aspects such as communication, grammar, and cultural integration.

The focus on elements like verbs of motion and cultural references reflects the need to address both linguistic complexities and real-life applicability. A balanced integration of inductive and deductive methods, along with a strategic use of visual aids and structured activities, enhances student engagement and comprehension.

Overall, these textbooks underscore the importance of tailoring teaching materials to meet the specific needs of learners, ensuring that Ukrainian language instruction is not only accessible but also enriching, fostering deeper intercultural understanding and linguistic proficiency.

Teaching in pandemic times, inspiration for change

(Review of *Teaching in Pandemic Times: Experiences and Lessons from the Study of Students' and Teachers' Opinions at the Blazhe Koneski Faculty of Philology* by Elena Onchevska-Ager and Ruska Ivanova-Naskova, Skopje, 2023, pp. 120)

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.09>

Sonja Kitanovska-Kimovska

Blazhe Koneski Faculty of Philology, Skopje; sonjakitanovska@flf.ukim.edu.mk

The book “Teaching in Pandemic Times: Experiences and Lessons from the Study of Students’ and Teachers’ Opinions at the Blazhe Koneski Faculty of Philology” by Elena Onchevska-Ager and Ruska Ivanova-Naskova consists of the following sections: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Discussion, Closing Remarks, Bibliography and Appendices (Appendix 1: Student Questionnaire, Appendix 2: Teacher Questionnaire and Appendix 3: Questions for Respondents’ Interviews).

The introduction elaborates the idea and the need to conduct this research. Driven by their personal curiosity, the authors dive deep searching to find out about the experiences and the effects of the new situation with the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching in the online space. Apart from their desire for personal development and growth, they recognise the opportunity for this research to benefit all other colleagues and students during the pandemic and beyond. Hence, they set themselves the goal of making a contribution to improve teaching by summarising the experiences from online teaching in a document that would inspire consideration and perhaps redesigning of teaching practices.

In the Literature Review section, the authors present the theoretical framework of their research study, together with a review of the relevant global studies at the intersection between the pandemic and university education. They talk about the changes that universities have gone through due to the pandemic and the difficulties students and teachers have faced, the nature of online teaching, including the use of social media, as well as the challenges of students’ (not)using web cameras and their (non)involvement in classes. The discussion is based on Salmon’s theoretical model on e-moderating and Ryan and Deci’s theory of motivated behaviour. Teaching during crisis is inevitably linked to the crisis itself and how it affects students’ and teachers’ well-being. So, the authors rely on Kübler-Ross’s model as a basis for understanding sudden changes, their consequences and coping mechanisms.

In the Methodology section, Onchevska Ager and Ivanova-Naskova describe the methodology they used to conduct their study. They pose four research questions and search for their answers through quantitative and qualitative methods. More precisely, they conduct surveys with the two groups of respondents (students and teachers) and interviews in focus groups, respectively. Data analysis is carried out using descriptive statistics, thematic coding and, in some cases, detailed statistical tests.

In the Results section, the authors share the results of their research. First, they provide demographic data about their respondents, and then they present the results based on the themes of their research questions as follows: attendance, teaching practices, respondents beliefs about online teaching (where they first convey the teachers’ positions followed by the students’ positions). Charts are provided for all aspects for which there is quantitative data in order to provide a visual representation. The qualitative analysis provides findings about how online teaching is perceived and understood (for instance, whether it includes using e-mail and social networks) as well as about respondents’ psycho-physical health. At the end, experiences, advice and suggestions to improve online teaching are provided by teachers and students (aimed at, inter alia, future students).

In the Discussion section, Onchevska Ager and Ivanova-Naskova analyse their research results in view of the theoretical background presented previously and previous research on the topic. They provide a summary of their findings with regard to coping strategies during the crisis, how classes are conducted (their format, communication, interaction, curriculum and materials), the beliefs about online teaching (including what (non)quality teaching is) and teachers' and students' psycho-physical health. This section ends with a list of pieces of advice and suggestions for more successful online teaching in the future aimed both at future students and teachers.

In the Closing Remarks section, the authors summarise their main research findings. They conclude that respondents proved to be exceptionally adaptable in the unforeseen conditions of the pandemic and pretty active in finding out new possibilities and development potentials. Both teachers and students are motivated to contribute their suggestions on how to improve teaching practice and demonstrate the need and desire to get actively involved in a wider debate in order to understand the complexity of the challenges and to offer quality solutions. Initial findings of this research have already led to activities which seem to bring institutional changes at the Faculty by getting teachers more involved in mutual exchange and learning, greater opportunities for students to express their experiences with the classes on each individual course, and the first and unique opportunity for teachers to gain psycho-social support assisted by the Faculty.

The book "Teaching in Pandemic Times: Experiences and Lessons from the Study of Students' and Teachers' Opinions at the Blazhe Koneski Faculty of Philology" by Elena Onchevska-Ager and Ruska Ivanova-Naskova is a pioneering work in at least three aspects. First, it is the first attempt to present a systematic overview of the teaching practices during the early stages of the pandemic involving the main stakeholders in the teaching process, teachers and students, from all Faculty departments, and addresses the topic of research through cross-examination and comparison of their opinions and experiences. Second, this research gives voice to students and teachers revealing all aspects of teaching and Faculty operations that are of interest to stakeholders, which may be perceived differently by different respondent groups. In analysing and discussing the results, the authors take an objective stance without unfounded generalisations and impartially leave room for different, and even contradictory, attitudes and experiences among students and teachers. This helps highlight individual differences that are to be taken into consideration without doubt in order to gain a realistic picture about all stakeholders. Third, and perhaps the most important, the findings presented in this work have already stirred real movement at the Faculty and have led to visible changes during the pandemic. Among the most obvious ones was the establishment and the operation of the Teaching Improvement Committee, which has helped channel many of the needs and suggestions made by the respondents. I would highlight the following: numerous webinars on mutual exchange of experiences among teachers, gaining students' opinions and evaluation of teaching/teachers through a purpose-built application *Students Comment* and the project for psycho-social support to teachers during the pandemic. All these activities were well received by the stakeholders and have played a significant (both expert and psychological) role during the hard period of the pandemic. The publication of this paper is a testimonial to the experiences of that time and the benefits that may arise from research of this kind. Let us hope that this work and the benefits already felt will serve to inspire and further encourage similar teaching and development activities at the Faculty in the future, and that the Dean's Office, teachers and students will recognise the potential, take their own initiatives and get proactively involved in order to advance both teaching practices and the overall joint operations of the Faculty.

This work is the first of its kind in Macedonia where systematically and with cross examination students' and teachers' beliefs about teaching during pandemic times are collected and recommendations are derived from participants who are directly involved in the teaching process. It makes a significant contribution not only to improving the methodological, technical and socio-affective components of teaching in pandemic times and beyond, but also to building an overall culture of democratisation of university operations. Overall, this work is particularly relevant to all current and future students, teachers, researchers and technical staff serving as a

testimonial to a specific time period and as a roadmap for future action in teaching and beyond by encouraging dialogue, mutual respect and recognising and addressing the various needs and opinions of all those involved.

The impact of gender diversity on expression - the language of sexuality - how early childhood studies students understand the semantics of gender dysphoria

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.10>

Eva Mikuska*, Andre Kurowski**

*University of Portsmouth; Eva.mikuska@port.ac.uk

**University of Chichester; A.Kurowski@chi.ac.uk

Abstract

Gender diversity is a current and much debated topic. Students are entering university with contemporary meanings and beliefs around the use of language in the discussion of gender that can challenge traditional value systems surrounding biological determination. This qualitative research was carried out with Early Childhood Studies students by means of self-directed focus groups. The aims were to investigate students' views on the language of gender diversity, gender differences, and the extent to which language can reflect and create gender identity. The research finding provides deeper understanding about how a group of traditional and non-traditional students interpret, use, and understand the language of gender.

Keywords: Gender dysphoria, gender inclusive language, discourse, semantics, identity

Introduction

Gender inclusive language and the debate surrounding this topic is relatively new, although it has gained a significant place in higher education [HE] in recent years (United Nations, 2024). In 2017 the UK government announced that it would undertake a review of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 (GRA) (Gender Recognition Act, 2004). The GRA had been significant; for example, in enabling trans people to change their birth certificates to their acquired gender without the requirement of surgical interventions. Therefore, the use of pronouns has become increasingly important, as well as conventional ways of addressing students and staff in terms of gender identification. Considering this opening in the body of knowledge, this qualitative study sought to investigate the collective perception of traditional and non-traditional students, attending childhood studies programmes at a Post 92 university in England. Post 92 universities also known as 'new or modern' universities were given university status in 1992 (Further and Higher Education Act, 1992).

The focus of the study was to find out the views of students on gender identity and language, how they use it, what is considered acceptable to them, and what barriers they may come up against. The term traditional *student* is typically defined as someone between the ages of 18 and 24, who first enrolled in their university immediately after graduating high school (or after a planned 'gap year'), while *non-traditional students* may deviate from their traditional counterparts in more ways than age. For example, they are 21 or over at the start of their studies, may have a dependent(s) other than a spouse, work part time or full time (UCAS, 2020). In this study we refer to *gender identity* as an individual's sense of their own gender (e.g., as a male, female, nonbinary). *Gender expression* is how an individual presents their gender to others through physical appearance and behaviour, while *gender diverse* is a term that addresses the spectrum of gender identities (NSPCC, 2024). In this work Atkinson and Russell's (2015) basic definitions were used:

Biological sex- based on reproductive organs

Gender identity- the inner sense of being a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’

Gender presentation- how gender is expressed on a ‘feminine’ to ‘masculine’ scale.

Therefore, the aims of the research were:

- 1) To determine views of Early Childhood Studies (ECS)] students on ‘gender’ discourse in language
- 2) To find out how students, both traditional and non-traditional, use language to present gender identity
- 3) To explore students’ ‘ideologies’ about variable gender identity

The research was carried out with two different types of students, traditional and non-traditional, on Early Childhood Studies [ECS] programmes. Almost all the students were female and this reflects the sector, with estimates only 2% (NCFE, 2022) to 3% (Bonetti, 2018) of early years practitioners being male. Against a theoretical background which included relevant definitions, gender related ideology, language and identity, the research was conducted using words derived from the University and College Union (UCU, 2021). The UCU is the trade union for university and college staff in the United Kingdom and has provided training materials for negotiating the language of diversity. The methodological approach was qualitative, involving four focus groups, as they were considered appropriate in securing meanings from the students. The method used was developed and selected specifically to allow the groups to discuss the words freely and to minimise the influence of the researchers on the groups. Data were coded and analysed against the theoretical background and conclusions drawn from this, significant differences were found in how the words were interpreted between the two main groups.

Review of the literature

Based on the assumption that the use and meaning of the language of diversity has changed rapidly in recent years, the first step in the context was to arrive at definitions to work with. Definitions addressing ‘gender’ were influenced by the feminist framework in particular considering biological determinism (Connell, 1987), and gendered inequalities (Davies and Gannon, 2006). It has been claimed that the reason for having gender categories (that are constantly constructed and reconstructed) in any social group, is that gender is a ‘fundamental component of the structure of domination and subordination’ (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990: 5). For example, the competence of men and women as gendered begins with how well they demonstrate qualities that are associated with understandings of femaleness and maleness. Davies (1989) further claimed that those who adopt identities outside the dominant versions of gender (male v female), that is, those who do not perform within the socially accepted boundaries of masculinity and femininity, risk marginalisation. For example, understanding sex-role stereotyping tends to reinforce the biological understanding of being female and male. In terms of Early Childhood Education and Care [ECEC] and in English context, the employment of males in nurseries is not always considered ‘normal’. Male nursery workers are often treated with scepticism (Mikuska, 2021) and, in this context, the status of the gender group is not equal. Examining the aims of this research considering these debates, can we illuminate the ways in which the gender related language has been constructed in the current educational environment.

These debates further influenced the development of gender related definitions which were broad and widespread, but helped with the research focus. For example, the meaning of gender is further complicated by the universal cultural belief that gender differences are due to underlying biological determinations (Connell, 1987), leading to traditional meanings of gender that typically focus on the difference between two distinct gender categories (Walker, 2014; Ward and Lucas, 2023). Whereas it could be generally accepted that babies born as female sex will later view themselves as ‘women’, and those born into male sex will develop into ‘men’ and dress accordingly, it was accepted that sex and gender are more likely to fall on continuums rather than in neat, dichotomous categories (Atkinson and Russell, 2015). The following model was used to work with this continuum (Table 1).

Table 1: (A Gender Agenda, 2024).

Intersex		
Male	Biological sex (Anatomy, chromosomes, hormones)	Female
Genderqueer/bigender		
Man	Gender identity (Sense of self)	Woman
Androgynous		
Masculine	Gender presentation (Communication of gender)	Feminine

With basic definitions of gender arrived at, further investigation was carried into variations between birth, or cis gender i.e., decisions about a person at birth based on genitals (Healthline, 2024), and gender as identified by an individual. Definitions included ‘gender dysphoria’, i.e., the feeling of discomfort or distress that might occur in people whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth or sex-related physical characteristics (Mayo Clinic, 2024), and ‘gender diversity’. This was to acknowledge and respect that there are many ways to identify one’s authentic self beyond the binary of the male and female framework (Walker, 2014). The extent of gender diversity was also considered; figures from the Riittakerttu et al. (2018) indicate that of 17–70-year-old males and females in the Netherlands with desire to undergo sex reassignment were 0.6% and 0.2% respectively, with about 0.5% of adults in the general population identify as transgender. Across Europe and North America 1.3% of 16–19-year-olds had potentially clinically significant gender dysphoria (Riittakerttu et al., 2018).

Conceptual framework

Gender identity was viewed as a form of ideology, or a system of beliefs shared by a social group or movement that could be social, political or religious ideas (Van Dijk, 2007; Cerezo et al., 2020). Van Dijk (2007) accepts that ideology need not be dominant, but simply the basis of social practices for group members which can often emerge from group conflict and struggle, and this definition was considered appropriate for gender diversity issues. Van Dijk views ideology as a form of social cognition or the basic beliefs that underlie the social representations of a social group, and that much of our discourse, especially when we speak as members of groups, expresses ideologically based opinions. In a Foucauldian sense (Khan and MacEachen, 2021), discourse concerns power balances and the nature of truth. These ideologies, it can be argued, are learned through the media, reading textbooks at school, or participating in everyday conversations with friends and colleagues, and this was felt significant for the study.

The concept of language was interpreted in a semantic sense, as ‘... a guide to social reality ...that powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes’ whereby the ‘real world’ is unconsciously largely built up on the language habits of the group....” (Sapir 1949: 68-69). Kearns (2011) distinguishes between two aspects of language. The first is the *literal* meaning of words and how they are combined and taken together to form meaning, and the second is the *pragmatics* of language or how literal meaning must be refined, enriched or extended to arrive at an understanding of what the speaker meant. In other words, language is a mirror of culture that simultaneously reflects culture and is influenced and shaped by it. In the broadest sense, it is a symbolic representation of a people, that signals historical and cultural backgrounds, an approach to life, and a way of living and thinking (Jiang, 2000). As Wittgenstein (1961) stated, the limits of one’s language mean the limits of their

world. Wittgenstein wrote about 'linguistic confusion' and 'private language'. By linguistic confusion, Wittgenstein accepted that language can be used to communicate different ideas and concepts, however language cannot convey all possible meanings. By private language, Wittgenstein referred to language as meaningful only where it is shared by a group of people, and thus not meaningful if used by an individual alone. Language can have different meanings in different contexts; according to Crystal (2005) the word *meaning* itself has 25 different meanings, so the elements of verbal communication should not be taken for granted. The codes of language are culturally agreed through symbols to assist in organising, understanding and creating meaning (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993), they are complex and subject to constant change (Zimmer, 2017). According to Shahrehabaki (2018), language has influence on our identity formation; it reflects race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality, and helps in the realisation of one's 'self' in given social environments. Language helps us to communicate observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs (McKay, Davis, and Fanning, 1995) but is also a method to encode and share collective experiences (Chiu, 2011). Affective language expresses a person's feelings and creates similar feelings in others; it can be used in relationship building by developing interpersonal bonds (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). Therefore, language will reflect the shared experiences of a group (Ross et al., 2002). If words are *felt* as such, language has the potential to influence and transform the perceptual world (Abram, 1997). Darvin and Norton (2019) refer to the different aspects of the 'self' and that in recent years, the relationship between social and cultural identity has become more significant but also more fluid. They argue that meaning making takes place at the micro-level of interactions, and that cultural identity arises from how an individual relates to a particular group who share language and similar ways of understanding the world. Shahrehabaki (2018) argued that through the influence of language on identity, people learn to be e.g., male, female, a nationality and, or ethnic group. For Wittgenstein (1961), language does not reflect reality; as Barraclough (2004) states, it is a metaphor for reality. It was against the backdrop of these ideas that the research took place to gain an understanding of how students understand and express issues around gender identity and diversity.

As well as language, the research approach was also interested in how identity is formed. According to Crocetti (2017), adolescents attempt to create continuity and self-sameness in their lives. The continuity and sameness are based on real, although subjective, experiences according to their own understanding of what is important for who they have become. Crocetti writes about cycles of identity formation, *identity formation* and *identity maintenance*. Identity formation occurs when adolescents consider identity alternatives and form identity commitments. Identity maintenance cycle is a function to maintain and further strengthen chosen commitments, although uncertainties may lead the person to reconsider and go back to the identity formation cycle (Crocetti, 2017). These cycles are used as a process as to how adolescents form their own identities.

Thus, the data was collected and analysed through the lens of definitions of feminist debates, ideology, discourse, semantics, pragmatics, and culture. The findings of this research could inform policymakers in education that can be seen as a potential vehicle to challenge and renegotiate symbolic and cultural notions of gender identity.

Methodological approach

The overall research strategy was qualitative, as the intention was to explore how the sample group makes sense of their everyday world, and the assumptions they hold about gender related language, what practices they adopt, and how they understand from within (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). The aim was to find out how meanings were shared by the participants through indexicality, and how language is used to find the taken for granted meanings, and how everyday conversation conveys more than is actually said through linguistic methodologies (Cohen et al., 2018).

Apart from the reasons outlined above, logistics posed a problem, i.e., the time and location of getting the participants involved, thus a group approach was selected to enable ‘conversations’ between participants. This would gain a wide range of responses especially as participants were familiar with each other and would allow for a number of students to get together (Watts and Ebbutt, 1987). However, due to the subject matter, there was a risk of “poor prompting, bias probing, poor rapport” (Oppenheim, 1992: 96-97) on the part of the facilitator. Conventional focus groups were also considered as these would offer interactions within the group to gain collective responses rather than the researcher’s agenda dominating (Morgan, 1988). However, this did not guarantee that all the participants would feel comfortable enough to say something (Cohen et al., 2018). Also, there remained the risk of dominance by some intra-group disagreements and conflict (Newby, 2010). Despite identifying benefits to these approaches, the issue of reflexivity was perceived as a significant perceived barrier to successful unfettered data collection. This problem is outlined effectively by Olmos-Vega et al. (2022), where researchers should self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate their own subjectivity and influence the research processes. The issue being faced was how to disentangle personal, interpersonal, and contextual factors that could have influenced the research. A perceived issue was the age of the two researchers (late fifties and mid-sixties respectively) and the effect this could have on interactions over the issues on the language of gender. As well as this, one of the researchers is a native Hungarian speaker in which language the commonly used pronoun for gender diversity is ‘they’. In Hungarian, this does not translate either linguistically or culturally. So, the issues faced were identified as potential poor rapport between researchers and participants (Oppenheim, 1992), the potential for the use of leading questions (Cohen et al., 2018), acquiescence, i.e., agreement by the participants with the researchers despite what is really felt or thought (Breakwell, 2000), power lying with the facilitators (Thaper-Bjorkert and Henry, 2004), and the defining of the questions, topics and course of discussions by the facilitators (Kvale, 1996).

To overcome these potential issues, a decision was made to use the method of the self-directed focus group to make use of minimal structure, reduced role and power of the facilitators, to achieve emergent understandings about potentially sensitive issues (Wood and Ristow, 2022), although as Wood and Ristow point out this approach does not necessarily eliminate power issues *within* the group. The final decision was made to simply use relevant words to attempt to stimulate conversation and allow the dynamics to find their own direction. The words used were taken from training literature from the University and College Union document ‘LGBT+ a guide to language in use’ (UCU, 2021) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Words used.

