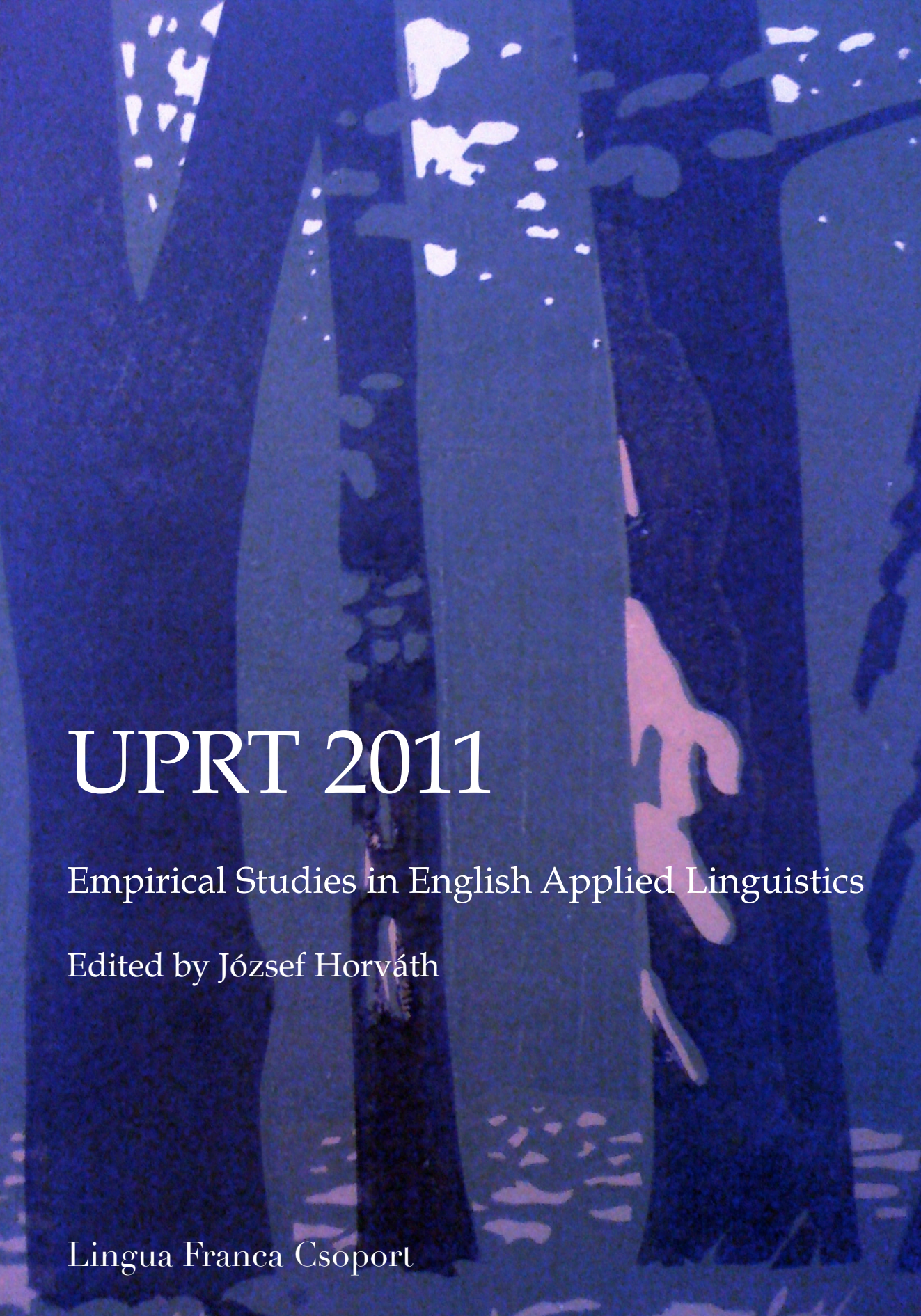

UPRT 2011

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Edited by József Horváth

Lingua Franca Csoport

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Pécs

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Introduction

PRT 2011 is our sixth publication in the series,

UPRT conferences have usually given interested participants much freedom in terms of what area of their research they can present. The organizers' only request has been that the paper proposal focus on an applied linguistically relevant domain. Thus, we have not advertised these events with specific themes. Still, each conference, and now we have had six of them, can be characterized by a theme that we may call its common core. This year, that theme is clearly culture.

This sixth edition of the UPRT series thus opens with papers that address culturally exciting questions, ranging from fundamental pedagogical issues such as the methodology of teaching cultural notions and values to linguistic developments such as the emergence of and debates related to global English. One might argue, of course, that culture is indeed inherent in all manner of applied linguistic endeavor – and one would be right, as attested by all the twelve chapters of the current edition.

Speaking of which: our readers and contributors may be pleased to know that the current edition may be the last one published in Pécs for the time being, as UPRT may transform into UZRT next year. According to plans now in development, from now on our colleagues in Zagreb will organize the roundtables every second year, the first being in 2012. It would certainly be a welcome extension of the scope of the event – geographically as well as culturally. If these plans do materialize, let me be the first one to wish the organizers of the Zagreb event and the editors of next year's proceedings all the best.

The editor

An Eternal Question: How to Teach Culture?

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Introduction

The concept of culture has been researched since ancient times. Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle, Roman philosophers, Arab writers and thinkers, European medieval writers and philosophers like Rabelais, European writers and thinkers of the 17th century, such as Descartes and Montesquieu all wrote about culture. European historians and ethnologists of the 16-17th centuries and evolutionists of the 19th century, such as Spencer, also incorporated culture in their work.

With the advent of cultural anthropology at the beginning of the twentieth century, culture became the subject of numerous studies and discussions. One of anthropology's main goals is to combat ethnocentrism, the tendency to apply one's own cultural values in judging the behaviour and beliefs of people raised in other cultures. Culture has been researched primarily by sociologists, anthropologists, ethnologists linguists and language teachers. Giles and Middleton (1999, p. 9) cite Williams who claims that 'culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language'. Nevertheless, scholars seem to agree that the term *culture* has two basic meanings (Kottak, 1991):

1. Culture with a capital C – culture in the general sense – a capacity and possession shared by humans, transmitted through learning. It is spiritual reality rather than material. It encompasses knowledge, arts, music;
2. Culture with a small c, culture in the specific sense, where the word denotes different and varied cultural traditions of specific societies which govern behaviour and beliefs.

What scholars also agree upon is that culture is all-encompassing. It is learned and shared, and it is symbolic.

In certain contexts the terms 'culture' and 'civilization' are used as synonyms. Still, in most sociological and anthropological theories *civilization* is referred to as 'a complex society with a central government and social classes'. In that respect it is synonymous to 'nation-state' and 'state'.

Many scholars have researched the link between human thought, language and culture (Sapir 1921, Whorf 1956, Lévi-Strauss 1958, Wierzbicka

1992). Levi Strauss (1958) states that the interrelation between language and culture is one of the most complex ones. According to him "language is a product of culture, a part of culture, and a condition for culture" (p.78). Bratanić, in her article about cultural differences and linguistic misunderstandings (1991a), analyses primarily the interrelation between lexis and culture. I would like to suggest that the interrelation between grammar and culture is less salient, which might consequently be the reason for its being less researched.

We may mark the 1960s to be the era when the importance of culture for language learning started being recognized. Brooks, in his seminal work *Language and Language Learning* (1960), offered sixty-four topics regarding culture. They included greetings, expletives, personal possessions, cosmetics, tobacco and smoking, verbal taboos, establishments providing refreshments, contrasts in town and country life, and patterns of politeness. Modern textbooks for learning English include numerous facets of the cultures of the English speaking world. These include facts about everyday life, ways of addressing people in conversation, letters and e-mails, facts about holidays, education system, nature and wildlife, monuments, and history.

Authors put a lot of effort into presenting the cultures of the English-speaking world in such a way that learners can understand and accept them. Critical thinking is encouraged, which should, ideally, diminish the occurrence of stereotypes and judgmental attitudes. In 1998 Vilke, Mihaljević Djigunović and Medved Krajnović carried out a study testing the presence of stereotypes concerning British people among young Croatian learners of English. They conducted the study among 224 grammar-school students. The results show that, despite good material contained in the course books, promoting various aspects of British culture (among other English- speaking ones), despite the students' high motivation for learning English, and despite the fact that British programme is not rare on Croatian TV, there exist stereotypes that are hard to dismiss (the British being conservative, for example, or talking about the weather). In the poll about the perception of British culture that I conducted in 1998, some of the university students and teachers of English provided answers that led me to believe they tend to look at British culture in a rather superficial way. ("British culture is simpler than any other. It is easy to understand and to learn about"; "British culture is not open to foreign influences".) To the question, "When should culture be introduced in language learning", all the students and teachers replied that culture should be introduced as soon as possible. Nevertheless, several of the answers suggested that the respondents tend to think of cultural elements only in terms of something easily perceived, something that we may call the "extrinsic or explicit aspects of a culture", such as songs, nursery rhymes, and the so called realia.

Bratanić (1991a) writes about culturally marked lexis, which can be described as an implicit cultural aspect. As an example we can mention the word *ocean*, which is used in American English as an equivalent of the word *sea.* Culturally marked lexis is conditioned by facts of life that a particular community is faced with. Words can have various cultural connotations, which are not always obvious from the context (*the Valley*, which stands for *Silicon Valley* in California). There is another implicit (or intrinsic) cultural aspect, which

concerns different human cultures perceiving the world differently, including space and time. In English, for example, a house can be *on the corner*, whereas a person waits for another *at the corner.* There is no such distinction in Croatian. The notions of time and space lead us to yet another potential cultural difference, which implies cultural behaviour (Bratanić 1991a, Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). In some cultures it is not impolite to be late for dinner, whereas in the English-speaking world it is generally not acceptable. In English-speaking cultures the space around one's body (personal space) should not be invaded. We may agree that there are linguistic and non-linguistic cultural differences, out of which some are more salient and others less salient (Bratanić, 1991b).

Modern teachers of languages should not consider teaching a language to be separated from teaching about the culture(s) of the people(s) that speak that particular language. The notions of *intercultural* (or *cross-cultural*) *competence* and *cultural awareness* pervade texts about teaching culture(s) in language classrooms (Valdes 1986, Tomalin and Stempleski 1993, Byram 1997, Petkova 1998, Sercu 2000). Still, some questions remain:

What teachers perceive as culture, what aspects of a particular culture are they really aware of, what they deem important to teach to their students, and what materials should they use. As a part of Evi Saluveer's MA thesis (2004) there is a discussion about the results of her study carried out among 61 secondary English teachers, out of whom 84% were secondary school teachers, and 16% primary school teachers. The results show that they consider culture to be a very important part of teaching a language. Out of 16 topics suggested by the author, they ranked high the topics "customs and festivals", "national symbols" and "patterns of politeness". On the other hand, the topics "government" and "law and order" were ranked low. According to the author, a number of "culturally loaded" course books are available in Estonia, both locally and internationally produced books, but teachers are often reluctant to use them. They admit to not being aware of many cultural aspects. I believe that such a survey would bear similar answers in Croatia, although the studies of English in Croatia have for decades now been designed in such a way that students could gain good insight into the concept of culture, as well as the concept of the cultures of the English speaking world.

After 18 years of teaching future teachers of English or translators different language, culture and translation courses, my opinion is that students often expect ready-made answers and formulas, which can only be partly provided. University students of a language have to do a lot of studying and research by themselves, with their university teachers giving them guidance. Once full-fledged teachers or translators, they should carry on the same way in order to gain more knowledge and become experts in what they do. Students often label linguistic and literature courses, even culture courses, as less important for their future jobs than practical language, translation and/or methodology courses. This opinion stays on with many of them after graduation, and it can be purported by the results of a study conducted by Mihaljević Djigunović and Zergollern-Miletić (2003).

In this article I will present the results of a study carried out at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb, Croatia, in the academic year

2010/2011. The participants in the study were future generalist teachers, as well as primary-school teachers of English. The study looks into their understanding of the terms *culture* and *culture of the English-speaking world*.

It also focuses on the students' opinions about their knowledge of the cultures of the English-speaking world, and about their needs for their future jobs as teachers of English.

Another goal was to establish whether students tended to think in terms of preconceptions, stereotypes and clichés when the cultures of the English - speaking world are concerned. My experience, both as a teacher and a researcher (Zergollern-Miletić 1998, 2001) is that people in general, educated people not being excluded, tend to embrace preconceptions, stereotypes and clichés with regard to cultures that are very little known to them, as well as to those whom they claim to know much about (their own, for example). My next interest was to see whether students were mostly familiar with British and US cultures, and whether they primarily take these two cultures into account when asked to define the cultures of the English-speaking world. I also wanted to learn whether students did their own research, and whether they understood that one could learn about culture(s) in courses that do not specifically focus on culture.

The study

The results of the study are based on the students' answers to the following questions:

1. What does the term 'culture' mean to you?
2. In your opinion, what does the term 'cultures of the English- speaking world' imply?
3. How much do you think you have learned about the cultures of the English-speaking world so far?
4. In what way (and where) have you acquired that knowledge?
5. What would you like to learn about the English-speaking cultures?
6. What do you think is necessary for a teacher of English to know about the English-speaking cultures?

The total number of students is 64, out of which 29 are first-year students, and the rest are students belonging to years two to five. The average number of years of learning English for the first year students is nine. As for the quality of the students' answers, the 15 second-year students and the 8 fifth-year students gave the most comprehensive and sophisticated answers. Although first-year students' answers may not always be much elaborated, they filled in the questionnaire very carefully. Most of them tried to give as precise answers as possible. One student warns against stereotypes. She also points out that learning about different cultures changes our world views.

At the beginning of the research I expected the answers by first year students to be different from those of the older students, since they had not had any course focusing on the cultures of the English-speaking world. Three courses focusing on the cultures of the English- speaking world are a part of our students' curriculum. Two of them are taught in the third and fourth terms respectively (*Introduction to Culture and Civilisation* and *Anglosaxon Cultures*), and one course is taught in the ninth term (*Culture in Early ELT*).

Question number 1: What does the term 'culture' mean to you?

Answering this question most students wrote that the term *culture* implies traditions, mores, customs, beliefs and history of a group of people living in a place or in a country. By their answers we can conclude that they link the concept of *culture* primarily with the concept of *nation.*

A number of students mentioned literature, arts and architecture as part of a nation's tradition, but only one first year student depicted culture solely as 'culture with a big C'. Five students additionally mentioned manners. Language was mentioned as a part of culture only by 11 students. From the students' answers we can suspect that they somehow understand that the term *culture* encompasses various traditions, ways of living of certain groups of people, where art, music, literature and architecture are also included, but no one seems to be aware that the term has two basic meanings. What can also be noted is that no one linked the term with a group of people who may be united by certain interests or world views, not by mere geography, politics or history (such as *rock culture, snow-boarders' culture, bikers' culture*).

Question number 2: In your opinion, what does the term 'cultures of the English- speaking world' imply?

About half of the students repeated the above answers, linking tradition, history, behaviour and beliefs with English-speaking countries, not mentioning which ones they have in mind. Others mentioned mostly the USA, and the UK. Australia occurred in some answers, and a few also mentioned Canada, Ireland, South Africa and New Zealand. Two first-year students and one fourth-year student only mentioned Britain, and yet another first year student claims that the term *cultures of the English-speaking world* refers primarily to the UK, USA, Australia and Canada.

From the students' answers we can see that some of them are not quite sure about the distinction between England, the UK and Britain. We may also notice some confusion, especially among the first-year students, regarding the interrelation between language and culture.

Question number 3: How much do you think you have learned about the cultures of the English-speaking world so far?

This is the first time where we can see a considerable difference between the first year students and the others. Thirteen first year students claimed that they had not learned much. Eight said that they had learned the basics. Only five thought that they had learned a lot. One student referred to her language skills rather than knowledge about culture. Two complained that in English classes focus was put on language rather than culture.

As for the older students, most thought that they had learned a lot. Nevertheless, some point out that there was still much to learn, that the subject was very vast.

About one-third thought that they had learned only the basic things. Two students claimed that throughout their schooling the focus had only been put on the USA and the UK. Five students suggested that they should be *taught*, rather than *study* themselves. This answer is honest, yet somewhat disappointing, since university students should do a lot of independent studying.

Question number 4: In what way (and where) have you acquired that knowledge?

Among the first-year students the predominant answers were school, the internet, the media (primarily TV and films). Some students mentioned books and magazines, and one student claimed that she had done a lot of research herself. Three students mentioned language classes at the university. As expected, older students mentioned the culture courses, but most gave additional answers including the other (primarily language) courses, books, TV, the internet, music, primary and secondary school. One mentioned history and geography courses at school. It is laudable that students do their own research. I find it also encouraging that they realize one can learn about the cultures of the English-speaking world outside culture courses, still appreciating the knowledge they have gained there.

Question number 5: What would you like to learn about the English-speaking cultures?

The most frequent answer to this question was 'as much as possible'**.** Seventeen students would like to travel to at least some of the English- speaking countries and gain knowledge and experience there. Most of the first-year students did not know exactly what they wanted to learn. Unlike them, the second- and the fifth-year students pointed out exactly what they wanted to learn. It is interesting to see that some of those students want to learn about history, while about the same number do not want to learn about history, but rather about the present day. Some stated that they wanted to learn about cultures other than British and US, and to learn about the similarities and differences between

them. Seven students mentioned that they did not want to acquire certain stereotypes.

From the students' answers we may conclude that most students would like to learn about customs, which includes songs, tales, holidays, and ways of behaving. Two students said that they did not want to learn about numbers and data, but about 'reality'. These answers corroborate my previous findings (Zergollern-Miletić 1998) that students of English and teachers of English primarily want to learn about extrinsic or explicit aspects of a culture.

Question number 6: What do you think is necessary for a teacher of English to know about the English-speaking cultures?

All students agreed that a teacher of English should know a lot about the cultures of the English-speaking world. Eight mentioned the interrelation between language and culture, saying that one cannot teach a language without teaching the cultures related to that language. Ten students mentioned the importance of presenting interesting facts and aspects of a culture in order to make lessons interesting. Several vague answers were given by the first-year students.

Conclusion

According to the results, there might be some misunderstandings regarding the term *culture* on the part of the students, since all students explained only one meaning of the term. This research has not ascertained my theory that students tend to form clichés and accept stereotypes concerning the English-speaking cultures (like any other foreign cultures, and even parts of their own). I would like to think this is true. Nevertheless, I intend to use some other instruments to look into that problem. Question number 2 may have been too broad, imprecise, and consequently elicited either formulaic or vague answers. My expectations that students link the term 'cultures of the English- speaking world' mostly to Britain and the USA have proved to be partially correct:

1. Those students who enumerated the parts of the world that can be described as 'English-speaking' primarily mentioned Britain and the USA.
2. On the other hand, some of them expressed their wish to learn about the other English-speaking cultures as well.

The results of the study also suggest that most students understand that they can learn about foreign cultures by using various media. Some of them are also aware of the fact that they can learn about the English- speaking cultures in different courses at school and the university. Some expressed their interest and wish to do more research by themselves. As for the difference in answers be-

tween the first year students and the others, it was most obvious in the answers to the questions 3 and 4, but also present in the answers to questions 5 and 6.

Having spent most of my career teaching university students of English, primarily teachers of English, I intend to state my perspective about how culture should be taught to them in view of their future professional needs. Having worked on two projects researching early ELT in Croatia, working and participating in various events and seminars for teachers, and being a member of the Croatian Association of Teachers of English, I hope I have gained some insight into what kind of training future teachers of English should be provided, and what knowledge and competences they should acquire. Future teachers should know what the concept of culture encompasses (different meanings of the word *culture*). They should be aware of the close connection be-tween language(s) and culture(s), learn as much as possible about the English- speaking world and its multiculturalism, compare different cultures of the English-speaking world to one another. They should compare different cultures of the English-speaking world to their own. The precondition for that is their awareness of their own culture (Thanasoulas, 2001). They should also be aware of the fact that one can belong to various cultures at the same time: belonging to one nation does not imply belonging to only one culture. A person may belong to Croatian culture + women's culture + young culture + (non)Catholic culture + skiers' culture, for example. They should be aware of the necessity of breaking clichés and stereotypes. This in turn may sound like a cliché itself, but we cannot deny the fact that teachers should really try to think critically, not in a biased way, and to encourage critical thinking by their students. Future teachers should be encouraged to do independent individual work, research projects, reports and presentations, including research of their own culture. Consequently, they are expected to interest their future students into doing this kind of work.

When designing university culture courses, one faces the difficult task of deciding how much theoretical insight into certain aspects of culture should be presented (Frankova, 1998). Topics such as law, government and politics are not always appealing to students. Nevertheless, knowledge about history should be combined with the knowledge of different social and political structures, about different legal and education systems, about religions and various outlooks on the problems of races and classes. Only when students have gained insight into geographical, historical and socio-political aspects regarding the English-speaking world, will they be able to understand the extrinsic or explicit facets of those cultures, and only then will they understand literature, art and popular culture coming from that part of the world.

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Stereotypical Images and Icons in the Teaching of Culture

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Introduction

A quick glance through the contents of coursebooks shows that culture is rather more interwoven with other teaching content than ever before. Given that it is an increasingly used and potentially inspiring part of our courses, I believe we should reconsider the traps and challenges that have been present from the days when culture was neatly partitioned in its own standalone slot in our curricula. The potential dangers lie in the sweeping generalisations and stereotypical views that are easily produced in an attempt to characterise the features of the culture under review. However, this paper takes the view that space should be given to the stereotype and its bedfellow, the icon, which it will be claimed form an important part of the picture of any culture we study. Such a position has already been taken on the British Council websites, LearnEnglish and TeachingEnglish, which successfully exploit stereotypical views. We will explore the presentation of the four countries of the UK on these websites and in other sources to examine the pitfalls and benefits of presenting stereotypical images and generalisations. Students' work will also be examined, showing how presentations of their own country have benefited or suffered from incorporating stereotypical or iconic views.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes generally have a bad press. Gill, admittedly tongue in cheek, writes:

> Stereotypes, most people agree, are bad things. They are intellectually sloppy. They are rigid and simplistic. They represent the antithesis of individuality and critical judgement. They help to perpetuate attitudes and behaviours many of us would like to see cease to exist. They are usually downright wrong (1998, p. 313).

Teachers duly admit that they would not be happy to hear that their teaching content included stereotypical views and would consider such a comment to be a criticism. But, however much decried, it seems that stereotypical views are all around. Let us take, for example, the presentation of Wales on the British Council TeachingEnglish website. The first line of the text as part of a discussion of the regional identities of the UK is: "Wales is a land of rugby, singing and beautiful scenery" (Destination UK: Wales, 2008). On another page, a survey is reported where Welsh people were asked "What does Wales make you think of?" The answers were as follows, with the percentage of respondents who mentioned the item (What does Wales make you think of? 2009):

rugby	44.08%
daffodils	18.27%
singing	15.05%
leeks	9.67%
other	12.90%

In another source, the Taglines of *Twin Town*, a film set in Swansea, South Wales, directed in 1997 by Allen, goes as follows:

> Rugby. Tom Jones. Male Voice Choirs. Shirley Bassey. Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwyllllantisiliogogogch. Snowdonia. Prince of Wales. Anthony Hopkins. Daffodils. Sheep. Coal. Slate Quarries. The Blaenau Ffestiniog Dinkey-Doo Miniature Railway. Now if that's your idea of thousands of years of Welsh culture, you can't blame us for trying to liven the place up a little, can you? (Taglines for *Twin Town*, 1997).

In three different sources on Wales, rugby comes out on top, and singing is also listed high up when an attempt is made to characterise the country. These sources, including the questionnaire that was probably answered by a relatively large body of Welsh people, prove that Gill might be right when he says that stereotypes "are often very deeply rooted" (1998, p. 313).

But let us examine the stereotype of Wales as a rugby-passionate nation a little more deeply to weigh the extent of truth contained in it. When it is said that Wales is a land of rugby, this idea applies only to a relatively small part of Wales in geographical terms. Rugby is enjoyed in the more densely populated areas of certain parts of South Wales, but it is not much played in larger expanses of the country where interest in the game is also less intense. So, rugby as a key element of Welsh culture is therefore rather of a generalisation! It might be useful to discuss the differences between generalisations and stereotypes using this as an example. In many cases a stereotype tends to belittle or demean the target, whereas a generalisation often does not have such an intent, but rather seeks to form a theory about the whole from particular evidence. Students might like to reflect on whether the idea of the Welsh being rugby enthusiasts falls into the former or latter category. A case may be made for either view, which is the kind of discussion that many teachers like to have in their classrooms.

Let us now examine in full the text on Wales whose first sentence we have examined above. This might prove a useful resource in a number of ways. A good starting point would be to ask students to read the text and identify any examples they can find of stereotype, generalisation, fact, cliché, simplification, and so on. We will quote the passage in full.

Language, Rugby, and the Millennium Stadium

Wales is a land of rugby, singing and beautiful scenery situated on the western side of the UK. Its population is just under three million which is about 5% of the total UK population. The main cities are Cardiff, the capital city, Swansea and Newport.

Wales was ruled directly from London until 1999 when the first elections to the Welsh National Assembly were held. The Assembly has some powers specific to people in Wales and can make decisions on areas such as education and health. Wales remains part of the UK and Members of Parliament (MPs) from Welsh constituencies continue to have seats in the UK Parliament at Westminster. Laws passed by Parliament in Westminster still apply to Wales.

The Welsh language is probably the most important thing that distinguishes Wales from the rest of the UK. Welsh (or Cymraeg) is one of Europe's oldest languages and is spoken by one in five Welsh people. This number doubles among children and teenagers which shows that the language is very much alive among the young.

Road signs and other signs are in both English and Welsh. The language is at its strongest along the Llyn Peninsula in North-West Wales, where 75 per cent of the population speak Welsh. Towns, villages and cities in Wales often have both a Welsh and an English name and Wales is home to one of the longest place names in the world - Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch, which means St Mary's (Church) by the white aspen over the whirlpool, and St Tysilio's (Church) by the red cave.

Wales is also known for its 'Eisteddfodau' which are festivals celebrating Welsh language, art, culture and heritage and which include an eclectic mix of music, dance, drama, debate and cultural competitions. Most people know of the annual National Eisteddfod which is held alternately in North and South Wales and the International Eisteddfod which is held in Llangollen, but there are Eisteddfodau of varying sizes held in towns and villages throughout the land.

The national sport is very much rugby union and the national team are sometimes known as the Dragons as a red dragon appears on the na-

tional flag of Wales. The home ground is the Millennium Stadium at Cardiff Arms Park in Cardiff" (2008).

In the first paragraph, students might identify the stereotype ("Wales is a land of rugby, singing"), the generalisation ("beautiful scenery") and fact ("situated on the western side of the UK"). The short paragraphs on the Welsh language and the Eisteddfodau might be found to be examples of simplification: volumes have been written on these subjects. A discussion could follow on whether these simplifications are appropriate in the context, since they allow the writer to condense information to introduce a relatively unknown culture to learners. It should be said, however, that the learners may not be able immediately to gather for themselves what here constitutes a simplification given their unfamiliarity with the country. But the process is the important thing, whereby they become aware that information presented to them should not necessarily be taken at face value, but should be scrutinised more carefully, helped by an understanding of the aspects of language already mentioned.

Finally, let us deal in this respect with two countries we have not mentioned yet: Scotland and Northern Ireland. It is interesting that the authors of the texts presented on the TeachingEnglish websites readily identify the stereotype as part of the picture that they seek to convey. The texts on Scotland and Northern Ireland each include a paragraph headed "Stereotypes". Those connected with Scotland are listed as "tartan, kilts, heather, haggis and the scenery" (Destination UK: Scotland, 2010) and those connected with Northern Ireland are "its troubled and violent past" (Destination UK – Northern Ireland, 2008). An obvious exercise might be to remove the paragraph headings and to ask the students to identify the paragraphs and parts of the text that convey stereotypical images, fact, myth, and so on. This might prove to be a useful exercise in text analysis.

Intercultural education

Edelhoff claims that "clichés and stereotypes can serve as gates into intercultural education" (2005, p. 16). Given this, we might use any of the texts we have observed to provide a model for students to reflect on their own culture, in this case Croatia. The British Council text on Wales was adapted in the following way and a group of students were requested to write a similar description of their own country:

> Croatia is a land of _____, _____, and _____. It is situated _____ . It has a population of _____ and its main cities are _____ , _____, and _____ . _____ is probably the most important thing that distinguishes Croatia…
>
> Another feature that distinguishes Croatia is….

Once they had written their pieces, the students were invited to read out their work to the rest of the group. A positive outcome of this kind of activity is generally the interest shown by the students in what their fellow learners have written. One of the characteristics of stereotypes is that they are commonly accepted and are often self-perpetuating. The students are usually keen to have confirmation of their own stereotypical image from other students. However, interest is aroused when a new element is introduced, hence creating surprise, and perhaps more so when a familiar image is conveyed with a twist, or when it is conveyed in an amusing or witty way. For example, one student started her description of Croatia with these words: "Croatia is a land of sea, sun and fun". This sentence seems to capture laconically and in rhyme the key features of Croatia's coastline, its climate, and the pleasure-seeking nature of many Croatian people.

The distinguishing aspects of Croatia mentioned by the group of twenty-four students who undertook this task are listed below in order of frequency:

sea (including coastline and islands)
sport
tourism
corruption
sun
wine
the good life

Other traits mentioned as key features included Croatia's cafés, inventors, and "wannabe celebrities".

The sea and coastline were mentioned by fourteen out of the twenty-four students as the most representative feature of Croatia. This is interesting in that the image of the sea (together with the coastline and the thousand or more islands) is mentioned as the key feature of the country to an even greater extent than rugby was for Wales. We should ask therefore whether this is not a statement of fact rather than a stereotypical image of the country, given that it is mentioned by so many people. Perhaps the point here is that this might be a generalisation about the country: Croatia extends far beyond the sea and has a very varied and diverse landscape including highish mountains and plains. Students might be asked to consider that the stereotype or generalisation by nature presents only a partial picture. The question therefore is to ask how true this partial picture might be or whether it distorts the true picture, whatever that may be.

The question of what is fact arises again, perhaps unexpectedly, elsewhere in the activity as described above. Croatia was placed by different students "in Southeast Europe", "in the Balkans", "in Southwest Europe", "in the west Balkans", "on the outskirts of Central Europe", "on the Adriatic Sea". So what might have been thought to require an uncontroversial statement of fact related to geographic location actually involved much more controversy and discussion than expected.

Perspectives

If you asked students what came to mind when Scotland and Northern Ireland were mentioned, there would be a fair chance that they would come up with the items mentioned a few paragraphs above. However, the texts on the TeachingEnglish websites present images which are less familiar and which might not be recognised as stereotypes by a Croatian or Hungarian reader, but would be considered as such by someone with greater contact to the country. For example, the title of an earlier text on Northern Ireland that is no longer available on the TeachingEnglish site was "Great craic, live music, and the Ulster fry". Two of the three items will probably be unfamiliar to the foreign reader. Everyone in Northern Ireland will be familiar with them and perhaps wearily recognise them as stereotypical images of their own country. Craic, in fact, represents the sociability of the Northern Irish and their reputed fondness for having a good time. The Ulster fry is hearty cooked breakfast, distinguished from the English version in that it generally does not include baked beans. Similarly, many people would be familiar with the stereotypical images of kilts and haggis associated with Scotland, but how many would recognise "shopping and beaches" as increasing common features linked with Scotland, along with festivals and lochs. Many people smirk at the caricature of Scottish people where they are painted as being careful with their money. But how many recognise this feature of some people in Wales who are reputed to have deep pockets and short arms? Ask people in Wales, are most will attribute this trait to the people of Cardiganshire.

Differences in perspectives are perhaps the greatest when we compare how we view ourselves with how others see us: the outsider looking in adds another dimension and also goes some way to helping us understand ourselves. A French acquaintance once said to me that what he admired in English people was their practicality, and how good they are at making things work. English people themselves might not be aware of this view, or the undercurrent that although the Brit might be good with his hands, when it comes to theory, philosophy, and such pursuits, he falls short of his French neighbours! When I tell students that my first impression of Croatians in Zagreb was what a loud people they are, the comment is met with smiles, nods and interest. My impression comes from walking in the evening in the city of Zagreb with people enjoying themselves on the terraces of cafés and talking volubly. Coming from more subdued neighbours in Hungary, the impression of loudness was all the more accentuated. The students are interested, because it is a feature that they might not have been aware of since they are accustomed to their manner of living. But they enjoy a fresh picture of themselves brought from the outside. The point, I believe, is that the stereotypical views are likely to differ, depending on the perspective of the viewer.

Change

We might also expect that stereotypes change over time. If you look at the illustration on Mikes's *How to be an Alien* (1966), illustrated by Bentley, you will see the Englishman portrayed with a bowler hat and umbrella. The bowler hat has disappeared, and the nation to which Mikes refers when he states "On the continent they have good food. In Britain they have good table manners" (pp. 15-16) is now awash with celebrity chefs, cook books, and, it might be said, some good food.

However, the speed of change could be said to vary depending on the perspective. Stereotypes are more deeply set and resist change the farther away you are from the target. Let us take the paragraph headed "Stereotypes" in the TeachingEnglish text on Scotland to illustrate this:

> Stereotypical images of Scotland often focus on things like tartan, kilts, heather and haggis and on the scenery. These are all still a part of the country, but contemporary Scotland is building a name for itself in other areas, such as its thriving computer games industry. (Destination UK: Scotland 2010)

It is clear that most of the images mentioned will be familiar to our students. But it is likely that they will be unaware of the more recent development. This last item is also hardly likely to be recognised yet as a stereotypical view even by those living closer to home.

In the end, we might have to admit that in a world where rapid change is part of our lives, stereotypes change very much more slowly than we might expect. Let us return to the "Twin Town" film to illustrate this. Singing is a permanent theme, as you might expect, in this film set in Wales, but the form of singing actually changes. The father of the eponymous twins, Fatty Lewis, bemoans the fact that youngsters do not join choirs any more, but are more likely to do karaoke. "Karaoke will be the death of the male-voice choir", he moans. However, in a spectacular final scene where the twins bury their deceased father at sea, they arrange for a Welsh male-voice choir to accompany the burial with a rendering of the song *Myfanwy* on Mumbles Pier. The film thus comes to an end with a masterpiece of irony. However much the boys have been rejecting what they consider the clichés of Wales, the final shot shows a Welsh male-voice choir in all its splendour invited to sing by none other than the two hoodlums who have been decrying this part of their culture for most of the film.

Icons

It will be noticed that not much has been said about England. The Teaching-English website text on England reports that:

> Many of the people in our survey, either English by birth or now living here, commented that it was very difficult to distinguish between English and British culture and identity. People found that they often identified more with other things than with England as a country. (Destination UK: England 2008)

However, the text identifies icons associated with England, including London, football, the actors Jude Law and Kate Winslet, pubs and beer. The concept of "icon" as something quintessentially representative of the nation is a popular development. There are many interactive websites where people may propose an icon of their nation, and if supported by enough clicks, the icon takes its place on the list of representative images of the nation in question. The icon might by definition be a positive exemplum of the country, but it can hardly be said that it does not share the features of the stereotype. For example, the cup of tea, which is listed as one of the icons of England, does smack of the stereotype in that it conveys that English people and tea, somehow, and in a particular way, go together.

Tone

The description of a culture is also very much coloured by the tone in which it is conveyed. Of course, as part of their practice in textual analysis, students need to identify the tone of the piece under study. The TeachingEnglish texts may be very useful here since they are representative of a type of writing that is generally devoid of irony and sarcasm. This is undoubtedly perfectly appropriate given their purpose. These texts are eminent examples of balanced, informative, and well-organised pieces of writing.

They are also useful as a point of comparison with other pieces, for example with the heavy irony of George Mikes, or the situational irony in "Twin Town". As another point of comparison, let us take the following diatribe of Blackadder related to Wales:

> *Blackadder*: Have you ever been to Wales, Baldrick?
> *Baldrick*: No, but I've often thought I'd like to.
> *Blackadder*: Well don't, it's a ghastly place. Huge gangs of tough sinewy men roam the valleys terrorising people with their close-harmony singing. You need half a pint of phlegm in your throat just to pronounce the placenames. Never ask for directions in Wales Baldrick, you'll be washing spit out of your hair for a fortnight. (Blackadder Quotes, 1996)

Here the tone is cynical, which we come to expect from the character of Edmund Blackadder, whose derogatory views of Wales and the Welsh clash with the balanced information offered on the LearnEnglish website.

Conclusion

We have viewed a variety of sources which can help learners form a picture of UK cultures and of their own. In studying these sources, the students can create their own picture, taking into account that it is made up of images that have features of the stereotype, icon, cliché, generalisation, fact, and that may be presented in a tone that is informative, humorous, ironic, satirical, cynical, or any combination of these. They have been able to develop literary skills by analysing texts to identify the various features and tones mentioned above. Fundamentally important, I believe, is not to reject any of the images presented, but to include them all as part of the picture. Let us consider what Raymond Williams wrote in 1989 about his native Wales:

> So if you say 'Welsh culture', what do you think of? Of *bara brith* and the Eisteddfod? Of choirs and Cardiff Arms Park? Of love spoons and *englynion*. Of the national costume and the rampant red dragon? All these things are here, if at different levels and in different ways. But over and above them is another culture. (cited by Drew, 1995, p. 3)

This again underlines that what might be familiar icons for the Welsh person, *bara brith* (a kind of fruit cake), the Eisteddfod (a cultural festival of literature and music), and the short poem (*englyn*) might in fact not be recognised by the outsider. On the other hand, you notice that Williams includes singing and rugby on this list, the latter with reference to Cardiff Arms Park, the former home of the Welsh national rugby team, which might be more familiar to the outsider. What is important here is that Williams does not reject these features, but includes them, although for him these are a less important part of a larger picture. His bigger picture, by the way, as might be expected from this influential figure of the New Left, involves "a way of life determined by the National Coal Board, the British Steel Corporation, the Milk Marketing Board... the Labour Party, the EEC, NATO" (cited by Drew, 1995, p. 3). How ironic it is that parts of Williams's bigger picture seem to have gone or been replaced, but the stereotypes and icons that he mentions are still there, some resonating more strongly to the insider and others to the outsider.

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ICC – Do I see? A Case Study on Intercultural Communication in a Secondary School

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Introduction

The idea of this study is rooted in attempting to meet students' needs and provide them the kind of context they had been yearning for; bringing foreign cultures into classes not with the help of a course book or videos but by meeting people representing these cultures. I intend to present the findings of a case study involving two groups of secondary grammar school students and six Eramsus English majors as presenters on their home country, culture, traditions, and their Erasmus experience in Hungary. This preliminary study of a qualitative nature is meant to prepare a longitudinal study with attempting to shed light on the effect of encounters with members of foreign cultures and their power in motivating learners of English to discover new cultures via the English language.

I will present how my students benefit from interacting with non-native speakers of English, whether non-native speakers may set a motivating example to get to know foreign cultures, and whether my students are likely to become more conscious of the role of English in learning about other people, traditions, and travelling. The primary goal is to see how students' attitude towards foreign cultures, their motivation to be a good communicator and their language proficiency would change.

Background to the study

Teachers' goals and students' needs

It is generally agreed that the goal of language learning from a sociocultural perspective is for learners to gain alternative knowledge, skills and abilities for understanding and participating in a wide range of intellectual and practical activities. This is to enable learners to broaden their communicative experiences, their world views, and their understanding of the active, creative

roles as individuals play in constructing these worlds. Learning can be viewed as socialization into certain sociocultural worlds with institutionalised tools and signs for mediating participation in various communicative activities and events. Articulating the kinds of communicative contexts which fit the curriculum content means attempting to bring worlds into the classroom which might enable the group to create a community and its own cultural reality within.

It is of utmost importance to articulate the directions the students' learning is supposed to be taking, as this provides language learners with a clear sense of where they are heading and the necessity of taking responsibility for getting there (Hall, 2002, p. 111). According to Barrow (1990, p. 3), any programme of teaching involves behaving in ways that might shape values and beliefs; teachers provide examples of attitudes, assumptions and values that might influence their students. On the other hand, as Cortazzi argues (1990, p. 54.), students also have their expectations about the content and the method of foreign language learning. If expectations and ideas about language learning of the teacher and the students meet, language learning will be easier.

Participatory pedagogy is an approach to language education that I wish to apply throughout my English classes. As opposed to the traditional view in which students are viewed as empty entities who are close to being only passive receptors during classes, I wish to create an atmosphere in which students can become critical and active participants. Within these circumstances learning can be seen as a collaborative process, and both student and teacher can work in association to reach the appointed aims of the language learning group. Participatory pedagogy sometimes referred to as critical pedagogy 'aims to create environments that assist learners in appropriating the skills and knowledge needed for full participation in their larger social worlds in ways that fully account for, and ultimately help to transform, their particular circumstances' (Hall, 2002, p. 114). Learning is not viewed as a central aim, but rather a way to know how to take actions to make a difference to their world. This means that the curriculum emerges from the learners' needs expressed in or out of the classroom.

Intercultural communication

Establishing relationships with individuals from different cultures can be beneficiary in many ways, such as creating healthier communities and creating personal growth through increased tolerance. 'Communities as groups of language learners consist of individuals working collectively for the benefit of everyone, open and sincere intercultural communication can enable students to work together to achieve commonly established goals' (Neuliep, 2006, p. 4). The competence to be able to be a receptive member of the colourful community of our world leads to the issue of having some kind of intercultural competence. According to Jandt (2004, p. 45) the definitions of intercultural competence more grounded in communication intended to stress the development of skills that transform one monocultural person into a multicultural person. This

particular individual respects cultures and has tolerance for differences. Intercultural competence can bring about numerous advantages, for instance assisting individuals in establishing new relationships; it opens up new perspectives and widens the viewpoint of the self and the others. Intercultural competence is capable of triggering the motivation in language learners to reach out to people from different cultures and look at the world from their perspective.

A qualitative study on intercultural communicative competence in language teaching (Aleksandrowicz-Pedich, Draghicescu, Issaiass, Sabec, 2003, p. 7) reveals teachers' points of view and describes their opinion on the beneficiary effects of introducing intercultural communication to their classes. The teacher as the backbone of the teaching system becomes the mediator between two or more cultures. It needs to be recognised that the content of the educational processes is influenced as much by the teachers' views as by official syllabi and course books. The way education is realized in classrooms depends very much on the teacher and their beliefs of appropriate content (Aleksandrowicz-Pedich, Draghicescu, Issaiass & Sabec, 2003, p. 7). According to the study the majority of the teachers uses culture-related topics from coursebooks and includes personal experience in classroom discussions, some teachers invite people who visited an English-speaking country to share their experience with students. Other ways of creating opportunities to experience other cultures according to teachers is to invite English-speaking guests to the classroom, encouraging students to keep in touch with peers from other countries through the Internet or getting penpals from different countries (Aleksandrowicz-Pedich, Draghicescu, Issaiass & Sabec, 2003, p. 16).

The main objective of a 2006 report involving ten European countries, on how intercultural skills are taught in foreign language courses in compulsory education, is to highlight the potential correlation between the teaching and learning of languages and the development of intercultural skills. The findings reveal why teachers may be reluctant to devote time to the development of intercultural skills. The reason is that their students are assessed in terms of their language proficiency. The report reveals the ways intercultural competence is developed throughout classes: 80% of the teachers use oral input; from 50 to 75% of them use role-plays, task-based activities, written information, online information, and literature and arts. Less than half of the teachers identified immersion, school visits abroad and exchanges, simulations and games, cross-cultural dialogues, and internet-based collaborative learning as an applied tool ("Study of Intercultural Skills," 2006, p. 35). Inviting a person originating from a foreign country as an option showed a low frequency whereas using realia, role-play, games or decorating the classroom with posters had a much higher frequency. Lack of time, shortage of suitable resources are the main reasons of not being able to aid students in developing intercultural competence; teachers also reported facing the difficulty of attracting students' interest ("Study of Intercultural Skills," 2006, p. 47).

According to Kelly (as cited in Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003) 'experience does not occur by simply being in the vicinity of events, it is rather a function of how one construes the events'. People have their own cultural

world views, and in order to broaden them they need to experience and encounter other cultures to become understanding towards them.

The study

Meeting representatives of other cultures was a need voiced by my students at classes. It was clear and straightforward; they were craving more information on different cultures around the world, something new and groundbreaking was in need besides the usual content of course books, films or books. The vision of classes with more interaction, first-hand experience and real life situations was materialised. The idea of inviting representatives of different cultures to classes was seen as the perfect action to take in the given situation. Providing the opportunity to communicate with people from different cultures was appealing to students, the idea to organise intercultural sessions was born. Incorporating intercultural sessions in the curriculum would promote the importance of communicating, getting to know new worlds and widening the students' knowledge on their existing worldview.

Research questions

The purpose of the study is to gain better understanding of how secondary school students relate to foreign cultures and how personal encounter with a member of the particular culture would have an effect on students and their language learning. The following research questions are in the focus

- How do students welcome the presentations of members of foreign cultures?
- How do Erasmus students tune their presentations to the perceived needs of the audience?
- How do the Hungarian and international students interact in a formal situation like this?
- How does personal encounter with a foreign English speaking person impact on attitudes and motivation to get to know a new culture?

Participants

The study was conducted in a prestigious secondary grammar school in Hungary with two groups of learners of English as a foreign language and six university exchange students. The first group of secondary school students comprises 18 seventeen-year-old students in their third form, attending a specialized English class. The second group comprises 18 eighteen-year old students in their fourth form, attending a year of intensive language learning class. Both groups had a high number of English classes throughout their first two years of

education and at present they are at the same level of proficiency. Both groups are preparing for their B2 language exams and intermediate school-leaving exams.

The presenters were six English majors: Agel from France, Sago and Rika from Poland, Keno and Pan from South Korea, and Lea from The Czech Republic, studying at the University of Pécs in the autumn semester of the 2010/2011 academic year (participant names are pseudonyms). A requirement for their Listening and Speaking Skills class was a presentation at the end of the semester. The topic of the presentations the Erasmus students chose was their home country, culture, traditions, their life at home, their life in Hungary and their Erasmus experience.

Data collection method

Triangulation in this research is provided by the following tools: a questionnaire with nine items, semi-structured interviews and classroom observation (tape recorded sessions). Secondary schools students filled in a questionnaire inquiring about their opinion on the presentations and trying to map their view of the beneficial effects of the sessions. The questionnaire was in English and students had an appropriate amount of time answering the questions which asked about the presenters, the structure, content and usefulness of the presentations (see Appendix). The students' answers revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the presentations, pointed at the valuable traits of a good presenter, and reflected on the language used during classes.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with both groups after the sessions. These interviews were in Hungarian, the reason for this being to make students more relaxed. While the questionnaire was anonymous and they had some time to think about their answers, the form of an interview requires immediate answers and also cannot provide anonymity in this context. My aim was to ensure a calm and informal atmosphere during the interviews to be able to get hold of genuine opinion of students. The questions inquired more about the opinion of the students on the study abroad experience, and the possible benefits of taking part in such sessions. I aimed for answers revealing the students' opinion on foreign cultures they met during the sessions, studying aboard and how useful the sessions were from their point of view.

Procedures

Altogether six Erasmus students attended my seminars, all of whom were given the opportunity to 'try themselves' and give their presentations not to their fellow university students, but learners of English at my secondary school. They all welcomed the idea and after negotiations on dates and times, four presentations were held; Pan and Keno delivered their presentations for the first group on 22 November, 2010, Agel from France visited the second class on 23rd November, Lea had the chance to meet group 1 on 24th November, the final

presentation was on 25th November with group 2 and Sago and Rika from Poland. Each session was divided into three parts: the first 10-12 minutes were for the presentations, the following 10-20 minutes for an open discussion asking questions, and the final 8-10 minutes for filling in the questionnaire.

Students had visual aid to support their presentations in the form of pictures or slideshows which were projected. It is necessary to note here, when designing their presentations, Erasmus students were asked to e-mail me all their pictures or projected slides to be able to assist them in designing their sessions and supervise the structure of the sessions at the same time. An unexpected turn of events was Eramsus students not keeping to their e-mailed materials, thus changing the provisional lesson plans. All sessions had a laid-back atmosphere; all presenters were welcomed with curiosity and interest. The first group met the visitors on Monday and Wednesday – the first session was dedicated to South-Korea, with the two presenters' well-prepared presentations.

However, it could be clearly seen that both Pan and Keno were excited as well as nervous about their talks and the slideshows did not follow the course of their speech. Pan did not keep eye contact while presenting, and her pace was too fast to be followed, she did not allow time for the students to see the slides properly. Keno involved the audience with asking questions about their interest in studying abroad while talking about the Erasmus programme. The discussions in two groups were smooth-flowing, starting automatically the minute Pan and Keno sat down. Presenters were showered with questions by students and less formal talks began to take shape. The final eight minutes were spent with filling in the questionnaire. The second session on Wednesday was about the Czech Republic. Unfortunately, Lea was late and on arrival she informed that she had lost her presentation the previous night so she had to create a new one that very morning. Although the presentation embraced interesting and thought-provoking topics the class remained silent when we came to the open-discussion part. Lea broke the ice with questions about their secondary school daily routine, a few questions were raised by students as well, but soon the discussion started fading and we said goodbye to her, the remaining time was used up for the questionnaire.

The second group met Agel on Tuesday; her visual support was engaging, her style of presentation enjoyable to students. The open-discussion mainly focused on Erasmus life, and there were four or five students asking questions only. Secondary school students kept looking at each other trying to encourage their peers to ask questions, sometimes laughter broke out after a few seconds of complete silence. Immediately after the presenter left, the class started talking about the presentation and the presenter evaluating it and asking for opinions. The session ended with administering the questionnaire.

The final presentation was held by Sago and Rika, who arrived in a remarkably good mood and were chatting and giggling while they were escorted to the classroom. After a few minutes of rearranging the classroom to their needs, they started their presentations which meant showing images of Polish towns and cities with not too much comment. Students kept looking at each other and later at me, confused by Sago's and Rika's style who were mainly

talking to each other, jumping form one topic to another, constantly searching for pictures that were not found. The open-discussion part hit the class like a bomb; the obvious questions exploded inquiring about their lifted spirits. The presenters' informal and rather friendly style encouraged students to be more direct with their questions and the formal context of the classroom soon disappeared. Students filled in the questionnaire in the last few minutes which even took five minutes from their break time.

The interview sessions were held the following week on 29th November with the first group and on the next day with the second. Both groups were eager to voice their opinions, first indicating their intention to speak. Then, the dictaphone was passed to the speaker, but later students automatically passed the dictaphone around in a circle, everyone having a chance to speak.

Findings

Triangulation with the help of the classroom notes, questionnaires handed to students and the interviews conducted after sessions proved to be reliable indicators for finding answers to the research questions. Students praised the opportunity to meet members of a foreign culture; they were welcoming towards the presenters, listened to their presentations and also actively took part in the open discussions afterwards. Interaction after listening to the presentations did not mean any problems at classes. Secondary school students were happy to ask questions and Eramsus students were also welcoming and communicative. It is reflected in the interview answers that secondary school students enjoyed talking freely with the Eramsus students:

> I think talking with them was the best, they were friendly and curious.'

> I did not like any of the presentations, they did not raise my interest, but the talks later were great.

> The talks were great, they were more intimate.

Here immediately another research question was answered about interacting in the formal environment of an English lesson. Students indicated that a 45-minute class might be a bit too short for these kinds of encounters. According to the secondary school students had they met the presenters in less formal circumstances, they would have asked more questions and touched upon various topics not covered.

> It was because of time and not the atmosphere, we were not tense at all but 45 minutes is just not enough. You do not directly ask from a stranger where he or she goes to party, but you have to approach slowly to more intimate fields.

> We would have asked about their free time. Let's invite them again.

Erasmus students' tuning their presentations to the needs of secondary school students was not successful. The formerly negotiated topics did not seem to tackle the interest of the secondary schools students and the style of the presenters was not engaging enough either. Agel, the French Eramsus student, was the only one who managed to engage students' attention by including personal information in her presentation and projecting images of her daily routine in Pécs:

> The presentation topics were good but not well-prepared.
>
> Personal experience was shown in the French girl's pictures and it was great to see it.
>
> It was so convincing to see the snapshots of her life in Pécs.
>
> I did not enjoy them because they did not prepare the presentations from an interesting perspective.

The last research question asked how personal encounter with a foreign English speaking person had an impact on attitudes and motivation to get to know a new culture. Secondary school students expressed their curiosity about different cultures and also finding the possibilities to meet these cultures. They were mostly engaged with the Erasmus programme itself and also gave voice to their interest. Here are some answers from the questionnaire:

> I liked what they told, and we talked about this Erasmus with my parents at home, we gave it a thought that it would be good to try it.
>
> Yes, I applied to the Assist Scholarship, I did not make it to the last round, and then I realized I can solve things at home, so I will attend university in Hungary for sure. I would not spend an academic year abroad, maximum 1-2 months.
>
> I told my parents about the presentations and study abroad and they emphasized it would be good to spend some time abroad. I guess is counts a lot that you meet foreigners and talk to them.
>
> I would not have looked for these kind of opportunities if I am not shown.

The presentations and the open discussions, listening to the Erasmus students speaking English was a great experience for the secondary-school students which made them think about their own performance. The sessions highlighted the fact for the secondary school students that they are proficient speakers of English. They also said that they received the kind of feedback they had been

waiting for. Firstly, that it is worth to be a persistent language learner; secondly, they speak English at a high level.

> I was surprised that one of the Korean girls did not speak English as well as we do and she manages with that little English here in Hungary and I realized you do not have to be that proficient to go somewhere.
>
> That it is worth trying.
>
> I find the differences in the accents very interesting. How different accents can be from different countries, I did not even realize that. Compared to Hungarians I guess we speak very well.

Conclusion

It is evident from the study that meeting a person from another culture is welcomed by students and interaction works even in the formal environment of an English class. However, in the future the structure of the sessions will need alteration as the presentations were not engaging or entertaining in particular, and did not raise as much interest as expected. All curiosity was focused on presenters, their lives, daily routine, personal experience in Hungary and opinion about the country. I presume that a biweekly 60- or 90-minute session could focus on Erasmus students introducing themselves, their home and culture followed by open discussion. Definitely, a more careful negotiation is needed with presentations concerning the topics and structure or they should be omitted eventually.

At the start of the following semester and school-term, in September 2011, I am planning to set up the English Round Table Club in the secondary school, considering the findings and conclusions of this study as guidelines for the project. The sessions in the future might serve as a basis for further research in the field of intercultural communication.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Trip around the world – What do you think?

Date:

1. What is your overall impression of the presenter?
2. What about the presentation?
3. List three things you remember about the country.
4. List three things you found really interesting in the talk and explain why.
5. Put down three questions you would like to ask the presenter next time you see each other.
6. Was there anything you did not like about the presentation?
7. How do you feel about the talks after the presentations?
8. What was your impression of the English they used?
9. What do you think you have learnt in this session? List three things.

A Qualitative Study on English Majors' Intercultural Experiences

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Introduction

This paper documents the first steps of my long-time endeavor to map and measure English majors' intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The study presented in this paper was designed to understand how English majors define intercultural encounters and to analyze their intercultural experiences. It follows the traditions of the qualitative research paradigm: it attempts to provide a thick description of students' intercultural encounters allowing in-depth understanding of their experiences.

The core idea behind this qualitative inquiry was to explore how students behave in intercultural situations and to identify what influences their behavior so that once these variables are defined, a quantitative instrument can be designed to survey and map the complexity of students' ICC. This will be done in the next stage of the study.

Theoretical background

This section serves to shed light on arguments supporting the substitution of the native speaker (NS) model in foreign language teaching (FLT) with a more timely concept, the intercultural speaker (IS). Language teaching has for long been engaged with the teaching of the target culture, which is labeled as the cultural component of language teaching. The various topics that were taught to language students as cultural components of the language – literature, arts, civilization, geography, history, customs, practices – may be defined along the dichotomy of little-c-culture vs. big-C-Culture (Lázár, 2007, p. 7).

In Scarino's argumentation (2010), the cultural knowledge students acquire does indeed broaden their understanding of the target language; however, the acquired body of knowledge remains separated from their knowledge and understanding of their first language and culture (p. 324). This means

that the cultural information students acquire about the target language does not influence their own identities and the ways in which they formulate ideas about their own language and their own culture.

An intercultural orientation in the FL classroom, Scarino claims, seeks to transform students' identities in the process of language learning, so that they would understand that culture is not merely information about different people, but a framework these people use to exchange ideas, negotiate meanings and understand social reality (p. 324). Kramsch (2008) makes a similar point, casting light on the intercultural approach, suggesting that it has to do with the circulation of values and identities across cultures (p. 15). Thus, an intercultural approach, as opposed to a merely cultural one, intends to make students familiar with the peculiarities of the target culture, and in doing so it also aims to make students think differently about their own culture, re-shape their identities, and re-negotiate their understandings of diversity.