Words used
Words used; Sex; Gender; Gender identity; Sexual orientation; Pronoun; Binary-gendered; Cis-gendered; Heterosexual; LGBTQ+; Gender queer; Gender dysphoria

These words were written on A4 sheets of paper and given to a volunteer in the group to show the rest of the group in their own time, to get reactions from the group, and stimulate conversation. The procedure was as follows: all groups were Early Childhood Studies students, the conversations were ‘timeless’, in other words allowed to run as long as needed. The conversations were almost entirely self-directed with minimal or no contact between facilitators and the groups, and the discussions were video recorded. Data analysis was thematic, but as stated above, subjectivity should be considered due to researchers’ background, identity, and background. Research variables were collected (see Table 3).

Table 3: Group characteristics.

Group 1: Traditional students (in total 15)	Group 2: Non-traditional students (in total 13)
Most in placement in various EY setting and some in Primary School	Most worked in an EY setting OR as a Teaching Assistant in primary schools
10 female 1 male	12 female 1 male
Most white British	All white British and between 32-58 years
Most in 18-30 age group (1 in 56-61 age group)	9 identify as she/her and 1 identify as gay
12 identify as she/her 1 identify as he/his and 2 did not disclose identity	10 have children on their own

Data analysis

The recordings were reviewed, and data analysed by layers of coding to determine emergent themes and sub-themes (appendix 1), group the themes addressing if there are hierarchies, and link themes to theoretical models (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). In general, there were similarities, but considerable differences between how the groups managed themselves and discussed the words.

Group 1

The following extract is from a self-directed focus group of 6 individuals discussing gender pronouns and societal awareness. They related to the kind of education needed to raise awareness about gender identity. The recording was 22 minutes long, in which they discussed issues around the number of pronouns and about the need of educating people:

R: I find it difficult to remember them, there are so many of them now, the more I see them the more there are I just need to have my head around.

G: there are six I think, the usual one, she, he her but then got they, he-she, the mixture of them, and I don't know

R: Exactly, so confusing.

T: I am really confused, I ask people's names so it is secure. I always double check. yeah... (all agreement).

R: It is almost more controversial using the wrong pronouns.

T: I don't really follow it which does not mean I am not respectful, just not really following this. I don't think I know anyone who is not he or she.

B: Is transgender a gender? Sorry to ask this, but I am really confused. It is a scale no? But how would you identify yourself then?

C: Do we have to? I guess, I really like the poster, like downstairs in the library, so everyone can read about this.

B: I think every student needs to have it in their starter pack, and to be included in the induction week.

F: Yeah, it is such a good idea. I feel people who are educating and those who educated, slike everyone has to have an open mind, yes, open minded

B: What about having it on your student ID card? Yes, I like my idea.

C: But why should we educate, what should be there, a lesson about something that should be just integrated in the society, only raising an awareness is needed.

G: Yes, I think when you grow up it is just normal, and the need to raise awareness is just temporary for older generation,

The conversation carried on about from what age the posters should be put up in schools, and whether primary schools should or should not address gender identity other than biological determination. This group took a highly

personal view of terminology used, and they had some reservations about the ability to meet needs of those with gender dysphoria.

In the other focus group, a considerable amount of time was spent on the words directly, and the remainder in free discussion after (the only) prompt from facilitators. The words on paper were used mainly for description, with more detailed analysis when 'off-script'. From analysis of the data, three themes were identified showing sympathy for, comment on the terminology, and acknowledgement of the novelty or 'newness' of gender diversity issues (Table 4).

Table 4: Traditional students - themes.

Group 1: Traditional students		
Theme 1 Sympathy	Theme 2 Terminology	Theme 3 Novelty
Personalisation Sympathy for Trans people and those adjusting to new terminology Acceptance of controversies around gender dysphoria Felt some terminology is derogative e.g., 'queer' Sensitive to potential for offending sensibilities Conscious of 'labelling' trans people, respect individual wishes Reservations about hormone blockers for children	Struggle with some terminology as there are 'so many' and it is 'hard to follow' Recognition of time and use of terminology Difficulty adjusting to use of pronouns Consider terms as 'gay' and 'lesbian' to be sexualised Some acknowledgements that terminology may become mainstream eventually	Accept that Trans issues are more mainstream today Some terminology is new and developing Pragmatic about terminology Empathize with those who struggle with terminology Traditional views may be the 'problem' Sense of exclusion from Social media important Aware of a moral panic about gender diversity issues Importance of education/educating people

Group 2, the older group, were more confused over the terminology, and rather than taking a personal view, took a broad, societal view of these issues. The following extract indicates how they feel about some people treat them:

A: With the 'they /them' people are getting angry at you. If you don't call them how they want to, you get in trouble.

C: I just think that for them [other than biological gender] they think it is normal, but for us it is not. Typically, it is male or female, you were taught that from a young age, and now you suddenly find yourself in a situation where it is not.

D: This doesn't mean we don't accept the younger generation.

[A B C D talking at the same time agreeing what was said.]

A: Automatically we go he or she.

B: But this is because we don't know anyone who is not.

C: Exactly.

A: If we to know someone maybe we would pay more attention

D: I think sometimes they are confused, and if the person in question gives clear instructions on how to be called, then it would be easier. You address them THEY, you don't want to offend.

A: Yes, like Ze or Zem

C: And what is that? I am really getting confused now.

A: I think you don't identify yourself as gender.

B: Oh God. But this should be THEY.

C: Maybe. Probably. Oh... I don't know.

D: I'll go with whatever, but I cannot follow this anymore.

They needed to and helped each other to understand some of the words and were focused on the terminology throughout and said little 'off script' except for elaboration or anecdotes. Those participants, who had personal and/or professional experiences with different gender identities (such as transgender, cisgender or non-binary) were more in a 'leading a conversation' role. Generally, this group required no prompting from the facilitator, (it can be called participatory facilitator) and looked to the facilitator for guidance at only one point. From analysis of the data, three themes were identified showing confusion, tolerance, and a societal view of gender diversity issues (Table 5).

Table 5: Non-traditional students – themes.

Non-traditional students		
Theme 1 Confusion	Theme 2 Tolerance	Theme 3 Societal view
Confusion over meaning of terms esp. cis gender, dysphoria, gender queer Some explanations discussed Dysphoria thought to be a mental health condition View that terms are interpreted in different ways More than binary male/female is baffling Pronouns 'they/ them' are plural and not suitable for individual people 'Gender queer' considered a derogative term Terms such as LGBT+ are getting more and more difficult to understand	Accept and respect those with gender dysphoria No need to understand Express a limit, e.g., young children and gender identity Gender dysphoria suffers from tokenistic attitudes Some people are oversensitive Difficulty to override gender stereotypes Some resentment over priority of Pride over e.g., Armed Forces Day Acceptance that celebration compensates for hiding sexuality in the past Trans people need to understand the difficulty others e.g., older people, have in understanding them Fear of offending trans people	Babies are born either 'male' of 'female' Beyond the personal and into e.g., policy Historical anecdotes Cultural view of stereotypes- Father Christmas/ tissues/ chocolate Awkwardness, e.g., midwives labelling babies Men who transition are not 'women' but 'transgender women' Pronouns are social construction Resentment over trans men entering female spaces, e.g., toilets, female sport events

Findings summary

The findings were linked to the research aims and after coding, data was divided under five subgroups: ideologies, discourse, semantics, pragmatics and culture. The discussions were based on our understanding of the language used which considers the perspectives of the traditional and non-traditional students, interpreted through some of the debates discussed in section two and three (Crocetti, 2017; Barraclough, 2004). The

participants understood gender identity development as an ongoing process that was also contextual, which was seen as simultaneously freeing and restricting.

The finding showed that there are similar discussions between the two main groups. For example, both groups:

- struggled with terminology, but the older group more so,
- empathise with those who struggle with trans terminology,
- saw some terminology, e.g., 'gender queer' as derogatory,
- are sensitive to negative labels being applied to trans people.

While there were similarities there were some inconsistencies, such as:

- traditional students took a much more personalised and pragmatic view than the older students,
- traditional students more sympathetic than the older/non-traditional students,
- traditional students see traditional values as an obstacle to progress, whereas older/non-traditional students feel traditional values are being threatened,
- non-traditional students are more concerned about trans men entering female spaces (e.g., toilets),
- non-traditional students feel that trans people need to have more concern for e.g., older people who do not understand trans issues.

Theoretical discussion

This article builds upon recent research on gender inclusive language (e.g., Zimman, 2017), and investigates the school experiences of binary-trans, non-binary and gender-questioning adolescents separately in the UK context. Findings demonstrate that gender-diverse adolescents experience considerable discrimination within the school environment (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights, 2018). This study extends previous research by focusing on multiple aspects of the school environment, including space, peers, and teachers. Additionally, this study adds to the existing knowledge base by highlighting the strategies that gender-diverse adolescents use to navigate the school environment.

This discussion is divided into five sections that feature in the conceptual framework; first, the research aims and definitions are revisited. In terms of definitions, neither of the groups had great difficulty in recognising and discussing the words given to them, in general, the traditional students (Group 1) were able to carry out debates more readily. Even so, the younger students still struggled with some terminology, and found difficulty in adjusting to pronouns such as 'they/ them'. However, non-traditional students (Group 2), were more confused with some terms, especially those that develop such as LGBTQ+, and were wary of different meanings attached to some of the words.

Ideology

In terms of the systems of ideology as beliefs and social practices (Van Dijk, 2007), Group 1 took a highly personal view of the words discussed; they saw these issues as devolved to the individual and personal choice signifying their identity. The emphasis is, therefore, on the gender identities that tend to be constructed through several socially defined voices rather than through one unified and coherent storyline. Gender identity formation, therefore, operates between the personal and the surrounding social world. whereas the older group took a much more societal, albeit binary, view with reference to wider social issues such as the restraints on midwives labelling babies at birth. Having said this, the younger students drew the line at hormone blockers for young children. The traditional students considered gender diversity as more mainstream than the non-traditional students, with the older students expressing some suspicion about (especially male to female) transitions. Both groups expressed reservations about their ability to avoid offending trans people. This was more about an inability to meet the needs of trans people by the younger, and more about falling into a trap by not knowing how to relate to trans people,

by the non-traditional students. However, non-traditional students did question social priorities over what they considered the excessive celebration of 'Pride' over more traditional events such as 'Armed Forces Day'. So, there were subtle but tangible differences over ideology between the two groups.

Discourse

In terms of power issues (Khan and MacEachen, 2021), Group 1 accept the novelty of diversity issues whereas Group 2 found the language of diversity overpowering with some difficulty in overriding gender stereotypes; there was a certain awkwardness in this (Zimman, 2017; Wittgenstein, 1961). Participants in Group 1 felt terminology is new and developing and embraced this, while participants in Group 2 feel that gender dysphoria issues suffer from tokenism and that they are given too much importance. Group 1 accepted controversies around gender dysphoria with little question whereas Group 2 see some in the gender diversity sphere as 'oversensitive', and that trans people need to understand the difficulty others, e.g., older people, have in understanding diversity issues (Ward and Lucas, 2023). The traditional students felt a sense of exclusion from gender diversity issues, in other words they felt a sense of shame that they did not know enough to engage fully; they also outlined the significant role of social media in understanding diversity questions. Group 2 did not mention social media, but they did see a shift in a power balance for previously excluded groups; they accept that celebration of diversity issues today, compensates for the hiding of sexuality in the past.

Semantics

In terms of the semantics of the language of diversity, (Kearns, 2011), the shared cultural meanings of the words discussed brought out some differences in interpretations. Although both groups struggled with some of the evolving language, participants in Group 1 were more confident and quicker in giving definitions. Group 2 discussed at length confusion over terms such as 'cis gender', 'transgender' 'dysphoria', and 'gender queer'. To this group the word 'queer' was seen as a derogatory term and there was some difficulty accepting it in the lexicon and in the changing language landscape. Overall, the older students felt that that terminology was getting increasingly more difficult to understand despite seeing it as a potential tool in recognising gender identity development. It is interesting that participants in Group 2 questioned the use of 'they/ them' from a grammatical point of view, while participants in Group 1 who were much more open, expressed sympathy not only for trans people, but those who find it difficult to adjust to the evolving terminology (Ward and Lucas, 2023).

Pragmatics

In terms of Wittgenstein (1961), participants in Group 1 considered the words less in terms of linguistic confusion than participants in Group 2. Non-traditional students looked for more definitive universal meaning of the words, whereas traditional students were happy with 'looser' interpretations. The latter fit more with Wittgenstein's (1961) concept of 'private language', that the language of diversity is meaningful mainly in the group most associated with it, and they themselves felt out of the loop and excluded from much of the discourse of diversity. However, Group 2 did accept that words can be interpreted in different ways (Zimman, 2017), and like participants in Group 1, they felt (more) excluded to the point that they did not feel the need to engage with the language of diversity. For example, they expressed that the recent use of pronouns is an example of an unnecessary social construction that they are expected to adhere to (Cerezo et al., 2020). In terms of words like 'queer', both groups were conscious of labelling and insulting trans people due to other meanings they have been aware of in the past. However, only the younger group were confident that the terminology in question would eventually become mainstream.

Culture

'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world' (Wittgenstein, 1961), and the limits of one's world reflect the culture they live in. There were varied if subtle differences in the cultural outlook of the two groups. Group 1 saw traditional values as an issue in advancing the cause of gender diversity, in other words people with traditional views about sex and sexuality were holding progress back. Therefore, it can be argued that identity formation was rooted in resistance against social pressures including from family of origin and valued community spaces (Cerezo et al., 2020). Specifically, it was noted the importance of community resilience and how they created their own social support networks upon facing marginalization whereas the older group felt that the trans movement expects too many people to adjust to the new realities. This is despite participants in Group 1 having some sympathy for those trying to adjust their use of language, and they themselves having difficulty with pronouns. Participants in Group 2 displayed open support for trans people, but used cultural examples such as Father Christmas and advertising for tissues and chocolate to regret how traditional assumptions about gender have changed. Having said this, traditional students questioned how terms such as 'gay' and 'lesbian' are unnecessarily sexualised, and the non-traditional challenged diversity on the grounds of protecting female spaces such as toilets and sports events from trans men.

Traditional students viewed gender diversity and language as natural, whereas the non-traditional students saw it more ideologically, even though both had their own reservations. Group 1 accepts, and understands the language of diversity more than Group 2, in general, participants in Group 1 feel excluded from the main debates, while on-traditional students harboured some resentment at being expected to adjust. It was evident that they have more difficulty with how language is changing to meet the needs of what they consider to be a 'minority group'. Therefore, some traditional students view that language of diversity as 'matter of fact and those traditional values hold back the development of gender inclusive language. Whereas some of the non-traditional students expressed their view on language as an unnecessary social construction which challenges the traditional values.

Conclusions and reflections

In terms of analysing the data, the respondents have been presented as the 'traditional' group and the 'non-traditional' group. In some respects, the responses were distinct for each group, but the students also share common ground. The former group embraced the language of diversity, whereas the latter found it more confusing, troublesome, and threatening. There were also differences in how the two groups felt about the words used in the research; for the traditional students, the language of gender diversity is more of a personal identity issue whereas it was more of a wider society issue for non-traditional students. There were differences in how the groups interpret cultural change, traditional students look forward to further cultural developments and accept that language will change with it, but non-traditional students tend to look back and compare cultural change and the language that accompanies it with a time before gender diversity issues were in the public discourse. However, both traditional and non-traditional students share the fear of offending trans people over language used e.g., pronouns. This micro study illuminates the ways that the interpretation of the gender inclusive language has changed over a short period of time. However, it would be useful to find out if these findings would be similar with a different sample, i.e., students from different, or outside, academic programmes, those with more diverse age differences, or more of a gender mix.

The method of self-directed focus groups was justified in meeting the aims. The self-direction of the group with minimal involvement of facilitator allowed for more naturalistic discussions and allowed for different approaches for each group. However, it is proposed that should subsequent research be carried out, a grounded theory approach may be more appropriate. In view of the freedom the respondents were given, the theoretical framework may have restricted the analysis of data on the topical subject of gender diversity.

References

- Abram, D. (1997). *Spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more-than-human world*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Atkinson, S., Russell, D. (2015). Gender dysphoria. *The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners*, 44(11): 792-796. doi: 10.1016/jc.2009-0345
- Barracough, K. (2004). Diagnosis and Wittgenstein's theories of language. *British Journal of General Practice*, 54(503): 480-481.
- Bonetti, S. (2018). *The Early Years Workforce: a fragmented picture*. London: Education Policy Institute.
- Breakwell, G. (2000). Interviewing. In G.M. Breakwell, S., Hammond, and C. Fie-Sahaw (eds.) *Research methods in psychology, 2nd Edition* (pp. 239-250). London: Sage.
- Burrell, G., Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*. London: Heinemann.
- Cerezo, A., Cummings, M., Holmes, M., Williams, C. (2020). Identity as Resistance: Identity Formation at the Intersection of Race, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 44(1): 67-83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684319875977>.
- Chiu, C. (2011). Language and Culture. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 4(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1098>.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education*. 8th Edition. London: Routledge.
- Connell, R. (1987). *Gender and Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Crocetti, E. (2017). Identity formation in adolescence: The dynamic of forming and consolidating identity commitments. *Child Development Perspectives*, 11(2): 145-150. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12226>.
- Crystal, D. (2005). *How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press.
- Darvin, R., Norton, B. (2019). Identity. In J. Schwieter & A. Benati (eds.). *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Learning*. Cambridge Handbooks in Language and Linguistics (pp. 451-474). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davies, B. (1989). Education for sexism: A theoretical analysis of the sex/gender bias in education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 21(1): 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.1989.tb00115.x>.
- Davies, B., Gannon, S. [Eds.] (2006) *Doing Collective Biography: Investigating the Production of Subjectivity*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Fraser, N., Nicholson, L. (1990). *Social Criticism without Philosophy: an Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism in Nicholson, L. J. (Ed) Feminism /Postmodernism*. London: Routledge.
- Further and Higher Education Act (1992). Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/13/2020-03-25> (Accessed 17th December, 2024).
- Gender Recognition Act, (2004). Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/en/ukpga/2004/7/contents/2005-12-05> (Accessed 17th December, 2024).
- Healthline (2024). *Cisgender and Straight Don't Mean the Same Thing - Here's Why*. Available at: <https://www.healthline.com/health/cisgender-vs-straight#cisgender-defined> (Accessed 15th July 2024).
- Hayakawa, S., Hayakawa, A. (1990). *Language in thought and action (5th ed.)*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace.
- Jiang, W. (2000). The relationship between culture and language. *ELT Journal*, 54(4): 328-334. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/54.4.328>.
- Kearns, K. (2011). *Semantics, 2nd Edition*. London: Palgrave.
- Khan, T. H., MacEachen, E. (2021). Foucauldian Discourse Analysis: Moving Beyond a Social Constructionist Analytic. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20: 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211018009>.

- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews*. London: Sage.
- Leeds-Hurwitz, W. (1993). *Semiotics and Communication: Signs, Codes, Cultures*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Mayo Clinic (2024). *Gender Dysphoria*. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/gender-dysphoria/symptoms-causes/sy20475255#:~:text=Overview,some%20point%20in%20their%20lives> (Accessed 3rd July 2024).
- McKay, M., Davis, M., Fanning, P. (1995). *Messages: Communication skills book* (2nd ed.). Oakland: New Harbinger Publications.
- Mikuska, E. (2021). *Nursery workers' narratives: What makes a 'good' nursery worker?* Unpublished Thesis) Available at https://repository.londonmet.ac.uk/6893/1/MikuskaEva_Thesis-2021.pdf.
- Morgan, D. (1988). *Focus groups as qualitative research*. Beverley Hills, CA: Sage.
- NCFE (2022). Sector Spotlight - Early Years and Childcare. Available at: <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/media/q5ofx4pz/175-sector-spotlight-reports-early-years.pdf> (Accessed 24th December, 2024).
- Newby, P. (2010). *Research methods for education*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.
- NSPCC (2024). What is gender identity? Available at: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/sex-relationships/gender-identity/> (Accessed 24th December, 2024).
- Olmos-Vega, F. M., Stalmeijer, R. E., Varpio, L., Kahlke, R. (2022). A practical guide to reflexivity in qualitative research: *AMEE Guide No. 149. Medical Teacher*, 45(3): 241-251. <http://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2022.2057287>
- Oppenheim, A. (1992). *Questionnaire design, interviewing and attitude measurement*. London: Pinter
- Riittakerttu, K.H., Bergman, H., Työläjäarvi, M., Frisen, L. (2018). Gender dysphoria in adolescence: current perspectives. *Adolescent Health, Medicine and Therapeutics*, (9): 31-41. doi: 10.2147/AHMT.S135432.
- Ross, M., Xun, E.W.Q., Wilson, A. (2002). Language and the bicultural self. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28: 1040-1050. doi: 10.1177/01461672022811003.
- Ryan, G., Bernard, H. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1): 85-109. doi: 10.1177/1525822X02239569.
- Sapir, E. (1949) *Selected Writings in Language, Culture and Personality*, D. Mandelbaum (ed.). Berkeley CA: University of California Press.
- Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights (2018). Available at: <https://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2018/05/views-and-experiences-of-lgbt-young-people-in-scotland-highlighted-in-new-report/> (Accessed 17th December, 2024).
- Shahrehabaki, M. (2018). Language and Identity: A Critique. *Journal of Narrative and Language Studies*, 6(11): 217-226.
- Thaper- Bjorkert, S., Henry, M. (2004). Reassessing the research relationship: location, position and power in fieldwork accounts. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7(5): 363-381. doi: 10.1080/1364557092000045294.
- UCAS (2020). Progression Pathways. Available at: <https://www.ucas.com/advisers/help-and-training/guides-resources-and-training/tools-and-resources-help-you/progression-pathways> (Accessed 24th December, 2024).
- United Nations (2024). Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml> (Accessed 24th December, 2024)
- University and College Union (2021). LGBTQ+ A Guide to Language in use. <file:///C:/Users/AKurowsk/OneDrive%20->

- %20University%20of%20Chichester/Documents/Chichester/Research/Gender%20diversity/Resources/LGBT__I
language_april_21%20UCU.pdf.
- Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) (2020). *Mature Undergraduate Students*. Available online
<https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/student-life/mature-undergraduate-students> (Accessed 7th July 2024).
- Van Dijk, T. (2007). *Ideology and discourse*. A Multidisciplinary Introduction. Available at:
onlinebooks@pobox.upenn.edu (Accessed 24th December, 2024).
- Walker, M. (2014). Gender and Language: Examining the use of diagnostic language in the discussion of gender
variance. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 5(2): 332-345.
<https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs.walkerm.522014>.
- Ward, L., Lucas, S. (2023). “You’re trying to put yourself in boxes, which doesn’t work”: Exploring non-binary
youth’s gender identity development using feminist relational discourse analysis. *Journal of Gender
Studies*, 33(5): 658-672. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2023.2172557>.
- Watts, M., Ebbutt, D. (1987). More than the sum of the parts: research methods in group interviewing, *British
Educational Research Journal*, 13(1): 25-34.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1961). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Wood, B., Ristow, B. (2022). Everyday talk: self-directed peer focus groups with diverse youth. *International Journal
of Social Research Methodology*, 27(2): 173-187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2022.2138107>.
- Zimman, I. (2017). Transgender language reform: some challenges and strategies for promoting trans-affirming,
gender-inclusive language. *Journal of Language and Discrimination*, 1(1): 84-105.
<https://doi.org/10.1558/jld.33139>.
- Zimmer, E. (2017). Children’s comprehension of two types of syntactic ambiguity. *First Language*, 37(1): 7-23.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0142723716673952>.

Appendix 1: Theming of data

Table 6: Theming of data.

Gender diversity theming of data		
Concept	Traditional students	Non-traditional students
Ideology	Personalisation Acceptance that trans issues are more mainstream today Sensitive to offending Consider some terminology derogative, e.g., ‘queer’ Reservations about hormone blockers for children	Beyond the personal/ historical anecdotes Gender dysphoria thought to be a mental condition More than binary- male/female is baffling Fear of offending trans people ‘Gender queer’ considered a derogative term Some resentment about priority of ‘Pride’ over e.g., Armed Forces Day Express limits, e.g., young children and gender identity Babies are born either male or female Men who transition are not ‘women’ but ‘transgender’ women

Discourse	<p>Accept novelty of trans issues</p> <p>Feel terminology is new and developing</p> <p>Accept controversies around gender dysphoria</p> <p>Sense of exclusion from gender diversity issues</p> <p>Social media is important in transgender issues</p> <p>Reservations about hormone blockers for children</p>	<p>Gender dysphoria suffers from tokenistic attitudes</p> <p>Some people are oversensitive</p> <p>Difficulty in overriding gender stereotypes</p> <p>Accept that celebration compensates for hiding sexuality in the past</p> <p>Trans people need to understand the difficulty others, e.g., older people, have in understanding them</p> <p>Awkwardness, e.g., midwives labelling babies</p>
Semantics	<p>Good with most definitions but struggle with some, e.g., LGBTQ+</p> <p>Sympathy for trans people as well as those adjusting to new terminology</p> <p>Empathise with those who struggle with terminology</p>	<p>Confusion over meaning of terms, e.g., 'cis gender', 'dysphoria', 'gender queer'</p> <p>Some explanations needed</p> <p>'They/ them' are plural and not suitable for individual people</p> <p>Terms such as LGBTQ+ are getting more difficult to understand</p>
Pragmatics	<p>Pragmatic about terminology</p> <p>Conscious of labelling trans people</p> <p>Acknowledgement that terminology will eventually become mainstream</p>	<p>View that words are interpreted in different ways</p> <p>No need to understand terminology</p> <p>Pronouns are a social construction</p>
Culture	<p>Traditional views may be the 'problem'</p> <p>Difficulty adjusting to use of pronouns</p> <p>Consider terms such as 'gay' and 'lesbian' to be sexualised</p>	<p>Accept and respect those with gender dysphoria</p> <p>Father Christmas, tissues and chocolate, and gender assumptions</p> <p>Resentment over trans men entering female spaces, e.g., toilets, female sports events</p>

Teachers' initiatives in youth literacy education – from beliefs to activities

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.11>

Anna Dąbrowska

University of Warsaw, Poland; email: anna.dabrowska@uw.edu.pl

Abstract

The aim of the article is to present interesting educational initiatives supporting the improvement of young people's writing skills. They are a response to students' difficulties in using written language diagnosed by researchers and observed in school practice. The proposals presented in the article for working with youth in the field of developing text-creating competences come from language teachers – reflective practitioners. They are the result of their knowledge and experience, their own observations combined with their creativity and passion. They can become a source of inspiration for new interesting and attractive, and at the same time effective ideas for youth literacy education.

Keywords: literacy, literacy education, youth, text-creating competences, teacher, educational initiatives

Introduction

Intuitions, experiences and finally beliefs often underlie both research activities and educational initiatives. It is ideal if, in a given area, they involve both theoreticians and practitioners. Then they converge and merge into one trend, strongly rooted in knowledge, previous research and experience. One such area that is currently emerging is youth literacy, understood as the ability to create texts that meet the criteria of a written text. The problem of writing competences of teenagers has been raised by researchers for some time and presented as increasingly urgent⁷. It has not escaped the attention of language teachers either, because it is they who are largely responsible for introducing students to the culture of writing, teaching the ability to interact with written texts that create cultural heritage - their reception and creation. They are also often the first to notice the difficulties of young people in this area and observe their struggles with the written language. After intuition, observations and finally beliefs regarding the need to support students in improving their writing skills, the time has come for action. These actions come from passionate teachers that can inspire interesting and important educational initiatives.

Theoretical background

Current dynamic socio-cultural changes also include language, which is becoming a mirror of the trends noticeable in the modern world. One of them is the change of dominant medium, and consequently the way young people communicate. Entering the era of new orality (Dąbrowska, 2023) raises questions about the future of literacy. Will advanced text construction skills still be necessary in the adult life of modern young people? What role will they play? And how can they be effectively trained in new cultural conditions? Before I move on to

⁷ The issue of literacy of the young generation of Poles has been of interest primarily to researchers who have analyzed the skills of constructing texts by young people. This topic was taken up by, among others, Aldona Skudrzyk and Jacek Warchala (2010), Agnieszka Rypel (2015), Anna Wileczek (2015), Ewa Nowak (2014), Anna Tabisz (2007), Anna Dąbrowska (2023), Anna Dąbrowska, Anna Konarzewska (2024). All the cited researchers drew attention to the numerous difficulties young people have in creating statements that meet the criteria of written text.

presenting interesting educational proposals, it is worth considering the importance of literacy in individual and communal human life.

The emergence of writing led to a huge breakthrough on many levels – cognitive, social and cultural. It has become an important new system of human communication. It has introduced irreversible changes and taken a permanent place in it. Next to speech, it has become the basic way of human communication. Speech and writing, as Ong (2011) claims, are different ways of communicating, two different ways in which culture functions, representing different cognitive styles, ways of thinking and completely different ways of coding and decoding statements. Orality is connected with interaction, situationality, additivity and redundancy, while writing requires categorization, abstraction, generalization and structuring. In the cognitive sphere, it transformed the way in which people perceive reality, moving away from reception through the prism of the situation towards reception dictated by the categorization of the surrounding world. As current research using fMRI scanning shows (Skeide, Kumar et al. 2017), contact with writing changes the structure of the human brain. Only 6 months of learning to read and write in previously illiterate people strengthens the centers of vision and visual-spatial coordination, but also those responsible for controlling focus, which proves how quickly and deeply learning these skills formats the human brain.

Writing also freed memory from the need to remember all the necessary information, thanks to which the statement could become the subject of discourse. From then on, it could be transformed, analyzed, placed in a different context and, based on it, conclusions about reality could be drawn, which would not be possible without this form of communication. This played a huge role in the development of culture. As Olson (2010: 401) claims, the contribution of literacy to thinking is the transformation of thought into a fully-fledged object of reflection. Ideas become hypotheses and then conclusions, assumptions – knowledge, thanks to the accumulation of evidence. Literate thought is based on language awareness, because it was modern writing that provided a clear model of the intentional dimensions of our language and thus made them conscious. The emergence of writing enabled the transition from culture to civilization, created the basis for the development of various scientific disciplines and the creation of various textual communities, i.e. communities of readers who developed their own rules for interpreting and using texts for their own purposes (Olson 2015: 33). Understanding and assimilating them means learning to function within a certain common "paradigm" (Olson 2010: 396).

The invention of writing created the basis for the formation of an entirely new way of thinking in humans and the organization of social life, as well as collecting and transmitting cultural goods. Gradually, text took up an increasingly important place in the life of communities that used writing. Learning a new form of communication has become essential for participating in a given community. Today, it is hard to imagine functioning without this skill. Acquiring skills in dealing with written texts facilitates the transition to the language of abstraction and symbolic understanding of reality, broadens human cognitive horizons and gives the chance to fully participate in a culture in which texts play an important role, because they contain the achievements of a given community, shaping its collective identity. Writing is not only a form of consolidating conceived content, it requires a different ordering of reality than speech. Acquiring this skill therefore has cognitive, social and cultural significance. As Walter J. Ong claims, a literate person cannot even imagine how much writing has influenced their way of thinking. According to Ong, functionally literate people, do not just think and speak; they do so in a chirographic way (recently conditioned by print and electronics). The fact that we do not usually feel the influence of writing in our thinking means that we have internalized the technology of writing so deeply that without enormous effort we cannot separate it from ourselves, or even recognize its presence and influence (Ong 2009: 124). Apart from the cultural and social effects of the emergence and dissemination of writing, this medium has revealed to people new ways of constructing the content of messages and has developed previously unknown cognitive perspectives.

Along with the development of new media, the written word has been transformed, as has its role and communicative functions. Current changes in the way of communicating via the Internet lead to the oral variant of the language coming to the fore in new conditions. The two strongest impulses of the new era are the dominant

orality and expansive visuality, which constitute the cultural basis for acquiring and shaping literacy skills by young people (Dąbrowska, 2023). Communication on the Internet is characterized by a new textuality (Warchala & Skudrzyk, 2010). It is distinguished by situationality, manifested in the reduction of those elements of the text that, according to the sender, are already known to the recipient. The sender assumes a community, even the co-presence of the recipient, as in a face-to-face situation. This assumption leads to a reduction in the information in the text, which during the conversation is supplemented by the situational context and non-verbal messages. Their absence in writing, on the other hand, leads to a lack of coherence and, finally, comprehensibility of the message. The function of messages written by young people is also changing; statements sent via social media are often a form of informal chat, without the need to comply with, or even contrary to, the rules of correctness imposed on writing. This message can be described as "speech written down" (Skudrzyk, 2005), not a written text.

According to Warchala (2020: 277-278), the process of literacy, which lasted for about 200 years in ancient times, changed the way of thinking and perceiving the world, created logic, rhetoric and also scientific reflection, as we understand it today. Currently, new media, which give preference to images and the spoken word, are slowly destroying literacy under the influence of these very images, the sound form of the word, the situationality of the act of speaking and are leading towards a patchwork way of thinking and formulating messages. According to Dukaj (2019: 235), the advent of the era of post-literacy is bound up with the direct transfer of experiences. Emotions can be experienced "here and now" thanks to audiovisual media. Writing transmits symbols of experiences, while new media allow the transfer of experiences themselves. They gain autonomy and become the basis for building a community, and man – as Dukaj claims – is their plaything. "I will not write a letter – I will call. I won't read a novel – I'll watch a series. I won't express political opposition in the form of an article – I'll record a video and put it on YouTube" (Dukaj, 2019: 235). Young people, immersed in this type of communication, become accustomed to oral methods of using writing. According to Tałaj, this leads to their problems not only with understanding the text and the meanings of words, but also with the correct performance of acts of reference, which condition reading. Young people lock themselves in private illusions of interpreting facts, do not feel the need to agree on meanings and things with other people, which isolates individuals from the community and condemns them to loneliness (Tałaj, 2023: 93-94).

Moreover, the space in which they practice the ability to create texts is shrinking. They are gradually limited to developing written competences at school. However, here, too, there are difficulties in achieving the goal of introducing students to the culture of writing. One of its most serious problems in this area are external exams, with their closed questions, the pressure to achieve the highest possible results and "learning for the test" (Dąbrowska, 2023). The method of examination has an impact on school practice. The construction of exam papers is a guide for teachers and students regarding what to pay attention to during preparation. The aim is to practice skills that will ensure exam success for young people. Students achieve this if they were able to write a specific answer corresponding to the key. This mechanism can significantly hinder the improvement of writing skills.

Writing becomes a tool that opens up new cognitive perspectives, and also provides tools with which a young person can acquire knowledge and participate in a creative way in the culture of writing. Given the importance of acquiring literacy by young people, it is worth paying attention to the effectiveness of this process in school education, as well as going beyond the framework of formal education, which would require observation and, if necessary, revision of the strategies used to teach text-creation skills. One of the responses to these needs may be interesting and creative ideas and educational initiatives.

Developing literacy skills in primary school. *Pedagogical experiment "Language Education of Students in Grades VI-VIII in the Era of New Orality"*⁸

Primary school is a place where its students acquire key skills that introduce them to the culture of writing. They learn to read, write and create their own texts, which will allow them to participate in writing culture creatively in the future. Current cultural and educational conditions cause difficulties in constructing written statements. One interesting initiative aimed at improving the writing skills of young people is the pedagogical experiment *Language Education of Students in Grades VI-VIII in the Era of New Orality*. It was conceived on the basis of the experiences of Polish language teachers. It is therefore all the more valuable because it stems from the observation of students, school practice and the pedagogical enthusiasm of its authors. Noticing, during their daily work with students, how strongly they are immersed in the era of new orality (Dąbrowska, 2023) or cultural changes, which Zofia Kłakówna calls the new cultural paradigm (Kłakówna, 2017), they, as reflective practitioners, adapted their work philosophy to the needs and capabilities of students in the new reality. The authors drew attention to the development of autonomy, independence, responsibility and reflectiveness of students. The experiment they proposed "involves the implementation of new activities in the process of language education using innovative methodological solutions and the introduction of an additional module of text-creation classes, an innovative model for the work of a Polish language teacher, focused on the development of text-creation competences and on the development of reading skills and understanding literary texts by developing thinking and independent learning of students of grades VI-VIII of primary school"⁹. The experiment is carried out in a primary school in a small town near Bydgoszcz. The duration is: September 2024 - June 2027. The experiment covers two current sixth grades of primary school and their teachers. As part of its implementation, the organization of educational activities and the scope of teaching content were modified by introducing two additional hours of text creation workshops for students of the experimental group, workshops developing the ability to read and understand literary texts, as well as a specially designed Polish language teaching program "Fourth dimension". As its title suggests, it is based on improvement in four basic areas, where practicing skills belonging to the first three builds the basis for the fourth of them - developing text creation competences. The guiding idea of this program is *I think, therefore I learn. Teaching today, we can tell tomorrow*, and its basic areas of education are as follows:

"I SEE - I perceive illustrated text more deeply, visualize deep meanings,
I HEAR - I listen carefully, receive sounds and interpret them, understand what I say and hear,
I THINK - I use thought patterns in understanding cultural texts,
I ACT - I create texts, illustrations, multimedia, develop text-creation competences" (Tkaczyk-Struk, Wamka, 2024: 4).

It should be emphasized that the authors have translated their several years of observations into specific proposals for changes in the structure of the lesson, so that the teaching process is not only effective, but also attractive to students. The authors emphasize that one of the important goals of the program is for students to understand how important it is to consciously use language in the times of digital domination of images, which will help increase the motivation and involvement of young people in improving their writing skills.

The program includes a multidimensional approach to language education, so I will mention here only some of its aspects, which have become the subject of the authors' reflections and proposals for changes.

Observing teenagers' problems with concentration, caused by their immersion in the world of images, being surrounded by films and memes, which focus attention for a short time, resulted in a change in the structure of

⁸ The authors of the experiment are Polish language teachers in primary school: Kamila Tkaczyk-Struk and Justyna Wamka, the scientific supervision of the experiment was provided by: Prof. Dr hab. Ewa Filipiak and Prof. Dr hab. Roman Leppert (Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, Faculty of Pedagogy).

⁹ I present the concept of the experiment based on unpublished materials: Kamila Tkaczyk-Struk and Justyna Wamka, *Pedagogical experiment "Language Education of Students in Grades VI-VIII in the Era of New Orality"*, Łochowo 2024, p. 2.

Polish language lessons, consisting in moving away from monotony in favor of combining written text with images, films and intersemiotic translation. Working with students therefore includes comparing, analyzing, discovering extra-textual meanings, as well as trying to understand and build their own interpretation, without an imposed key. In searching for ways to practice concentrating attention on written texts and creating intersemiotic translations, the method of constructing Lego structures – Lego Logos (Spychała, 2020) is used. It is based on selected literary texts and elements of coding and logical thinking. In addition, the didactic process uses students' imagination and their potential in building stories. Weaving storytelling elements during the lesson develops the skills of creating statements.

One of the skills that young people have the most difficulty with is language correctness, especially punctuation, which often results from a lack of understanding the structure of a sentence. These problems are caused by the structure of "online conversations" that are different from the rules of writing, which are the everyday experience of today's teenagers. The proposed program therefore includes introducing students to language correctness, making them aware of the need for spelling in accordance with the rules and using punctuation so that the form of the messages they create does not hinder mutual understanding.

An important goal of the project presented here is to implement critical thinking practices in students' language education, in order to equip them with one of the most important competences of the future. During classes, young people should have a sense of security and autonomy, as well as space for the free exchange of thoughts and mistakes. For this purpose, thought patterns are used (Project Zero - Harvard University), thanks to which students' thinking becomes "visible", and can be subjected to observation and analysis, which allows them to reflect, feel a sense of agency and the usefulness of processing knowledge. During the lesson, everyday knowledge is gradually supported by "scientific" knowledge (Klus-Stańska, 2018), and students can move freely in the areas of knowledge required by the core curriculum, noticing its usefulness in everyday life.