A major problem FLT has to face in connection with the cultural–intercultural dimension of teaching, as Kearney (2010) observes, stems from the common and persisting belief that authentic cultural forms may only be acquired through direct contact with native speakers of the target language while residing in their country. Kearney cites research confirming that study abroad is not the sole source of cultural knowledge (p. 332), arguing that the classroom environment is just as suitable in providing students with opportunity to understand frameworks through which physically distant communities regulate their practices (pp. 332-333).

In sum, an intercultural approach in FLT not only helps students to better understand other cultures, but it also makes them aware of the distinctness of their own. A constant and conscious reflection on culture and cultural differences makes students reflect on their own culture, and view it in relation to different cultures, thus broadening their scope of understanding. Obviously, the intercultural approach helps not only in reaching the desired goals of making students broad-minded and sensitive to cultural differences, but it also helps them in coping with intercultural situations language-wise. Relying on students' intercultural experiences, and revisiting these experiences again and again has the potential of making them aware of and sensitive to cultural differences.

One way of deciding whether an individual is competent in intercultural situations is to refer to their ICC. Byram (1997) argues for using the term ICC, as it displays and maintains a link with recent traditions in FLT, but at the same time it broadens the concept of communicative competence (CC) in different ways (p. 3). Although Byram places the construct in the context of FLT, he calls attention that FLT cannot and should not claim sole responsibility for the teaching of ICC.

Byram (1997) defined ICC in the first chapter of his monograph as the 'individual's ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries' (p. 7). An individual with intercultural competence (term used by the authors), in Byram and Fleming's definition 'has the knowledge of one, or, preferably, more cultures and social identities and has the capacity to discover and relate to new people from other contexts for which they have not been prepared direct-

ly' (1998, p. 9). Byram (2008) defined the IS as someone who, being aware of cultural differences and similarities can function as a mediator between distinct cultures and diverse sets of beliefs, values and behaviors (p. 78).

This leads to the assumption that FLT should focus on educating ISs, who possessing these qualities, are able to negotiate meaning in interactions involving interlocutors of various cultural backgrounds. The role-model of the native speaker (NS), as the desired outcome of FLT has frequently been challenged ever since Widdowson (1994) raised the issues of ownership and norm-providing in his seminal article.

As Byram (1997) sees it, there are at least two grounds for criticizing the NS as the model in FLT. The first is a pragmatic concern: requiring learners to master the foreign language to the same extent its NSs do is an impossible target. Literature in FLT clearly demonstrates the differences in conditions under which learners and NSs learn and acquire the language. The second ground of criticism draws on questions of identity-formation: identifying with the NS model, learners of a language may abandon one language in order to perfectly master another language, and in striving to become accepted members of a new linguistic community they are at the risk of losing their identities (Byram, 1997, p. 11, see also Kramsch, 1998a; Norton, 1997, 2000). The requirement that learners should adopt the NS as a model is labeled alarming by Jaeger (2001), emphasizing the threat inherent in shifts of power-relations in communication in favor of the NS.

Thus, the literature suggests, substituting the NS model with the IS model as the ultimately preferred outcome of FLT is both appropriate and timely (Byram, 1997, 2003; Byram & Fleming, 1998, Jaeger, 2001, Kramsch, 1998b).

The empirical study presented in the next sections reveals how university students understand intercultural interactions, and demonstrates the diversity of experiences they had had. Understanding would-be teachers' intercultural experiences is crucial, because, as Lázár (2006) notes, later on they will be responsible for developing language students' ICC in the foreign language classroom.

Background to study

This study aims to better understand English majors' intercultural experiences in an attempt to find out how they define intercultural encounters and what aspects of it they tend to emphasize. Besides, emphasis is laid on presenting the differences between students' experiences.

Method

This study applies introspective methods: I elicited self-reflections from respondents. According to Dörnyei (2007, p. 147), this is a suitable way of obtaining information about unobservable mental processes such as thoughts,

feelings, motives or attitudes. There are two specific techniques within introspective methods: think-aloud protocol and retrospective reports (Gass & Mackey, 2000).

The problem with retrospection is that the accuracy of recall depends on the time interval between the actual occurrence of a thought and its verbal report. However, in interaction research immediate report is rather impossible (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 149); instead, Gass and Mackey (2000) propose a technique frequently referred to as stimulated recall. The core idea in this technique is that some tangible reminder of an event would help the respondents retrieve the thoughts and feelings they had during an event.

In the research instrument designed for this study I chose to apply narrative accounts of international students about their experiences in Pécs. These accounts were expected to trigger participants' ideas about similar experiences they encountered.

Research questions

The following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. How do students perceive intercultural encounters?
2. What characterize students' intercultural encounters?

Participants

Participants were 45 English majors in their third year, studying in the BA in English studies programme at the University of Pécs. All of them had completed introductory courses on Intercultural Communication, and the majority of them (32, 71%) were currently enrolled to an elective Intercultural Communication lecture course. Intercultural communication courses at the UP cover a wide range of topics from different fields, such as linguistics, applied linguistics, communication studies, social and general psychology (for details see Dombi, 2010); thus, students became familiar with the basic theories underlying intercultural interactions during their studies.

Students' average age was 22 years; the youngest student was 20, the oldest 25. There were 29 female and 14 male participants, and data were not available in two cases. All participants were native speakers of Hungarian, and considered English their first, and most important foreign language. All of them had been studying English for a minimum of nine years at the time data were collected.

Data collection instrument

A special data collection instrument was designed for this study. First, retrospective narratives were collected from ten international students of the UP (4 German, 3 Scandinavian, 2 Saudi and 1 Korean) on their experiences after arriving in Pécs. As a next step, the texts were analyzed and three narratives were selected to be part of the research instrument. An expert senior researcher's opinion was also considered in selecting the final narratives. These scripts were evocative enough to provoke participants' ideas about similar experiences: one gave an account of a successful intercultural communication encounter, one of an unsuccessful one, and one was about surprising differences in lifestyle between the country of origin and the host country.

Participants were asked to read the three narrative accounts and to write a short essay in English of about 250 words describing an occasion in which they felt similarly to one of the authors of the sample narratives. In addition to the story writing task, participants were also asked to fill in a short questionnaire on their background: their age, gender, mother tongue, current year of study, number of years studying English, and number of IC courses completed.

Procedures

Data were collected in the spring term of the 2010/2011 academic year. Most of the participants (32) were enrolled to an elective lecture course entitled Intercultural Communication. Students in that course were invited to participate in this study, and in return they were offered the possibility that their narrative accounts would count towards a part of the end-term written exam to be assessed on the basis of content and language. The other 13 students volunteered to be part of the research in other classes but their assignments did not count towards any grade.

Students were all informed that their accounts would form a database and would be subjected to content analysis for research purposes. The completion of the task required 60 minutes. Data collection took place in a lecture; students provided their handwritten accounts.

The qualitative content analysis (Cresswell, 2003; Dörnyei, 2007) of students' narratives took place in May, 2011. There were some participants who shared more than one intercultural story; as a result, 49 narratives were analyzed. As a first step, students' writings were digitalized as one document. Then, the narratives were repeatedly read to gain general understanding of the type of information in the text. As a next step, the ways students defined intercultural encounters were categorized: then, emerging themes and patterns were identified and classified.

Results and discussion

This section presents findings on how participants defined an intercultural (IC) encounter and on how their experiences are distinct from one-another.

Participants' definition of IC encounters

As has been described, the data collection instrument included three authentic narratives told by international students describing diverse intercultural encounters. To find out how participants perceived intercultural encounters narratives were analyzed on the basis of what kind of memory participants wrote about: (1) a successful communication situation, (2) an unsuccessful communication situation, or (3) surprise at differences in lifestyles. Participants were not directly requested to define an intercultural encounter; however, the kinds of memories they wrote about implicitly show what they think an intercultural encounter involves. One should bear in mind that the authentic narratives used to evoke memories might have had an influence on which stories students finally decided to share; however, as has been pointed out previously, using trigger texts was a must, and the authentic narratives were carefully selected to be representative of students' encounters.

The three topics identified in the dataset were evenly distributed in the narratives: 17 students wrote about successful intercultural encounters, 15 gave an account of unsuccessful ones, whereas 17 narratives described surprising event. This similar ratio shows that the initial narratives in the data collection instrument had been well chosen, as they elicited a wide range of stories. Figure 1 shows the distribution of narratives according to these criteria.

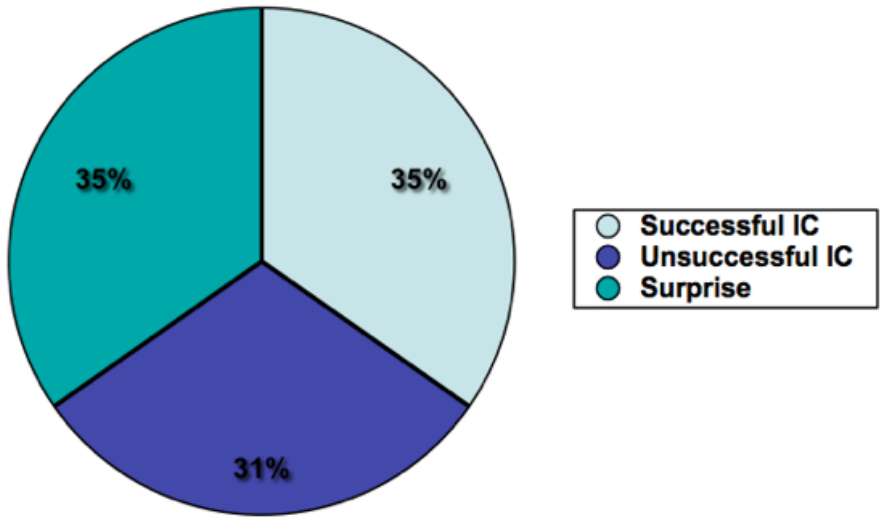

Figure 1: The main topics in students' narratives

Out of the 49 scripts, 45 described situations in which actual interaction of individuals was involved. Four narratives, all accounting for surprise at the differences of lifestyle, described the participants' ideas on visiting other countries, or observing foreigners in Hungary. Thus, participants overwhelmingly described intercultural encounters as events in which verbal communication between individuals took place.

In 42 stories students mentioned situations in which they talked in English with either a NS of English, or a non-native speaker (NNS). The NNSs mentioned by students included mostly citizens of a Western-European country, and in some cases Asians. Table 1 provides information on the origin of interlocutors involved in the interactions carried out in English.

Table 1: Origin of students' interlocutors

NSs of English	NNSs of English		
	Western European	Eastern European	Asian
10	14	2	16

Three narratives described situations in which Hungarian was used with native Hungarian interlocutors residing in neighboring countries, labeled 'ethnic Hungarians' by respective participants. Thus, these respondents found it unnecessary to define intercultural encounters as communication acts in which interlocutors speaking a foreign language are involved, pointing towards a broader definition of culture and intercultural contact. However, this is an outstanding example not characteristic of the sample, and will be discussed in more detail further.

Most students describing an intercultural encounter reported events in which they spoke English, thus, they mostly defined intercultural communication as situations in which English was used as a common medium. In 25 narratives, participants' introductory phases indicated that they perceived the encounter as having a great influence on their lives. Their either too positive or too negative wording indicated that the event had a significant impact on their lives. To quote some of these examples (number in brackets refer to respondents):

> This was an unforgettable experience for me. (14)
> I will never forget this situation. (01)
> I consider this an important step, because I became more open. (22)
> I felt so ashamed that I will always remember this mistake. (33)
> The most haunting experience happened to me when I was in Australia on holiday. (29)

The findings indicate that students described their intercultural encounters in terms of (1) success, (2) failure and (3) surprise; they mostly gave accounts of situations in which communication between participants took place. However, some students wrote about events in which they specified neither the commu-

nication act nor the language used, but they highlighted the surprise they felt at observing other cultures. The majority of participants in the stories used English as a medium for communication. For three participants, however, intercultural interactions did not mean interacting in a foreign language. Approximately half of the stories were told by participants who considered it important to share that their intercultural encounters were so memorable as to have an impact on their lives or ways of thinking.

Differences in students' experiences

The next area of findings is related to the differences in students' experiences. The situations described are diverse: participants range from the ones first leaving their little town at the age of 18, when entering the university to the ones having visited many European or non-European countries. This section attempts to point out the role of their socioeconomic backgrounds in their intercultural experiences.

Thirty-two students had visited foreign countries, 24 wrote about European countries, mostly Western ones, like Germany, Italy, Belgium, France, England or Spain. Eight wrote about their exotic trips to far-off destinations, such as Thailand (two students), China (two), India (one), to the US (two) and to Australia (one). This shows that one-sixth of all participants had an opportunity to visit faraway tourist destinations which are not typical for Hungarian families. The importance of students' socioeconomic background on their studies has often been emphasized in education (in the Hungarian context, see Csapó, 2002, 2004), and intercultural experiences are no exception to this: undoubtedly, those whose families could afford such travels must have had better opportunities to get to know a wider range of cultures and people. One student seemed to be aware of their advantageous position, and wrote:

> Fortunately, I have been blessed with a family that is open towards our colorful world and loves travelling. As a result, I have visited many countries and met numerous cultures in my life. (30)

Twelve students reported not having been abroad yet, and they all wrote about this fact in strong negative terms. Seven students mentioned insufficient financial conditions, two wrote about the lack of possibilities, and three did not write about a reason.

> Unfortunately, I have never been abroad.(28)

> If I have better financial conditions, I will definitely travel all around the world. (31)

> Unfortunately, I haven't stayed abroad yet. (11)

> I was interested in getting to know other cultures but, unfortunately, I didn't have the time, nor the money to actually do something for it. (33)

However, it is also evident that students' home (Hungary) or study environment (Pécs, in all cases) provides ample opportunities for them to interact with members of other cultures, thus, those students who are deprived of the privilege of extensive traveling also have chances to acquaint themselves with other cultures either at the university, in the neighborhood where they live, or during leisure activities, as the excepts from the narratives indicate:

> I have the chance to meet other cultures, because in Pécs, where I am studying, there are lots of foreigners, Erasmus students and medical students, from different countries and cultures as well. (28)

> Fortunately, ... many foreign students come to study here. In this way we can take part in different activities, and in seminars and lectures together, so we can collect some knowledge about others. (31)

> I live in a neighborhood, where many ERASMUS and medical students live, and I go to the same gym with many of them. (45)

> There are many foreign students at our university, and there are many opportunities to meet with them. I frequently meet some at spinning classes, and Paulus is another popular scene. (25)

> I could have many such opportunities, because I live in Szigeti Street, where all the foreign students rent their flats. (27)

> Well, all my days are intercultural, as my boyfriend is from Norway. He is a university student, here in Pécs, training to become a doctor. (19)

These texts show that students' most frequent intercultural contacts in Pécs were international students studying at the UP. As will be shown, many encounters students accounted for were with these foreign students. They are particularly important contacts for many reasons: (1) they are of the same age as Hungarian students; (2) they mostly live in the same neighborhood, as one district of Pécs, near the faculties of Humanities, Sciences, and Arts, as well as the Medical School, is especially popular with both international and Hungarian university students; (3) they have plenty of opportunities to socialize with one another at festivals, concerts and during other leisure activities.

The next important difference is related to participants who had their intercultural encounters abroad, and concerns the purpose of their travel. Out of the 32 stories that described experience abroad, 20 were on holidays or school

trips, five worked abroad and only two of them went for study-abroad experience, whereas the purpose of travel was not stated in five cases. The most important difference here is related to the duration of the stay, as holidays typically last shorter than a work or study-abroad experience. Evidently, longer stays allow students to gain a deeper insight into a foreign culture and to better understand others' ways of thinking. However, only seven students stayed abroad for longer periods, ranging from three months to one year. Two students worked as au-pairs, a job that enabled them to closely observe others during their everyday activities. What these scripts tended to emphasize was that the students working as au-pairs had not only the opportunity to get first-hand experiences of other cultures, but also to chat with au-pairs from other countries, and this had contributed to shaping their ideas about their stay abroad. As one student wrote:

> I asked the other girls at the playground – Polish and Estonian, mostly – to tell me more about their experiences, and I was shocked that they were not as enthusiastic as I was.... Looking back, this may be due to the fact that they were permanently there, not just for the three months I was. I feel I was successful in my staying there, because I learned a lot, mostly the language, but not only that. I also became familiar with British culture, and with other nations' view on Brits. (13)

Three students wrote about their experiences while working as a receptionist in a tourist destination, two in Croatia and one in Turkey. These multicultural environments provided students opportunities to improve their intercultural skills mostly through extensive interaction with their co-workers and with the tourists:

> We had many different people at the camp-site I worked for. I mean not just the guests, but the co-workers as well. I worked at the reception desk, and I had to deal with different costumers. (16)

> Once I spent a couple of months in Turkey working in a hotel by the see. I got acquainted with a bunch of Turkish people who were mainly my colleagues. (18)

There were only two students who took part in study-abroad programmes, but none of them specified within which programme the exchange took place. It is, however, evident that neither student chose the ERASMUS student mobility programme, as their destinations were Thailand and the United States. When describing their intercultural contacts, students frequently mentioned the ERASMUS students studying in Pécs, which shows that they are familiar with the possibility of applying for grants to study at European universities as exchange students:

> Fortunately, our university provides everybody a chance to spend one or two semester(s) by studying abroad and also foreign students come to study here. (31)

> The German girl I befriended in the gym last term... was here with ERASMUS. (45)

However, it is striking that none of the 45 third-year BA students took part in ERASMUS mobility programme. As one of the programme's declared aims is to promote intercultural dialogue between European countries, it would be a great possibility for students to visit other countries, meet other people and develop their intercultural skills. There is no data provided by students on why they are not taking part in this programme, so a study with a different focus is needed to explore this issue.

A further difference between students' experiences is whether they have had the opportunity to visit an English-speaking country. As has been presented 32 stories describe encounters that happened abroad. Out of these, 10 students reported to have had their intercultural experience in an English-speaking country, either traveling or working. As the following extracts show, students were very enthusiastic about their stays in these countries:

> Australia is a fascinating country with friendly people and superb landscape and view. (29)

> My school trip to England two years ago was fantastic. I was looking forward to it very much, and it was like a dream coming true. (38)

> When I was in the US for the first and only time in my life, I had many great experiences. (04)

> When I was sixteen years old (in 2006) I participated a journey to London with my classmates. We visited Austria, Germany, France, Belgium, too. Of course, the final destination was the most experimental and memoryful for me. (21)

> "My most important intercultural experience was... when I was in England as an au-pair for a summer. (13)

The findings indicate that although the group of participants shared many things in common – they were all in their early twenties, were born and grown up in Hungary, spoke a minimum of two foreign languages, were enrolled to the same university studying for the same degree – there were enormous differences between their intercultural encounters. Apparently, even those students who could not afford expensive journeys have also had possibilities to acquaint themselves with members of other cultures in their home environment.

It also became evident that students did not overwhelmingly choose to work or study abroad, as most of their journeys were family holidays or school-

trips. Findings also pointed out that for unspecified reasons none of the students took part in ERASMUS student mobility programme, the most extended exchange programme offered by their university.

Conclusion

This study aimed to find answers to how English majors experience and define intercultural encounters and how different their experiences are. Students described their intercultural encounters in terms of (1) success, (2) failure and (3) surprise; they mostly gave accounts of situations in which English was used as a medium for communication. For three participants, however, intercultural interactions did not mean interacting in a foreign language.

Many participants considered it important to share that their intercultural encounters were so memorable as to have an impact on their lives or ways of thinking, which suggests that awareness-raising can be achieved by making students reflect on their previous experiences.

A further finding is that there are enormous differences between students' experiences, as some of them, not having any possibility to travel abroad, only had intercultural contacts in their home environment. Only a fifth of the stories described presented encounters taking place in an environment where English is used a native language, which underlines the point made in the theoretical Background section: students overwhelmingly use English with contacts of diverse cultural background, thus, developing their ICC and helping them become ISs is a suitable goal.

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"To me it's a bit different to teach a course like this": Evaluation of a Course on Intercultural Communication

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Introduction

In the past few decades the field of applied linguistics (AL), similarly to other social sciences, has witnessed a number of changes both in its perspectives (Grabe, 2010) and in its research approaches (Duff, 2010). As AL now maintains itself as the discipline that addresses real-world language problems, the focus of much research has shifted to descriptive analyses of language uses in a variety of real settings, and at the same time, there is "a growing emphasis on social, cultural, political, and historical aspects of language and language research" (Duff, 2010, p. 53).

The shift in AL research perspectives and approaches has several implications for Hungary, and specifically for the study of intercultural communication (IC). For instance, a heightened attention to real-world language problems, such as those related to multilingual-multicultural settings, has resulted in the increased importance of needs analysis within the local context (Grabe, 2010). Needs analysis is especially relevant in Hungarian tertiary level education, given the recent adoption of the Bologna system as well as the current professional climate, which is increasingly characterized by intercultural contact. Consequently, a number of English Studies programs in Hungarian institutions of higher education have come to recognize the need to offer students training in IC (Lázár, 2006), in order to prepare them for the challenges they may face in their future workplaces.

The present paper reports on the findings of an empirical study exploring the 'Introduction to Intercultural Communication' seminar and lecture, offered by the Institute of English Studies at the University of Pécs. It enquires into teachers' practices as well as both teachers' and students' views on the benefits and difficulties related to the courses.

Theoretical background

In defining the general and communicative language competences of learners of foreign languages, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) identifies "intercultural awareness" and "intercultural skills and know-how" as two of the general competences to be attained (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 103-105). This implies the recognition that, in addition to linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competences, foreign language learning also involves an intercultural component. Yet there is no general agreement within the field of IC on what dimensions constitute intercultural communicative competence (ICC), or on how it can be developed and assessed. As IC embraces a range of disciplinary knowledge and is a relatively young field of study where theory proliferation (Doughty & Long, 2003) is still a weakness, "the discipline's terminology is evolving still, the parameters for 'intercultural' as a discipline are fluid" (Davidson-Lund, 2009, p. xvi). For instance, there is a lack of consensus as to how ICC can or should be developed, largely due to the differences in the funding and aims of various development programmes, such as ones within the academic, or the business sector (Fleming, 2009). There is an understanding, however, that the methods employed in different intercultural development programmes are ultimately determined by the contexts for which they have been designed (Feng, Byram, & Fleming, 2009).

In what follows I briefly discuss Byram's (1997) conceptual model of ICC, which serves as a theoretical basis for the paper. I have chosen to rely on this framework precisely because of considerations related to the context of my study: Byram's model has been devised with foreign language education programmes in mind. Moreover, in a recent survey exploring the most fitting definitions of intercultural competence as seen by both intercultural experts and administrators at various US institutions of higher education, Deardorff (2006) found that it is Byram's approach that received the highest ratings by administrators.

Byram draws on the term ICC and thus takes the concept of 'communicative competence' as a starting point, which is expanded in a number of ways. With this the scholar emphasises the possible contribution of foreign language teaching to the development of such a competence. At the same time, it is a fundamental element of Byram's framework that it rejects the notion of the native speaker as an ideal for foreign language learners, and suggests that the ideal of the intercultural speaker should take its place. The model is therefore a description of the five dimensions of ICC, along which language learners may develop to attain this ideal of the intercultural speaker. It comprises the following:

1. Attitudes: "curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own".
2. Knowledge: "of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction".
3. Skills of interpreting and relating: "ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own".
4. Skills of discovery and interaction: "ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction".
5. Critical cultural awareness: "ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 1997, pp. 50-53).

The five dimensions are defined in terms of educational objectives, which are further elaborated on by the author, and are complemented by stages of planning a curriculum for ICC, as well as suggestions of how they can be assessed. Byram (1997, p. 64) points out, however, that "teachers whose professional identity is that of the linguist, educated in a tradition of philology or linguistics, may find the range of objectives introduced here difficult to accept". As will be seen, this point is of particular relevance to the study presented in this paper.

Background to the study

The course 'Introduction to Intercultural Communication' was launched as a part of the BA in English Studies programme of the Institute of English Studies at the University of Pécs in the first semester of the 2006/2007 academic year, and has since been offered in the first semester of every academic year as mandatory for all students. It comprises a lecture and two or three seminars, which are all held by different teachers. BA students are required to enrol in the lecture and one of the seminars. The teachers who offer this course teach a variety of other courses within the field of English linguistics, in the areas of semantics, pragmatics, and bilingualism.

I decided to examine the course in depth as in the first semester of the academic year 2010/2011 I was granted the opportunity to teach one of the seminars myself. The study presented here is part of a larger study that I am planning to conduct concerning the course, and I hoped that it would inform both the subsequent phases of data collection and my own practice of teaching the course.

The study

Research questions

In the study I expected to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the current practice of teachers on the course 'Introduction to Intercultural Communication' at the Institute of English Studies, University of Pécs?
2. What is teachers' and students' overall attitude like toward the seminar and the lecture?
3. What specific benefits and difficulties do teachers and students perceive in relation to the course?
4. Which of the topics covered and tasks employed do students enjoy the most and which ones do they enjoy the least?
5. In what ways have the courses proved beneficial and useful for the students?

Participants

Three teachers participated in the study: two males (T1 and T3) and one female (T2). They are experienced teachers who have taught for many years at the Department of English Linguistics. Whereas T1 and T2 have held the seminar 'Introduction to Intercultural Communication' since its inclusion in the curriculum in 2006, T3 has held lectures with the same title.

The second group was made up of 16 second- and third-year BA students of English studies, all of whom are native speakers of Hungarian. All student participants (S1-S16) had previously completed the 'Introduction to Intercultural Communication' seminar, but one student (S6) had not yet taken the lecture at the time of data collection. Out of the 16 students, nine took T1's seminar (S1-S9), and seven T2's seminar (S10-S16). The participants were selected through convenience sampling: at the time of the study they were all attending my course entitled 'Intercultural Communication'.

Data collection methods and analysis

I relied on a semi-structured interview with each of the three teachers and a questionnaire completed by the students (see Appendix). Teachers' interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, and were based on 12 carefully worded questions, but participants were encouraged to elaborate further on certain issues. The majority of the interview questions were related to teachers' practice on the course, in that they enquired into the topics covered in the syllabus, the textbooks and supplementary educational material used, the tasks employed, and the modes of assessment. I asked the teachers what they thought about

students' attitudes toward the course, and also asked them to talk about positive aspects, as well as difficulties. Finally, teachers were invited to raise further topics they found important, which had previously not been discussed. The interviews were conducted in Hungarian and were tape-recorded.

The students in the study completed the questionnaire in English, which consisted of five open-ended and two closed-ended items. I chose four of the open-ended questions to be of a sentence completion type: here students were asked to list three reasons why they liked and disliked the seminar and lecture. In the fifth open-ended question they were required to list three examples of when and how they have been able to apply the knowledge gained from the courses. Finally, in the two closed-ended items students indicated on a 4-point Likert-type scale the extent to which they enjoyed the listed topics and tasks. These two lists were compiled with the help of the findings from teachers' interviews, in which teachers had told me the specific topics and tasks they drew on.

Whereas teachers' interviews as well as students' answers to the open-ended questions were analyzed in the iterative manner of qualitative content analysis (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 243), the data made up of students' responses to the two closed-ended questions were entered into SPSS, where frequency counts were obtained for the values found for each variable (i.e. the topics and tasks listed in questions 4 and 5 in the written interview). Due to the fact that there were only 16 student participants in this part of the study, no other statistical analyses were carried out.

Findings

As the study does not only explore teachers' practices on the seminars and the lecture but also teachers' and students' opinion, the findings are manifold. In this paper, I therefore only present some of the findings, which are organized along the lines of three main focus points: (1) participants' general attitude toward the course; (2) topics and materials; and (3) tasks and activities. Note that passages of quotations from teachers are presented in English, but were originally articulated in Hungarian.

Students' general attitude toward the course

Both groups highlight a number of benefits and difficulties related to the seminars and the lecture, yet we can generally state that students' responses reflect a more positive attitude toward the courses than do those of the teachers. For instance, the most frequently occurring answer to the question enquiring into what students liked about the courses is related to the activities and tasks completed on the lessons or as home assignment. As will be seen, this means that students are happy to complete tasks if they find them meaningful. Secondly, out of the 16 participants 14 also mention the teachers' personality

and/or teaching style as a reason why they liked the seminars and the lecture. T1, T2 and T3 are referred to as students' favourite teachers, or as "nice", "kind", and "funny". In addition, the atmosphere is brought up several times as a positive aspect of the courses, which students find "friendly", "relaxed" and "good". Thirdly, based on 13 positive comments it seems that the majority of the students are also keen on the discussed topics, which are mostly referred to as "interesting". In fact, the word 'interesting' occurs 10 times in the written interviews, most often in collocation with the word 'topics'. Taken together, the adjectives 'fun/funny', 'enjoyable' and 'exciting' are almost equally frequent, but so are the words 'boring', 'monotone' and 'repetitive', which are found altogether eight times in the responses.

Indeed, the problem of discussing "topics of limited importance" on the lecture is mentioned by more than one student, but in most cases, perhaps due to the data collection instrument, this view is not elaborated on. Other reasons given to the questions why students did not like the courses include classroom management issues, such as the time slot of the lessons (mentioned six times altogether), the lack of a microphone and presentations with slides, and the fact that "there were too many people" in one class, and too few in the other: "Very small group, too much activity was required". However, the problems mentioned by most participants in connection with the seminars refer either to other students' presentations and passivity, or to the lack of certain tasks, both of which are discussed in detail in the section entitled 'Tasks and activities'.

Teachers' general attitude toward the course

In comparing it to other seminars he teaches, T1 finds it an advantage of 'Introduction to Intercultural Communication' that its topics are less rigidly defined. He claims on a positive note, "a syntax seminar is much more rigid than an intercultural communication seminar". However, T2 regards this as more of a daunting matter. She claims, "To me it's a bit different to teach a course like this, compared to the usual syntax [seminars], where there are absolutely assessable things". She goes on to say that it is not clear to her what the focus of this course is, or what abilities ICC entails and how they should be assessed, and therefore cannot phrase the sentences on her syllabus that would state the aims of the course.

It is repeatedly expressed by both T2 and T3 that IC as a field of study in its own right, is "not serious", and is "unacademic". T3 points out that he likes to hold the lecture and finds it useful, "but that's because I've really designed it according to my own ideas". He notes that he has observed two defining trends within the field of IC: one that is "serious", as it includes pragmatics and discourse analysis, and another that "isn't serious", as it is rather anecdotal. He regards this second trend very concrete and practical, as it gives guidance to businessmen, within the realms of trainings, of how they should behave in situations involving intercultural contact. He claims he does not know, however, to what extent and in what ways the course 'Introduction to Intercultural Communication' should include such practical guides. He concludes

that this area of IC has practically no connection with language, whereas "we should, as a matter of fact, relate it to such things as language, language teaching, foreign language learning, and second language learning, but it's very difficult".

The questions and difficulties raised by T2 and T3 are significant ones indeed. While they underline Davidson-Lund's (2009, p. xvi) claim that "the parameters for 'intercultural' as a discipline are fluid", they also point to the fact that the aims and methods of an intercultural development programme are context-dependent (Feng, Byram, & Fleming, 2009), and therefore need careful consideration. One of the aims of the presented study and its subsequent phases is to reveal what the current practice is and thus facilitate further considerations regarding the design of such a course.

Topics and materials

All three teacher participants state that the topics covered on the course correspond to three broadly defined subject matters: language, communication, and culture. Yet there is a difference in emphasis within these general areas on the three courses: whereas the focal point of the seminar held by T1 is politeness strategies, T2 prefers highlighting issues in sociolinguistics, and T3's lecture is mainly concerned with cross-cultural semantics and pragmatics. A common point of teachers' practice is that they prefer relying on materials gathered by themselves from various sources. In addition, topics drawn from the intercultural textbook *Mirrors and Windows* (Huber-Kriegler, Lázár, & Strange, 2003) are explored to some extent on the two seminars, yet T1 claims, "I did not find it as useful as I had thought, or as much help as I had previously expected". T2 is of a similar opinion about the textbook, which she deems "unacademic" in its approach, although, just like T1, is satisfied with parts of it entitled 'Language Work', which consist of activities that help students learn language through culture. Additionally, there is a general agreement among the three teachers that examples from either teachers' or students' experiences of intercultural contact always help in raising great interest. Among students' responses, only one is found that refers to the textbook, in which S1 claims (s)he liked it. The teachers' second point, however, is substantiated by altogether six students' positive responses, in which they either refer to "memorable" and "understandable examples", or state specifically that they liked how the teacher "could tell us a lot of cultural things by experience", or "shared her own experiences, extra information with us".

It appears from students' responses that they found the topics discussed on the courses interesting: this is supported by seven such remarks related to the seminar, and six related to the lecture. Consider the following comments, however:

S4: "The topic itself is not my top favourite one";
S7: "Topics and the style of the lecture was sometimes similar: boring, but the teacher's style [...] was interesting".

Most students do not specify which topics they liked and disliked, with very few exceptions, such as the following: "I liked when we were talking about stereotypes". This can be seen as a result of the nature of the instrument itself, and was, to some extent, accounted for by the item that required students to indicate on a 4-point Likert-type scale how much they enjoyed learning about certain listed topics. However, it becomes clear that this list is incomplete, as students' position on the included topics is overwhelmingly positive. Although the option to add other topics to the list was provided, only one out of the 16 participants did so, by including 'gender and culture'.

In the case of 12 out of 14 topics, 11 students marked 'Mostly true' or 'Absolutely true' to indicate the extent to which they enjoyed learning about them. The most popular topics appear to be 'features of culture', 'features of language', 'cultural differences in verbal communication' and 'cultural differences in non-verbal communication', with 15 or 16 students indicating their preference at the top half of the scale, but 'cultural differences in beliefs and values' and 'cultural differences in politeness strategies' are close runner-ups with 14 such responses each.

Although it is not possible to generalize to the larger population based on such a small sample of students, it seems that these 16 participants at least prefer topics that centre on difference. This is confirmed by the answers given to the last question of the questionnaire, where participants were asked to state how they have been able to apply the knowledge gained from the seminar and the lecture. Here, the majority of students refer to attaining a deeper understanding of cultural differences as a great benefit of the courses. As pointed out by Byram and Feng (2005), a strong focus on cultural differences in ICC development programmes is often criticised for its reductionism and essentialism. Yet we may argue that it can still prove to be a valuable basis, on which other, more critical perspectives can be founded. Of course, it is not clear from the results of this interview study why students are keen on topics about difference. Among others, one possible reason may be that the 'Introduction to Intercultural Communication' seminars and lecture may have predominantly taken this perspective, whereas another reason may be students' genuine interest in cultural differences, rather than, say, specific strategies to level these differences and thus arrive at appropriate and effective communication in intercultural contact.

Tasks and activities

The three courses differ greatly in terms of the tasks that students are required to complete. Whereas the seminars held by T1 and T2 are built on a wide range of tasks, this is not the case on T3's lecture, due to the very fact that it is a lecture in its traditional sense. It seems that this is also the reason why students

here are evaluated on the knowledge they have acquired on the topics presented above, rather than on their development of the dimensions that Byram (1997) defines as attitudes, skills, or critical cultural awareness. Conversely, it appears that the two seminars, taken together, employ tasks that may contribute to a more comprehensive development of students' ICC, drawing on Byram's (1997) definition of the construct. These tasks include discussions, presentations, interviews, observations, discovery activities, deconstruction, and reflection, most of which are popular among students based on their responses in the questionnaire.

It is claimed by T1 that the task which students greatly enjoy and which he deems particularly beneficial for them is conducting an interview with a native speaker of a language other than Hungarian. In addition, he argues that the use of films can provide a great basis for classroom discussion. At the same time, T2 reveals that one of the greatest difficulties related to the seminar is the lack of active participation on the lessons on the part of students. The teacher also expresses her belief that students' passivity can be explained by the fact that they either do not want to converse about issues that they may see as trivial, or do not have enough experience of intercultural contact, and therefore cannot talk about it.

These points made by T1 and T2 are partly reflected in students' responses as well. Consider the following comments made by T1's students:

> S1: "I [...] especially enjoyed the final task – conducting an interview with a person from a different culture – because in this way I had the chance to familiarize with the norms/cult. differences of the other culture."
> S2: "I had the opportunity to interview Aga, an Erasmus student from Poland on politeness. I really enjoyed this task, and I could get to know Aga."

The only negative responses regarding the interview task were the ones that referred to there not being such an opportunity on one of the seminars:

> S10: "We didn't meet anyone from a different culture. There were no tasks involving this opportunity."
> S12: "We didn't make an interview with a foreign people."

These remarks demonstrate that students are indeed keen on doing tasks that they see as relevant and meaningful. Here, the "opportunity" of getting to know an Erasmus student (S2) and of gaining knowledge about cultural differences first-hand (S1) is what constitutes the added value of the interview task; it is what makes it meaningful and enjoyable to students. That they are fond of this task is also evidenced by their ratings in question 5. Out of 16 students 9 find the statement 'I enjoyed the following task: interviewing someone from a different culture' mostly, or absolutely true. Yet, based on the interview conducted with her, T2 does not place emphasis on this task in her syllabus; therefore, I also examined the answers only given by the students who had

attended T1's seminar, where the interview task plays a central role. Results show that out of 9 students 6 found the statement absolutely true and 2 found it mostly true, whereas only 1 student marked the option 'Not really true'.

T1's concern about students' passivity is also substantiated by participants' comments, yet the possible reasons given by the teacher are not confirmed by the results of this study. The following statements can be found among students' responses:

> S6: "Great number of my classmates were that passive that we couldn't even start a single group discussion."
> S10: "Not everyone participated actively in the courses, some students didn't at all."
> S13: "Much of the group was quite inactive."

However, the findings gained from the fifth question of the written interview show a positive picture about the extent to which students enjoy participating in class discussions, as well as small group and pair discussions. The former is marked by 13 students as an activity that they mostly or absolutely enjoyed, whereas this is true of 12 students in relation to the latter. Further research will have to be carried out to determine why, contrary to these findings, the lack of active student participation is still an issue.

Conclusion

Throughout the interviews conducted with teachers it became clear that, as their practices differ greatly and contribute in various ways to the development of students' ICC, discussions of their experiences is essential. This study shows that such collaboration, as well as one between teachers and students, may have positive outcomes in terms of teachers' understanding of what the aims and appropriate methods of such a course may be. For instance, the lack of student participation is seen as a great problem on one seminar, but is resolved, at least to some extent, on the other by giving students research tasks and using intrinsically motivating material. The findings also indicate, however, that there is an urgent need to investigate further what ICC is, and how it can be developed and assessed within this particular BA programme.

There are plenty of questions that have remained unanswered. In order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the subject, I plan to conduct a large-scale study, as well as a focus group interview with students. Whereas the former could result in more reliable findings, the latter could complement these findings with examples to students' positive and negative experiences related to the courses, and reasons for students' views and preferences presented here.

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Appendix

Teachers' interview questions

1. What are the main topics covered on your 'Introduction to Intercultural Communication' seminar/lecture? How and why did you choose or keep these in your syllabus? How did these change throughout the years?
2. What textbook and/or other educational material do you rely on? How and why did you choose or keep these in your syllabus? How did these change throughout the years?
3. What oral and written tasks are students required to do in class and as home assignment? How and why did you choose or keep these in your syllabus? How did these change throughout the years?
4. On what tasks can you integrate students' English linguistic development and intercultural content?
5. What is students' attitude like? How does it change throughout the semester? What interests them and what doesn't? How did you change the syllabus in light of this?
6. What are the requirements for your course? How do you assess?
7. What benefits could you mention in relation to the course?
8. What difficulties could you mention in relation to the course?
9. In your view what should be changed in order to improve the course?
10. Please describe a task/topic/material that works well, according to your experience. Why does it work well? How do you know that it does?
11. Please describe a task/topic/material that doesn't work well, according to your experience. Why doesn't it work well? How do you know that it doesn't?
12. Apart from the issues we have already discussed, what other topics do you find important?

Students' questionnaire

Questionnaire on *Introduction to Intercultural Communication* seminar and lecture

Please take a few minutes to answer the questions below about the *Introduction to Intercultural Communication* seminar and lecture you have completed. Please note that this questionnaire is anonymous; therefore, it would be greatly appreciated if you could state your honest opinion.

I attended the *Introduction to Intercultural Communication* seminar held by:
…….

3 reasons why I liked the *Introduction to Intercultural Communication* seminar:

1
2
3

3 reasons why I didn't like the *Introduction to Intercultural Communication* seminar:

1
2
3

I enjoyed learning about the following topics:

Please indicate how much you enjoyed learning about the following topics by putting an X in the box that best describes your position:

I enjoyed learning about the following topics:

	Not at all true	Not really true	Mostly true	Absolutely true	I don't remember the topic
features of culture					
features of language					
features of exotic cultures					
ethnocentrism					
stereotyping					
otherization					
cultural identity					
cultural barriers in intercultural communication					
linguistic barriers in intercultural communication					
cultural differences in beliefs and values					
cultural differences in habits					
cultural differences in verbal communication					
cultural differences in non-verbal communication					
cultural differences in politeness strategies					
other:					

Please indicate how much you enjoyed the following tasks by putting an X in the box that best describes your position:

	Not at all true	Not really true	Mostly true	Absolutely true	I don't remember the topic
reading articles					
reading about cultural issues in the textbook *Mirrors and Windows*					
completing *Language Work* tasks in the textbook *Mirrors and Windows*					
writing essays					
observing how people behave and communicate					
interviewing someone from a different culture					
giving a presentation					
participating in class discussions					
participating in small group/pair discussions					
watching films					
discussing pictures					
other:					

3 reasons why I liked the *Introduction to Intercultural Communication* lecture:

1
2
3

Thank you for your participation.

Give 3 examples of when and how you have been able to apply the knowledge gained from the *Introduction to Intercultural Communication* seminar and/or lecture:

1
2
3

3 reasons why I didn't like the *Introduction to Intercultural Communication* lecture:

1
2
3

A Comparative Study of Views on Globish

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Introduction

The expansion of English used as mother tongue, second or foreign language has brought to life numerous variants of this language worldwide. Some researchers have raised the question of which variant is or will be used as a globally accepted form. In this article I will analyze views on Globish by comparing two sets of data. One of them is comments retrieved from an online debate of *The Economist,* which took place in the summer of 2010 between two authors. Robert McCrum claimed that local variants of English were morphing into a global version, Globish, whereas Michael Agnes argued that American English was taking the role of the lingua franca. People were able to leave their comments to reflect on these ideas. Eighty-one comments were entered.

The other source of analysis is the results of a short survey conducted at IBM in March 2011 to explore which English variant employees considered the future global language. They were given five options (including American English, British English, and Globish), and an open question to explain their choice. Fifty-four participants filled in the online questionnaire.

The aim of the study was to gain information in the form of personal opinions about such a current issue as global language. Online debates and the possibility of leaving comments, provider of one of my data sets, give ground to today's basic forums of interactions. Besides this platform, I found it compelling to gather opinions of people who use the language as a tool in their everyday work. Even though respondents' answers at IBM are only assumptions, their pragmatic approach highlights cultural changes and what is expected of speakers outside the domain of education. Their experiences can give insights into what is taking place in this segment of professional language use. It is also true that these are merely personal opinions; however, employees of such multinational companies undoubtedly have a great share in global language change.

Theoretical background

As Crystal points out, "most of the scientific, technological and academic information in the world is expressed in English and over 80% of all the information stored in electronic retrieval systems is in English" (1997, p. 106). However, for English to rise to eminence on the world stage, it had to accomplish phases of linguistic evolution. The language of once scattered tribes on the British Isles saw one of its biggest developmental booms in the 16th and 17th centuries. As is thoroughly described in Graddol, Leith, Swann, Rhys, and Gillen (2007), English as a conveyor of reformation and humanistic sciences and the language of printed materials in England fulfilled its role as a national language. Also, with a growing amount of scientific terminology translated into English and more speakers to acquire knowledge in this language, Latin and the Catholic church met their great counterbalance, a power that was gradually spreading beyond religion and geographical boundaries.

Protestantism brought religion closer to people in that they were able to read and speak the words of God in their mother tongue. Science with its demand for "pure reason" provided a firm ground against the dogmas of the church. Through being solidified in the wording of both faith and reason, English would vindicate "its preeminent role developed due to extra linguistic factors. According to Kachru (1992) the importance is in what the medium conveys about technology, science, law, and (in the case of English) literature" (as cited in Graddol et al., 2007, p. 14). Having been transported to uncharted territories in times of the great explorations and British colonialism, it was inevitable that the language should be subject to dialectal changes which by grades led to the birth of an abundance of local varieties. After the Second World War, through the expanding political and economic dominance of the United States, the English language was approaching (and has been ever since) its status as the ultimate global language.

Global English, lingua franca, new Englishes, globish

What makes a language global? According to Crystal (2003), a language can be called global "when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country" and the "language has to be taken up by other countries around the world" where it is not a native language (pp. 3-4). Crystal points out two ways in which this special status may be achieved and maintained: it is declared to be the official language of the government, legal administration and education of the country; and it is given primary importance in the country's foreign-language teaching without an official status (p. 4). This is the case with the English language that since 1945 has become the common forum of international institutions such as the UNICEF, the UN, the World Bank, NATO with a view to both facilitating communication and making it cheaper (p. 12).

Discussion of terminologies

The frequently used term "global English" covers a set of functions that have been ascribed to English. These functions are best characterized by the role the language has in international diplomacy, commerce and science. As Crystal (2003) points out such "a global language is particularly appreciated by the international academic and business communities, and it is here that the adoption of a single lingua franca is most in evidence" (p. 13). According to McArthur (2001) the greatest contributors to the global English phenomenon are globalization, global markets, global culture, sciences and, using Michael Toolan's words, "globetrotting professionals" (p. 4). To sum it up, global English is term referring to English as a globally accepted medium with its "special role" and "special status" (Crystal, 2003) that provides the international basis of professional and cultural interactions.

If English is referred to in the plural form, that is, as new or global or world Englishes, all the varieties of the language spoken and written around the world are included. If we apply the "three circles" model described by Kachru (1985), these world Englishes can be traced on the outer and expanding circles where English is used as a second or a foreign language. The inmost, the inner circle includes countries where English is spoken as a native language.

The term "Globish" for global English was coined by Jean-Paul Nerriere (2006), a former vice president of IBM. He had recognized that communication in English between employees who were non-native speakers of English went more fluently than between native and non-native speakers of English. He also found that these speakers used fewer idioms and throve to push communication through concentrating on the raw meaning of what they said instead of being eager to be grammatically accurate. According to his observations, Globish operates with a limited number of words, its users apply very simple but standard grammatical structures and it serves as a tool for leading conversations as a business person to make the communication of non-Anglophones easier. This interpretation of Globish renders the term a close kin to the original meaning of lingua franca, an expression that spread "in the Mediterranean region in the Middle Ages among crusaders and traders of different language backgrounds" (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1996, p. 214). McCrum, a supporter of the Globish idea, remarks that for the time being "Globish may be a metaphor, but it is not yet a reality" as English speaking people "will continue to express themselves in varieties" of the language (2006, para 25). Indeed, the problem with applying the term Globish for global English is that Nerriére's Globish (2006, 2009) moves about on a narrow path of a framed function. With its limited vocabulary and standard but simple grammar it offers a frame to conversations on trade and business. Its major focus is on the global phenomenon and through implying standard grammar, it seeks standardization. The focal point of global English on the other hand is English that happens to be used many people around the world. In such circumstances global English allows for different varieties both in vocabulary and grammar. These circumstances have provided the conditions for the birth of not one but numerous Englishes.

Participants and procedure of the study

Participants came from two groups of people. One of them was made up of 81 commenters who reflected on the arguments of two scholars, Michael Agnes and Robert McCrum. Their debate on the language of the future (Globish or American English) took place in the summer of 2010 and was displayed online by *The Economist*, thus providing an interactive setting for people to leave comments.

Little personal information could be reconstructed from comments retrieved from *The Economist* online debate. Commenters' professions or any kind of qualifications remained undetected throughout the analysis. From the 81 comments, allusions to the individual's nationality or first language were rare to crop up. What could be understood, however, were people's choices for the deemed future global variant of English or such other languages as Chinese or Indian language. Reading through explanations for commenters' options it was possible to draw up categories of their solutions that aimed to underpin their statements. Both debaters' arguments proved to whip up intensified reactions. Agnes had claimed that American English was "seductive" enough to and capable of becoming the variant of English used globally whereas McCrum (2006) had expressed his doubts about the free acceptance of simply one version. According to him, it would be more likely to see many variants of English slanting towards a global form, which he named Globish. The comments on the views given by McCrum and Agnes contain interesting ideas and occasionally carry emotive strength that might draw a clearer picture what people around the world actually think and feel about the topic.

The other group was made up of 54 employees of IBM. In March 2011 the survey conducted at the company in aimed to explore which English variant employees considered the future global language. They were given five options (American English, British English, Globish, Other variant, and I do not know), and an open question to explain their choice. With regards to personal information about the participants at IBM, in the online questionnaire they were asked whether they were native and non-native speakers of English.

In the second part of the questionnaire the five options they were given (American English, British English, Globish, Other variant, and I do not know) had been construed based on major response categories found on *The Economics* debate. The open question to explain their choice was meant to provide respondents enough space to expound their opinions and elaborate on their choices. The reason there was no further information asked about participants is that the major focus of the study was to see the opinions of people who work in an environment where the issue of language variants is salient. Thus with such amount of data the comparison of the two groups was carried out in equal measure as it was the comments that gave the basis of the analysis.

Discussion of findings

In the following I will discuss choices and responses received from the two sources. First, an overall picture will be shown (see Figures 1 and 2) to outline the number of informants choosing each certain language variant.

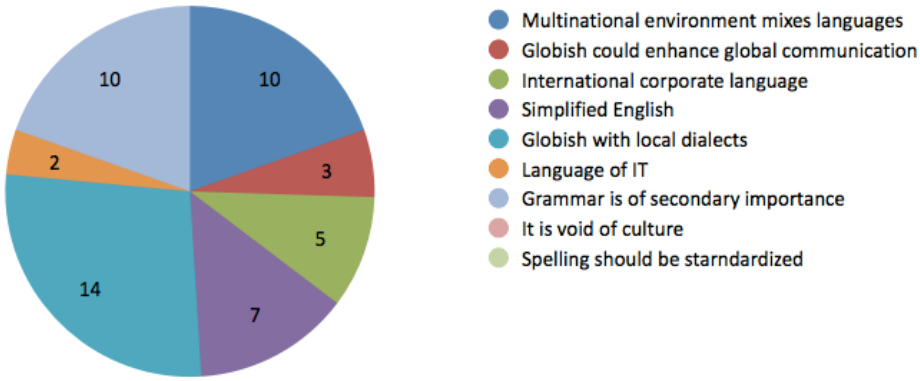

Figure 1: Choices of respondents' from IBM debate for the language of future communication. More than one answer was possible

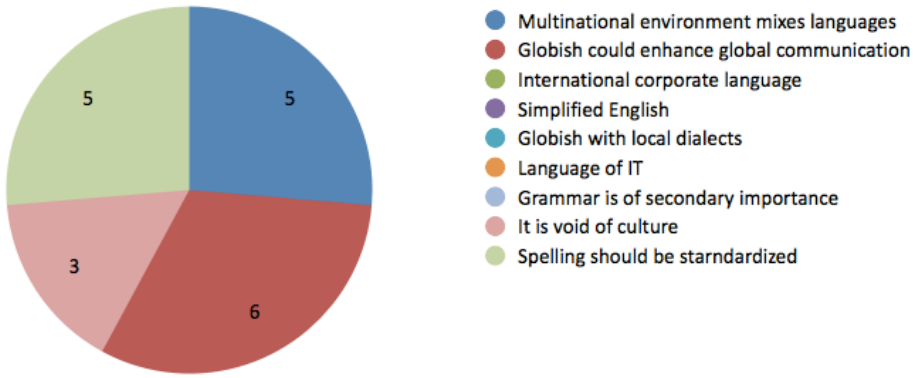

Figure 2: Choices of respondents' from Economist online debate for the language of future communication. More than one answer was possible

At IBM, 54 participants filled in the online questionnaire. The majority (52 respondents) were non-native speakers of English and only two respondents' mother tongue was English. In the case of *The Economist*, nationalities of the 81 commenters were not evident. At IBM, Globish achieved the highest ranking opted for by the majority (28) whereas on The Economist debate it was Other variant that was given the highest probability. It was chosen by 40 people.

American English earned a second position in both groups. Even though if the number of choices is compared to the total number of respondents in either group, it can be seen that it was selected more frequently at IBM (15 out of 54) than on *The Economist* (17 out of 81). Almost the same number of people (16) voted for Globish in this latter group. British English received nearly the same amount of choices, less than one tenth of the total sample in both groups: five people at IBM and eight on the online debate ticked this variant. At IBM other variant achieved as low as did British English receiving only five votes. Interestingly, through the detailed analysis of open-ended questions it will be seen that other variant actually received more. The option "I do not know" was ticked by four at IBM whereas on *The Economist* only one person seemed hesitant.

Arguments for choices

In the following, I will discuss categories deduced from the comments and the open question of the questionnaire. Each argument category was drawn up based on arguments both groups elaborated on with a view to explaining their choices. Due to the open-endedness of both the comments and the slot for explaining participants' responses, it is natural that one informant came up with more than one argument for his or her choice or choices.

Fourteen people, that is, half of the 28 respondents who chose Globish regarded this variant of English as a possible option to appear together with local dialects in the future. In other words, local dialects were judged to influence Globish, the globally accepted form. Ten respondents thought that Globish was quite apparent because, as they experience it in their workplace, multinational environment creates a "mixture of languages" and since they have to "focus on their business" and communicate information as quick as possible, grammar plays only a secondary role (10). These remarks seem to be in line with what McArthur (2001) observes in relation with the symbiosis of standard Englishes and different variants. He writes that even though "an increase in variety and in local prestige seems likely to be matched by powerful pressures towards a world standard, but inherently any such standard will be a 'federation of unequals'" (p. 10).

Seven respondents emphasized that their experience showed that the language used at the company world-wide was a simplified version of English. Relying on this language used in multinational companies, five people expected Globish to evolve into an international corporate language. Mikie Kiyoi (2001) mentions such great corporations as CNN and BBC World Service that provide English globally, however, they "stick to their hometown's brand of English" thus non-native speakers of English fail to be represented equally (Kiyoi, 2001 as cited in McArthur, 2001, p. 10). One of the native speakers of English from these seven respondents also highlighted the influence of American media. Nevertheless, the respondent added that many non-native speakers had learned British English, therefore "it will be a more CNN / Corporate English we will hear in the future." Interestingly, only three informants expressed explicitly that

Globish might enhance global communication. And even though they work at a company whose reputation was founded by its computers, only two respondents thought that information technology was to contribute to the expansion of Globish.

Globish on *The Economist* debate

Six people emphasized the ability of Globish to speed up global communication. The notion of a more simple common means of global communication is also emphasized by Warschauer, Black and Chou (2010) who discuss a "growing movement around the world to teach a denationalized version of English based on local and regional standards of pronunciation, syntax and usage, rather than US or British English (Warschauer, 2000), and to use a simplified global English" (p. 491).

Similarly to what was received from IBM, the language blending capacity of multinational environment was highlighted by five. These assumptions referring to global communication and mixed languages are resonated in McCrum's article according to which in miscellaneous domains of our lives "from the early 1980s, English and American culture has hovered on the brink of a universal non-Anglo-American expression" (McCrum, 2006).

Interestingly, there was a demand appearing concomitantly with global communication expressed by five people: a standardized spelling of the English language all over the world. It was claimed that such a standardization would make their job much easier. Such complaints took shape as the vexing spell-checks that vary from country to country. Three people reasoned their option for Globish with the fact that it was easier to communicate as it is "void of culture" therefore you needed not worry about finding "the right idiom." According to Nerriére, this feature makes non-native speakers of English feel freer to communicate in Globish with one another (McCrum, 2006).

American English at IBM

As can be seen in Table 1, eight respondents ascribed major potentials of American English to convert into a globally used variant of English to the size, economic and cultural dominance of the United States. This notion is in harmony with one of the main arguments of Crystal (2003) who claims that "a language has traditionally become an international language for one chief reason: the power of its people – especially their political and military power" (p. 9). This military and political power is further solidified through the press, advertising and broadcasting. "The high profile given to English in the popular press was reinforced by the way techniques of news gathering developed" (Crystal, 2003, p. 92). The fact that "the language has come to be used as a means of controlling international transport operations" (p. 106) is another scaffold of the status of its speakers.

One respondent pointed out that "the US has already reached the point from where the is only one way, to down." This decreasing power of the US was marked as one of the reasons for choosing Globish, whereas Chinese was assumed to be a potential competitor based on similar economic grounds. Indeed, the assumption is luring that "a significant change in the balance of power – whether political, economic, technological or cultural – could affect the standing of other languages so that they become increasingly attractive, and begin to take over functions currently assumed by English" (Crystal, 2003, p. 124).