The experiment is currently being implemented. Like any study, it sets specific goals. One of them is to formulate recommendations for school practice in the field of improving writing skills – so crucial for developing the cognitive potential of young people and their creative participation in the culture of writing. However, the preparation of an innovative and valuable program for teaching text-creation skills among primary school pupils, which may serve as an inspiration for language teachers, should be considered exceptional.

Creative ideas for developing writing skills in secondary school

While language education at the primary school level is to equip children and young people with basic skills that allow them to efficiently navigate the area of receiving and creating different types of texts, education in a secondary school or a technical school is to provide young people with the necessary tools to be able to fully and creatively participate in the culture of writing. At the end of the school, the graduate takes the secondary school leaving exam – the Polish Matura exam – which is also associated with ability and maturity in the appropriate use of language.

Anna Konarzewska (Dąbrowska & Konarzewska 2024) uses unconventional methods of working with students at this stage of education. As in the case presented above, they are a response to the difficulties of young people in constructing their own texts, this proposal resulting from research and her own many years of observations in this area. According to her, the cause of the problems is haste and the resulting brevity. The habit of using patterns when writing one's own written statements deprives them of depth and specificity. In their texts, students often summarize the set books instead of synthetically presenting the issues found in them, they omit conclusions, and their statements are colloquial in nature. In order to get rid of the blocks and prejudices related to writing, Konarzewska proposes primarily work on young people's perception of the depth of the text, analysis of the characters' attitudes, motivations, emotions and their causes, and thus thinking. Initially, this is writing that is not assessed. The aim is for students to unleash their enthusiasm for writing and unconventional thinking about literary texts. (Dąbrowska & Konarzewska, 2024: 140) In her educational practice, she uses many interesting

activating methods of work, taking into account not only digital technologies, but above all a fresh look at readings and journalism – not limited by patterns. Each of them has been tested many times in work with young people. The author develops key writing skills in students: reasoning, arguing, considering, summarizing and using contexts. For this purpose, she uses various activation methods, including the teaching station technique, which combines various activities in different places in the room – stations; the 5 WHY method, which allows her to find the real causes of the problem presented in the literary text under discussion; drama – a sculpture technique; and others, which she creatively transforms and combines, adapting to current needs.

One example of using various forms of work, materials and contexts during classes is Konarzewska's proposal for discussing the myth of Heracles (Mythology). It is based on the text *Heracles at the Crossroads* (Xenophon, 1967) and introduces the concept of the monomyth. She presents the following idea for conducting classes:

Students start by reading the text *Heracles at the Crossroads* (Xenophon, 1967), and then move on to completing tasks for the text.

1. Instructions for students: Graphically present the myth of Heracles that you have read, to summarize it. Work in groups.
 2. Each student chooses two Dixit¹⁰ cards that they associate with this myth – it is mainly about metaphorically presenting two paths of life. Students must choose cards in such a way that they can later justify their decision, placing it in the context of the myth.
 3. What truths about human life and the choices made do you find in this myth? Independent work.
 4. What is your attitude towards the truths contained in this myth? Do you agree with them? Do you oppose them? Justify your opinion.
 5. Next, students are presented with Annibale Carracci's painting *Hercules at the Crossroads* (1596).
 6. Based on the information contained in the myth of Heracles at the Crossroads, write/tell what connects the above painting with the story you have read. Consider whether you recognize the characters from the myth in the painting. Justify your considerations and observations. Or: Paraphrase the myth of Heracles based on the image.
 7. At this point in the class, you can introduce Joseph Campbell's concept of the monomyth using a film published on TED¹¹.
 8. After watching the film, students provide a definition of monomyth and draw conclusions on this topic. It would be good if students gave examples of literary and film characters that fit into the idea of the monomyth.
 9. Is Joseph Campbell's idea inscribed in human life? Justify your position.
 10. The class works in groups, using Edward de Bono's six thinking hats method (1996). Each team represents a different way of thinking about the problem.
- Each group presents its considerations, observations and ideas in turn. However, the "blue hat" may speak all the time – during and at the end of the debate – summarizing the discussion and drawing conclusions.
11. Questions for reflection: What did you learn today? What surprised you and why? What else do you want to learn?
 12. Write a summary of the considerations and conclusions from this lesson. This exercise is to be performed individually by each student. Alternatively, this can be done in the Mentimeter application¹² (Dąbrowska & Konarzewska, 2024: 153-155).

Class time is skillfully interspersed with various activities – there is time for independent reflection by the student, time for discussion and confrontation of interpretations of the proposed sources, and time for creative group work.

¹⁰ More about Dixit cards here: <https://www.rebel.pl/gry-planszowe/dixit-2001605.html>

¹¹ https://www.ted.com/talks/matthew_winkler_what_makes_a_hero/transcript?language=pl&subtitle=pl

¹² Here are instructions on how to use the app: <https://www.doskonaleniewsieci.pl/Upload/Scenariusze/efektywne-wspomaganie/Mentimeter.pdf> or <https://skokiporozum.blogspot.com/2018/12/mentimeter-instrukcja-do-tworzenia.html>

The author encourages students to create their own texts with ideas for developing the art of creative writing. She suggests using their own imagination to build different versions of well-known stories, writing letters to a literary hero, using artifacts as magical objects that inspire them to write a story. She encourages students to write a time travel journal, use photographs, musical or painting works, and even newspaper clippings to create their own statements, construct dubbing for an animated story, or start a class blog. These activities teach them how to master the matter of written language and notice stylistic and genre differences in individual statements in order to use them more and more perfectly.

Conclusion

Teachers' knowledge and experience combined with their creativity, initiative and passion can become the driving force of changes in education. Dynamic changes in the socio-cultural context in which contemporary youth are immersed require a response in the form of updating educational proposals. Otherwise, education will be neither effective nor attractive to students. They will also find it incomprehensible why they should absorb the indicated content. Any curriculum reforms and formal adjustments require a long time, many months, during which current students complete subsequent classes, sometimes stages of education and, perhaps, lose the opportunity to take advantage of new, creative educational proposals. Therefore, the grassroots actions of teachers are all the more valuable – reflective practitioners, passionate educators who work with young people on a daily basis, notice what arouses their interest and what bores them. They are the ones – equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills – who have the opportunity to react, propose new, adequate solutions, and thanks to this, inspire others.

References

- Dąbrowska A. (2023). *Piśmienność młodzieży w epoce nowej oralności*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Dąbrowska A., Konarzewska A. (2024). *Pisanie to wyzwanie. O tekstach młodzieży w edukacji szkolnej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Dukaj J. (2019), *Po piśmie*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Bono de E. (1996). *Sześć kapeluszy czyli Sześć sposobów myślenia*, przeł. M. Patterson. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Medium.
- Kłakówna Z.A. (2017). *Wykłady z dydaktyki. Akademicki podręcznik myślenia o zawodzie szkolnego polonisty*. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.
- Ksenofont (1967). *Pisma sokratyczne*, przeł. L. Joachimowicz. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, dostęp online: <https://filozofuj.eu/prodikos-z-keos-herakles-na-rozstajach-drog/>.
- Nowak E. (2014). *Stworzyć tekst. Uczniowska kompetencja tekstotwórcza w edukacji polonistycznej*. Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas.
- Olson D.R. (2010). *Papierowy świat. Pojęciowe i poznawcze implikacje czytania i pisanie*, przeł. M. Rakoczy. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Olson D.R. (2015). *Piśmienność, polityka piśmienności, szkoła*, przeł. A. Brylska, I. Hryniewicz, [w:] *Almanach antropologiczny*. *Communicare*, t. 5: *Szkoła/Pismo*, red. T. Buliński, M. Rakoczy. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, s. 29–43.
- Ong W.J. (2009). *Osoba – świadomość – komunikacja*, przeł. J. Japola. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Ong W.J. (2011). *Oralność i piśmienność. Słowo poddane technologii*, przeł. J. Japola. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

- Project Zero Harvard University*, dostęp online: <https://pz.harvard.edu/>.
- Rypel A. (2015). *Gimnazjaliści w epoce wtórnej oralności. Analiza wybranych wypowiedzi pisemnych*, „Polonistyka. Innowacje”, nr 1, s. 37–53, dostęp online: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/144283865.pdf>.
- Skeide M.A, Kumar U., Mishra R.K., Tripathi V.N., Guleria A., Singh J.P., Eisner F., Huetting F. (2017), *Learning to read alters cortico-subcortical cross-talk in the visual system of illiterates*, “Science Advances”, 3(5), dostęp online: <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.1602612>
- Skudrzyk A. (2005). *Czy zmierzchn kultury pisma? O synestezji i analfabetyzmie funkcjonalnym*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.
- Skudrzyk A., Warchała J. (2010). *Kultura piśmienności młodego pokolenia*. Katowice: Oficyna Wydawnicza WW.
- Spychała J.M. (2020). *Mali rebelianci*. Toruń: Taco.
- Tabisz A. (2007). *Kompetencja tekstotwórcza uczniów na przykładzie rozprawki*. Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego.
- Tałaż D. (2023), *Rozbrat z przestrzenią słowa*, [w:] *Jaka jest współczesna młodzież?*, Seria: *Współczesne problemy wychowania*, t. 1, red. P.T. Nowakowski, Warszawa: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, s. 93-109.
- Tkaczyk-Struk K., Wamka J (2024). *Eksperyment pedagogiczny „Edukacja Językowa Uczniów klas VI-VIII w Epoce Nowej Oralności”*. Łochowo. (unpublished material)
- Warchała J. (2020), *Piśmienność i oralność, czyli język w czasach cyfryzacji*, [w:] *Polszczyzna w czasach cyfryzacji*, red. A. Hącia, K. Kłosińska, P. Zbróg, Warszawa: Polska Akademia Nauk, s. 277-288.
- Wileczek A. (2015). „Zrobić” tekst. O kompetencji tekstotwórczej gimnazjalistów, „Postscriptum Polonistyczne”, nr 2(16), s. 167–184, dostęp online: [https://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media/files/Postscriptum_Polonistyczne/Postscriptum_Polonistyczne-r2015-t-n2\(16\)/Postscriptum_Polonistyczne-r2015-t-n2\(16\)-s167-184/Postscriptum_Polonistyczne-r2015-t-n2\(16\)-s167-184.pdf](https://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media/files/Postscriptum_Polonistyczne/Postscriptum_Polonistyczne-r2015-t-n2(16)/Postscriptum_Polonistyczne-r2015-t-n2(16)-s167-184/Postscriptum_Polonistyczne-r2015-t-n2(16)-s167-184.pdf).

The educational role of children's literature and bibliotherapy in primary schooling (towards new beliefs about healing education)

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.12>

Mirzana Pašić Kodrić
University of Sarajevo, mpkodric@pf.unsa.ba

Abstract

Children's literature educates, nurtures, and heals, and through its interdisciplinary nature, it offers teachers in primary schools rich interdisciplinary and creative approaches that constantly must be researched and improved. This paper wants to draw attention to the fact that the teaching of children's literature in Bosnian and Herzegovinian primary schools must be taught more within the framework of ethical criticism, interculturality, feminist literary criticism, and gender studies, etc., and that all of the above can be done through Gestalt therapy and different bibliotherapy approaches and methods, which are concurrently the methods of research in this paper. Also, this paper offers an original educational questionnaire containing elements of bibliotherapy, which can be used in any mother tongue and children's literature course, and is intended for 3rd-grade primary school students (8–9 years old). Namely, only through creative, relaxing, and healing ways of teaching, children's literature can give its full educational meaning and potential.

Keywords: education, children's literature, teaching, bibliotherapy, educational questionnaire

Introduction

The 21st century is witnessing the peak of interdisciplinarity in all scientific fields, and children's literature through its interdisciplinary nature, offers limitless approaches in that direction. Through children's literature, above all, children, especially in primary schools, learn and nurture their native language and its possibilities, and these modes of expression are closely related to their emotions, state of consciousness, and the way they perceive themselves and others. The psychology of literary readers focuses on the application of cognitive psychology, particularly in relation to readers' understanding of literary works (Lindauer, 2009: 12), and in the most direct and simplest terms, it means that children's literature greatly shapes the behavior of children and their cognitions. Because of all this, the role of children's literature in shaping a child's psychology is enormous, and it certainly doesn't stop with adulthood. New Thought and New Thought fiction infiltrated twentieth-first-century popular culture, psychology, and self-help literature (Stiles, 2020: 7), psychological concepts and practices we now take for granted, such as silent meditation, creative visualization, daily affirmations and denials, and the inner child. In twenty-first-century psychology and self-help literature, the inner child stands for a person's true or spiritual self, which can serve as a reservoir of strength and untapped creativity. The inner child can also be wounded by past traumas, requiring healing to reach its full potential (Stiles, 2020: 16-17). On the other hand, children's literature has always had its full autonomy, and its function is not to be an additional auxiliary tool for either linguistics, pedagogy psychology, or any other science. However, it achieves its greatest potential precisely through various interdisciplinary contexts. Children's literature should not be a tool for different adult ideologies, but above all, it should develop curiosity, imagination, creativity, and critical thinking in children. Also, children's literature can greatly help children understand and control their emotions. Children's literature today best achieves its educational function through the application of contemporary literary theories, and their application in teaching

in primary schooling is inevitable – **the best educational effect is achieved precisely by combining knowledge from contemporary literary theories through bibliotherapy**. Namely, because along with the best education, the spiritual development of children and the prevention of various mental conditions and difficulties must also be a priority in the methods and techniques of any education.

Theoretical background

Children's literature, in its broadest definition, includes literature intended for children, the most vulnerable reading audience and therefore the application of ethical criticism to children's literature requires a high degree of responsibility and caution, and an equally high, careful, and dedicated level of study (Pašić Kodrić & Pečenković, 2021: 11-12). That is because of the reason that ethical criticism does not only analyze the established moral standards of children's literature but also seeks a reinterpretation of established ideological statements that were once called ethical. Especially the question of the possible ideological preoccupations of the texts in children's literature is also represented by the phenomenon of empathy that does not only include possible ideological aspects and frameworks in its interpretation and practice but also a whole series of extremely positive features that should not be mentioned separately. Empathy is one of the fundamental phenomena in children's literature and is the key to using knowledge of contemporary literary theories in teaching children's literature. Namely, children develop empathy for Otherness through their imaginative explorations of the text and by reading good children's literature, young readers gain invaluable experience of empathy and perspective, qualities crucial for developing a healthy and mature psychological "self," because narratives transport the reader outside the story into the space of the ultimate other with the "what if" experience of the Other and Different (Jenkins 2016: 98). It is through the acquisition of empathy that children and young people hone their critical thinking skills, develop important behavioral and social skills necessary for good discussion and moral engagement with their peers (exchange opinions, give reasons, listen respectfully, develop compassion), and learn to recognize and appreciate the philosophical and ethical dilemmas of the world. Cultivating empathy through children's literature must be an integral part of teaching children's literature, every class, regardless of size, can soon become entrenched in the dynamics of who is in charge, who is vulnerable, who steals the spotlight, and who stays out of it (Hammond, 2006: 1). In general, therefore, philosophy for children not only invites discussion of these central ethical questions, but it models the form of interaction with Others that it emphasizes openness to new ideas, empathy for Others and peer respect (Mills, 2016: 7). At the beginning of the 21st century, philosophers in the field of feminist ethics, such as Samantha Brennan in *Feminist Moral Philosophy* (2003), discussed from various angles several extremely important ethical questions and phenomena, such as feminist ethical scholarship, which involves the reexamination of great historical figures or theories, and through the application of feminist ideas through core problems in society. Scholars such as Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, Sarah Ruddick, Virginia Held and Fiona Robinson speak about the phenomenon of the ethics of care, arguing that relationships of care should serve as the basis for ethical decisions in both public and private life. So, all these important questions, somewhat later, resonate loudly not only within the framework of feminist ethics but also among critical theories regarding children's literature. Mary Jeanette Moran, in the manner of a feminist import of philosophical studies, explains in detail what exactly the ethics of maternal care would entail in children's literature. Namely, the ethics of maternal care, broadly speaking, actually speaks ethically about the relationships between fiction and fact, that is, about widespread cultural schemas of motherhood in a way that emphasizes the difference between fantasy and reality, especially when it comes to the mother-child relationship and the ethical dimensions of the constructions of motherhood found in educational texts and especially in children's literature. These widespread cultural schemas of motherhood in literature would imply socially "expected" roles of mother characters as seen through the eyes of patriarchy (Moran, 2016), and excellent examples of all of the above are easiest to see in classic fairy tales that are steeped in misogyny and monarchist sentiments. Folklorists are quick to point out that fairy tales were never really meant for children's ears alone (Tatar, 1987: 14).

Lest this litany of atrocities leads to the mistaken view that women are the sole agents of evil in German fairy tales, let us look at examples of paternal and fraternal cruelty. Who can forget the miller who makes life miserable for his daughter by boasting that she can spin straw to gold? Or the king of the same tale who is prepared to execute the girl if her father's declarations prove false? (Tatar, 1987: 4)

A special place in the ethical study of children's literature belongs to boyish or youthful male characters of heroes, rebels, wizards, detectives, etc. Interestingly, this type of character is most popular today in many cartoons with anthropomorphic animal characters modeled after boys (e.g., *Spiderman*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Paw Patrol* and many characters from Disney cartoons). But also, in famous books and/or literary texts adapted into films for children, such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Mark Twain) or *The Hero of Paul Street* (Ferenc Molnar), etc. Of course, there are also films, drama series and/or books for somewhat older age, but also for adults, such as *Batman*, *Superman*, *Terminator* or *Matrix*, the film *Troy* (Homer's *Iliad*), etc. the drama television series *Game of Thrones* (an adaptation of the literary series *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin, the first part of which is called *Game of Thrones*), *The Lord of the Rings* (R. R. Tolkien), *Harry Potter* (J. K. Rowling), etc. All these "newer" boyish and youthful characters gained their immense popularity mostly on the dominant epic features of ancient and widely known epic heroes who were certainly not of boyish age. It is enough to recall Firdusi's Rustem (father of Suhrab) from the *Shahnameh*, but also the famous Homeric characters from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, such as Achilles or Odysseus, Virgil's Aeneas from the *Aeneid*, the character of Arjuna from the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Alexandrida* and Alexander the Great, etc. In Bosnian and Herzegovinian and Bosniak literature, these are mostly characters from oral traditions such as Alija Đerzelez, Mujo and Halil Hrnjica, Mustaj-beg Lički, etc., who also have their versions in traditions and stories for children. All these male characters in literature are accompanied by more or less identical characteristics of heroism and heroic feats, physical strength, dominance, and power, albeit with clear cultural differences, but an almost identical ethical essence – the ultimate expression of the hero's ethic: an autonomous, uncontrolled, and violent fighter for what he knows is "right" (Hourihan, 2005: 66).

It is clear that more or less every national literature has some kind of "its own Odyssey" and that generations and generations of young people, but also children, have shaped and directed their opinions and emotions precisely through such discourses. The enormous influence of such characters from the world of literature and history is expressed not only in the context of the male population's imitation of them but also in the context of women's perception of "true masculinity".

But in the course of the hero's odyssey, his dominant character trait begins to shade into its opposite through a process of inversion. The humble hero weds a woman of royal blood; the brazen fool proves his mettle; the naive simpleton outwits just about anyone. In fairy tales and folk tales, the youth lacking a good pedigree, a stout heart, and a sharp wit is precisely the one who wins a princess and a kingdom. (Tatar, 1987: 99). Every national literature has its Penelope, Dido, Ajiša (e.g., *The Green Lawn* by Edhem Mulabdić), etc. This epic discourse has always been extremely popular among the entire reading public of completely different generational ages, especially among children and young people. This popularity has only continued in new media such as cartoons animated films, and even documentaries. First in oral children's literature and later in all other genres, a series of precisely such impeccable boyish characters and young men appeared, who, in fact, in some cases may be the least bearers of the fundamental healthy traits of the generations to which they belong.