Table 1: Arguments for American English at IBM (N=15) (more than one reason possible for each respondent)

	IBM	Economist
Economic and cultural dominance	8	10
Easier and more trendy, practical	5	7
Am. E. and its variants to be Globish	3	
Emotional attachment to Am. E.	2	

American English was also thought easier by five people than other variants. They perceived its grammar as "less strict" and the language, especially the dialect as more trendy. Three respondents pondered that future global language was likely to be American English and its variants. Two respondents expressed emotional attachments to American culture and language depicting it as "the foreign language of [their] childhood"; thus, they would not like to have anything else.

American English on *The Economist* debate

Similarly to what has been learned from responses at IBM, economic and cultural dominance was a major drive for choosing American English in the case of ten out of 17 respondents on The Economist debate. Financial status and the influence of the motion picture industry of the USA were mentioned. The perceived reasoning seems less colorful in this latter case since the only other argument that was brought up is the practicality and easiness of the variant, mentioned by seven. By practicality, as assumed from the context, they meant its versatile usage and trendiness in connection with scientific domains and the aforementioned movie industry.

Arguments for British English

In the following I will discuss the deemed position of British English. However, since this variant was chosen by only a small number of people in both groups and only two reasons were given to support the choices, I will not analyze answers of each group in individual sections nor will I provide graphs as it has been done thus far.

At IBM ,five respondents counted with British English as a future possibility. Three respondents highlighted sophistication as a reason for their choice, that is, they believed that British English was more eloquent and sophisticated, "the language of Shakespeare" as one of them put it. According to another respondent, "it is very formal and is in use at the most of the multinational companies." Two seemed less enthusiastic when they wrote that it was just as good as American English to fulfill the role of global language.

In *The Economist* debate, sophistication was a massive base stone of statements since all the eight respondents choosing British English argued that it was more sophisticated than American English. Striking, as it may seem, four commenters who revealed that even though they were Americans, they rejected American English as an adequate variant on the grounds that it contained "far too many colloquialisms."

The case of other variants at IBM

Similarly to British English, the other option was marked by only five people at IBM, who mentioned the prevalence local variants. The case of local variants is interesting in this case as it has been mentioned earlier, half of those at IBM who voted for Globish also mentioned local variants as a possibility or auxiliary of Globish. Such statements as "most people speaking this language aren't Americans or British. All non-native English speakers use their own accents and phrases" and "people cannot learn the "real" English because there does not exist an only one English" exemplify respondents' understanding of English existing in many forms and the acceptance of a vision that this trend is probable to continue and escalade. The major thing to be considered is "just being understood and that is it." The same requisite is emphasized in Firth's (1996) "let it pass" principle which means that ELF speakers seek to arrive at a consensus and mutual understanding of communication and as long as utterance is intelligible (in House, 2003, p. 559).

Answers given to the other options by 40 respondents in the case of *The Economist* were similar to those at IBM but more manifold (see Figure 3): local variants of English stood out as it was mentioned by 33 people. Four wrote that Other variant will probably comprise those versions that certain speech communities might want to adopt from already existing varieties. The necessity for this (other) global variant to maintain cultural differences was underlined by four respondents arguing that any variety would be appreciated that was able to and willing to keep cultural differences intact. Four commenters accentuated that as long as the variant was intelligible and not ambivalent, its "origin and dialect" did not matter.

Other variants on *The Economist*

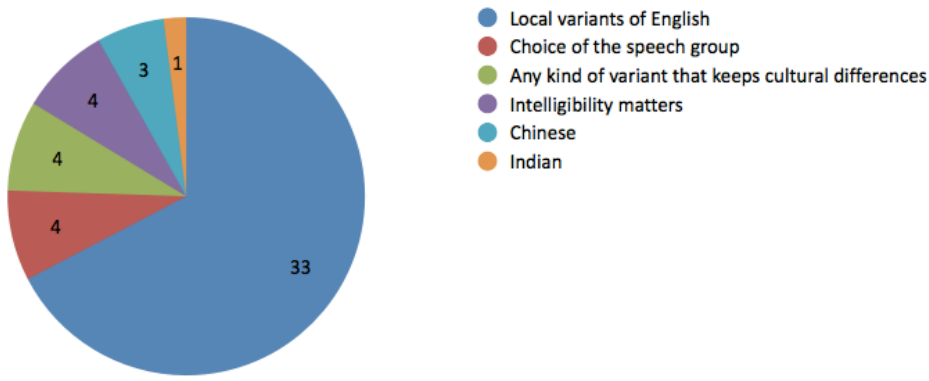

Figure 3: Examples for the other option on *The Economist* (N=40). More than one reason possible for each respondent

Similarly to reasons in the case of American English, Chinese was prophesized by three persons as a possible dominator in the future owing to China's growing power and influence. One person wrote that a standard Indian language would be welcome. He admittedly was from India.

Summary of findings

Altogether, the answers of 135 respondents (IBM and *The Economist* put together) were analyzed. The conclusion can be drawn that none of the giants (American English, Globish, British English) turned out to be absolute winners. Other variant, even though very close to Globish, yet it beat all of them with 45 votes. It can also be seen that among other variant, local variants won with flying colors. Thirty-eight of the 45 respondents opting for the other variant foretold the prevalence of diversity of local variants that were expected to stem from some of these main variants.

In second position stands Globish selected by 44 people choosing it. The main basis for their option was that it was deemed "grammatically less standard and less culture-bound", as indicated by 20 respondents. In the answers of 32 people, American English mostly appeared by virtue of the country's economic and cultural power (18) and the relative easiness of this dialect (12). British English earned the votes of 13 people due to its sophistication and grammatical standards deemed to be higher than those of American English (11).

Local variants arose as complementing versions along with Globish Fifty-two people out of 135 mentioned local variants. It was definitely the highest rating on the whole. That is how language users of the present sample saw the

language, languages of the future: giving English great influence while retaining the possibility of local off-springs of core variants of the English language as we know it today.

Concluding remarks

This small-scale survey, even if it demonstrates only personal opinions, may underpin the power of "unequals" (McArthur, 2001). The role of local dialects of the English language has been gaining more ground. Using the words of Graddol (2004) "'old' national languages are losing functionality as much communication—economic, cultural, and political—becomes international" (p. 1330). At the same time, one might find it confusing which way to go. Linguistic plurality has been emphasized, for instance in the European Union, whereas there is an international language arching over our head. House explains that what we need is *multilingual multicompetence* that reaches beyond language and implies the versatility of socio-cultural knowledge (2003, p. 559). In her analysis of Danish and British call center speech style, Hultgren (2011) found that Americanism can be detected not as much in the language itself as in courtesy patterns towards the clients. Such expressions as "have a nice day" or "thank you for your call" tend to appear in the Danish vocabulary as an openly American (global) influence.

In the case of English what is seen is that we have at our disposal is a language that grew from rags to riches. From the language of the man of the fields during Norman reign in England to the conveyor of cutting-edge technology throughout the world, it has traveled from the pastures to the Moon. And as long as it is a living language, it is bound to be subject to change. The path is similar to that of Latin. However, means of information storage of our times make it possible for Englishes of the "inner circle" to remain as a reference point. Therefore, English is also likely to avoid the fate of Latin. At the same time, English is like a musical instrument and everybody who plays its tunes, native speakers and non-native speakers alike, have their own accords to make it fit.

The findings of the study lacks representativeness and could be repeated on a much larger scale with more types of data. The aim was to look at the views of a couple of people on a current global issue that has affected their lives. In the meantime, these users contribute to the changes in language – thus, making it multihued and taking it one step closer to expressing the inexpressible: a language without boundaries.

Acknowledgements

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Establishing Difficulty Levels of Diagnostic Listening Comprehension Tests for Young Learners of English

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Introduction

Task difficulty is often taken for granted in teaching materials when teachers simply choose a published course book in line with the assumed proficiency level of their learners and proceed from unit to unit. However, establishing task difficulty is an empirical research area in language testing and it involves a complex process. The aim of this paper is to discuss how levels of task difficulty were calculated in a large-scale assessment project involving Hungarian learners of English as a foreign language between the ages of six and 13.

In our paper we present some of the first results of a large-scale study involving over 2,000 pupils (grades 1-7) learning English in 26 public schools in Hungary. The study aimed to develop, pilot, and validate new diagnostic tests for young learners in listening, reading, writing and speaking. In addition to these aims, we intended to place the tests on a scale of difficulty corresponding to the A1 and A2- levels of the *Common European framework of reference* (*CEFR,* Council of Europe, 2001) descriptors with the help of Rasch analysis. Data were collected with various instruments in the fall of 2010: (1) listening, speaking, reading and writing tasks arranged in 21 booklets each comprising 20 tests (including anchor tests); (2) short questionnaires on the tests for pupils and (3) their teachers; (4) a questionnaire filled in by the teacher on pupils' background data; and (5) teachers were also invited to comment on each task. The paper discusses how the tests worked by analyzing how pupils performed on them and how difficult the tasks were with a special focus on listening comprehension tasks.

The theoretical framework of our study concerns three main areas. First, as the number of children learning English has increased exponentially in recent years, testing young language learners has also become an important issue (Inbar-Lourie & Shohamy, 2009; McKay, 2006; Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006; 2011). Second, besides studies on testing *of* learning, research emphasizing

testing *for* learning (Alderson, 2005; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Nikolov & Szabó, 2011; Teasdale & Leung, 2000) has become a priority. The most important aspect of this change means that the aim of testing is to help teachers diagnose their learners' weaknesses in order to be able to scaffold their development (Poehner, 2008). In other words, the purpose of assessing children is to allow teachers to tune teaching to learners' individual levels at all times. The third aspect concerns how task difficulty can be established with the help of item response theory (IRT) analysis.

The study

The context of and background to study

Over the last two decades Hungarians' attitudes towards foreign language study have been extremely favourable, especially towards English as a lingua franca (Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006), and parents are keen to make sure their children start learning foreign languages as soon as possible. Early foreign language education can be characterized by the following important trends (Nikolov, 2009a, b):

1. annually, an increasing number of children start learning English before the mandatory fourth grade due to parental pressure;
2. a huge variety characterizes foreign language programmes, as children may start in any year before grade four, the mandatory start, in one to five weekly classes, the quality of teaching also varies a lot, and there are no official achievement targets for the first three grades;
3. schools stream students into ability groups (the more able study in more intensive and earlier programmes);
4. classes are divided for foreign language study;
5. large-scale research studies involving representative samples of learners have found a weak relationship between the number of years devoted to English and German and frequency of weekly classes and large differences in levels of proficiency;
6. the best predictor of proficiency over time is students' socio-economic status as reflected by their parents' level of education;
7. teachers often apply traditional classroom techniques: the most frequent task types are reading aloud, translation and grammar exercises;
8. teachers of young learners know how young children learn languages, but they often fail to apply principles of age-appropriate methodology;

9. assessment practices are often problematic and not in line with what young learners can be realistically expected to be able to do.

Therefore, it was necessary to define what the aims of early language teaching are and to describe what young Hungarian language learners should be able to do at different levels of their development during their school years (Nikolov, 2011). Based on these documents it became possible to develop diagnostic tests to allow teachers to be able to find out where their students are in their development and to help them scaffold their learning based on the information they gain from diagnostic tests. These are the aims of a large-scale project designed and implemented at the Center for Research on Learning and Instruction, University of Szeged, with the support of The Social Renewal Operational Program (TÁMOP–3.1.9-08/01-2009-0001) for the first six grades of primary school. The project involved not only English as a foreign language but also mathematics, reading in Hungarian, science, and some cognitive and affective domains; however, in our study we focus on English. The aim was to design and to pilot diagnostic tests, to calibrate items for an item bank to be made available on the internet at a later stage. All these steps are necessary to contribute to better practice in schools.

The first phase of the English project explored classroom practice and a framework for developing diagnostic tests was developed. In the second phase tests were developed and piloted. The first results of this second phase are discussed in this paper. The framework (Nikolov, 2011) consisted of two parts: (1) an analysis of statistical data and published empirical studies, definitions of the construct found in curricular requirements on the teaching of modern foreign languages to learners in grades one to six in Hungary, and (2) lists of age-appropriate topics, text and task types for the four basic skills and 'can do statements' in line with the construct and *CEFR* (2001) levels (A1 and A2-). The framework served as a basis for developing tests by a team of trained item writers.

Research questions

We aim to answer the following questions:

- To what extent have the listening tasks worked as predicted? In light of the results, can the tasks be demonstrated to be of suitable quality?
- Was the difficulty of the listening tasks in line with expectations? In other words, was the difficulty of the tasks included in the three sets of booklets sequentially increasing?

Participants

A convenience sample of 2,173 students was involved in the project in 161 groups at 26 schools in various towns and villages around the country. Students attended grades two to seven, and their age ranged between seven and 13. Learners were at three estimated levels depending on the number of years and weekly hours of studying English as a foreign language. Despite the weak relationships found in empirical studies between years of language study and weekly classes (Nikolov 2009a, b), these were the only reasonable indicators to rely on. Thus, we negotiated with teachers which of the three levels their learners were most probably at. The number of students filling in the 21 booklets ranged between 116 and 132. The number of students in the 161 groups ranged from four to 32, depending on the numbers of learners in various contexts.

Data collection instruments

A total of 21 booklets were used in the English project; each booklet comprised 20 tasks: five tasks for listening, speaking, reading and writing. In this paper we focus on the tests measuring listening comprehension. A total of 85 listening tests were piloted. The tests were arranged into seven booklets on three estimated difficulty levels, thus the total number of tests for each level was 28 plus one task used in all booklets. In order to allow us to compare the difficulty levels of every test, anchor tests were used: the very same listening test was used in all 21 booklets. The sequence, however, was different: the anchor task was the fifth on the lowest, third on the intermediate, and first on the most difficult estimated level.

The task types required multiple choice and multiple matching of visuals and short texts (a word, an expression or a short sentence); the number of items in all tests ranged between six and nine. All listening tests were recorded on a CD: all texts were recorded twice, and instructions were in English. All 21 booklets were accompanied by a teachers' book comprising a detailed description of the project, a question-and-answer section on how to use the tests in the classroom, a key to all listening tasks. Teachers' booklets included the transcripts of listening texts.

After taking the English tasks, students were asked to evaluate each test on a 4–1 scale (easy – difficult; familiar – unfamiliar; liked – disliked). For the sake of triangulation, teachers were also asked to fill in the same instrument, and also to write additional comments on the tests. In addition to these instruments, a questionnaire was filled in by the teachers on pupils' aptitude, motivation, parental support, and the time devoted to learning English (years and weekly classes).

Procedure

The project lasted less than a year (between February 2010 and January 2011). As a first step, an exploratory study was conducted on how English teachers tested their pupils, and which tests they found useful and why (Hild & Nikolov, 2010). As a second step, teachers piloted sample tasks and gave feedback on how they worked. As a third step, the framework document was developed (Nikolov 2011) for item writers. Finally, schools were recruited to participate in the piloting in September 2010. All booklets were filled in by the pupils in their regular English classes in November and December of 2010; data were entered into files centrally and analyzed in January 2011.

The following analyses were performed to answer the research questions. First, all tasks were evaluated using classical test analysis. This meant examining tasks' reliability figures, descriptive statistics, score distribution data and item discrimination indices. Then, IRT-based fit statistics (Winsteps) were used to check item quality. IRT analyses, however, were performed for another reason as well. As our aim was to calibrate all items of each skill onto a common scale, it was inevitable to rely on a model going beyond classical test theory. Accordingly, Rasch analyses were conducted in the following manner.

First, the anchor items' logit difficulty indices were estimated on the basis of all responses available. As anchor items were included in all booklets for each skill, this meant that, theoretically, all students' responses to all anchor items would be available. Although in reality some of the students skipped some anchor tasks, the remaining population in each skill was sizeable enough (1,928 in the case of listening and 1,974 in the case of reading) to provide a solid basis for item difficulty estimates. Next, the person ability logits estimated in the course of determining anchor items' difficulty were used to estimate the difficulty of the rest of the items. Thus, eventually all items could be placed on a common difficulty continuum, making it possible to directly compare all of them with one another.

Results

The first stage was the classical analysis of the actual tasks. Table 1 provides an illustration of the type of information gained for all the 21 booklets. As can be seen in Table 1, Booklet 12 comprised five listening tasks (numbered 11 to 15). All tasks appear to have an acceptable level of reliability, and descriptive statistics, distribution measures and mean item-total test correlation figures seem to indicate that the tasks performed relatively well. Results for the other 20 booklets were similar, and while occasional reliability and item discrimination problems did occur, the overwhelming majority of listening tasks were found to have worked in a satisfactory manner. IRT-based item fit statistics show a similar picture. While some items were found to be misfitting (most of which had discrimination problems), the tasks and the items therein, were proven to have worked well in the light of the Rasch analyses as well.

Table 1: Listening and reading results of classical analyses for booklet 12

Booklet 12	11	12	13	14	15
N	106	106	106	106	106
N of Items	7	6	9	8	7
Alpha	80	0.89	0.88	0.79	0.87
Mean	3.67	4.69	5.18	4.16	4.25
Median	4	6	6	4	5
Std. Dev.	2.28	1.99	2.82	2.49	2.53
Min.	0	0	0	0	0
Max	7	6	8	8	7
Skew	-0.03	-1.44	-0.62	-0.05	-0.63
Kurtosis	-1.18	0.75	-0.97	-1.00	-1.04
SEM	1.00	0.64	0.96	1.12	0.89
Mean Pcnt Corr	52	78	58	52	61
Mean Item-Total	0.54	0.72	0.68	0.50	0.66

Hence, with respect to the first research question, it appears to be safe to claim that, based on classical as well as Rasch analyses, the vast majority of the listening tasks piloted performed appropriately. Accordingly, most of the tasks seem suitable for measurement purposes, and after carefully checking the datasets item by item, most tasks appear to be of suitable quality to be placed in a future item bank.

However, an equally important issue is at what level they are to be applied. Indeed, as the main focus of the whole project was diagnostic testing, it is probably the single most important issue to deal with. As was discussed earlier, the research design made it possible to compare item difficulty figures of all items in all tasks directly. Let us then take a closer look at these actual comparisons. Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of all listening items piloted.

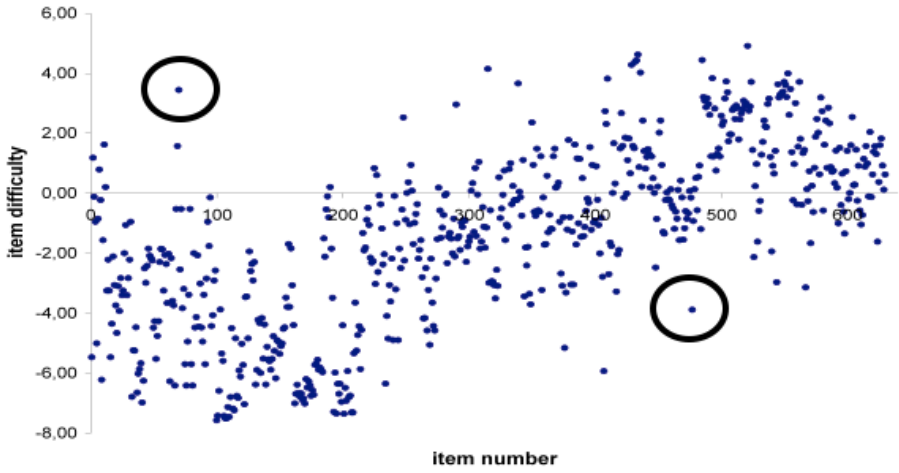

Figure 1: Distribution of all listening items (N=630)

Each dot in Figure 1 indicates one item; a total of 630 items were analyzed. The sequence number of the item is an indication of which group of booklets included a particular item. Items with low sequence numbers were included in the booklets intended for the lowest level, while items with the highest sequence numbers were part of the booklets targeted at the highest level. As can be inferred from Figure 1, there appears to be a tendency for items to be more difficult as sequence numbers increase, even though there are some exceptions to this trend, such as the items marked with a circle.

More important than the impression, however, is whether such a tendency can in fact be verified, and whether the tasks in the different sets of booklets are significantly different in terms of difficulty. In order to answer this question, a one-way ANOVA was performed using SPSS 14.0. Since individual items all formed tasks, it seemed rational to analyze the relationship of the tasks rather than the individual items. The findings indicate that significant differences do exist, but the pattern of relationships is somewhat more complex than the three levels in which the booklets were arranged. Table 2 presents information about homogeneous subsets in the dataset. As can be seen in Figure 2, the first set of booklets aimed to be the least difficult (numbered 1 to 7) appear to form a more or less homogeneous subset. Similarly, the last set of booklets targeting the highest level (numbered 15 to 21) also appears to be relatively homogeneous. Admittedly, however, there are a number of overlaps, especially between the most difficult set of booklets and the 'intermediate level' set. What this seems to indicate is that while the three targeted levels seem to emerge as genuinely different, the actual booklets aimed at these levels do not always clearly belong to one level or the other. Arguably, further analyses will need to be performed in order to find out whether it is particular tasks in certain booklets that were misclassified, or whether a more fundamental problem caused the overlaps.

Table 2: Homogeneous subsets in the listening tasks

Booklet	N	Subset for alpha = .05							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
4	31	-5.52							
6	31	-5.07							
7	31	-4.90	-4.90						
5	31	-4.75	-4.75						
2	34	-3.94	-3.94	-3.94					
3	33	-3.13	-3.13	-3.13	-3.13				
1	32		-2.42	-2.42	-2.42	-2.42			
9	28			-2.10	-2.10	-2.10			
8	29			-1.92	-1.92	-1.92			
11	28				-.99	-.99	-.99		
10	28				-.89	-.89	-.89	-.89	
13	29				-.87	-.87	-.87	-.87	
12	28				-.63	-.63	-.63	-.63	
16	31					-.55	-.55	-.55	
14	29					-.33	-.33	-.33	
21	29						.67	.67	.67
20	28						1.00	1.00	1.00
15	31						1.41	1.41	1.41
18	29						1.44	1.44	1.44
19	29							1.61	1.61
17	31								2.49
Sig.		.11	.07	.46	.06	.37	.08	.05	.69

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed
a: Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 29.90
b: The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

In response to the second research question, then, it seems that listening tasks performed mostly in line with expectations, even though the differentiation between the intermediate and the highest level is not always quite clear. Further analyses need to establish how each individual listening item and task worked. Data from children's and teachers' feedback on task familiarity and difficulty may throw light on the findings. Another avenue for further analyses should take into consideration what role different task types, text types and whether or not tasks included only visuals, visuals and texts or only texts may have impacted results. Yet another perspective for further investigations has been launched: learners were invited to take tasks in different booklets and data were collected with think aloud protocols to gain insights into how they went about solving the tasks, what strategies they applied and what caused difficulties – this is work in progress. Previous research showed that qualitative enquiries

may provide useful information on tests and complement statistical analyses in important ways (Nikolov, 2006).

Conclusion

The aims of this study were twofold: to find out how well listening tasks worked and to what extent they were of suitable quality to assess young learners of English, and to examine if the difficulty of the listening tasks was in line with expectations. We wanted to check if the difficulty of the tasks included in the three sets of booklets increased sequentially. Although a few items did not seem to discriminate well, most of the tests worked well, and after checking each and every item and changing or deleting the problem ones, the majority of the tests are eligible to become part of an item bank. Tests with problem items, however, have to be scrutinized; some need to be changed or deleted and tests have to be piloted again.

As for the difficulty of the tests, the predicted levels and the actual levels of difficulty seem to be in line with one another. Further detailed analyses are necessary on the tests before they can be calibrated and placed in an item bank. Thus, the overall outcomes of the project are positive. In addition to the findings, some useful data are available in the feedback collected from teachers and students on task familiarity, how easy and how motivating they found the tests. These will be taken into consideration when individual tests are analyzed. That is, however, beyond the scope of our paper.

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Aural Comprehension and Oral Production of Young EFL Learners

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Introduction

This paper looks into aural comprehension and oral production of a sample of over 90 young EFL learners from Croatia and Italy who participated in the *ELLiE* (Early Language Learning in Europe) Project. ELLiE is a European transnational longitudinal study that was carried out in the past four years (2006-2010) in seven country contexts: England, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Croatia. The aim was to investigate what can realistically be achieved in terms of foreign language learning (FLL) in state schools where relatively limited amounts of class time are available for foreign languages (FL). *ELLiE* has addressed three central issues: the processes of policy implementation, the factors contributing most effectively to the success of early language learning and the linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes.

The present contribution draws on findings from the two issues of the project related to factors contributing to FLL success and to learners' FL outcomes (Mihaljević Djigunović & Lopriore, 2011).

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Aural comprehension and oral interaction

In the early stages of FLL, learners' aural comprehension of the FL is much higher than their production. Comprehension and production of lexis, for example, at this age level, are never symmetrical (Clark, 1993; Schmitt, 2000). At the early stages of FLL, young learners are usually able to produce short utterances, a number of individual words, or longer chunks of fixed phrases. Learners' exposure to the target language is an important aspect for successful language learning, hence the focus on oracy in early FL programmes. Frequency of input has been underlined as important for noticing of language aspects

(Ellis, 2002) while the level of input is important for successful acquisition (Pienemann, 1998).

In a young learner programme, oral language – speaking and listening - is thus seen as the basis for literacy development, and it is through oral language that the foundation for learning a new language is established (Cameron, 2001; McKay, 2006; Blondin et al., 2008). In primary classes learners are immersed in an environment where most of the activities are based on exposure to the FL through songs, games or stories and teachers' input, as well as on elicited oral interaction with peers or the classroom teacher through role playing, information gap activities or drama. Aural comprehension and spoken interaction are therefore the most relevant skills that enable learners to learn a FL.

Even if there is still insufficient research into young learners' FL aural comprehension processes, classroom based research shows that in younger learners FLL is closely linked to experiences based on a combination of oral inter-action and visual input. With respect to comprehension in the mother tongue some studies (Grabielatos, 1998; Rost, 2002; Vandergrift, 2007; Goh, 2008) show that many aspects of listening in the first language are mastered at a very early age, particularly in conversational contexts, but when the listening tasks involve complex cognitive information processing, children might encounter some problems because aural comprehension involves a multiplicity of skills that are the result of both social, cognitive and linguistic dimensions.

In FL oral interaction FL learners seem to rely upon their experience in the mother tongue as well as upon the knowledge of the content and of the language used in the spoken message (Anderson & Lynch, 1988; Brewster, 1991; Grabielatos, 1998; Vandergrift 2002; Rixon, 2003).

Study description

Our study is aimed at presenting and discussing some of the findings of the *ELLiE* research on the development of young Croatian and Italian learners' aural comprehension and oral production skills and of their learning achievement in FL classroom contexts. Different quantitative as well as qualitative instruments have been developed and used (Dörnyei, 2007): classroom observations, teachers', parents' and learners' interviews and questionnaires, learners' self-assessment, analysis of country specific documents and materials, specific listening and oral interaction tasks. Classrooms activities were observed at regular intervals during the four years through specific observation grids (COLT, MOLT) where factors such as the use of mother tongue vs the use of the FL, activity types, types of teacher–learner interactions, type of language used, learners' groupings, lesson management, use of materials and teacher's support of learners' understanding of the FL were recorded and coded.

Context areas and events where young learners were specifically engaged in comprehension and production tasks during the FL lesson were identified, observed and monitored in each classroom. The data emerging from quantitative instruments were triangulated with evidence from observation of the

FL classrooms, teachers' and learners' interviews thus providing information about the impact of specific activities and events on learners' aural comprehension development.

Our study about aural comprehension and spoken interaction was carried out bearing in mind the following research questions:

- Is there progress in YLs' listening and oral production skills during early primary years?
- Do learners' characteristics, parents' support and out of class FL exposure impact on YLs' listening and oral production skills?

Research instruments

The participants' aural comprehension was measured by means of two listening tasks administered at the end of each year maintaining a few anchor items and with some variations in terms of increased difficulty. The first listening test, based upon picture recognition, consisted of a set of multiple choice (MC) items on three options. The decision of using only three options was taken by the majority of ELLiE team because this is the format most children were used across countries. In the second, the third and the fourth year the same test was gradually modified adding new items and keeping some anchor items to sustain the longitudinal construct and to take into account the children's cognitive development in the years.

Parallel to the MC test, a new test, consisting of a set of statements and short exchanges about the picture of a room, was administered from the second year onwards. The linguistic and cognitive complexity of the tasks increased each year. The statements of the second test aimed to measure YLs' ability to identify specific vocabulary items and comprehension of short chunks supported by visuals.

In the third and fourth year of the research, the participants' perception of task difficulty as well as of what helped or hindered their comprehension was measured by a post-listening questionnaire in the learners' first language, administered immediately after the listening test. The post-listening questionnaire consisted of four sections: the first and the second one investigated the participants' perception of difficulty (5-point scale ranging from "very easy" to "very difficult") for each of the two parts of the listening tests; the third section asked children what had facilitated their comprehension choosing from a list of possibilities (such as pictures, voices, word familiarity and concentration). In the fourth section, children were asked what had on the contrary hindered their understanding, and the options to choose from were elements such as clarity of pictures and of recordings, presence of unknown words, lack of concentration, and background noises.