Such literature acquired a distinctly authoritative character in which the position of children and young readers was subordinated and passive about the "superior", and "unattainable" values of super boys and super young men. It is precisely in connection with this imposed superior attitude that ethical questions of such discourses arose, which speak in particular about the influence of such literature on children and young people. This imbalance of the state of the young and inexperienced reader about the superior surreal hero could certainly produce among boys a pronounced feeling of anxiety and lack of self-confidence, i.e., a feeling of incompetence and a feeling of injustice in the sense of cosmic fairness and the "allocation" of good qualities, etc. But also, an unrealistic desire that such a "standard" must be caught up with and achieved by all means, by directing enormous

energy in that, completely wrong direction, while neglecting essential and real values and positive achievements that can probably be difficult to compensate for and build up later. After the popular characters of heroes and warriors from the distant or nearer tradition, they will, by the new times, be replaced by other, equivalent characters, including, for example, the character of the detective or, especially in postmodern literary practice, the character of the wizard. Especially in English literature, the character of the boy detective, from the mid-19th to the early 20th century, was extremely popular. In its earliest incarnations in the narrative, *The Boy Detective* or *London Crimes* the dominant role of the boy is to express and contain anxiety about the potentially delinquent tendencies of adolescents, especially those working-class boys to whom these stories were predominantly directed (Lucy, 2017: 187-188).

Namely, today we understand that many of the characters of boy or young man heroes, rebels, detectives, or wizards in children's literature require serious ethical reinterpretations. Also, we should not ignore the many good qualities of these characters and the many other clear reasons why books whose fundamental carriers are these and other characters have earned the status of classics in children's and young adult literature, but in any case, **gender studies, but also postcolonial studies, intercultural studies, etc. must be an integral part of the study of children's literature in schools.**

Methodology

Bibliotherapy in classroom teaching should be a mandatory model in planning, systematizing, and conducting lessons in children's literature. For this reason, bibliotherapy requires clear and elaborated methodological models and principles, especially when it comes to schooling and courses in the native languages (Pašić Kodrić, 2023). Although the term bibliotherapy takes on special significance in the twenty-first century, bibliotherapeutic practices are as old as humankind. Although of a fictional nature, literature has always had the power to influence the psychological states of children in particular, because bibliotherapy primarily involves the oral narration of various literary genres and reading literary texts to prevent and treat certain psychological difficulties and to nurture mental health in general. (Pašić Kodrić & Sousa Reis, 2023). Gestalt therapy is a humanist and process-oriented form of therapy. It includes principles from various other theoretical approaches such as psychoanalysis, gestalt psychology and humanist theories (Blom, 2006: 17) and is often used in different arts therapies and practices including in bibliotherapy. **Gestalt therapy focuses on discovering oneself and experiencing reality in the process of self-discovery, and for this reason, it can be used in bibliotherapy because the dynamics between characters and readers inevitably establish the aforementioned processes.** By focusing on the present and the "here and now", Gestalt therapy through literature aims to raise the reader's awareness through their connection with certain characters. In these processes, the reader more clearly accepts themselves and their environment. They more clearly understand their responsibility for everyday and long-term choices and all this results in better self-reflection. The aim of Gestalt therapy is to awaken or mobilize people enough for them to get on better with their lives than they were managing before coming for help (Houston, 2003: 3), so the prevention of stress, but also different difficulties and conditions through bibliotherapy is of invaluable importance. **The Gestalt approach emphasizes the uninhibitedness, strength, and freedom of the individual to act according to their own beliefs despite the pressures of the outside world and literature abounds with such characters.** Literary bibliotherapy is used when one wants to address a specific manifestation of emotion within a literary work, and it focuses on noticing, understanding, and experiencing emotions through the MEE cycle, i.e. the process of mutual motivation of thoughts, emotions, and events in a literary work, all to gain insight (Piskač, 2016: 63). **This paper offers an original educational questionnaire containing elements of bibliotherapy and Gestalt therapy and is intended for 3rd-grade primary school students (8–9 years old).** Questionnaires can be used by teachers as part of a lesson in any mother tongue and children's literature course.

Results and discussion
Fairy tale questionnaire for female pupils

Question number:	TEACHER'S QUESTIONS:	PUPIL'S ANSWERS:
1.	What is the name of your favorite princess?	
2.	Can you imagine that you are that princess at this moment?	
3.	Can you borrow her physical look now?	
4.	Using different adjectives can you describe how you look like as that princess at this moment?	
5.	Can you borrow her emotions now?	
6.	Using different adjectives can you describe how you feel as that princess at this moment?	
7.	Which emotions about her do you like and find familiar with yourself?	
8.	Which emotions about her you don't like and you don't find familiar with yourself?	
9.	Do you want to be a beautiful princess like her in real life?	
10.	Using different adjectives can you describe what is exactly beautiful about her?	
11.	Who are her enemies in a fairy tale?	
12.	Do you have enemies in real life and are you scared of them?	
13.	Do you think that is strange that this princess only wanted a prince and love in her life?	
14.	Would you find a job for her to work as your mother?	
15.	Do you think that she was a bit lazy and passive or do you like it exactly about her?	
16.	Would you marry her for anybody else in a case if she did not meet a prince?	
17.	What do you want to change about her at this moment?	

Fairy tale questionnaire for male pupils

Question number:	TEACHER'S QUESTIONS:	PUPIL'S ANSWERS:
1.	What is the name of your favorite prince/hero?	

2.	Can you imagine that you are that prince/hero at this moment?	
3.	Can you borrow his physical look now?	
4.	Using different adjectives can you describe how you look as that prince /hero at this moment?	
5.	Can you borrow his emotions now?	
6.	Using different adjectives can you describe how you feel as that prince /hero at this moment?	
7.	Which emotions about him do you like and find familiar with yourself?	
8.	Which emotions about him you do not like and do not find familiar with yourself?	
9.	Do you want to be a strong prince /hero like him in real life?	
10.	Using different adjectives can you describe what is exactly strong about him?	
11.	Who are his enemies in a fairy tale /story?	
12.	Do you have enemies in real life and are you scared of them?	
13.	Do you think that is strange that this prince /hero does not show deep emotions?	
14.	Would you find a job for him to work as your father?	
15.	Do you think that he was cruel and aggressive to his enemies or do you exactly like it about him?	
16.	Can you imagine that he cries?	
17.	What do you want to change about him at this moment?	

The aim of any therapy is arguably to enable people to understand and befriend themselves and others, or cope, or move on more rewardingly in their lives (Houston, 2003: 2), and one could say that the main task of literary bibliotherapy is the prevention of various difficulties. Therefore, bibliotherapy must find its place in the teaching of any mother tongue and children's literature course. It has already been mentioned that the Gestalt worldview is based on deep self-reflection and ideas that emphasize individual freedom of choice and a stronger ability to act according to one's own beliefs despite the pressures of the outside world with a focus on the "here and now". If the questions from these questionnaires are studied in detail, they aim to produce this state of consciousness in children through literature. Gestalt therapy also implies stronger self-acceptance with acceptance of responsibilities, so in these questions from both questionnaires, interdisciplinary education, in this way, replaces established school pedagogical practices. Gestalt is an experiential therapy and as such experimentation is key to the approach (Mann, 2010: 4). Since experiments are one of the key ingredients of

Gestalt therapy, those questionnaires imply educational experiments because, in addition to educating children, they also have a healing nature.

Both tables for female and male pupils have all elements of AFFECTIVE DOMAIN which are very important in the class interpretation of all fairy tales (Pollete, 2005: 7):

RECEPTIVENESS: Willing to pay attention. Willing to become aware. Sensitive to human needs. RESPONSIVENESS: Willing to participate, discuss, and justify.

VALUE-DRIVEN: Placing value or worth on an object or idea. Demonstrating beliefs.

ORGANIZATION: Formulates plans consistent with beliefs. Brings together and examines values. Resolves conflicts between values. Internalizing values.

CHARACTERIZATION BY A VALUE: Develops lifestyle based on specific values. Demonstrating self-reliance, discrimination, and verification.

Those questionnaires combine education and bibliotherapy elements as well as elements of Gestalt therapy. Their primary goal is to demonstrate interdisciplinary approaches to the teaching of children's literature. Their use in teaching of any mother tongue and children's literature courses is still expected.

Conclusion

Children's literature does not only have the function of building literary preferences in children and young people but also has dominantly a psychological, pedagogical and ethical function, which are its most dominant functions in addition to the aesthetic function of literature. In this sense, especially in complex societies such as Bosnian and Herzegovinian, special importance belongs to the **question of the educational role of children's literature in building and nurturing gender sensibility, but also in erasing misogynistic stereotypes and stigmas about women and gender roles in general.**

Outside the circle of legends are fairy tales about a girl, most often a stepdaughter, industrious, beautiful, obedient, but persecuted and neglected or enchanted, who after all her troubles is miraculously rescued by a beautiful prince, among which, among many others, the best known are those of the Cinderella and Snow-White types. In both of these widely spread groups of stories, contemporary feminist criticism sees the reinforcement of desirable values and norms of female behavior, the ideal of passivity and helpless suffering of fate. (Bošković Stuli, 1999: 25, 41). Children's literature must promote multicultural and intercultural identity and sensibility for any Difference. All that directly influences future generations and promotes sensibility for Otherness from a very early age as extremely positive values. Scientific disciplines such as psychology, pedagogy or methodology, etc. drew attention to the influence of teaching literature and language to participants in the educational process and its exceptional importance in shaping the image of the world (Pašić Kodrić & Pečenković 2021). Examining the influence of children's literature on the perception of gender roles in society must be an integral part of teaching children's literature. The story of Odysseus has long been regarded as an ideal story for children (earlier generations might have said 'for boys'). A clever trickster hero, sea voyages and shipwrecks, battles, monsters, a happy ending with the hero's triumph over his enemies and a joyous reunion with wife and son: what could be more child-friendly? As Edith Hall notes, a reason why the Odyssey has achieved such cultural penetration is because it has been regarded as a suitable material for children's books, and latterly children's theatre, cartoons and videos (Miles, 2015: 213). Epically coded characters of boys or young men, heroes, warriors or detectives, have had a huge impact not only on the boy population but also on girls, who were and still are being forced by such discourses to understand the idea of "real men" worthy of admiration. And when, although rarely, epic heroines appear in children's literature, they most often take on the same pattern of masculine behavior. All this clearly shows that ethical criticism in children's literature only draws attention to a series of ethical contradictions in this literature, which, especially in the context of the widespread knowledge of the 21st century, are in dire need of **ethical reinterpretations**. The most suspect areas of children's literature are precisely hidden behind the seemingly "ethical hubs" of empathy, but empathy is also the key to understanding all the Differences. However,

encouraging equality, empathy, and belonging to multiple differences should be fundamental characteristics and one of the goals of the society and the world in which we live, but also of the discourse of children's literature (Winters, 2020). Because of all of the above, this paper offered a new way of studying children's literature in the classroom that combines educational and bibliotherapy elements. Those questionnaires also contain strong bibliotherapy elements as well as elements of Gestalt Therapy and **show how it is possible to combine educational and bibliotherapy elements within the teaching of children's literature**. In this way, the educational segments of children's literature teaching follow the insights of contemporary literary theories, but in a creative and healing way.

References

- Bošković-Stulli, M. (1999). *O usmenoj tradiciji i životu*, Zagreb: Konzor.
- Blom, R. (2006). *The Handbook of Gestalt Play Therapy: Practical Guidelines for Child Therapists*, London, Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Brennan, S. (2003). Feminist Moral Philosophy, Alberta: *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 28.
- Hammond, A. (2006). *Tolerance and Empathy in Today's Classroom*. London, California, New Delhi: Paul Chapman Publishing, A SAGE Publications Company.
- Houriham, M. (2005). *Deconstructing the Hero*. Taylor & Francis eLibrary.
- Houston, G. (2003). *Brief Gestalt Therapy*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Jenkins, R. Y. (2016). *Victorian Children's Literature: Experiencing Abjection, Empathy, and the Power*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lindauer, M. S. (2009). *Psyche and the Literary Muses, The contribution of literary content to scientific psychology*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Lucy, A. (2017). *The Boy Detective in Early British Children's Literature: Patrolling the Borders between Boyhood and Manhood*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mann, D. (2010). *Gestalt Therapy: 100 Key Points and Techniques*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Miles, G. (2015). Chasing Odysseus in Twenty-First-Century Children's Fiction. In: L. Maurice (ed.). *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles* (pp. 213-232). Brill, Leiden, Boston.
- Mills, C. (2016). *Ethics and Children's Literature*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, New York: Routledge.
- Moran J. M. (2016). The Mother Was the Mother, Even When She Wasn't: Maternal Care Ethics and Children's Fantasy, *Mothers in Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. Lisa Rowe Fraustino, Karen Coats. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Pašić Kodrić, M., Pečenković, V. (2021). *Etička kritika i književnost za djecu*. Tuzla/Sarajevo: Lijepa riječ Ešić, Univerzitet u Sarajevu – Pedagoški Fakultet.
- Pašić Kodrić, M. (2023). Bibliotherapy in teaching of children's literature: (On the example of Ahmet Hromadžić's story "The White Nightingale "). *International Conference on Lifelong Education and Leadership for All (ICLEL 2023)*. Atlantis Press – part of Springer Nature.
- Pašić Kodrić, M., Sousa Reis, C. (2023). Bibliotherapeutic Models in Children's Literature Teaching. *KNOWLEDGE - International Journal*, 60(5): 781-784.
- Pollete, N. (2005). *Teaching Thinking Skills with Fairy Tales and Fantasy*. Westport/Connecticut/London: Teacher Ideas Press.
- Piskač, D. (2016). Biblioterapija i psihoanalitička kritika u kontekstu teorije sustava. *Kroatologija*, 7(2): 60-81.
- Stiles, A. (2020). *Children's Literature and the Rise of 'Mind Care'*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Tatar, M. (1987). *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Winters, M. F. (2020). *Inclusive Conversations: Fostering Equity, Empathy, and Belonging across Differences*. Broadway, Oakland: Berrett-Koehler Publisher.

Shaping perspectives through narrative and visual adaptations: a comparative study of *Beauty and the Beast*

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.13>

Nadira Puškar Mustafić*, Nejira Mulahmetović**

*International University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; npuskar@ius.edu.ba

**International University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; nmulahmetovic@ius.edu.ba

Abstract

This study examines Beauty and the Beast across three adaptations: Villeneuve's 1740 original, Beaumont's 1756 abridgment, and Disney's 2017 live-action film. Utilizing a New Historicist framework, the paper explores how these versions reflect and negotiate societal norms related to class, gender, and beauty. Villeneuve's original tale critiques the rigid hierarchies and patriarchal structures of pre-revolutionary France, while Beaumont's version aligns with Enlightenment ideals of rationality and moral education. Disney's adaptation, though outwardly feminist, juxtaposes modern ideals of empowerment with traditional romantic structures. By engaging with Hutcheon's concept of palimpsests, the study underscores how each adaptation layers contemporary cultural anxieties and values over the original narrative, maintaining its core themes while engaging in a dialogic exchange with its predecessors. Through Hutcheon's dialogic adaptation and Greenblatt's circulation of social energy, this study reveals how Beauty and the Beast functions as both a mirror to its historical contexts and a dynamic site for cultural negotiation, addressing evolving societal values while preserving core themes.

Keywords: *Beauty and the Beast, new historicism, adaptations, gender, cultural negotiation, palimpsests*

Introduction

Beauty and the Beast (*La Belle et la Bête*), written by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve in 1740, is a story that has continually evolved across centuries, reflecting the societal norms and cultural anxieties of different eras. Adapted into countless literary and cinematic versions, including Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's 1756 abridgment and Disney's animated (1991) and live-action (2017) films, the tale has been reimagined to appeal to the tastes and values of each generation.¹³ As a result, *Beauty and the Beast* is not only a story of transformation and love but also a cultural artifact that glimpses into the values and ideologies of its time.

In this context, the story demonstrates Hutcheon's (2006) dialogic nature, as each adaptation engages in a conversation with its predecessors while responding to the societal and cultural concerns of its time. Moreover, Stephen Greenblatt's (1988) concept of the "circulation of social energy" is evident in how the themes of class, gender, and beauty are continuously reshaped to resonate with evolving audiences. According to Hutcheon (2006: 7), adaptation is a process of "repetition without replication," blending reinterpretation and recreation to resonate with contemporary cultural contexts. Elaborating on this, Hutcheon (2006: 8) references Priscilla

¹³ For comprehensive lists of various adaptations, see:

- Beauty and the Beast adaptations and references - IMDb
- Category: Films based on Beauty and the Beast - Wikipedia
- Beauty and the Beast Adaptations - IMDb
- Beauty and the Beast (disambiguation) - Wikipedia

Galloway, who explains that her motivation for adapting myths and historical narratives for children and young adults is to preserve stories “worth knowing” while using creative “reanimation” to make them resonate with modern audiences (Galloway, 2004). *Beauty and the Beast* exemplifies this process through its unorthodox portrayal of its fairy-tale heroine.

As noted by Budidarma et al. (2023), Grimm’s *Snow White* and *Cinderella* reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, portraying masculinity as dominant and femininity as submissive. In contrast, *Beauty and the Beast* challenges these traditional roles, as its female protagonist is “free to determine her life” (Budidarma et al., 2023: 11). This distinction underscores how *Beauty and the Beast* diverges from the trope of passive heroines awaiting rescue by a prince or magical intervention. Instead, it is the Beast who requires saving, as his fate ultimately hinges on Belle’s transformative kiss.

This paper examines Belle’s portrayal in Villeneuve’s (1740), Beaumont’s (1756), and Disney’s 2017 cinematic adaptations, juxtaposing these representations with their respective historical contexts. By situating Villeneuve’s original within the atmosphere of pre-revolutionary France, Beaumont’s version alongside Enlightenment ideals, and the 2017 adaptation within modern feminist aspirations, this study demonstrates how Belle’s characterization evolves to reflect shifting societal norms surrounding gender, class, and beauty. Despite these changes, her narrative arc remains consistent, as she ultimately ends up with the Beast, preserving the story’s core themes even as its interpretations shift.

Feminist and anti-feminist critiques are essential to this discussion, as they highlight the ideological complexities of Belle’s portrayal and the broader cultural tensions within *Beauty and the Beast*. Scholars like Rashed and Al-Shaqri (2021) celebrate Disney’s 2017 adaptation as a feminist reinterpretation, while Kunze (2021) critiques its adherence to patriarchal romantic conventions. Meanwhile, Hardman (2021) recognizes the contradictions within the narrative, acknowledging the coexistence of conventional storytelling and feminist representation. These perspectives illustrate the ongoing debate about the role of adaptations in balancing continuity with cultural evolution.

Through Greenblatt’s (1988) new historicist lens, this paper positions *Beauty and the Beast* as a mirror of the dominant values of its time. While adaptations introduce incremental shifts in representation, their primary function lies in reflecting societal norms rather than initiating systemic change. By examining how themes of gender, class, and beauty are negotiated within Villeneuve’s, Beaumont’s, and Disney’s versions, this study underscores how the tale resonates with its historical and cultural contexts.

Literature review and methodology

Scholarly debates surrounding *Beauty and the Beast* have long centered on its portrayal of gender, class, and societal values, particularly in its cinematic adaptations. These discussions position the tale as a cultural artifact that reflects the dominant ideologies of its time, emphasizing the adaptive nature of fairy tales as cultural texts. This study situates *Beauty and the Beast* within this framework, exploring its role as a narrative that negotiates societal norms across its adaptations.

Stephen Greenblatt’s (1988) New Historicism serves as a foundational lens for this analysis. New Historicism interprets literary texts as products of their time, emphasizing their interconnection with the historical and social forces that shaped their creation. This approach challenges the idea of literature as isolated from its context, instead viewing it as a dynamic participant in cultural exchanges. Greenblatt’s concept of ‘the circulation of social energy’ underscores how texts reflect and shape societal values, engaging in a dynamic exchange between art and culture. As Greenblatt explains, “the social energies that circulate very broadly through a culture... pass from zones designated as art to zones apparently indifferent or hostile to art, pressing up from below to transform exalted spheres and down from on high to colonize the low” (Greenblatt, 1988: 6). This approach reveals the intricate interplay of cultural forces within literary works, demonstrating how *Beauty and the Beast* adaptations reflect and negotiate shifting societal ideologies.