Children's responses to the post-listening questionnaire were used to triangulate the test results and the data emerging from the children's interviews.

Data on oral production was gathered first in the second and third year by a production task (the 'restaurant task') and, in the fourth and last year, by means of an interactive task (a 'guess who' game) measuring participants' language in terms of lexical diversity and syntactic complexity. The main research questions guiding the construct of the speaking tasks for the focal learners that were administered in the four years were aimed at finding out:

- the characteristics of children's oral performance in each grade;
- to what extent variables from the wider social context correlate with oral performance.

The data from the speaking task were analysed and compared with the information gathered during classroom observations, with the children's interviews and with the country contexts.

Results on the aural and oral tasks were compared for each learner. Comparisons were also made taking into account the young participants' individual differences (attitudes, motivation, linguistic self-concept) as well as the differences in the contexts in which they were learning EFL (teaching quality, exposure to English, home support, SES).

Sample

The learners' sample consisted of 91 young EFL learners from Croatia (42 learners) and Italy (49 learners) attending, respectively, seven and eight classes from each country. The classrooms were drawn from metropolitan, small town and rural schools in each of the two country contexts. In each class a sub-sample of six learners – the focal learners – was formed with two low, two average and two high level learners chosen on the basis of the classroom teachers' help.

Two countries: An overview of similarities and differences

The rationale for analysing in detail the findings related to Croatia and Italy, two of the seven countries participating in the ELliE study, was to investigate what young learners from both countries have in common and what is typical and unique to each country. Croatia and Italy, geographically very close, share many similarities in terms of policies for early language learning, even if the implementation of their language policies may be different, particularly in terms of the forms of teacher education available for primary teachers. While, for example, in Croatia the availability of forms of pre- and in-service training is rather homogeneous, in Italy there has been in the years a variety of heterogeneous forms of in-service training available for FL primary teachers, most recently alternating face-to-face with on-line courses. In Italy, in contrast to Croatia, not all pre-service courses, for example, offer the same type of language courses: some of them lead to B1, others to B2 level. In-service training are compulsory only for generalist teachers who have not achieved the required level

(B1). Comenius scholarships and on–line courses from the Italian national training agency (ANSAS) are optional.

Another important difference lies in the type of linguistic landscape available in each of the two countries since, for example, exposure to FLs through the media, even if accompanied by subtitles, is one of the variables that has been shown to sustain FL learning. Both the linguistic landscapes and the type of out-of-school exposure to FLs in the two countries are quite different since, for example, most of the films or TV series are always dubbed in Italy while they are shown in their original version in Croatia.

The closer analysis of each country context allowed us to get to know and better understand how language policies in our own country are being implemented in and affected by local contexts. Overall each of the two countries has a unique FL policy and their way of implementing it may help explain and justify some of the results emerging from the ELLiE study. Their similarities and their differences in the provision of primary FLs are illustrated in the following section.

The Croatian context

The first FL (English, German, Italian or French) is compulsory from grade one (age: 6/7 years) thanks to the national policy introduced in 2003. The choice of FLs depends on individual schools and availability of qualified teachers, even if most learners' parents want their children to learn English. The FL, mostly English, is also offered at pre-primary level: approximately 40% of all preschools offer additional English activities paid for by parents. However, pre-primary schools are not compulsory and half of the children do not attend it.

The National Curriculum goals in the first four years refer to developing sensitivity for another language code and facilitating further learning of that language. Early language learning is based on multi-sensory and holistic approaches and it is grounded in situation–based oral communication. The required and recommended number of lessons is two 45-minute-lessons per week. The national policy requires a teacher qualified as a FL teacher to teach FL at primary level. The preferred national model is a generalist primary class teacher with a university minor in the FL, but specialist FL teachers with a university degree in the FL also teach in many primary schools in the country. Course-books by Croatian and international publishers that have been approved by the Ministry of Education are provided at national level. The selection of FL books and materials is made by FL teachers and they are purchased by each school.

The Italian context

The Italian FL policy foresees the teaching of English at primary school and an additional compulsory FL at middle school level (age 11-14). English is compulsory from grade one of primary school when children are six years old. The

policy was introduced in 2003, after the introduction of a FL in the new primary curriculum (1985) from grade three. All primary school children are now studying English from year 1 to year 5. Pre–schools are not compulsory, but English teaching is offered in some pre-primary schools that may use their budget to finance additional FL learning. The required number of lessons per week varies depending on school and class organisation. In the five years of the primary school the numbers are as follows:

- 1 hour per week in the 1st year
- 2 hrs per week in the 2nd year
- 3 hrs per week in the 3rd, 4th and 5th years.

FL learning aims, as stated in the National Curriculum, have a longitudinal (from primary to university) and horizontal dimension (integration with the mother tongue and other disciplinary areas) with special emphasis on continuity. The CEFR is partly used at primary level for syllabus design, for teaching and for assessing the exit level (A1 plus).

As for the type of teacher to teach a FL at primary level, a generalist primary class teacher with language teaching skills and B1 minimum competency, certified by the university language centres, is the preferred national model: If no teacher with the required competences is available, the school can use a specialist teacher. Teachers select course-books and materials, only some of the books are provided for free since funding provision is devolved to regional level. Interactive white boards have just recently become available in a number of schools.

Findings

The findings presented in this contribution refer to the two groups of focal learners. The listening results are related to the four years (2006-2010) of the research study while the oral production and the interaction tests refer to the last three years only (2007-2010). The linguistic outcomes from each country are presented and discussed in relation with the data about their attitudes and motivation emerging from the focal learners' interviews and questionnaires. Most findings are presented separately for each country in order to highlight their differences and similarities, except for a few ones when the two countries are presented jointly and/or together with all the other countries that were part of ELLiE.

Aural comprehension

The results of the young learners in the two countries are strikingly different: while the Croatian learners steadily improved in the four years (Figure 1), the

Italian students had very positive results in the first year and then dropped below the means in the third and fourth year (Figure 2).

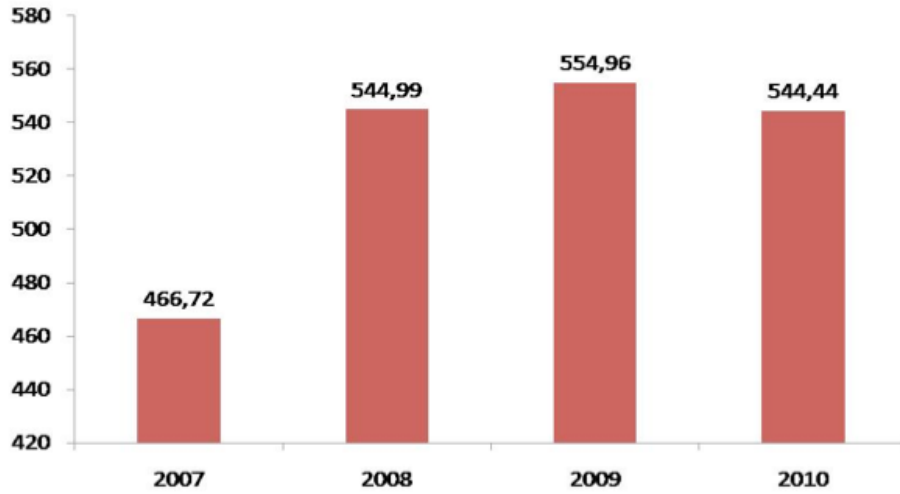

Figure 1: Croatia – listening results 2007-2010 (Rasch Tpoint mean, 500)

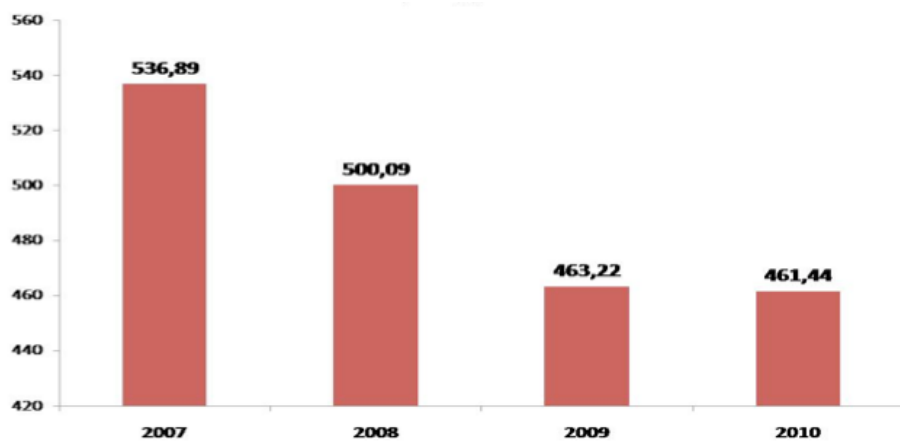

Figure 2: Italy – Listening results 2007-2010 (Rasch Tpoint mean 500)

The lower results of the Italian learners in the second and third year may be attributed to the lower exposure outside the school to the FL. The countries share a similar lower result in the last year, most probably due to the cognitive challenge of the two listening tasks. Thus, in the section where children were asked to respond to a series of multiple-choice items (they had to identify one response out of three visual options) the results overall were positive. In contrast, in the second section where children were asked to provide the correct answer by identifying one amongst a larger number of visual options, they experienced more difficulties. This was particularly true in the last year because

of the length of the test and the larger number of items compared to the previous year (32 vs 20). Variance in results may probably be due to the fact that some children were less familiar with this task format and with the type of input (voice, speed), as emerged from the children's response to the post-listening questionnaires.

Post-listening data

If we look at the responses provided by both the Croatian and the Italian children in the post-listening questionnaire (related to the first and to the second section of the listening test in the fourth year), all those children who found the listening tasks either difficult or very difficult scored well below the mean. Both country samples had a clear perception of their own difficulties in the aural comprehension process (Figures 3 & 4) and were able to identify the main causes of those difficulties (such as unknown words, different pronunciation, and background noises).

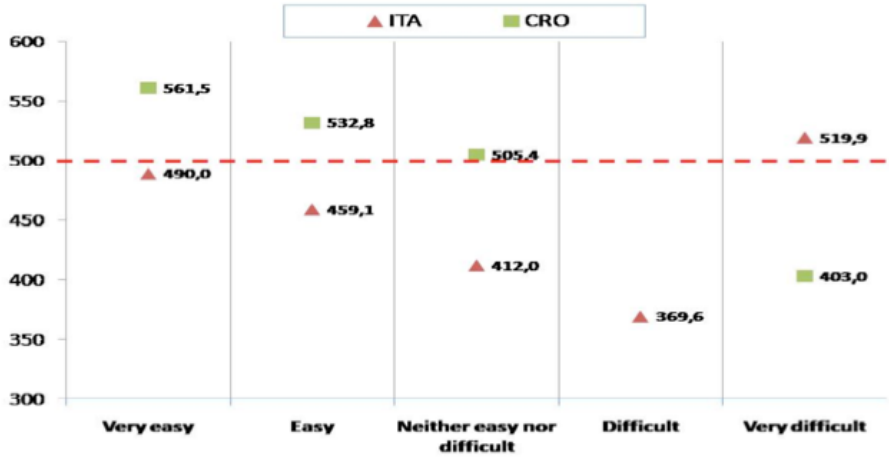

Figure 3: Children's (Italian and Croatian samples) responses to the post-listening questionnaire – section 1 – and their listening results

Besides the clear relation between the children's perception of the difficulty of the test and their results, the difference between the Croatian sample and the Italian sample is once more confirmed. The Croatian children's results are not only above those of the Italian sample, but also above the whole ELLiE sample.

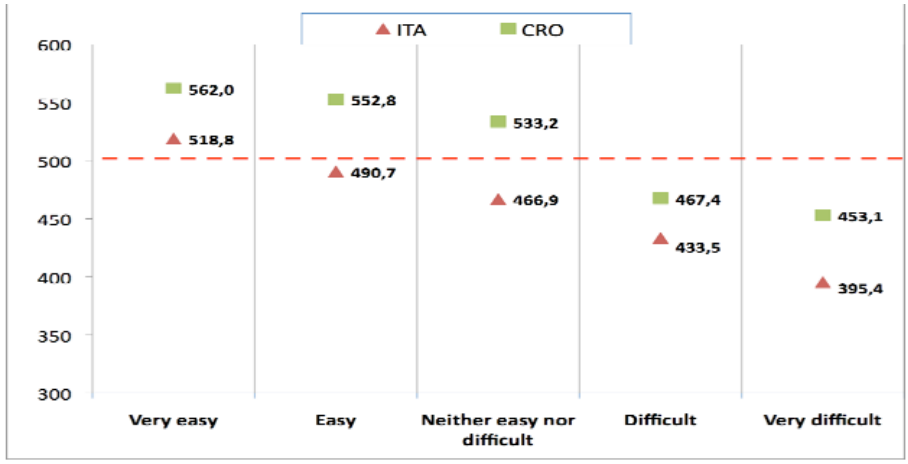

Figure 4: Children's (Italian and Croatian samples) responses to the post-listening questionnaire – section 2 – and their listening results

Attitudes to the FL

Children's attitudes to the FL were monitored by means of one of the questions in the interview. Every year, the children were asked "How do you feel about learning the foreign language?" The findings from the two countries are shown in Figures 5 and 6 where results in the listening tasks, in the second (2008) and in the fourth (2010) year, are represented. In both samples the children's attitudes to the FL do not match their results in 2008 (second year), while there is a clear connection between their attitude to the FL and their results in the listening tasks in the fourth and last year (2010).

The last year shows a clearer link between their attitudes and their results in both groups. The variance between the second and the last year may be attributed to the fact that in the first year children in both samples all expressed their positive preferences for the FL, since the exposure to a new language is to them a totally new experience. It is only in the following years that they were capable to express their preferences towards subjects most probably because their attitudes had been better defined by their individual learning experiences as well as by their encounters with new subject areas.

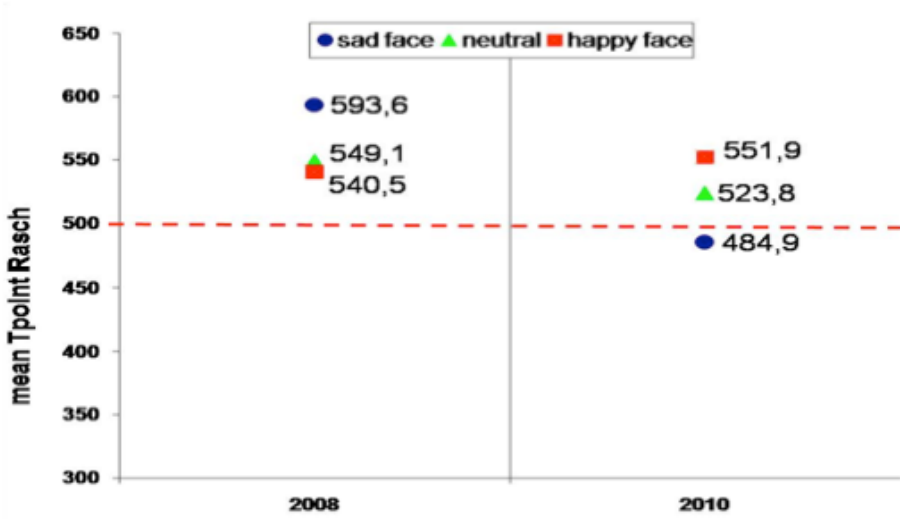

Figure 5: Attitudes to the FL ("How do you feel about learning the FL?") and listening results in 2008 and in 2010: Croatian sample

Figure 6: Attitudes to the FL ("How do you feel about learning the FL?") and listening results in 2008 and in 2010: The Italian sample

Self-concept

Contrary to what emerges from the attitudes expressed by the children in the second year, young learners had, since the beginning of their FLL experience, a clear perception of their level of competence when they were asked to compare themselves to their peers. As shown in Figures 7 and 8, the two groups both show how close the children's perception of their own FL competence matches

their listening scores. Those children who felt they learned more slowly than their peers, i.e. had a lower self-concept, got lower results, while those who felt they learned faster than their peers also got better results. In the Croatian sample the number of children who felt they were learning the same or faster than their peers in the second year, almost coincide and their results in aural comprehension match their perception, while in the fourth year there is a clear distinction in the association between the three types of self-perception and the children's results. In the Italian sample the clear distinction among the different types of self-perception emerged from the second year and was maintained also in the fourth year.

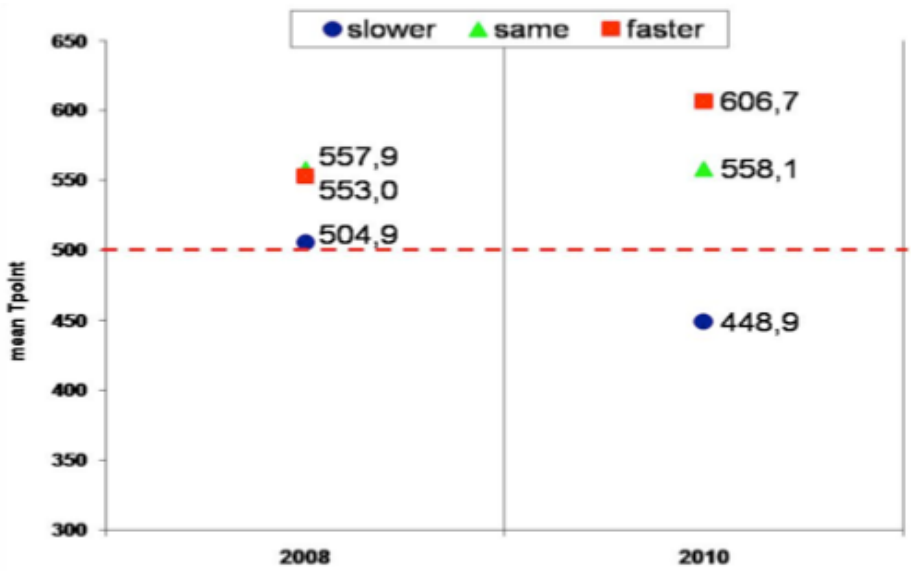

Figure 7: Croatian sample – Learners' self-perception and listening results (2008-2010)

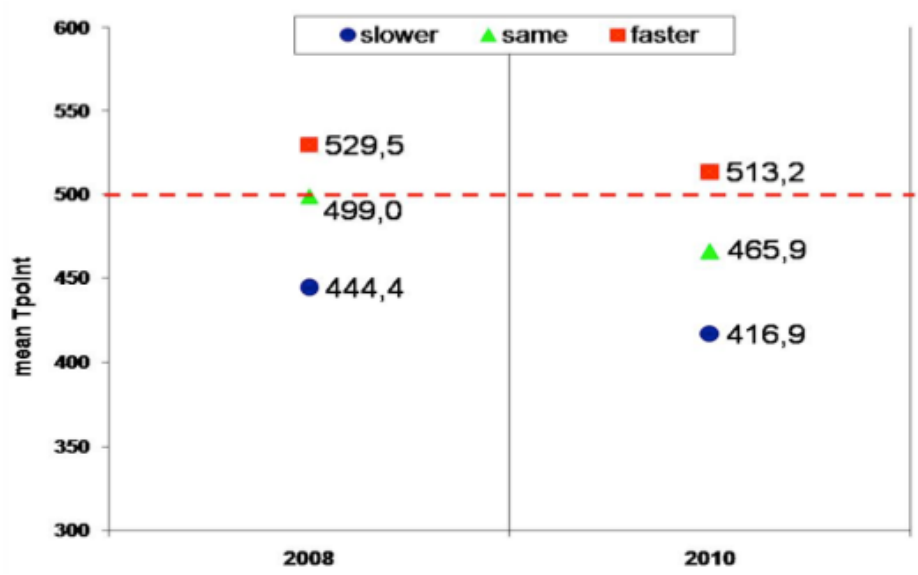

Figure 8: Italian sample – Learners' self-perception and listening results (2008-2010)

Children's exposure to the FL

As already mentioned in the description of the two countries, both the linguistic landscapes (the use of language in the environment: the words and images displayed and exposed in public spaces) and the exposure to the FL by means of the media and of the Internet outside the school greatly differ between the two countries. Exposure outside the school is also connected with different forms of parents' support. How much are these differences reflected in the aural comprehension results of the two groups?

Access to the internet

One of the indicators of out-of school exposure is the children's weekly access to the internet at home and to games or activities in the FL with or without their parents' supervision. Figure 9 shows how in Croatia, in the last year (2010), access to the internet at home for about one hour per week is connected with the aural comprehension results. In Italy (Figure 10), children usually spend less time on the internet than their Croatian peers, but the ones who spent about an hour per week scored better than those who spent less than one hour per week.

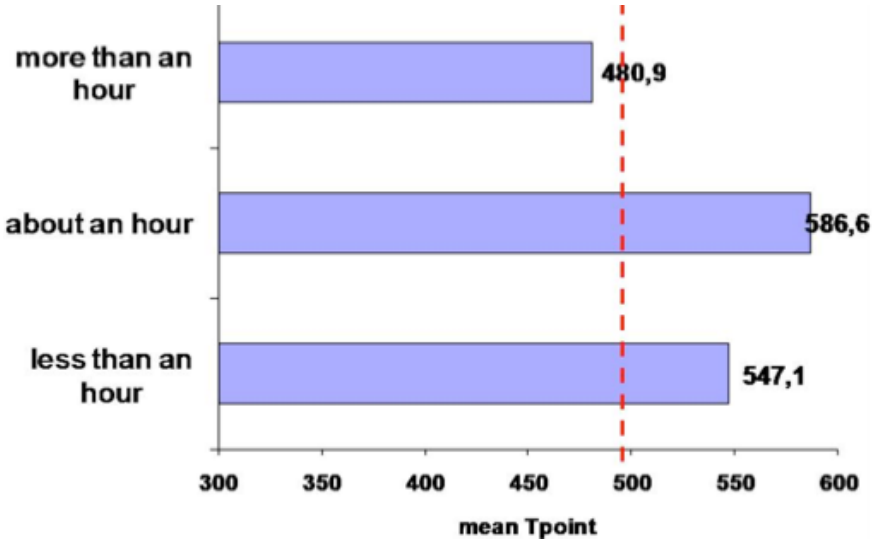

Figure 9: Croatian sample – Average time of access to the internet in a week (2010)

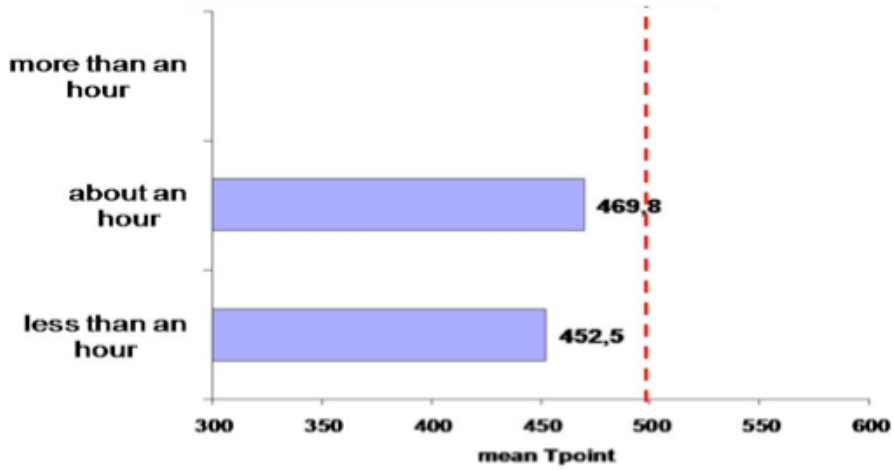

Figure 10: Italian sample – Average time of access to the internet in a week (2010)

Activities in the FL at home

Parents were asked in the last year (2010) to describe how much time their children spent doing different types of activities in the FL when at home. The types of activities and the children's results show (Figures 11 & 12) that watching films or cartoons as well as having the opportunity to speak the FL outside the classroom are positively connected with the aural comprehension results.

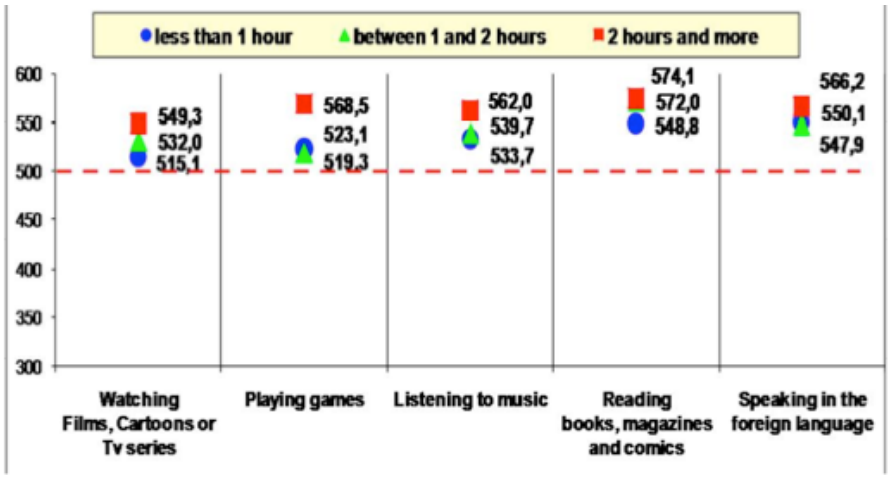

Figure 11: Croatian sample – Time spent weekly on activities in the FL at home (2010)

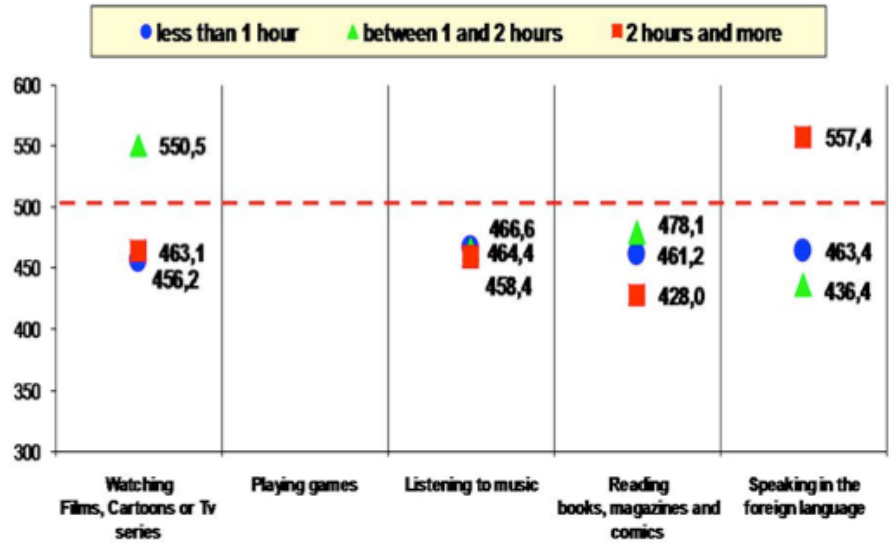

Figure 12: Italian sample – Time spent weekly on activities in the FL at home (Croatian sample, 2010)

It looks as if Croatian learners mostly benefit from an exposure of more than two hours per week by doing all types of activities, whereas the Italian learners seem to benefit more from a less than two hours exposure to films or cartoons. Consistent access to the Internet and to a variety of activities in the FL for an average of two hours per week seem to positively correlate with the results of the Croatian group of learners. Best results in the group of Italian learners are

mostly connected to the exposure between one and two hours to cartoons or films in the FL and to the opportunity to speak the FL.

Parents' support

Parents' support to their children's FL work at home usually correlates positively with their children's results in the listening tasks. In the Croatian sample (Figure 13), parents' support seems to be particularly effective in the fourth year, this is probably due to some type of more focussed type of intervention by the children's parents, while in the Italian group (Figure 14), the connection between parents' support and the children's results is stronger in the second year and in the fourth year the Italian children seem to get better results when working on their own. Most probably parents' help is mostly requested when children are very young and less requested when the children grow up.

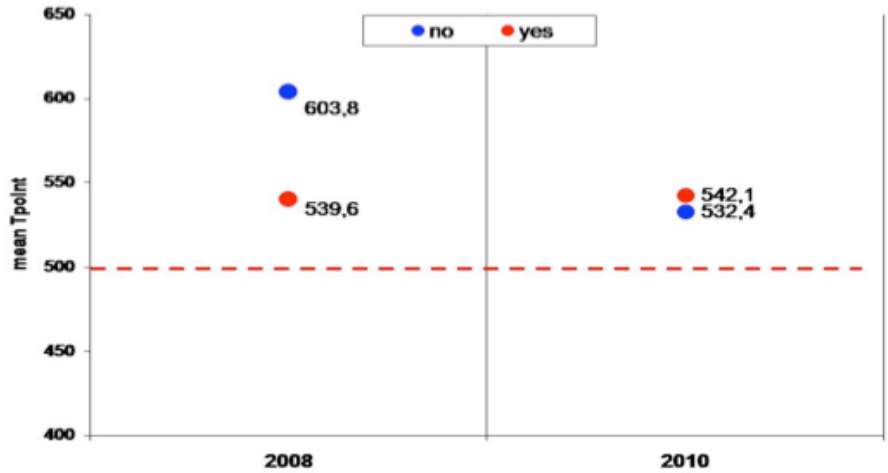

Figure 13: Croatian sample – Parents' support and children's results (2008-2010)

So far the results of both the Croatian and of the Italian group in the aural comprehension tasks have been explicated through the analyses of other sources of information, data deriving from qualitative tools such as the learners' interviews and questionnaires. The results of the two groups of learners in the oral production, in the second and in the third year, and of the interaction task in the fourth year, were analysed. It is interesting to observe how two samples of children from two countries with different linguistic landscapes and different types of language teacher education, have many points in common when it comes to oral interaction, one of the fundamental communicative activities in the FL primary classroom.

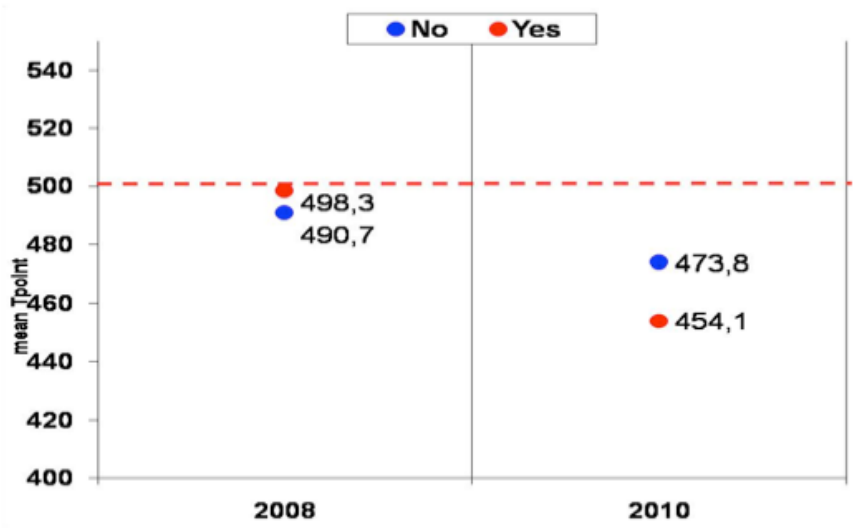

Figure 14: Italian sample – Parents' support and children's results (2008-2010)

Oral production and interaction

In the oral production and interaction tasks, the two groups scored differently, the Croatian group scoring much higher than the Italian, whereas the relation between the results and the other variables such as children's attitudes or self-concept shows more similarities than differences in the findings of the two groups. Children's lexical complexity in their oral production and interaction was measured by means of Giraud's Index (Vermeer, 2000) in which the total number of word types are divided by the square root of the total number of word tokens, while the Determiner/Noun ratio was used to establish learners' performance on determiner production. The resulting data were triangulated with those derived from the interviews and the questionnaires showing data very similar to those emerging from the aural comprehension tasks.

Self-concept

Both the Croatian and the Italian groups' results in terms of lexical (Figure 15) and of syntactic (Figure 16) complexity match the learners' perception of their own competence in the FL. Young learners seem to have more difficulty in evaluating their own FL performance at the start. As their learning progresses, they have a longer, more solid and consistent learning experience to refer to. This contributes to their self-concept turning more realistic (Wittrock, 1986).

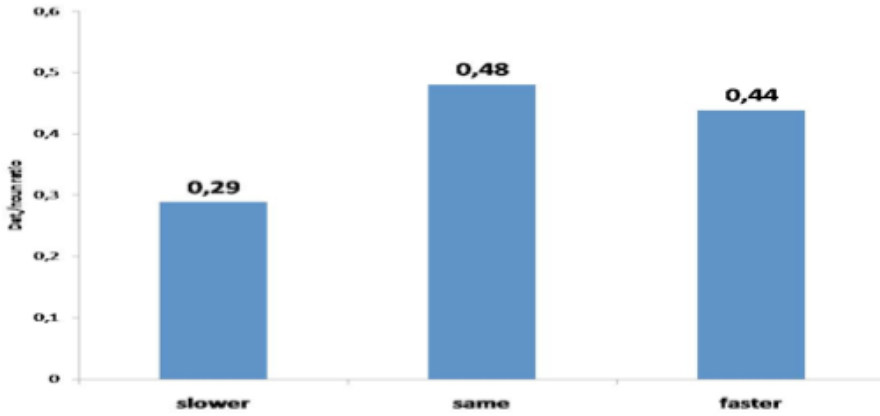

Figure 15: Learners' self-perception: connection with the Giraud's index in the spoken interaction (Croatia & Italy, 2010)

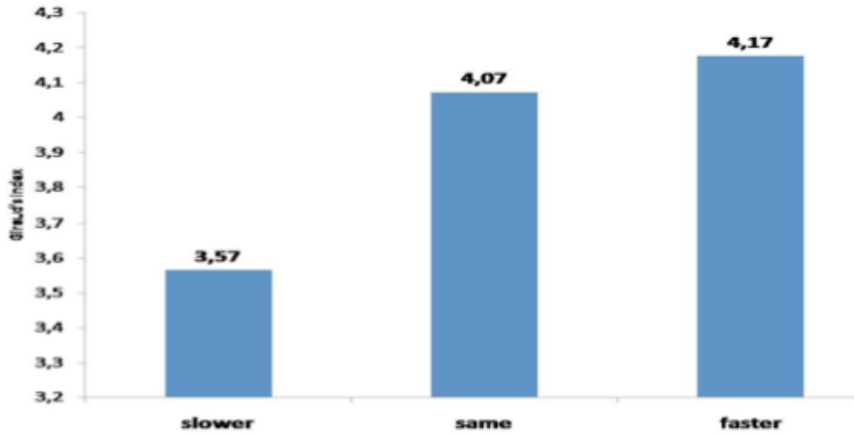

Figure 16: Learners' self-perception: connection with the Det/noun ratio in the spoken interaction (Croatia & Italy, 2010)

Parents' support

Parents' support is positively connected with the results of the oral interaction task as represented in Figures 17 and 18. Support at home also consists of the help of other significant members of the family, such as brothers and sisters who often support children in their homework. At times, as emerges from the children's interviews and from the parents' questionnaire, these people have good competence in the FL and positively sustain the children by providing also extra materials or practice besides the homework.

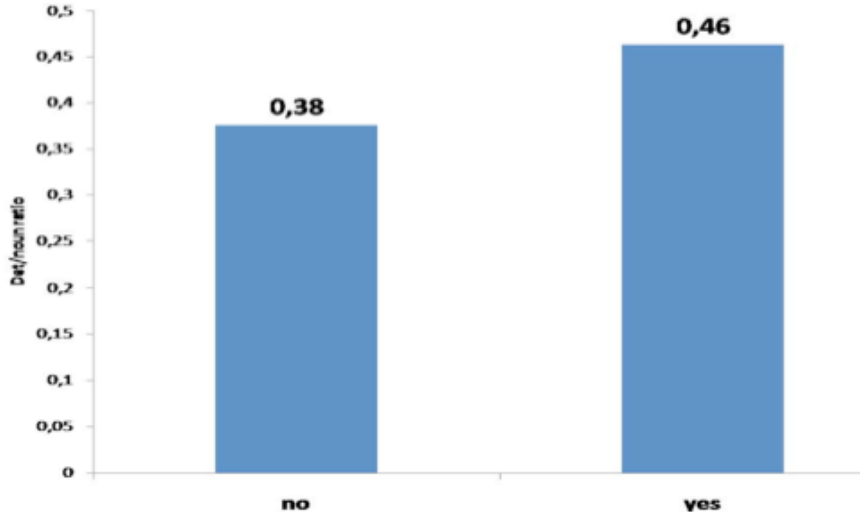

Figure 17: Parents' support: connection with the Det/noun ratio in the spoken interaction (Croatia & Italy, 2010)

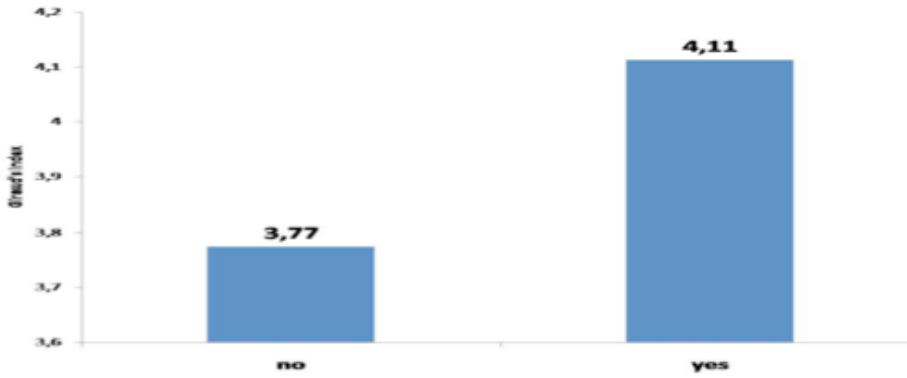

Figure 18: Parents' support: connection with the Giraud's index in the spoken interaction (Croatia & Italy, 2010)

FL classroom activities

Children were regularly asked about their preferences for classroom activities. These preferences changed over time, particularly in the fourth year. High achievers, for example, usually find new types of activities more challenging and stimulating. It is interesting to notice that in both countries those learners who preferred reading and speaking activities and games showed not only higher listening comprehension but also a higher Det/noun ratio (Figure 19) in their spoken interaction. Lexical diversity was, on the contrary, associated with

preferences for speaking, singing, reading and games – activities that require active and enjoyable use of vocabulary (Figure 20).

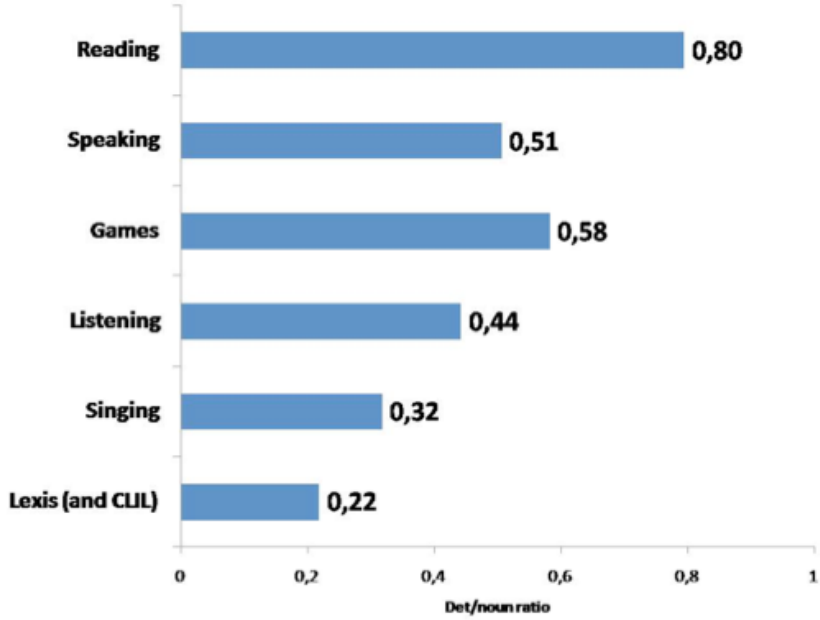

Figure 19: Learners' preferences for FL activities: connection with the Det/noun ratio in the spoken interaction (Croatia & Italy, 2010)

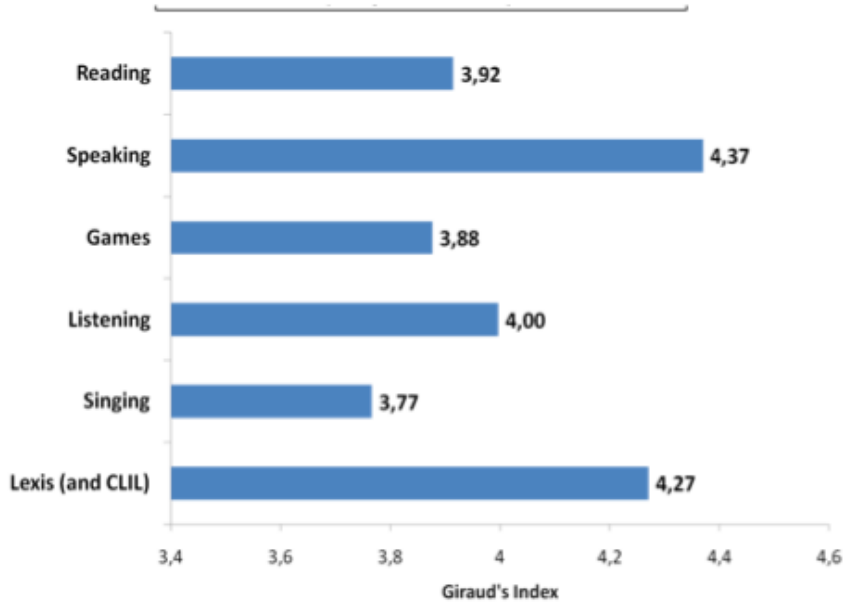

Figure 20: Learners' preferences for FL activities: connection with the Giraud's index in the spoken interaction (Croatia & Italy, 2010)

Conclusion

A longitudinal study presents several challenges and carries inevitable constraints, such as, for example, the reliability and comparability of quantitative data, but it has the advantage of establishing meaningful links among the main stakeholders involved in the research thus sustaining shared understandings in time while shaping a new type of professional discourse. In our case, the analyses carried out on two different country samples has highlighted similarities and differences between Italy and Croatia. The two countries confirm the children's similar development of individual attitudes to the FL and how the children can perceive their own competences in comparison with their peers' performance.

The two countries mainly differ in terms of FL achievement in aural comprehension and in the children's ability to interact in a FL simulated conversation. Croatia's better results may be explained by the children's larger exposure to the FL either through the media or by means of exposure to the Internet, but also by the type of teacher education FL Croatian teachers have been consistently exposed to. In terms of FL activities observed in the classrooms, the language component seem to cancel out the skills component. This is particularly true in terms of aural comprehension because teacher's classroom behaviour patterns impact young learners' approach to listening comprehension that is very seldom developed in a structured way. As for productive and interactive spoken language tasks, more structured interactive tasks are needed, and teachers need to consider young learners' individual characteristics, out of class FL exposure and parents' support when planning their FL lessons.

The current study, even if limited in the investigation of oral skills development and of other aspects of oral production, highlights the need to further explore aspects of learners' listening skill development that are seldom investigated and to carefully observe learners' attitudes and self-concept development.

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“I would like to speak it as perfectly as possible”: The potential for TBLT in Hungarian EFL

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Introduction

One can safely say that task-based language teaching (TBLT) has not been broadly applied in Hungary’s EFL classrooms, but to what extent are EFL learners in Hungary predisposed to accepting this teaching paradigm? This paper reports on findings from a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews that explore the individual EFL/FL learning histories of upper-intermediate Hungarian EFL learners enrolled in an English BA course at the University of Szeged, Hungary. It analyses the students’ past and present experience of language learning to ascertain their language learning views and practices and thus to infer their openness to TBLT. The article first introduces the context of the learners involved. It then establishes the research perspectives that inform the study. It describes the questionnaire and interviews as well as discussing the findings before offering conclusions and recommendations.

The context

The Communication Skills class

The specific context is Communication Skills, an upper-intermediate English for Academic Purposes (EAP) speaking class at the University of Szeged. One 90-minute session is organised every week during one term, forming part of students’ intensive language practice in Year 1 of a three-year Bologna-compliant undergraduate course. The aim of the speaking class is to provide learners with an opportunity to develop both the interactional and transactional speaking skills that are required for their studies – and for their working lives beyond – and, more immediately, to prepare them for an advanced speaking exam at the end of their first year.

The vast majority of these learners have acquired English in primary and secondary schools in Hungary, an experience which naturally informs what Tonkyn has aptly called their "script", i.e. their educational expectations, for FL learning (Alan Tonkyn, personal communication). Almost all of the University of Szeged students are specialized in English or American Studies while the rest are taking a minor in one of these fields and studying another main subject in the arts and sciences (for example maths, history, or German language and literature).

Hungarian learners' script

What is the script that Hungarian learners have developed during their language learning careers? In a number of studies carried out in Hungarian primary schools, Nikolov and her colleagues (Bors, Lugossy, & Nikolov, 2001; Nikolov, 1999, 2000, 2003; Nikolov & Nagy, 2003) discovered that actual teaching practice varies widely. In one study involving learners in years 6 and 8, it was found that, while practice does include communicative language teaching that centres on meaning-making, role play, real-world situations, and authentic materials with learners being actively involved and using language to reach relevant goals, teacher-fronted class interaction with the teacher asking closed questions and learners answering individually was far more common. Furthermore, in both German and English language classes, the traditions of grammar-translation and drills remained strong: reading aloud, translating, and performing grammar exercises were among the most frequent student activities, while watching videos, engaging in discussions, role plays, and language games were among the least frequent. This then represents the participants' educational context both past and present. I will now discuss the research perspectives of the paper.

Research perspectives

The study was informed by two perspectives: the TBLT paradigm and learner beliefs research. I will review each of these in turn.

The TBLT paradigm

Central to the TBLT paradigm is the second-language pedagogic task itself. This has been defined variously by Breen (1989), Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001), Candlin (1987), Ellis (2003), Lee (2000), Long (1985), Nunan (1989), Prabhu (1987), and Skehan (1998). Samuda and Bygate (2008) have taken a critical look at Ellis's comprehensive criteria for a task and produced a working definition: "A task is a holistic activity which engages language use in order to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge, with the

overall aim of promoting language learning, through process or product or both" (p. 69).

With this definition of the task in mind, Samuda and Bygate (2008) go on to identify the central characteristics of TBLT in this way:

- Tasks define and drive the syllabus;
- Task performance is a catalyst for focusing attention on form, and not vice versa;
- Assessment is in terms of task performance;
- Task selection is shaped by real-world activities of relevance to learners and their target needs;
- Tasks play an essential role in engaging key processes of language acquisition (p. 196).

Learner beliefs about language learning

Learners' beliefs about language learning are commonly thought to impact on their actual language learning processes. In a review of studies on learner beliefs, Bernat and Gvozdenko (2005) concluded that learners' notions about language learning may well affect their motivation, experiences, and behaviours in the classroom. As such, these notions could create an obstacle to or a springboard for language learning.

Two early studies explored the character of such beliefs. Wenden (1986; 1987) studied 25 adults learning advanced English at a US university. She elicited their opinions on language learning in semi-structured interviews, using twelve explicit statements, which were divided into three broad categories: (1) how we use the language as we learn it; (2) how we learn about the target language; and (3) what personal factors are involved in language learning. Wenden found that these learners' beliefs represented a wide range of cognitions, but that each learner's set of ideas could easily be placed in one of the three categories she had created.

A study by Horwitz (1987) used a 34-item questionnaire (The Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory, or BALLI) to determine the beliefs of 32 intermediate learners from a variety of ethnic backgrounds in an Intensive English Programme (IEP) at a US university. The findings were discussed in terms of five general areas: foreign language learning aptitude; language learning difficulty; the nature of language learning; learning and communication strategies; and motivation and expectations. Among the most relevant findings: 81 per cent of the learners held the view that a person either possessed an inborn language learning aptitude or did not – but they also felt certain that they were among the ones who did. Many respondents entertained restrictive ideas about how people learn language: for example, language is best learnt by memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules. And 94 per cent of these learners felt one needed to know about Anglophone cultures to be able to speak English well.

In a small-scale study of two learners, Abraham and Vann (1987) found some proof that beliefs influence learning outcomes. The learners, Gerardo and Pedro, shared some of the same notions about language learning (e.g. it was important to practice as much as possible), but they diverged in other ways (e.g. Gerardo felt attending to grammar was key, while Pedro disliked metalanguage). In the end, Gerardo outperformed Pedro on the TOEFL, whereas Pedro outscored Gerardo on a speaking test. The suggestion was that certain views of language learning may lead to certain kinds of achievement.

But what determines language learning beliefs? Ellis (1994) reported on a study that used random samples of students of foreign languages at Trinity College. It found that "past experience, both of education in general and of language learning in particular, played a major role in shaping attitudes to language learning" (Ellis, 1994, p. 479).

It is this past experience of language learning that I will explore in this study through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the research is to gain an insight into these learners' scripts and their beliefs about learning and to ascertain how these impact their likelihood to benefit from TBLT, a technique that is presumed to be novel for them.

The study

The current study is part of a larger project that seeks to investigate the implementation of TBLT in a Hungarian EFL context. The larger study consists of two phases: a classroom phase involving speaking tasks and a questionnaire and interview phase. The participants were upper-intermediate learners of English. They were 18 to 24 years old and in their first year studying English Language and Literature at the University of Szeged. They attended one of three speaking classes that I was teaching in autumn 2009. Fifty-six participants participated in the classroom phase, 44 completed the questionnaire, and 28 took part in the interview portion of the study. I will describe the questionnaire and interview phase in detail below.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 13 items designed to elicit information about respondents' personal background and their experience and understanding of language learning (see Appendix). Questions aim to establish, for example, what English language-related activities learners engage in beyond their classroom instruction and what sorts of activities they believe are most effective inside the classroom.

The interviews

The interview questions are based on concepts that are of central concern to the TBLT paradigm. Questions 1-3 deal with learners' views of form-focused teaching: how form is taught (cf. distinction between Focus on Form v. Focus on Form*S* in Doughty & Williams, 1998) and how errors are viewed and handled (see, e. g., Lyster, 2001). Question 4 addresses group and pair work and thus hints at the reduced role of the teacher (see, e.g., Willis, 1996). Question 5 focuses on teachers' promoting learner responsibility – and empowerment (Long, 2005). Questions 6 and 7 examine learners' experience of needs analysis and individualized instruction. Question 8 offers the learners an opportunity to provide any additional impressions. Finally, Question 9 has learners look at their recent – and usually first – experience of TBLT in our class. The interview questions had two aims: to ascertain the learners' second language learning experience (Questions 1-8) and to gather their reflections on their exposure to the TBLT paradigm (Question 9).

Each interview lasted between 25 and 35 minutes and was administered one-on-one in my office within two weeks of the task-based lessons. The interviews were recorded on a cassette tape player and subsequently transcribed. A total of 28 volunteers selected at random took part from the larger population that had participated in the task-based classes. The language of the interview was English. The questions were as follows:

1. How important has grammatical correctness been to your foreign language teachers in either the speaking or writing of their students? What do you think about that?
2. How much have your foreign language teachers corrected their students' grammatical errors in the classroom? What kinds of errors have they corrected? What do you think about that?
3. How have you learnt grammar? Many teachers go over a major grammar point, say, the present perfect, have the students practice it, and then move on, assuming it has then been learnt and will not be forgotten. Have you experienced this sort of thing? How do you feel grammar should be covered?
4. How much have your teachers used group or pair work in the foreign language classroom? How useful do you feel that has been? How much do you think it should be used in the classroom?
5. "Learners should take responsibility for their own learning both inside and outside the classroom." Have your teachers tried to encourage this? What do you think of this statement?
6. Have your teachers generally used a given textbook and not other materials or rather a mix of materials? What about their own materials? What is your view of this?
7. Have your teachers used materials or topics that you feel are really interesting? Have they taught you vocabulary and grammar that you feel you will need?

8. What have been the most successful teaching techniques or ideas you have experienced in the past?
9. What did you think of the classes we did with the speaking tasks? What purpose, if any, do you think they served? Do you think a language class made up entirely of such tasks would be effective?

Although these constituted the core questions, I made additional queries ad hoc as a learner's response seemed to call for further exploration. Now I will discuss the findings of the questionnaire and interview phase.

Findings

The nature of the findings from the questionnaire and interviews reflects differences in design. The questionnaire was intended to reveal what the learners value in language learning and teaching, whereas the interviews mainly explored what they have actually experienced in that area.

Questionnaire findings

Both the personal background (age, gender, student status and parents' educational attainment) and language learning history of the learners were covered in the questionnaire. First, I will summarize their personal background. The vast majority of the learners (40) were aged between 18 and 20 (with three being 21 and one being 24). As for gender, the three groups consisted of 25 women and 19 men. In terms of their status as students of English, 36 were majored in that subject and 8 were minors who were typically specialized in other arts subjects. With regard to their parents' educational attainment (the highest level of education at least one parent had completed), students fell into four groups of roughly the same size: four-year technical (secondary) school (12); (college preparatory) grammar school (11); college/undergraduate (11); and university/graduate (10). Thus, the students demonstrated relative uniformity in terms of age, gender and student status but great diversity as regards their parents' educational attainment.

Now I will report on the students' language learning histories. In response to the question of how many years they had been learning English, 5 said 4-5 years, 25 said 8-10 years, and 14 said 11 or more years. The number of hours a week spent in English classes ranged from 2 to 6. As to other languages learnt besides English, 23 reported they had taken one other language for 2-4 years, 5 responded they had had one other language for 5 or more years, 8 stated that they had gone to lessons for two other languages for 2 or more years, and 3 said they had learnt more than two other languages for 2 or more years. Interestingly, from among the latter three groups, seven had been taking a language (other than English) for a total of 12 or more years. Finally, of the

remaining five students, 3 had attended no other language classes while 2 fell into the Other category.

Certain items covered learner motivation. In response to the question of how much learners actually liked learning English on a Likert scale (with 1 meaning 'not at all' and 5 signifying 'very much'), 3 selected the middling rating of '3', 14 chose '4', suggesting they liked learning English, and a total of 27 opted for '5', which meant they liked learning English very much. Student aims or reasons for learning English ranged widely as follows: work (27); personal interest in/enthusiasm for English/language(s) (26); travel/living abroad/family abroad (11); Anglophone or other culture(s)/film/reading (9); communication/social use (8); and world language/importance of language (6). As most students offered more than one aim or reason, these categories are not mutually exclusive.

Also related to motivation, an item on activities that required English outside the classroom generated a wide variety of responses. 35 reported they watched English-language television or listened to English-language radio. 34 listened to songs in English. 33 read in English. 23 chatted in English on the Internet. 20 each had had private lessons and wrote letters or e-mails in English. 17 regularly talked to a native speaker, and 5 had lived in an Anglophone country. As students typically provided more than one response, these are not mutually exclusive. Finally, under the Other category, a diversity of answers included watching films and series on DVD, using English in part-time jobs, and writing music reviews for a website.

Similarly suggestive of motivation, another item on number of hours a week spent on homework or study tied to English lessons – beyond the activities noted above – elicited the following answers: 11 spent ½-4 hours per week; 20 spent 5-10; 5 spent 11 or more; and 8 said that it depended on the week or that they didn't know. Of the eight English minors, 3 devoted ½-4 hours per week to homework; 5 devoted 5-10; and none devoted 11 or more.

In answer to the question of what classroom activities promote language learning most effectively, here too the learners proffered a variety of ideas: talking/discussion (40); translating (18); group/pair work (17); going over grammar exercises/multiple-choice tests (7); watching films and discussing them (3); writing, listening, and games (2 each); and, finally, singing, reading, reading a text and summarizing it, and reading a play aloud (1 each). These answers are likewise not mutually exclusive.

Thus the questionnaires reveal primarily quantitative data about the learners as a group while the interviews uncover mainly qualitative information from a subgroup.

The interview findings

Learner responses to the interview questions could be grouped into a number of categories. The most salient points were divided into three: learning form; classroom management; and reflections on the TBLT experience. What follows is a report on the interview findings within those three areas.

Learning form

The learners generally described a learning experience in which grammatical forms and correctness were in the forefront. Some thought that this represented an important foundation to language learning, while others found it dry and unmotivating. One learner, János, went so far as to say it had done him no good at all. When asked if he felt that he had been well prepared by classroom instruction in Hungary for spending a year in Australia with his family, he answered, "No, I wasn't. I couldn't speak a word, literally, so I couldn't understand what they were saying and [it] just was confusing." Perhaps it was a matter of an insufficient number of classroom hours before his Australian sojourn. How much classroom instruction had he had? His response was clear. "A lot! I started in Year 3 and finished in Year 11 here and literally couldn't communicate at all, so it was really hard."