Building on Greenblatt's framework, Linda Hutcheon's (2006) theory of adaptation provides a complementary perspective. Hutcheon views adaptations as "palimpsests" that layer new cultural meanings onto original texts while engaging with contemporary anxieties. As she explains, "adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation" (Hutcheon, 2006: 8). Additionally, Hutcheon emphasizes that adaptations are inherently dialogic, functioning as spaces where past narratives interact with present ideologies. She asserts that "adaptation as adaptation is unavoidably a kind of intertextuality if the receiver is acquainted with the adapted text. It is an ongoing dialogical process, as Mikhail Bakhtin would have said, in which we compare the work we already know with the one we are experiencing" (Hutcheon, 2006: 21). This highlights how adaptations engage in a constant dialogue with earlier texts, allowing past narratives to be reinterpreted and recontextualized for contemporary audience.

When it comes to the 2017 adaptation, feminist and anti-feminist interpretations dominate much of the current scholarship. Pro-feminist scholars, such as Rashed and Al-Shaqri (2021), praise Disney's 2017 adaptation for evolving Belle's essentially flat character from its original and earlier versions into an independent, intellectually curious woman, one who is "willing to stand outside of what is expected of her, and chase her dreams" (Rashed & Al-Shaqri, 2021: 133). This portrayal emphasizes her resourcefulness and defiance of traditional gender roles, aligning with feminist ideals and offering a departure from the passivity often associated with fairy-tale heroines. Furthermore, the 2017 adaptation is described as embracing a "transgressive feminist discourse" to reflect "Disney's strategy of diversity and inclusion of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation as constantly evolving cultural categories" (Rashed & Al-Sharqi, 2021: 127). Consequently, Belle is portrayed as a figure who challenges patriarchal norms, aiming to inspire contemporary audiences to value independence and self-determination.

Conversely, Kunze (2021) contends that the adaptation makes only superficial changes to appear feminist while primarily serving commercial interests. He highlights Disney's decision to cast Emma Watson - renowned for her portrayal of the intelligent and independent Hermione in the *Harry Potter* series - as a calculated move to address criticism of the 1991 animated version's depiction of female characters. This casting choice, according to Kunze, serves both as a response to concerns about gender representation and as a strategic marketing tactic to appeal to a wider audience. Despite these updates, Kunze argues that Belle's narrative arc remains confined by conventional fairy tale romantic structures. While she is portrayed as more intelligent and independent than other women in her surroundings, her ultimate happiness is still tied to marrying the Beast. As he observes, "the storyline of both films, in its attempt to empower Belle, needs her to return. Her unselfishness selflessly - not the Beast's - ensures the happy ending" (Kunze, 2021: 127). This, he concludes, reflects the film's inability to fully break away from traditional gender norms despite its outward gestures toward feminist ideals.

Hardman (2021) adopts a balanced perspective on the 2017 adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*, arguing that "to label a film such as Disney's live-action *Beauty and the Beast* as purely feminist or strictly antifeminist ignores the potential for contradictory messages to be communicated" (Hardman, 2021: 13). She acknowledges Belle as a modern, intelligent, and ambitious heroine, reflecting progressive ideals. However, she also critiques how moments showcasing Belle's strength are fleeting and "undercut by the film's adherence to the traditional narrative structure in which Belle's happiness is ultimately tied to her relationship with the Beast" (Hardman, 2021: 16). In Hardman's view, the adaptation exemplifies the contradictions inherent in postfeminist media, where feminist aspirations are juxtaposed with conventional storytelling that reinforces patriarchal norms.

This interplay of progressive and traditional ideals extends beyond gender to include class dynamics. Marina Warner (1995) notes that fairy tales often reinforce societal hierarchies, portraying upward mobility as a reward for virtue rather than a challenge to systemic inequality. In Beaumont's abridgment, this is evident in the contrast between Belle's humility and her sisters' vanity, with Belle's eventual marriage to a prince reinforcing

Enlightenment ideals of meritocracy. However, Warner critiques how such tales often constrict women to roles of moral guardianship and arbiters of beauty, wealth, and virtue.

Disney's 2017 adaptation reinterprets these class dynamics to suit contemporary sensibilities. Gaston, as a self-made man, embodies the ambition and arrogance associated with bourgeois values, contrasting with the Beast's inherited wealth and privilege. The grandeur of the Beast's castle, particularly the vast library that Belle admires, serves as both a symbol of intellectual empowerment and a marker of exclusivity. Hardman (2021) critiques this duality, noting that the adaptation glorifies wealth and privilege even as it gestures toward equality and empowerment.

Despite the abundance of scholarship on *Beauty and the Beast*, a notable gap exists in tracing how these adaptations collectively engage in dialogic exchanges across versions while simultaneously participating in Greenblatt's circulation of social energy. Much of the current literature either isolates specific adaptations or narrowly focuses on gender discourse, often overlooking the intersectionality of class, beauty, and historical contexts. This study aims to address this gap by offering a comparative analysis that integrates these dimensions, emphasizing how each adaptation negotiates societal norms while engaging with its historical and cultural contexts.

Building on these perspectives, this study situates *Beauty and the Beast* within its historical contexts to examine how its adaptations reflect societal values while negotiating cultural tensions. Through a comparative analysis of Villeneuve's original tale, Beaumont's abridgment, and Disney's 2017 live-action film, these works are analyzed as cultural artifacts that preserve core themes of transformation and morality while reinterpreting them to align with contemporary ideals. By engaging with themes of gender, class, and beauty, this study contributes to broader discussions on the role of adaptations in shaping cultural perceptions. In this way, *Beauty and the Beast* serves as both a mirror to societal norms and a platform for exploring the contradictions inherent in cultural memory and adaptation.

Class, gender, and beauty representation in Villeneuve's, Beaumont's, and Disney's versions of *Beauty and the Beast*

Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast* (1740)

Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, the author of the original *Beauty and the Beast* (*La Belle et la Bête*) (1740), experienced both privilege and struggle, a consequence of being a noble Parisian woman born in 1685. The start of her writing career marks the peak of societal tensions in pre-revolutionary France, with the burgeoning middle class revolting against the aristocracy's established *Ancien Régime*. Both Villeneuve's personal and societal contexts are woven into the story, confirming the New Historicist claim that literary texts are deeply embedded within their historical and cultural contexts. Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast* offers a complex portrayal of the class and gender dynamics of 18th-century France. The Beast's aristocratic status and Belle's eventual revelation as a high-born figure reflect the rigid social hierarchies of the time. The tale's focus on beauty standards ties these elements to broader societal views on women's worth, highlighting how the literature of the time both reflected and reinforced prevailing socio-cultural values.

Villeneuve, as a noblewoman in a transforming society, encountered significant challenges. Her marriage to an aristocratic lieutenant colonel failed as he gambled their property, leaving her exposed and vulnerable in a society that did not encourage women's independence (Wolfgang in Villeneuve 2020: 3). Even though she started writing to support herself financially and entered a relationship with a famous tragedian (Villeneuve 2020: 4-5), she endeavored to hide both as neither met societal approval of the times. As Aurora Wolfgang notes, Villeneuve published her writings anonymously not only as a female author in a "male authorship"-dominated era, "but as a member of the nobility who might have thought it below her station" (Wolfgang in Villeneuve 2020: 1). Her anxieties were not unfounded, as *La Belle et la Bête* received only mild approval (Wolfgang in Villeneuve 2020:

13), likely due to patriarchal constraints in a society unprepared to embrace a female heroine of humble descent, even if she turned out to be a fairy princess by the story's conclusion.

Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast* is considerably longer compared to the popular Beaumont's abridgment, both conforming to and challenging and class and gender related social restrictions, all undoubtedly influenced by her own experiences (Wolfgang in Villeneuve 2020: 28). The Ancien Régime¹⁴ characterized by rigid class hierarchies and gender norms declined during this period, as the rising bourgeoisie increasingly criticized the dominant aristocracy for its elitism. As Alexis de Tocqueville observes, "at no period in our history had the title of nobleman been more easily obtained than in 1789, and never had the middle classes and the nobles been further apart" (2008: 119). Villeneuve's narrative aptly reflects the class dynamics of her time. The relationship between Belle, a merchant's daughter, and the Beast, an aristocrat, symbolizes the shifting social dynamics, where the virtue and values of the bourgeoisie begin to challenge the established power of the nobility. Moreover, Beast's aristocratic status is not merely a background detail but a central element of the story, since his transformation into a beast can serve as a metaphor of aristocracy's moral corruption and detachment from the rest of society. The tale likewise emphasizes the importance of noble ancestry as the Amazon Queen, also Beast's mother, explicitly forbids him from marrying beneath him, appalled by the thought of "the strange mixture... (of) the noblest blood in the world...united with the humble blood of this young woman" (Villeneuve 2020: 133). She only relents when Lady Fairy reveals Belle's identity as that of a fairy princess. This plot twist reflects adapting to the rigid class structures of the time, where social mobility was restricted and marrying "down" was not an option, even when inspired by true love. According to Greenblatt's notion of the "circulation of social energy," Villeneuve's tale both critiques and absorbs the values of pre-revolutionary France. While the narrative challenges the rigid hierarchies of the Ancien Régime by portraying Belle, a merchant's daughter, as the agent of redemption, it ultimately reaffirms the necessity of noble ancestry, as seen in Belle's revealed status as a fairy princess. This duality underscores how literary texts negotiate societal tensions by embedding progressive critiques within traditional frameworks.

Similarly, Belle's character arc is restricted by the societal expectations of women during this period, particularly her willingness to sacrifice herself to save the monstrous looking Beast, despite her own physical allure. In Villeneuve's narrative, Belle's beauty emphasizes her moral purity and virtuous nature, her physical attractiveness serving as a visual cue to her inherent goodness, making her a fitting candidate for the role of the redemptive heroine who can see beyond the Beast's monstrous exterior to the nobility within. This aligns with the 18th century interpretation of beauty as reflecting moral character, especially that of women. However, the idea of equating beauty with goodness and noble descent is not new, as the distressed heroines of traditional fairy tales are either high-born goodies (*Snow White*) or natural beauties turned princesses as a reward for their moral behavior (*Cinderella*). To emphasize the alignment of beauty with morality, virtuous female characters are contrasted with ugly, evil, and jealous women, such as the aging jealous queen in *Snow White*, which reinforces the idea that being unattractive is tied to being morally bad (Grimm and Grimm, 1812). In Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle is contrasted with her ugly evil sisters, deformed by their jealousy of Belle. Therefore, even though Villeneuve's narrative is not a derivative, the fact that it still engages with and employs the conventions of the traditional fairytales, demonstrates it's having a dialogic nature, as described by Hutcheon.

Furthermore, as Enlightenment thinking evolved, beauty and gender roles were increasingly shaped by notions of "naturalness" where women were seen as inherently closer to nature and expected to embody not only

¹⁴ The Ancien Régime, preceding the French Revolution, is referred to as "old" because it reflects the outdated social structures that were eventually overthrown, paving the way for France's transformation into a republic and changing the course of history forever. See "Ancien Régime," *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/ancien-regime>; and "Ancien Régime," *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ancien%20r%C3%A9gime>.

physical beauty but also moral virtue. This concept of "natural" femininity further demoted women by allowing men "to define them as 'the other': as that which has to be defined, rather than that whose nature is obvious and right" (Outram 2013: 95). The idea that beauty equals goodness follows the traditional belief in fairy tales that beauty is connected to morality and higher social status or can be used to improve one's social standing. Ugly characters in these stories are often old, evil, jealous, and usually women, reinforcing the idea that being unattractive is tied to being morally bad.

Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast* subtly critiques these societal norms by presenting Belle as a figure who can redeem the Beast despite her lower social standing. Yet, this redemption is only possible because Belle is a fairy princess (Villeneuve 2020: 136), reinforcing that social class and beauty are inextricably linked to one's destiny. The text, as a palimpsest, blends traditional fairy-tale conventions with Villeneuve's critique of societal structures, dialogically engaging with the cultural and historical shifts of its time. Through its layers, the story reflects both the challenges and the persistence of class hierarchies and gender expectations in pre-revolutionary France.

Beaumont's *Beauty and the Beast* (1756)

The societal restrictions of the Ancien Régime, reflected in Villeneuve's original story, were replaced by the evolving 18th century society's Enlightenment ideals of rationality, moral education, and the evolving role of women in society. Enlightenment thinkers, such as Moses Mendelssohn, stressed the importance of spreading "education in the use of reason, which should be open to all" (Outram 2013: 2). This transformation was reflected in the story's most popular adaptation by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's published in 1756, which demonstrates Greenblatt's notion of the "circulation of social energy", as the text does not only reflect societal changes, but also endeavors to influence their general acceptance.

As Villeneuve's original, this text too demonstrates its dialogic nature engaging in an intertextual discourse with its original by retaining the core of its plotline and characterization. For instance, Beaumont's adaptation depicts Belle as the embodiment of Enlightenment virtues, or one of the "the custodians of morality and religion within the domestic setting" (Outram, 2013: 92). This shows that a woman's position within the new social setting is not drastically changed, especially since her humble, dutiful and self-sacrificing nature is shown in stark contrast to her materialistic and vain sisters, complying with traditional fairytale conventions of simplifying female characters to binaries.

Moreover, Beaumont's abridgment is also an example of Hutcheon's palimpsest, as it reflects the slight societal changes without completely breaking from the tradition. As noted by Warner (1995: 292), to adjust to the times, Beaumont's abridgment disposed of Villeneuve's intricate subplots and character backstories, simplifying the tale with focus on its moral lesson and an attempt to appeal to young readers. This shift aligns with the Enlightenment's emphasis on didacticism, where literature was increasingly seen as an ethical and intellectual education tool, especially for the young. In this context, *Beauty and the Beast* is a parable about virtue, obedience, and the rewards of moral integrity. This focus on moral and intellectual development is reflected in the growing role of literature as a tool for teaching societal values. Beaumont's abridgment exemplifies Hutcheon's notion of adaptations as "palimpsests," layering Enlightenment ideals over Villeneuve's critique of the Ancien Régime. By simplifying the narrative to emphasize moral education, Beaumont engages in a dialogic process that reflects the period's broader cultural transition. As Greenblatt posits, literature not only reflects societal values but also endeavors to influence them, evident in Beaumont's emphasis on Belle's virtue and reason as markers of ideal womanhood within the Enlightenment framework.

Beaumont's adaptation subtly reaffirms traditional gender norms. According to Warner (1995: 280), the story reflects the broader societal belief that "the Beast is identified with male sexuality which must be controlled or changed or domesticated through *civilité*, a code chiefly established by women." While Belle is intelligent and moral, she uses those virtues primarily within the domestic sphere, which concurs with the period's view of women as nurturers and moral guides within the home. Specifically, Belle redeems the Beast through her

goodness, transforming him into a prince. This dynamic supports the idea that the power of women lies within their ability to inspire and change men. Therefore, while women are given a form of agency through this, it ultimately confines them to roles that support and sustain the patriarchal order. Essentially, Belle - domestic and moral, yet graceful, is an epitome of an ideal Enlightenment woman, which confirms Greenblatt's new historicist notion of literary works' reflecting societal values of their times.

Beaumont's adaptation of Villeneuve's original can also be characterized as Hutcheon's palimpsest, as it acknowledges tensions occurring from the shifts in societal hierarchies but also reaffirms the dominance of the ruling class. In Beaumont's version, Belle's virtue is rewarded through the Beast's metamorphosis into a handsome prince, symbolizing how virtue aligns with nobility, suggesting that morality is not only desirable but is ultimately recognized and rewarded within the social hierarchy. The tale thus reinforces the notion that those who embody virtuous qualities deserve higher status, a concept that mirrors the rigid class structures of 18th-century France.

As in Villeneuve's original, Belle's beauty in *Beaumont's* version reflects her goodness, which clashes with her sisters' inner physical unattractiveness but also their shallowness and stupidity stemming from their jealousy and materialistic greed. The contrast serves to highlight the Enlightenment ideals of virtue and rationality, with Belle's physical appearance becoming a symbol of her superior moral character. In Beaumont's tale, beauty is a reward for virtuous living, and Belle's ultimate happiness and elevation in social status are portrayed as the natural outcomes of her moral and physical excellence. Therefore, beauty is not only a personal attribute but also a social currency that dictates a woman's role and destiny. The association of beauty with moral goodness reflects a broader cultural attitude that valued women primarily for their physical appearance and the virtues it was believed to represent. This portrayal reinforces the gender norms of the time, which confined women to roles that emphasized passivity, obedience, and domesticity.

Ultimately, Beaumont's *Beauty and the Beast* serves as a palimpsest, layering Enlightenment ideals of moral education and rationality over the traditional structures of class and gender. It simplifies the narrative to emphasize the virtues of domesticity and moral integrity, further reinforcing class hierarchies and gender norms by rewarding Belle's virtue with nobility and portraying her influence within the domestic sphere as the ideal form of female power. Through these changes, Beaumont's version functions as a dialogic text, engaging with Villeneuve's original while reflecting and perpetuating the socio-cultural values of 18th-century France. By circulating cultural energy, the tale participates in the broader discourse of its time, reinforcing dominant ideologies while subtly negotiating shifts in societal hierarchies.

Disney's 2017 Adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*

The 2017 live-action adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast* by Disney was released in a socio-political climate heavily imbued with contemporary feminist movements such as #MeToo.¹⁵ Generally, this era increasingly focuses on issues of gender equality, diversity, and inclusion, which Disney attempted to address in reimagining the classic tale. The film is a modern interpretation meant to appeal to a new generation of viewers, particularly feminists. However, even though the adaptation supports progressive values on the surface, it remains deeply faithful to traditional gender roles, reflecting the complexities and contradictions in postfeminist media. This tension between the contemporary and traditional exemplifies *Beauty and the Beast* as a Hutcheon palimpsest, layering modern feminist ideals atop the underlying traditional frameworks of gender and class.

Disney's broader diversity and inclusion agenda is evident in the casting choices, costume design, and subtle narrative adjustments. Emma Watson (Belle), a celebrated actress and feminist activist in real life, became the

¹⁵ The #MeToo movement, founded by an activist Tarana Burke, started in 2006 with an idea of supporting sexual violence survivors. However, it became widely recognized in 2017 after a number of celebrities spoke out about their buried traumas encouraging other survivors, especially those working in the entertainment industry to speak out. It was Alyssa Milano's viral tweet in October 2017, which sparked the global wave of #MeToo: *Time*, 2017. Available at: <https://time.com/5052770/me-too-movement-origin-history/>

face of the 2014 UN HeForShe Campaign, which intended to mobilize men to join women in their perpetual fight for gender equality (Kunze, 2021: 126-27). Apparently, the casting decision and the most empowered and provocative characterization of Belle so far strategically align the film with current feminist ideals. Moreover, the overall representation of Belle is modernized, as the film shows her as intellectually curious, rebellious, and independent. For example, the scene where Belle invents the washing machine highlights her resourcefulness and intelligence, demonstrating her autonomy and desire to break societal norms (Condon, 2017: 14:37). This adaptation further illustrates Greenblatt's concept of "circulation of social energy," as it integrates contemporary feminist discourses like #MeToo into the classic narrative. However, its depiction of Belle as a modern heroine is juxtaposed with the enduring association of female happiness with romantic fulfillment, revealing the dialogic nature of adaptations. As Hutcheon notes, adaptations are inherently intertextual, drawing upon earlier works to resonate with contemporary audiences while retaining their core structures.

Nevertheless, as Kunze (2021: 128) wonders, the question remains whether these upgrades in Belle's characterization are "conscientious improvements - or opportunistic attempts to maintain a profitable work of Disney culture." Indeed, the feminist elements added to the film fade, since Belle "for all of her boldness... ultimately assumes the role imagined for her in the very romances she reads...(and) the film remains inherently conservative in its politics because it does little to reimagine the troubling romance plot or the logics therein" (Kunze, 2021: 128). Generally, while the adaptation embraces modern sensibilities, it stays faithful to the conventional gender dynamics inherent to the original story, which is closely tied to Belle's romantic relationship with the Beast (Kunze, 2021: 128). This reveals its dialogic nature, as the film engages with its predecessors by simultaneously critiquing and reinforcing the traditional roles embedded in the original text.

As Greenblatt proposed in his critical theory of new historicism, literary texts inevitably reflect their societal circumstances, and the same can be claimed of its cinematic adaptations. The 2017 live-action version of Belle embodies the conflicting qualities of contemporary female characters in popular culture. On the one hand, she is depicted as a forward-thinking figure who challenges the norms of her small-town society. Belle places a high value on education and independence, reflecting female aspirations in the 21st century. For example, the scene where she invents the washing machine shows her engrossed in her complex drawings and calculations, demonstrating her resourcefulness, intelligence, and desire for autonomy, setting her apart from the more passive heroines of traditional fairy tales (Condon, 2017: 14:37). Her interactions with the townspeople further emphasize her nonconformity, as she refuses to be limited by the roles imposed on her by society, such as marrying and having children. "I want adventure in the great wide somewhere... I want so much more than they've got planned," she sings passionately, gazing out from the hilltop at the natural, fenceless, and borderless landscape as a symbol of freedom (Condon, 2017: 18:46).

Despite the scenes emphasizing her empowerment, Belle's character remains confined within traditional gender roles, as the central storyline revolves around her relationship with the Beast, suggesting that her happiness depends on romantic love. This dynamic reinforces the palimpsestuous nature of the text, as it layers contemporary feminist ideals over a deeply rooted patriarchal framework. As Hardman (2021: 62-70) points out, in the 21st-century context, this is extremely problematic, especially since the Beast in the 2017 live-action is a true monster who initially locks Belle up and shows no empathy, isolating her from her father. However, in the 2017 live-action version, it seems like Belle, eventually captivated by the glamour of the castle and its luxuries, overlooks the Beast's earlier rough behavior. This dynamic reflects the circulation of social energy, as modern values of empowerment are intertwined with the enduring association of female worth with beauty and wealth. This sends a troubling message to young girls about what they should aspire to and tolerate in a relationship. As Hardman (2021: 62-70) notes, this representation is a significant step backward, as even in the traditional retellings of the original *Beauty and the Beast*, the Beast is consistently kind to Beauty and tries to win her affection.

Furthermore, the 2017 version emphasizes the 21st-century trend of natural beauty. Belle is portrayed as stunning, even while wearing simple clothes and no makeup. However, as it is noticeable in the ballroom dance

scene (Condon, 2017: 01:24:48), Belle's beauty truly shines only when she wears the luxurious dress provided for her, which subtly links her happiness to marrying somebody rich. Disney's layering of feminist ideals over traditional frameworks is characteristic of what Hutcheon describes as "repetition without replication." While Belle's intellectual pursuits and independence align with contemporary feminist values, the narrative's resolution reinforces patriarchal norms, reflecting the palimpsestuous nature of adaptations that balance cultural critique with commercial appeal.

Class representation in Disney's 2017 live-action adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast* is reimagined to align with contemporary sensibilities while still echoing the themes of the original narratives. The glamour of the Beast's castle, its visual opulence, and grandeur symbolize higher-class dominance, especially when juxtaposed with the modest living of the village people, who are not poor but live far below the living standards of the high class that the Beast represents. Moreover, the 2017 adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast* introduces new characters, such as Gaston, as symbols of bourgeois aspirations. Gaston, a former soldier and self-made man, is determined to marry Belle, whom he perceives as the most desirable woman in the village (Condon, 2017: 00:16:00–00:17:57). His ambition and aggressive pursuit of Belle are portrayed negatively, critiquing the bourgeois drive for social advancement at the expense of moral integrity.

Belle's intellectual pursuits and rejection of Gaston's advances further underscore the film's engagement with class themes. Unlike her sisters in Beaumont's version, who are consumed by their desire for wealth and status, Belle is portrayed as a lover of books and knowledge, signifying her alignment with middle-class values of self-improvement and education. As Lareau (2003: 5) observes, "Middle-class parents across racial differences actively engage in a concerted cultivation of their children, which generates a robust sense of entitlement and produces cultural advantages in institutional settings such as the school." However, scenes such as the grand library encounter reveal that knowledge and education are commodified, reflecting the contemporary reality of the high costs associated with elite education.

Ultimately, the 2017 adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast* functions as a dialogic text, simultaneously critiquing and reinforcing societal values surrounding class, gender, and beauty. The interplay between its modern elements and traditional frameworks underscores the circulation of social energy, as the story continues to evolve while retaining its core. By framing the narrative as a palimpsest, Disney both acknowledges the changing socio-political landscape and reaffirms enduring power dynamics, offering a rich site for examining the tensions between progress and tradition.

Conclusion

The enduring appeal of *Beauty and the Beast* lies in its adaptability, a quality that allows it to engage with evolving societal norms while maintaining its core themes of transformation, morality, and love. Villeneuve's original tale reflects the tensions of pre-revolutionary France, critiquing rigid class hierarchies and gender roles, while Beaumont's abridgment aligns with Enlightenment ideals, simplifying the narrative to emphasize virtue and domesticity. Disney's 2017 adaptation, situated in a postfeminist context, attempts to modernize Belle as an empowered heroine, yet it remains tied to conventional gender and class structures, highlighting the persistent interplay between progress and tradition.

Through Hutcheon's framework of dialogic adaptation and Greenblatt's concept of circulating social energy, this study demonstrates how *Beauty and the Beast* evolves as a palimpsest, layering contemporary values onto its original narrative. Each adaptation mirrors the dominant ideologies of its era, from Villeneuve's nuanced critique of aristocratic privilege to Beaumont's moral didacticism and Disney's complex negotiation of feminist ideals within a commercial framework.

By situating these adaptations within their historical contexts, this analysis underscores the tale's role as a cultural artifact that not only reflects societal anxieties and aspirations but also participates in their negotiation. This comparative approach addresses a gap in existing scholarship, which often isolates specific versions or

narrowly focuses on gender discourse. Ultimately, *Beauty and the Beast* serves as a dynamic text, inviting critical engagement with the societal norms it reflects, reaffirms, and challenges.

References

- Beaumont, J.M.L. de. (1756). *Beauty and the Beast*. In: *Le Magasin des Enfants*.
- Budidarma, D., Sumarsono, I., Abida, F.I.N., Moybeka, A.M. (2023). Gender Representation in Classic Fairy Tales: A Comparative Study of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella and Beauty and the Beast. *World Journal of English Language*, 13(6): 11-19. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n6p11>.
- Condon, B. (Director) (2017). *Beauty and the Beast* [Film]. Walt Disney Pictures.
- Galloway, P. (2004). Interview with the Author. 25 April.
- Greenblatt, S. (1988). *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Grimm, J., Grimm, W. (1812). *Grimm's Household Tales*. Translated by Margaret Hunt. Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2591> (Accessed 22nd December 2024).
- Hardman, C. (2021). *Tale as Old as...Feminism? The (Re)making of Beauty and the Beast*. [Master's thesis]. Syracuse University. Available through ProQuest.
- Hutcheon, L. (2006). *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge.
- Kunze, P.C. (2021). Revise and Resubmit: Beauty and the Beast (2017), Live-Action Remakes, and the Disney Princess Franchise. *Feminist Media Studies*, 23(1): 121-136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1944259>.
- Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Ancien Régime. In: *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ancien%C3%A9gime>.
- Outram, D. (2013). *The Enlightenment*. 4th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rashed, A.A., Al-Shaqri, L.M. (2021). Roses in Amber: Gendered Discourse in Disney's 2017 Adaptation of Villeneuve's Fairytale Beauty and the Beast. *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies*, 5(1): 126-143. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol5no1.9>.
- Time (2017). Me Too: A Timeline of Events. Available at: <https://time.com/5052770/me-too-movement-origin-history/>.
- Tocqueville, A. de. (2008). *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*. Translated by G. Bevan. London: Penguin Classics.
- Villeneuve, G.S.B. de. (2020). *Beauty and the Beast: The Original Story*. Edited and translated by A. Wolfgang. Toronto: Iter Press.
- Warner, M. (1995). *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Students' belief in reading boosted by reading camp: Towards effective English learning a report

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.14>

Xiaojun Kong*, Chi Chenkai**

*Independent Researcher, China, kxj0726@hotmail.com

**University of Windsor, Canada, chi3@uwindsor.ca

Author 1 designed a book-reading camp (in the original language, i.e. English) and launched the first installment in February 2024. After continual lesson preparation and improvement, the camp has now reached its fourth installment.

The camp is fully online; thus, campers can access the reading materials and engage in reading activities at any time and location with an internet connection. The camps last six months, with the students reading throughout the camp. It was originally designed for children aged 10 to 12; however, it has attracted some working professionals who haven't used English since graduating from university to participate. Up to now, the number of participants in the camp has reached 59.

During the 2024 summer vacation, a 21-day version of the Celebrity Biography-Themed Reading Camp was launched, attracting 22 campers from various cities and provinces in China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Henan, Hunan, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang. This reading camp was reported by several media outlets, including China Daily.

On April 21, 2022, China's Ministry of Education released the revised curriculum programs and standards for 16 compulsory education subjects, including English (MOE, 2022a). The revised English curriculum standards place greater emphasis on reading skills, as the learning of vocabulary and grammar should be rooted in contexts and discourses and must be combined with other language knowledge and skills as well as the cultivation of core competencies, such as cultural awareness (Cheng, 2022). This strengthened Author 1's belief that through the creation of diverse contexts and discourses and the implementation of relevant teaching activities, teachers can promote students' effective accumulation and mastery of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and can comprehensively improve students' language application abilities, and promote cross-cultural understanding and the development of thinking skills.

The 2022 English curriculum standards set different requirements for the cumulative amount of extracurricular reading in each grade level: 1,500 to 2,000 words for Level 1 (Grades 3 to 4 in primary school) and Level 1+; 4,000 to 5,000 words for Level 2 (Grades 5 to 6 in primary school) and Level 2+; over 40,000 words for Level 3 (Grade 7 in junior high school); over 100,000 words for Level 3 (Grade 8 in junior high school); and over 150,000 words for Level 3 (Grade 9 in junior high school) and Level 3+ (MOE, 2022b). The book-reading camp is Author 1's attempt to implement the 2022 English curriculum standards as an English teacher and curriculum developer.

The books in the reading camp are divided into two types: those for close reading and those for extensive reading. Each month, one book is closely read, while two books and one current affairs article are extensively read. Both the close and extensive reading books address the major pillars of life development, including physical and mental health, wealth, relationships, spirituality, and career. A combination of fiction and non-fiction books is offered each month, all of which have won international awards, such as the Newbery Medal or the Caldecott Medal. Although these books are written for children, adult campers believe that they can also benefit from them, as if reparenting themselves emotionally.

The closely read book corresponds to six to eight instructional videos, and the extensively read books and current affairs article each correspond to an illustrated text. Each video is 10 to 15 minutes long and includes

explanations of reading methods and chapter guidance. After watching the videos, the campers must read chapters corresponding to the videos for 30 to 40 minutes. The videos and illustrated texts are uploaded to an online digital learning platform and made available on a weekly basis according to a fixed schedule. Campers can flexibly arrange their study time, either spreading it out over the week or completing it in one go on the weekend.

Each closely read book is accompanied by a core task. For example, when reading a biography, campers must create a character card; when reading science books, campers must make a mind map, etc. This task is broken down into several guiding questions and posted on the learning platform. Every week, after reading, the campers are required to answer these questions on the platform, and Author 1 provides personalized feedback based on the content submitted by each camper. Excellent answers are made public on the platform (with the camper's permission) to serve as examples for other campers.

Author 1 believes that goal-oriented practice must be combined with personalized feedback to help campers recognize which content they already understand, what they have done well, what they are currently not doing well, and the specific actions they can take to improve. Some campers already have a relatively good foundation in English and see immediate results after learning efficient reading methods, with their vocabulary enlarged and reading speed significantly improved. Those campers experience the positive emotional feelings inspired by reading and learning, which strengthens their understanding of new knowledge and methods as well as their confidence.

Other campers may not achieve the expected results when first employing the learned methods and may feel frustrated or doubt themselves due to the lack of positive emotional experiences. In this case, Author 1 helps them identify the reasons for their learning ineffectiveness, provides timely personalized feedback, helps them to actively reveal the problems they encountered during the application process, and jointly discusses solutions, and guides campers to correct any deviations in the application process. The aim is to encourage campers' reflection and stimulate their internal learning process.

After one month of reading in this camp, according to the test results of the "BuBeiDanCi" app (an app for learning vocabulary), over 60% of the campers increased their vocabulary by 200 words. Most campers are able to guess the meaning of new words according to context. They increasingly believe that memorizing words and grammar rules does not directly help them produce English output. Through reading, however, they cultivate expressive language, grasp more details of the content, clarify the structure of paragraphs and the coherence between sentences, and can now produce some English naturally.

References

- Cheng, X. (2022). *What to Reform, How to Teach and What to Test: An Analysis of the English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education* (2022 Edition). Beijing, China: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. [in Chinese].
- Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MOE). (2022a). *MOE releases compulsory education curriculum program and standards*. Retrieved from http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press_releases/202205/t20220507_625532.html
- Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MOE). (2022b). *English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education*. Beijing, China: People's Education Press. [in Chinese].

International youth conference on language, literature and education: joining forces to build a better world – a report

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2024.02.15>

Emina Jelešković

International University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; ejeleskovic@ius.edu.ba

Embarking on a university mark one of the biggest and most important transitions in students' education. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, freshmen students are frequently welcomed to university with the phrase: *Welcome to the academic world!* University truly opens up to students a new world where they meet professors and mentors who should not just educate and teach them, but also motivate them and inspire them to discover and rediscover their own ideals, beliefs and dreams. After all, this is an opportunity for students to do so just before they march into the adult world of competitive economy and labour market. Academic world tests students' endurance and persistence, with its high standards in learning and exams. On the other hand, it is the place where students meet new friends and form connections which may last for a lifetime. This unique combination of formal, clear and curriculum-based structure of the academia with the less tangible qualities like values, inspiration, beliefs and bonds, make the university life a very special and personal experience for each and every student.

Different study programs choose different ways in which they want to enrich their students' learning and growing experience at university. With this aim, English Language and Literature (ELIT) and English Language and Literature Teaching (ELT) programs at International University of Sarajevo (IUS), Bosnia and Herzegovina, have implemented different projects over the past years, including: international cooperation and exchange with students and staff from other universities, field visits to various institutions, and the international youth conference. This short report will present the International Youth Conference which is organized by ELIT and ELT programs at IUS every year, its impact on our students and the way such an event contributes to university programs.

One of the most successful stories from our programs is the annual International Youth Conference on Language, Literature and Education which is held every year in autumn. The Conference provides an opportunity to students of all three study cycles to present their research, meet new friends, form connections and contacts, and network with students from all over the world. Also, students receive feedback on their papers from reviewers and have their papers published in the conference book of proceedings. For students, this is also a chance to gain conference-presenting experience and to build their confidence in presenting their topic in English language.

The first conference was held online in 2021, amidst the uncertainty and fear caused by the COVID-19 pandemics. Our goal was to reach out to students and help them reconnect to professors and their classmates. Since then, the conference was held every year live on IUS campus in Sarajevo, with online sessions available too. The conference became a well-known and expected event at our programs and university. It is also noteworthy that the Conference offers students from Bosnia and Herzegovina a chance to network and meet with their peers from the country. For years, our country has been facing consequences of the terrible war and destruction which took place in 1990s. In such context, an event like the Conference that connects the youth through education, creativity and dynamic exchange of ideas is quite precious. In addition, students from many different countries have participated in the Conference, including Turkey, Poland, North Macedonia, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Spain, Algeria, Oman, Indonesia and the Philippines.

We also need to emphasise the important role our keynote speakers have had in inspiring students with their life stories and professional stories and research. At each conference, we welcomed keynote speakers who were

mostly from different countries in the region of Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. The professors were experts in different fields, ranging from language and literature to theatre, translation studies and interculturalism. The keynote speakers and the topics they presented at each conference are listed below:

- 2021: Dr. Amira Sadiković (the University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina): *Ethics and Quality Standards in Translation and Interpreting* and Dr. Yolanta Osekowska-Sandecka (the University of Zielona Góra, Poland): *Translators' work in the context of COVID 19 pandemic*;
- 2022: Dr. Ljubica Matek (Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia): *Hoping against Hope: Visions of the Future in Byron's "Darkness"* and Dr. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki (Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia): *Journey in American History and Literature*;
- 2023: Dr. Sanja Nikčević (the University of Osijek, Croatia): *The Importance of Art for Society* and Dr. Davor Piskač (the University of Zagreb, Croatia): *Literary Bibliotherapy as a Method of Therapeutic Reading*;
- 2024: Dr. Ana Kocić Stanković (the University of Niš, Serbia): *The Voices of (Ex)Change in Contemporary American Literature* and Dr. Mirzana Pašić-Kordić (the University of Sarajevo Bosnia and Herzegovina): *The Role of Foreign Languages in Building and Nurturing Intercultural Sensibility*.

The professors are true role models to the students in promoting academic and scholarly excellence, but also peace, love and universal human rights and freedom.

With regard to the impact of the Conference on ELIT and ELT students, there are three main aspects we can emphasise: the impact on students' beliefs about their own creative potential, their organisational skills and their overall worldview.

Over the years, we have noticed something interesting: Some university students are not even aware of their own creative potential and are actually reluctant to explore it. Professors who work with young people have the privilege of educating academic citizens and next generations of leaders in the country. On the other hand, professors also have the task of encouraging students to believe in themselves, to develop their self-confidence and to not be afraid to take next steps in their journey. The Conference is a great opportunity for students of English Language and Literature programs to do exactly that: they are encouraged to research a topic that interests them, apply appropriate methodology, research variety of sources, develop their argumentation, exercises critical thinking skills and reach their own conclusions. Then, presenting their topic in front of their peers from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the world will be a new learning experience for students. They will learn about their own potential and creativity through real life experience, reflection and introspection. Also, students learn from their peers about the variety of other topics, ranging from *Shakespearean Echoes in Tolkien's Literary Criticism*, to *Critical Thinking against Nihilism in Education*, *The Influence of Podcast on English Language Learners' Listening and Speaking Skills*, *Exploring the Educational Potential of Social VR Environments* and *The Effectiveness of Using AI Chatbots in Enhancing Conversational Skills*.

In the world increasingly dependent on AI technology, universities are emphasising the importance of developing and honing students' literacy skills, while protecting their academic integrity and finding and expressing their own voices and arguments. The Conference emphasises the role of literacy in the contemporary world and promotes originality and authenticity in students' writing. The Conference book of proceedings is published to mark and celebrate students' work and effort. Our students' positive experience and success is our best reward. One great example is our student Hadil Abou El-Ardatt, who participated in the Conference in 2023, which was her first conference presenting experience, while the book of proceedings that was later published included her paper. After participating in the Conference again in 2024, Hadil submitted her paper for publication in an international journal. Her paper was subsequently published in the International Journal of Language and Literary Studies.

Also, one of the aims of ELIT and ELT programs was to involve students in such a valuable project like the International Conference. Students are invited to become members of the organizing committee and to work together to see the project through to completion, from the initial stages, promotional activities and establishing

the network of contacts, to the very implementation of the conference, both on-campus and online. After helping organize the Conference over the years, our senior students now help younger students with their experience and advice. Although this journey is not without bumps, with different organisational and technical challenges faced during the Conference preparation and implementation, the final outcome inspires us to keep on and continue with this project.

Finally, the Conference experience may shape students' overall worldview. The Conference participants contemplate on the eternal questions of human existence: love and hatred, good and evil, life and death, hope and despair. Exchange of ideas and lively discussions which follow each conference presentation allow students to hear voices other than their own, to hear different opinions, to question their own beliefs and, overall, to learn and to grow together with their peers. This is very important for the education system and peace processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the entire Balkan region. Also, the Conference raises students' awareness of the importance of working together to build a better world. Students are asked to explore, promote and understand current trends and values of language learning, multicultural understanding, freedom, democracy, and equality in the contemporary world. Our local government recognized the importance of such an event for the education system in our country. In 2023, the conference was supported by Sarajevo Canton Ministry of Science, Higher Education and Youth, which allocated funds for the Conference within the Public call for financing scientific, research, artistic and development projects and programs from the Sarajevo Canton budget for 2023.

We will finish this report with a short passage from the Conference's call for papers that describes the need for academic exchange among students in light of future challenges:

Language does not only express facts and observations, but it is also a unifying force and medium for displaying and exchanging concepts, ideas, meanings, and thoughts. Language depicts and transmits all the achievements of human civilization and all the features of the objective and subjective world. The humankind has faced unprecedented crises of environmental destruction, pandemics, wars and nuclear war threats. Now more than ever before, it has become clear that only by working together and joining forces, young people may resist all the issues and build a better world for themselves and the generations to come.

Volume 2024-2(12) Authors

Carol Benson orcid.org/0000-0003-3075-0745: USA, MLE International. Carol is a founder and director of MLE International, a non-profit organization providing technical resources, consulting and networking to support the implementation of L1-based multilingual education in low-income context. Previously she was Associate Professor in International and Comparative Education at Teachers College, Columbia University (2014-2022). She has worked in teacher education, curriculum development and policy implementation in multilingual countries of the Asia/Pacific, Africa and Latin America regions. Her scholarly interests include language-in-education policy change, the inclusion of Indigenous and non-dominant languages in education, assessing emergent multilinguals, the link between MLE and the participation of female learners, and creating a multilingual habitus in educational development. worldcitizen0357@gmail.com

Gisi Cannizzaro orcid.org/0009-0001-3454-5119: NETHERLANDS, Heritage Language Education (HLE) Network. Gisi is the Managing Director and founder of HLE Network, a charitable non-profit organization that connects and supports heritage language educators. She has an academic background in experimental and theoretical psycholinguistics and child language acquisition (PhD from the University of Groningen, 2012) and a professional background as educational advisor to families with children who are internationally mobile during (pre-)primary and secondary school. Gisi's current activities include developing professional development and networking opportunities for heritage language educators, public outreach, and advocacy work. hlenet.org@gmail.com

Chenkai Chi orcid.org/0000-0002-4331-3600: CANADA, University of Windsor. Chenkai Chi obtained PhD degree in education from the University of Windsor. He now works as a post-doctoral fellow at the Faculty of Education, University of Windsor. He won SSRHC Doctoral Fellowship and Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS). His research interests include teacher education and professional development, mathematics education, literacy education, curriculum studies, and West-East Reciprocal Learning. He was a Research Assistant in Xu and Connelly's SSHRC Partnership Grant Project (2013-2020) and is a Research Assistant in Xu's Canada Research Chair program (2019-2024). He is also a Research Associate at University of Western Ontario in Sirek and Sefton's SSHRC Insight Program (2023-2024). chi3@uwindsor.ca

Anna Dąbrowska orcid.org/0000-0002-5192-2684: POLAND, University of Warsaw, Faculty of Education. Ph.D. (Post-doctoral degree). Her primary research interests are focused around literacy, as well as cultural and educational conditions for the acquisition and improvement of writing skills by children and young people. Her scientific interests also include issues of youth slang, communicative competence and linguistic worldview. The author of monographs on text-creation skills and education: *Youth Literacy in the New Orality Age* (2023), *Writing is a Challenge*. Young People's Texts in School Education (2024), she is also a member of The International Association for the Educational Role of Language. anna.dabrowska@uw.edu.pl

Georgi Dimitrov orcid.org/0000-0002-6336-7403: BULGARIA, University of National and World Economy, Faculty of International Economics and Politics. He is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics. He has a PhD in phonetics and phonology. His key interests are phonetics and historical linguistics. gmdimitrov89@gmail.com

Renata Emilsson Peskova orcid.org/0000-0001-5618-5030: ICELAND, School of Education, University of Iceland. Renata's current research project Plurilingual Pedagogies for Diverse Classrooms explores how students and

teachers can build on their linguistic repertoires to enhance their learning and teaching. Renata's research interests are in the field of educational linguistics and include plurilingualism and multilingualism, language policies, heritage and second language education, and linguistic identities. renata@hi.is

Erina Iwasaki orcid.org/0000-0002-8574-0125: UNITED STATES, University of Notre Dame, Postdoctoral Research Fellow. Erina Iwasaki is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in International Education, Languages, Literacy, and Poverty at the Pulte Institute for Global Development of the University of Notre Dame's Keough School of Global Affairs. Her research and work focus on language issues in international educational development, particularly on language-in-education policy, and the efforts of historically marginalized ethnolinguistic communities in implementing education in their own languages. She has consulted for various INGOs and NGOs in Senegal, Tunisia, and Myanmar, designing and implementing multi-year teacher training, curriculum development, as well as conducting analyses and evaluations for multilingual education programs. eiwasaki@nd.edu

Emina Jelešković orcid.org/0000-0001-8438-829X: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, International University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Emina Jelešković is a lecturer at the English Language and Literature program. Her key interests are education, linguistics and translation studies. She has been involved in several projects, including: IUS Youth Conference, ECML's project on developing competences for democratic culture for young learners through language education and a project on the international cooperation between higher education institutions. ejeskovic@ius.edu.ba

Sonja Kitanovska-Kimovska orcid.org/0000-0003-0037-0434: NORTH MACEDONIA, Ss Cyril and Methodius University (UKIM) in Skopje, Blazhe Koneski Faculty of Philology. Sonja works as an Associate Professor of English and Translation Studies at the Department of Translation and Interpreting at UKIM. She holds an MPhil degree in English and Applied Linguistics from Cambridge University, UK, as a Chevening Scholar, and a PhD in Translation from UKIM, Skopje. She has been a practicing freelance translator and interpreter for more than 20 years. Her research interests include style in translation, translation quality and assessment, translator training and professional aspects of translation. sonjakitanovska@flf.ukim.edu.mk

Xiaojun Kong orcid.org/0009-0005-1200-9824: CHINA, independent researcher. Xiaojun received her degree of Master of Education in Language and Literacies Education from University of Toronto. She received her degree of Master of Professional Education in Multiliteracies Education from the University of Western Ontario. She received her degree of Master of Arts in Marketing from Durham University. She has been teaching IELTS (International English Language Testing System) since 2010. Her research interests are teacher education and professional development, curriculum design and implementation, and second language teaching methodologies. kxj0726@hotmail.com

Ervin Kovačević orcid.org/0000-0003-1262-071X: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, International University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Ervin is an associate professor of applied linguistics in the English Language and Literature Program at the International University of Sarajevo. He is the author of *Teaching Adult Language Learners: Enhancing Personal Methodologies*. His latest research mainly focuses on teachers' professional development dynamics and the theoretical models representing it. ekovacevic@ius.edu.ba

Andre Kurowski orcid.org/0000-0002-8841-3365: UNITED KINGDOM, University of Chichester, Institute of Education and Social Sciences. Andre has a BSc (Hons) in Sociology, a BA (Hons) in Post Compulsory Education, and an MA in Leadership and Management. Andre achieved his PhD in Educational Policy and School Leadership from the University of Chichester. Andre is a Senior Lecturer on Childhood Studies programs with specialisms in

social science and management, and coordinator of a Level 6 Top up program in Early Childhood. Andre has worked in a variety of educational settings, and has a wide range of experience working with young people in other capacities. Andre is currently involved with research into students' experiences on childcare programs. Andre's primary interests are the social and cultural aspects of language. A.Kurowski@chi.ac.uk

Sunny C. Li orcid.org/0009-0005-6987-6152: USA, Syracuse University, School of Education. She is a Ph.D. candidate in Literacy Education at Syracuse University, graduated from Syracuse University with an M.S. in Literacy Education. She has directed her research and scholarship towards understanding primary and secondary students' learning of English as an additional language which also serves as the primary language of instruction in most U.S. schools. With colleagues, she has published original research on novice teachers' emotions, comparisons and assumptions about English learner (EL) students. She has taught EL students in a U.S. urban school district, as well as co-taught post-graduate students-novice teachers about optimal language and literacy practices for all students. Her current research focuses on U.S. teachers' personal knowledge and beliefs about teaching academic language to all students, but in particular, EL students. sli226@syr.edu

Sladana (Jelica) Marić orcid.org/0000-0002-9270-7016: SERBIA, University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Philosophy, Research Associate in Social Sciences - Pedagogy. After her studies in Piano Performance, Music Theory, and Opera, at the "Isidor Bajić" Music School in Novi Sad, Sladana graduated in Music Pedagogy at the Academy of Arts, University of Novi Sad ("The Best Student of the Generation" award), and English Language Philology ("Dr Lazar Vrkatić" - Faculty of Law and Business Studies FLV, Novi Sad), she completed interdisciplinary master studies in Management in Education (ACIMSI UNS) and doctoral studies in Teaching Methodology (FFUNS) mentored by Prof. Emerita Milka Oljača. Dr Marić has extensive experience in teaching music subjects and the English language in professional music and ballet educational settings. Her main research interests are in fields of Social Sciences (Education - Pedagogy) and Humanities (Languages and Music Arts). She published articles in peer-reviewed journals and international publications. Presented her research at major international summits and conferences in education (USA, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Malta, Poland, Serbia). Contributed with her research within the national project entitled Digital Media Technologies and Socio-educational Changes funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia. Editorial board member of the Educational Role of Language Journal (2019-2024) and member of ERL Network. sladjana.maric@ff.uns.ac.rs

Eva Mikuska orcid.org/0000-0003-2486-9643: UNITED KINGDOM, University of Portsmouth, School of Education, Languages and Linguistics. Currently works at the University of Portsmouth as a Senior Lecturer and Departmental Director for Postgraduate Research Degree; she gained MA LTHE in 2012 and EdD in 2021 and became a Senior Fellow Higher Education Academy (SFHEA) in 2021. Her research interest focuses on the quality education and care for young children, gender discourses in ECEC field, ethnicised minority rights for education, social inequality, and identity questions. She is a Vice-Chair for Research and Knowledge Exchange, Early Childhood Studies Degree Network [ECSDN] and a trustee for TACTYC. Eva.mikuska@port.ac.uk

Nejira Mulahmetović orcid.org/0009-0001-5277-3828: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, International University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Visual Arts and Visual Communications Design Department. Nejira Mulahmetović is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Visual Art and Communications Design at the International University of Sarajevo. She earned a degree in Product Design from the Academy of Fine Arts, University of Sarajevo, in 2007, and later received a Master of International Contemporary Art and Design Practice from Limkokwing University in Malaysia. From 2008 to 2013, she taught at the Faculty of Design and Innovation in Malaysia, holding various leadership roles. She also lectured at Jeddah International University in Saudi Arabia

from 2013 to 2016. Since returning to Bosnia, Nejira has been actively involved in both academic and professional projects. nmulahmetovic@ius.edu.ba

Mirzana Pašić Kodrić orcid.org/0000-0002-1982-3352: Bosnia and Herzegovina, University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Educational Sciences. Mirzana is an Associate Professor of Literature and Head of the Department of Elementary Class Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as a visiting professor at the International University of Sarajevo, contemporary Bosnian writer and member of the Writers' Association of Bosnia and Herzegovina and other literary organizations in the country and abroad. She has published co-authored scientific books *Ethical Criticism and Children's Literature* (2020) and the *Book About Nasiha* (2022) and several scientific and professional papers, as well as several independent art books in the field of literature (some of them have been translated into several world languages). She has won numerous awards for her literary work and she is one of the founders of the Institute of Children's Literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her narrower areas of scientific interest are the Bosnian language as a foreign/second language, cultural and gender aspects of literature and literary bibliotherapy. mpkodric@pf.unsa.ba

Federico Piccolo orcid.org/0009-0006-7160-0750: ITALY, University of Palermo, Department of Humanities. Federico Piccolo, after graduating with honors in Languages, Intercultural Literatures, and Didactics (LM-39) from the University of Palermo, Italy, specialized in language teaching, specifically in Russian and Italian as foreign languages. Since November 2022, he has been a Ph.D. candidate in Humanities (linguistic curriculum) at the same institution, conducting an experimental research project on the teaching of Russian, focusing particularly on the errors Italian-speaking students make when using motion verbs (with and without prefixes). He has participated in international conferences and mobility programs, spending time at various institutions. He is currently a teaching tutor in Russian language and translation at the Department of Humanities at the University of Palermo. His research interests are Russian linguistics, Slavic-Italian contrastive linguistics, typological linguistics, language teaching, language technology, didactics of the Russian language, Ukrainian language studies. federico.piccolo@unipa.it

Nadira Puškar Mustafić orcid.org/0009-0000-2624-0692: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, International University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, English Language and Literature Department. Nadira Puškar Mustafić is an Assistant Professor of English Language and Literature at the International University of Sarajevo, specializing in American and English literature and cultural studies. She holds a PhD from Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera in Osijek and coordinates the university's Cultural Studies program. In 2021, she was an Erasmus Exchange professor at Sivas Cumhuriyet University in Turkey and, in 2023, received the SUSI Scholars grant from the US State Department. Her 2020 publication, *Tears in the Audience: Catharsis in Contemporary Auto/Biographical American Drama*, was funded by the Croatian Ministry of Education. Dr. Puškar Mustafić has also reviewed books for the Taylor & Francis Group and contributed articles to local and international journals. npuskar-mustafic@ius.edu.ba

Agnieszka Suchomelová-Połomska orcid.org/0000-0002-7056-1394: the CZECH REPUBLIC, Masaryk University Language Centre, Faculty of Arts. She has experience of teaching English as a foreign or second language in various environments (Poland, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic) and for various purposes. At tertiary level, she has taught specialized courses of English for Sports Managers, Business and for Science (courses for chemists, biologists and physicists). She currently teaches English for Academic Purposes at the Faculty of Arts. Her previous research focused on syllabus design, project-based learning and simulations and roleplaying in a language classroom. Currently, she is interested in research in language and culture, and ethnolinguistic identity. She

received her MA degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language from London Metropolitan University in 2003.
a.suchomelova@mail.muni.cz

Louise C. Wilkinson orcid.org/0000-0003-3315-9918: USA, Syracuse University, School of Education. Louise is a Distinguished Professor of Education, Psychology and Communication Sciences at Syracuse University, graduated from Harvard University with an Ed.D. in Human Development. Her research program has focused on learning both within and outside of schools. An internationally recognized leader in educational research, Wilkinson is best known for her extensive research studies on children's language and literacy learning and mathematical literacy, publishing more than 150 peer-reviewed research journal articles, monographs, volumes and book chapters. She has presented her work widely at international conferences and meetings and has collaborated extensively with researchers and practitioners in language, literacy, and mathematics education. Professor Wilkinson teaches courses on language and literacy development, research methods, and the language of learning mathematics and literacy learning for English learner (EL) students. lwilkin@syr.edu

Volume 2024-2(12) Reviewers

Amir Begić (Croatia, University of Osijek)

Vesna Bulatović (Serbia, University of Novi Sad)

Halina Chodkiewicz (Poland, Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biala Podlaska)

Ivana Cimermanova (Slovakia, University of Presov)

Irem Comoglu (Turkey, Dokuz Eylul University)

Veronique Duché (Australia, The University of Melbourne)

Oumaima Elghazali (Morocco, Mohammed V University)

Antonia Estrela (Portugal, Higher School of Education of the Polytechnic School of Lisbon)

Abha Gupta (Virginia, Old Dominion University)

Ana Jovanović (Serbia, University of Belgrade)

Chahrazad Mouhoubi-Messadh (Algiers, University of Algiers)

Zakaria Othmane (Morocco, Mohammed V University of Rabat)

Sanja Simel Pranjić (Croatia, University of Osijek)

Jelena Pataki Šumiga (Croatia, University of Osijek)

Žejko Pavić (Croatia, University of Osijek)

Solzica Popovska (North Macedonia, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University)

Alina Resceanu (Romania, University of Craiova)

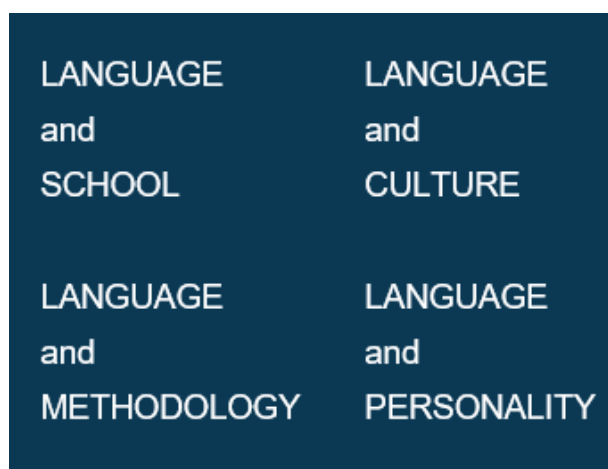
Goran Schmidt (Croatia, University of Osijek)

Silvana Tokić (Croatia, University of Split)

Senka Zizanović (Croatia, University of Osijek)

ERL Journal – Scope Major

Key premise. **The educational role of language, reaching far beyond school(ing), is determined by multiple aspects relating to culture, methodology and/or personality.** To be suitably comprehensive, studies blending educational with linguistic studies need to comprise all these aspects.



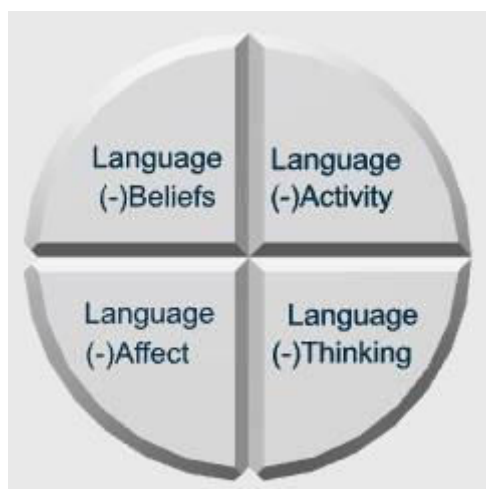
General rationale. Language lies at the heart of schooling, culture, (learning and teaching) methods, and personality – thus underlying education on the individual and on the social level. Its social existence determines its experiencing by an individual person and vice versa. Both these levels matter when it comes to learning and teaching methods as well as schooling as a whole. Socially determined and individually experienced, language shapes culture and education, and, from an individual perspective, it defines a person’s place in the world and defines the world in which a person is placed.

Specific issues. Accordingly, ERL Journal welcomes papers addressing issues such as: language of schooling, bilingual education, language identity, intercultural competence, discourse analysis, children narratives, personal constructs, language in special education, transversal skills, language mediation, academic language, elicitation, plurilingual teaching, CLIL, functions of language, etc.

Expected outcome. Systematization of knowledge concerning the educational position of language; aggregation of empirical findings pertaining to social and cultural determinants of how language serves education; development of interdisciplinary educational and linguistic studies; recognition of problems calling for research and discussion of ways of putting language theories into practice.

ERL Journal – Scope Minor

Key premise. **A person's education is determined by how language operates on four levels – beliefs, activity, affect and thinking.** To be maximally educational, the experiencing of language by a person comprises these four dimensions, which implies a need for their comprehensive studies.



General rationale. How language affects a person's education depends on multiple axiological, psychomotor, affective, and cognitive factors. For instance, what a person thinks of language (e.g. on whether it is worth speaking or not) and how much a person speaks determines that person's mental faculties. Conversely, how a person understands a given issue (as well as how s/he feels about it) impacts on how interesting utterances s/he produces. Hence, there exist relationships between language and all the aforementioned educational domains.

Specific issues. Accordingly, ERL Journal welcomes papers concerning issues falling within one or more of the four domains, such as: status of language in school curricula, language of textbooks, language activity of children or grown-ups, stages of language fossilization, argumentative skills, language learning styles, verbalization of knowledge, approaches to oracy, personal experiencing of language skills, language image of the world, cognitive discourse functions, language reflectivity, etc.

Expected outcome. Collection of theoretical proposals and empirical data supporting learner-oriented educational practice; exploration of the relationship between language and four educational domains; detection of factors determining learners' language identity/personality; accumulation of data providing assistance in construction of language-grounded educational systems.

ERL Journal is designated for papers on cross-disciplinary, educational and linguistic, issues. It is meant to address (I) the position of language and how it is put into practice across different schools, cultures, methods and personalities, and (II) the experiencing of language by learners in terms of their language beliefs, activity, affect and cognition. *ERL Journal* includes theoretical and empirical papers, presenting qualitative and quantitative approaches. Resting on the overarching premise of language shaping our reality and education (assignment of meanings to the world and subject matter learnt), it ultimately aims to unravel this process and to boost the position of language in education.

ERL Journal is international, interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed, and double-blinded.

It is open access and follows free-of-charge policy for authors.

|

<http://educationalroleoflanguage.org/erl-journal/>