Most of the learners reported that teachers used a Focus on FormS approach that was supposed to lead to an incremental mastery of successive forms. Albert explained, "When we learnt a new tense, we came to know everything about it. So I think it's okay because for me I like to learn everything about that tense and I like to know how to use it properly." This comment speaks volumes. Learners schooled in the classical humanist tradition, in which great stock is placed in a demonstrated knowledge of explicit facts, tend to value such an exercise highly.

Closely tied to this notion of mastery is a near intolerance of errors on the part of many teachers. Alexandra speculated about learner anxiety in the following terms: "When we start to learn a language, we have to learn a lot of rules and we have tests and when we make a mistake, just a little mistake, they [teachers] don't want to help us in this way, so they don't correct it but give a mark 1 if you don't know something. It's so frustrating when somebody tells you *this* is not good and *this* is not good and *this* is not good… It makes us nervous and anxious not to make a mistake."

The learners also reported certain other approaches to grammar teaching in which form takes precedence over meaning. For instance, Kinga described a German class in which short dialogues were memorized and recited in class as an aid to learning and improving grammar. "It was just to learn how German grammar works, so it was like 'Anna ist eine [*sic*] ungarisches Mädchen'. It was the first sentence we had to learn and everyone knew it because we had to memorize it and it was good because we remembered… that sentence. If you forget [how to say] 'Hungarian' [you realise] oh, it's 'ungarisches' and we knew that from the sentence, so it was good in that way." Clearly, Kinga felt this technique had been successful. Likewise, Csaba described class work with fill-in-the-gap practice grammar tests as an effective way to improve grammar. Indeed, the view that succeeding on a written grammar test – often a context-free, discrete-item multiple-choice test – signifies language learning success is commonly held by the respondents. Translation exercises were also considered to be an effective way of improving language proficiency.

In contrast, Dávid spoke of immersion French lessons in which forms were covered as problems arose in communication, usually through speaking. He described a very motivating and creative classroom atmosphere. His account differed from most of the others'.

Classroom management

Learners by and large described a teacher-fronted style of classroom management. The teacher typically interacts with the students by asking them questions, which are primarily of the display type, in which a simple demonstration of previously taught knowledge is required. Conversely, after a detailed explanation, a teacher might ask, "Is that clear?", typically eliciting a face-saving silence.

As for the methodological formats their teachers used, the respondents mentioned the following:

- "We rather worked individually. We got a task, we had to do it, and we spoke about it, [but] I don't remember that we did anything like this [pair work or group work]."
- "We did group work… more or less when we prepared for a final exam or a language exam, for example we were working in groups for [speaking exam] practice, but sometimes we didn't work in groups because it wasn't needed."
- "I can't think of any good activities that we did. Maybe in the first five minutes of the class, where we would have a bit of a chat with the teacher."
- "The teacher talks and the student listens and you do work at home."

In contrast, several learners had been familiarized with independent class work. For instance, Anett described her experience with one secondary school EFL teacher: "We were given a topic and then we had to give our opinion, but in bigger groups – I don't know why, but it was always in bigger groups of four or five. We talked about a topic like women in society, gave our opinions, and told them to the class.... And that was motivating, I think, because everyone has a strong opinion on those kinds of topics."

Reflections on the speaking tasks

Both in class and in the interviews, the learners by and large responded favourably to the two sessions they had participated in. They were stimulated by a good argument, by the need to convince others of their view, by what they perceived to be the quirky, but ultimately realistic quality of the tasks, and by the challenge of being forced to arrive at a difficult decision.

For example, Dóra's comment was typical of the positive reactions, though her impressions might also have been coloured by previous classroom experiences: "Well, it was good for speaking because we could argue… and we had many options… but I [have always had] a strange feeling about working in groups because my experience, especially in the grammar school, was that everyone started to speak in Hungarian: 'OK, what did you see on TV last week?' We didn't do the task properly." Naturally, such a failure in group or pair work could have been due to the task design or task implementation or both – or, indeed, the activities in question might not even have met the criteria for a task at all.

None of the learners raised the common objection that two native speakers of one language might find it absurd to be communicating with one another in a language which is foreign to both of them. This may owe much to the design of the tasks. One naturally loses oneself in the work of completing them and forgets one's inhibitions. However, several learners expressed the concern of two Hungarians not necessarily noticing each other's errors and certainly not correcting them if they were noticed. For such learners, feedback must be immediate.

A complaint that several learners voiced was that their partner was unwilling to talk and that the conversation was therefore one-sided. Such reticence is not uncommon among Hungarians, and it surely cannot be helped – and may even be promoted – by the common teacher concern about errors noted above.

Summary of findings

The results of this study appear to present a somewhat grimmer picture of foreign language teaching in Hungary than the findings of Nikolov and her colleagues. These learners seemed to have experienced less meaning-focused, learning-centred, holistic, real-world pedagogy than even those researchers identified in their studies. This could be because successful foreign language learners such as the ones in this study who have personal knowledge of several kinds of teaching techniques with several different teachers are willing or able to speak more critically about their language learning.

Overall, the learners seemed positively disposed towards TBLT, despite foreign language learning histories often marked by the kinds of teacher-fronted, grammar- and translation-oriented classroom environments Nikolov and her colleagues described. Although some of the learners expressed a preference for such practices as translation, form-dominated exercises, and text memorization, they also saw the pedagogic benefits of a task-based paradigm.

A learner's script is closely linked to a learner's beliefs. After all, if a learner *expects* certain things to happen in the foreign language classroom, she or he presumably also *believes* that they will work. At this point, let us recall Bernat and Gvozdenko's (2005) observation (from the earlier section on learner beliefs research) that learners' views about language learning may well affect their motivation, and their experiences and behaviours in the classroom and

that these views could thus hinder or boost their language learning success. If the learners in this study generally both understand and accept TBLT, then this would presumably suggest potential success with this paradigm.

Conclusion

The present study forms part of a larger project that investigates the potential for introducing TBLT to a Hungarian educational environment. In order to evaluate the potential contribution of this teaching paradigm, this paper first explores Hungarian university students' learning histories through questionnaires to establish the current methodologies used in the EFL classroom in Hungary. In the second part of the study, a subgroup of the learners was provided a platform to assess their learning experience through semi-structured interviews. The study argues that since state school EFL teaching centres on conventional teaching paradigms such as Grammar-Translation and a Focus on Forms it therefore falls short in preparing students for real-world interaction. TBLT as a paradigm that promotes such interaction may thus prove a useful complement to current practice.

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Appendix

Questionnaire Code:_____

1) How old are you?

2) Are you a woman or a man?

3) What is your status at the Institute of English and American Studies?

(e.g. English major (English Studies), English major (American Studies), English minor–German major, Erasmus student (History major at University of Reading (UK) etc.)

4) What is the highest level of education your parents completed? (Underline the level.)

Your dad:	Your mum:
primary school	primary school
trade school (3 yrs.)	trade school (3 yrs.)
technical school (4 yrs.)	technical school (4 yrs.)
grammar school	grammar school
college	college
university	university

5) Have you learned other foreign languages besides English? If so, which one/ ones, for how many years and what level have you reached?

6) Why are you learning English? What are your aims or motivations?

7) How much do you actually like learning English? (1 = not especially 5 = very much)

1 2 3 4 5

8) How many years have you been learning English?

9) How many English lessons do you have now? How many have you had in past years?

10) How many hours a week do you do homework or study at home for your English lessons?

11) Have you been involved in any kinds of activities outside the classroom that require English? If so, what are they?

I read English (e.g. novels, newspapers).
I watch English-language TV channels or listen to English-language radio stations.
I listen to English-language song lyrics and translate them.
I have or have had private lessons.
I regularly talk or used to talk to a native speaker of English I know.
I lived in an English-speaking country.
I write letters or e-mails in English.
I chat in English on the internet.
Other (please explain, or say more about any of the above, if necessary):

12) What kind of classroom activities do you think help the most in learning English or any foreign language (e.g. talking, translating, doing pair work, going over multiple-choice tests etc.)? Why?

13) Are these the kinds of classroom activities you have experienced with English and/or other foreign language teachers? If not or if only partly, what other ways of learning have you experienced?

Thank you for your help!

Students' Needs in a BA in English Studies Programme in Hungary After Bologna: A Research Report

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Background and rationale

The attractiveness and popularity of modern philology programmes have been decreasing in the European higher education area (Coleman, 2004; Eurydice, 2008; Kelly & Jones, 2003). This is the case in Hungary as well where the decline of language degree programmes, including English studies, coincides in time with the implementation of the Bologna Process in 2006 (Sárdi, 2010, p. 72).

As five years have already passed since the introduction of the three-cycle system in Hungary, and the first BA degrees were issued in 2009, it has become possible and indeed necessary to investigate whether and to what extent the new BA in English studies programmes can be useful and effective in terms of developing the competences and knowledge needed in the labour market. This paper reports on preliminary results of such a project.

Aims of research

The overall research project takes a closer look at the situation in Hungary, and focuses on how the introduction of the three-cycle degree system has influenced the curriculum of BA in English Studies programmes in the recent years. The broad aim is to test the hypothesis if there is a discrepancy between the competences and knowledge language graduates need in the European labour market and the objectives and expected outcomes of BA in English studies programmes in Hungary.

This paper focuses on one aspect of the study: students' needs and expectations regarding the aims, content and outcomes of the BA programme in a Hungarian higher education institution. In order to do this, the following research questions have been asked:

1. What is the value of a BA in English degree according to students?
2. What career plans do students studying for such a degree have?
3. What level of proficiency is needed for this according to students?
4. What competences are needed for this according to students?
5. What content is needed for this according to students?

Research method

A needs survey was carried out to collect the data. As the size of the overall target population was quite large (n=99), the data were collected by means of questionnaires. On the basis of the results, it will be possible to carry out follow-up focus group interviews later.

Research context and participants

The needs survey was carried out at János Kodolányi University College, a non-state higher education institution which is fully accredited by the state. The BA in English studies is the only language degree programme offered here. First-year and third- (final) year students studying towards their BA in English degree took part in the survey. Participants included both full-time and part-time students.

Techniques

Two questionnaires, one designed for the first- and the other for the third-year students, were used. (See the Appendix.) They contained mostly closed questions, but allowed the respondents to give additional information too. The questions focusing on our five research questions were identical and therefore comparable in the two questionnaires.

Procedures and data analysis

After piloting the questionnaires, first-year students were approached in the beginning of their first semester and third-year students were asked to fill in the questionnaire before their last exam period. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was ensured as well. Frequencies and rank orders were calculated. Categories were developed on the basis of the analysis of the responses to the open questions. Excel was used for data organisation and statistics.

Results and discussion

The overall population of the two target groups was 99 students. A high percentage of them (70%, n=69) completed the questionnaires. The representativeness of the sample was checked against two variables: gender and study mode, and the results were sufficient in both cases.

Perceived value of a BA in English studies degree

One aim of the survey was to find out students' opinion about the value of a BA in English Studies degree in terms of future career plans. Thus, both questionnaires contained a closed question asking students to rate the value of the degree, and an open question seeking students' reasons behind their evaluation. The results of the closed question are summarised in Table 1.

Looking at the overall results, it is apparent that the value of the degree is regarded as low by the majority of students: two thirds of them chose the categories 'low' or 'very low' from the list. Examining the two target groups separately, however, we find a significant difference in their opinions. While almost every third-year student (85%) perceived the value of their degree as low, the opinions were more positive in the case of first-year respondents. Nearly half of them felt that they studied for a valuable degree. A reason for this difference may be that third-year students started their programme in 2008, only two years after the introduction of the three-tier higher education system in Hungary. At that time, the BA programme was still new for all stakeholder groups and the first graduations were still one year away. First-year students, however, enrolled in 2010. By that time, graduates had already tested the value of their degree for two years.

Respondents were also asked to explain their evaluation regarding the value of the degree. Three categories were formed on the basis of the arguments underlying the low value of the degree. These relate to English, a lack of profession, and the level of the degree. Opinions regarding English state that a large number of people have a high level of proficiency in this language already. Another view in close relationship with this is that competence in one foreign language is not enough. As for the content of the degree, many respondents find it a problem that no profession is included in it. As a consequence, a number of students feel that the degree equals a language exam. The third line of thought concerns the degree level. Some respondents regard any type of BA degree only as an entrance to MA studies.

Table 1: The perceived value of the BA in English studies degree according to students

Value of degree	Overall		First-year		Third-year	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Very low	4	6	2	5	2	7
Low	40	58	19	45	21	78
High	19	28	17	40	2	7
Very high	1	1	1	2	0	0
No response	5	7	3	7	2	7
Total	69	100	42	100	27	100

Two categories were formed on the basis of the arguments supporting the high value of the degree: English and the perceived needs of the labour market. As regards English, respondents stress its importance due to its role as the major international language globally. They feel that they will be able to reach their career aims only with a sufficient proficiency in it. Arguments in the second category stress the respondents' perception that the likelihood of finding a good job is higher with a BA degree than without it.

Students formed their opinions along similar lines, regardless of their positive or negative judgement of the degree's value. Thus, they often emphasised one or the other side of the same coin. For example, the importance, frequent use and popularity of English is seen as a difficulty by some respondents while others regard this as an opportunity for career building. Also, the degree level, regardless of its content, is seen only as an entrance for further master studies in some cases, while other students stress that a BA degree can open up career opportunities for its holder. The relatively high number of comments focusing on the difficulties may partly stem from a negative attitude towards life in general, a characteristic feature of many Hungarians.

From the point of view of our research, two findings need to be highlighted, however. One is that respondents find it a problem that the degree does not include a profession. This can clearly be a disadvantage in the labour market. The other finding is that the degree is not worth more than a language exam. This finding relates closely to the previous one and indicates that the aims of the BA programme may not be entirely clear and the outcomes seem to be questioned by some of the respondents. This is an issue we will return to later in this section.

Career plans

Research question 2 focused on students' career plans. In the questionnaires, 12 options were given, divided into two categories: work-related (n=7) and study-related (n=4) plans. The list was open-ended. Table 2 shows the results in rank order. The findings underlie that the majority of students feel that the completion of their BA in English is only the first step in their university studies. Thus, the most frequently selected plans are study-related aims, and 'doing an MA course' is the first in the rank. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents chose this option, while 'studying translation/interpreting', the third in the rank, also seems a realistic aim for over 30% of the participants.

It is interesting, however, that both 'doing another BA degree' and 'studying abroad' are less popular study-related aims and can be found in the lower part of the rank. In fact, only 12% of respondents thought that they wanted to invest into another bachelor's degree after graduation. This may also be an indication that the perceived pragmatic value of a degree at a BA level is lower than that of a master degree by students. As for 'studying abroad', chosen only by 6% of the overall sample, it is possible that financial reasons play a role in the relative unpopularity of this possibility.

While 'studying abroad' does not seem a realistic plan for many, 'working abroad' is an entirely different issue. This is the second in the rank since almost half of the participants indicated that this is a realistic option for them after graduation. This aim appears to be in accordance with those of the European Union regarding international job mobility. Further research is needed to identify the job types students would like to and could hold abroad making use of their degree.

Another frequently mentioned work-related plan is 'becoming a translator'. This is the fourth in the rank, and a quarter of the overall sample chose this option. At the same time, however, fewer respondents thought that 'becoming an interpreter' could be their profession in the future, and, as a result, this aim can be found in the lower part of the rank. The difference between the popularity of becoming a translator or an interpreter may stem from respondents' beliefs regarding the difference in the difficulty in developing the necessary competences and knowledge needed for the two professions.

'Getting a job at a company' is the fifth most frequently mentioned plan in the list, with approximately one-fifth of the sample choosing this aim. This is the first plan in the rank that may be fulfilled without further studies in the Hungarian context. The case is similar when we look at 'getting a better position', the sixth most frequently chosen option. At the same time, neither 'getting another job' nor 'getting a pay rise' seemed a realistic aim for most of the participants. These finding also indicate that further studies are regarded as a priority by a large number of first degree students.

Responses to the open-ended option (6% of the sample) revealed that some participants would like to continue their studies in order to become language teachers, and some of them thought even beyond the master level and mentioned the possibility of future PhD studies. Only 4 percent of the sample did not mention any career plans.

Table 2: Students' career plans

Career plans	Overall		First-year		Third-year	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Doing an MA course	1	62	1	67	1	56
Working abroad	2	46	2	45	2	48
Studying translation/interpreting	3	32	3	33	3	37
Becoming a translator	4	25	4	29	4=	15
Getting a job at a company	5	19	5	21	4=	15
Getting a better position	6	13	6=	12	4=	15
Doing another BA degree	7=	12	6=	12	7=	11
Becoming an interpreter	7=	12	8	10	7=	11
Studying abroad	9=	6	13	7	7=	11
Other	9=	6	9=	5	10=	4
Getting another job	11=	4	9=	5	10=	4
I don't know	11=	4	11=	2	10=	4
Getting a pay rise	13	1	11=	2	13	0

Proficiency level

Research question 3 focused on proficiency and aimed to find out what level of proficiency students felt they needed to achieve for graduation in order to fulfil their career plans successfully. Hence, students were asked to indicate the level of proficiency they perceived they needed, and also, to estimate their actual level of proficiency at the time of giving the response with the help of the descriptors provided in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (European Commission, 2001, p. 24).

According to the 289/2005 Government Decree, C1 is the proficiency level BA in English students need to achieve in order to successfully graduate. Results (see Table 3) indicate that no students thought that a proficiency level below C1 could be sufficient. The findings also show, however, that a large number of students seem to be more ambitious and demanding than the decree. In the overall sample, the most frequently chosen proficiency level was C2. Examining the two target groups separately, we can see that there is a major difference between the opinions of the two groups. The majority of third year students indicated that C1 would be a sufficient level for them. At the same time, however, a much larger number of first year students felt that they needed to achieve C2 by the time they graduated. A reason for this difference may be that third-year students were very close to the completion of their studies at the time of the investigation and awareness regarding their actual level of proficiency might have influenced their responses. Another may be that third-year students were more aware of the difficulties in achieving C2 (near-native proficiency) and hence more realistic about it. Still, the findings concerning the

perceived needs indicate that students' expectations towards the BA in English programme are very high in terms of English language development.

Table 3: Proficiency level needed at graduation for career purposes according to students

Proficiency level	Overall		First-year		Third-year	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
B1	0	0	0	0	0	0
B2	0	0	0	0	0	0
C1	28	41	11	26	17	59
C2	41	59	31	74	10	41
Total	69	100	42	100	27	100

Respondents were also asked to estimate their actual level of proficiency. Results suggest that there is a discrepancy between perceived needs and present proficiency according to students (see Table 4). While every respondent expressed a need to reach at least level C1 by the end of their studies, almost two thirds of the overall sample claimed that their proficiency was still at B2 while 16 percent of the respondents felt that their command of the language was only at B1. These results would not be reassuring even if the distribution of the responses indicated that mainly final year students regarded themselves as proficient users of the language. What the findings suggest, however, is that there is not much difference between the estimated proficiency levels of the two target groups. In fact, 74% of the third-year respondents felt that they were still at an intermediate or upper intermediate level, whereas this rate was only four percent higher (78%) in the case of the first-year students. Although further research is needed to investigate how students' self-evaluation corresponds to proficiency test results, the above findings suggest that the BA in English programme may not entirely be in correspondence with students' expectations.

Table 4: Self-evaluation of proficiency level by students

Proficiency level	Overall		First-year		Third-year	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
B1	11	16	9	21	2	7
B2	42	61	24	57	18	67
C1	13	19	8	19	5	19
C2	2	3	0	0	2	7
No response	1	1	1	2	0	0
Total	69	100	42	100	27	100

Competences

The aim of research question 4 was to investigate students' opinions regarding competences. In this paper, the term 'competence' means the ability of a person to perform a task, a role or a job properly. The term 'skill' is used as a synonym for our purposes. The two target groups were asked to indicate the importance of ten competences from the point of view of their career plans. The competences were selected using the 289/2005 Government Decree and the list of graduate key skills by the Chartered Management Institute (2002). The competences can be divided into three broad categories depending on whether they relate to (1) language use, (2) work situations or (3) further studies. Students were asked to give their opinion using a four point Likert scale. Table 5 shows the ranking of competences as well as the mean and mode of the overall responses.

Table 5 Ranking of competences according to importance by students

Competences	Overall		
	Rank	Mean	Mode
Mediating between languages	1	3,91	4
Proficiency in English	2	3,86	4
Communication skills	3	3,68	4
Preparing for MA studies	4	3,55	4
Intercultural competence	5	3,48	4
Relevant theoretical knowledge	6	3,28	3
Work-related skills	7	2,90	4
Research-related skills	8	2,80	2
Personal skills	9	2,54	2
IT skills	10	2,11	1

The findings show that competences relating to language use are the most important for the students. Indeed, the top three places of the rank are occupied by skills that belong to this category, while 'intercultural competence' another skill very strongly related to appropriate language use, follows them closely. We can draw the same conclusion if we observe the mode of the competences. The mode is 4 ('very important') in the case of six out of the ten competences, including every language-related one (n=4). 'Mediating between languages' is at the top of the list showing that students find this skill even more important than 'proficiency in English'. This finding suggests an awareness regarding the wide range of situations where mediation between languages is a very useful and necessary skill.

The ability to prepare successfully for the MA studies is a very important study-related skill according to the students. It is the fourth in the rank, and its mode is 4 as well. It is interesting to see, however, that the importance of other study-related skills also crucial for the successful completion of an MA degree, are somewhat underrated by the respondents. Thus, both the ability to use 'relevant theoretical knowledge', and the development of 'research related skills' can be found in the lower part of the rank. Also, whereas most respondents regarded the former as 'important' (mode 3), they seemed less aware of the importance of the latter (mode 2, 'to some extent important').

'Work-related' and 'personal skills' can be found towards the bottom of the rank. While these skills are necessary in work situations, according to the findings students do not seem to regard it as important to enhance these competences during their BA studies. One reason may be that they do not expect the BA programme to focus on such skills. Existing research results indicate, however, that labour market expectations towards the aims and outcomes of degree programmes include the development of work-related and personal skills as well. Another reason behind these results may be that most students are planning to continue their studies after graduation, hence the relative importance attributed to study-related skills.

The development of 'IT skills' is regarded as the least important competence by the students despite the fact that it is frequently needed both in study and work situations as well as for communication purposes in general. This result may point to two directions. One is that students are likely to regard their own IT skills as already sufficient, and the other is that respondents may not be fully aware of the IT applications necessary for translation and research purposes. Follow-up interviews will help clarify the issues mentioned in this section.

Content

Research question 5 focused on the content of the BA in English programme. Our aim was to find out students' perceived needs, and thus respondents were asked to indicate, on a four-point Likert scale, how interesting and useful they regard each of the seven modules of the programme. The overall ranking of the modules as well as the mean and mode of the responses are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Ranking of modules according to popularity and usefulness by students

Modules	Interesting			Useful		
	Rank	Mean	Mode	Rank	Mean	Mode
Culture	1	3,54	4	4	3,29	3
Language development	2	3,37	3	1	3,81	4
History	3	3,29	4	5=	3,16	3
Business English and translation	4=	3,18	4	3	3,43	4
Literature	4=	3,18	4	7	3,5	3
Applied linguistics	6	3,12	4	2	3,49	4
Linguistics	7	2,77	2	5=	3,16	3

The results show that the rank order of interesting versus useful modules differs in four cases. Thus, whereas 'culture' is regarded as the most interesting module of the programme, its usefulness seems somewhat questionable by the students. Similarly, when we look at 'history' and 'literature', students find these studies more interesting than useful for their future purposes. At the same time, the views appear to be the opposite in terms of 'applied linguistics'. Here the ranking suggests that while students are aware of the usefulness of knowledge and skills in this field they do not find such studies equally interesting. These results indicate that students are motivated to focus on the above fields of study. The difference can be found in the extent to which their motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic in each case.

There are three modules where we cannot see a large difference in the opinions when we look at the ranking of interesting versus useful modules. 'Language development' is regarded as both interesting and useful. This finding relates closely to results we discussed in the foregoing, and indicates that students' motivation is probably strong to reach their aims. It is not possible to expect the same in the case of 'linguistics', however. This appears to be the least popular module; in fact, it is the only case where the mode is 2 indicating that most respondents found this module only 'to some extent interesting'. Also, it is close to the bottom of the list in terms of usefulness as well. 'Business English and translation' is the third module that needs to be mentioned here. It is a 50-credit specialisation with a twofold aim: (1) to focus on knowledge and skills useful in work situations and particularly in business settings, and (2) to provide an introduction to the theory and practice of translation. The module can be found in the middle of the ranking both in terms of popularity and usefulness. At the same time, the mode is 4 in both cases, which suggests that most students appreciate the inclusion of the specialization in the programme.

The only major difference between the opinions of the two target groups can be found in the case of 'culture'. While both groups regarded it as the most interesting module, their views are rather different in terms of its usefulness.

Interestingly, it is the third year group that found cultural studies the second most useful module. This might result from personal experiences of the respondents: follow-up interviews are necessary to shed more light into the issue.

Conclusion

This study showed the preliminary results of a survey into the needs of BA in English students concerning their degree programme in Hungary focusing on five research questions. The perceived value of the degree was regarded as relatively low in general, and the most often mentioned reasons were the lack of a profession associated with the degree, the level of the degree and that it focused only on one foreign language. Investigation into students' career plans provided similar results: the most frequently mentioned aim was to continue studies after graduation in order to gain a profession. Results also showed that students had great expectations regarding the development of their proficiency level. While the majority of them wished to reach near-native proficiency, this is probably not a realistic aim in most cases as most respondents thought that their actual proficiency level was B2 or B1. Findings regarding competences correspond to the above needs. Language use-related skills were regarded as the most important followed by those related to further studies. As for content, linguistics (excluding applied linguistics) was the only module which respondents did not find interesting or useful.

BA in English students appear to regard the value of the degree as low, and they also seem ready to continue their studies after graduation in order to enhance their career perspectives. Results clearly indicate that the students' strongest expectation towards the BA programme is that it should develop their communicative competence to the mastery level of English proficiency. While this seems an understandable desire in the given context, it raises two issues. One is that the aim of the programme is different: its targeted proficiency level is C1. This is clearly a discrepancy between students' perceived needs and the officially expected learning outcomes of the programme. Discussions with students may help clarify this issue. Also, focusing on effective learning strategies and independent learning can raise students' awareness of their own language development and may involve them more in the process. The other issue is that the degree programme does not equal an advanced level EFL course. Still, although it has aims other than proficiency level development, students do not seem to fully accept this. Since the aims and expected outcomes of the programme have been defined on the basis of the requirements of the 289/ 2005 Government Decree, a national level discussion could address this issue and even consider a shift in the relative importance of aims so that they meet students' needs more. Further research using triangulation is needed in order to refine these results.

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Appendix

Questionnaire extract

1. Year of studies:	1st year	2nd year	3rd year
2. Gender:	male	female	
3. Study mode:	full time	part time	

4. In your opinion, what is the value of a BA in English studies degree at the labour market?

very low low high very high

Please explain your answer.

5. What are your career plans after graduation? *(It is possible to select more plans.)*

1) I would like to do an MA course.
2) I would like to get another BA degree.
3) I would like to study translation/interpreting.
4) I would like to get a job at a company.
5) I would like to be a translator.
6) I would like to be an interpreter.
7) I would like to get a pay rise.
8) I would like to get a better position.
9) I would like to get another job.
10) I would like to study abroad.
11) I would like to work abroad.
12) I don't know.
13) Other:
……

6. In your opinion, what is your proficiency level now?
A1 A2 B1 B2 C1 C2

What proficiency level would you like to have upon graduation?

A1 A2 B1 B2 C1 C2

7. How important is it for you that the BA in English programme develops the following?
1 = not at all 2 = to some extent 3 = important 4 = very important

Competences	Importance
Proficiency in English	
Theoretical knowledge relevant to English studies	
Intercultural competence	
IT skills	
Knowledge and skills necessary for MA studies	
Research-related knowledge and skills	
Communication skills	
Work-related skills (e.g. teamwork, problem solving)	
Personal skills (e.g. independence, endurance of stress)	
Mediation between languages	
Other (please specify): ……	

8. How (a.) interesting and (b.) useful do you find the different modules of the BA in English programme regarding your future plans?

(a.) 1=not interesting at all 2=to some extent interesting
3=interesting 4= very interesting

(b.) 1=not useful at all 2=to some extent useful
3=useful 4=very useful

Content	a. Interesting	b. Useful
Language development		
Linguistics		
Applied linguistics		
Literature		
History		
Culture		
Business English and translation		

Principal Examiners' Perceptions of Test and Item Analysis

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Introduction

Working in close collaboration with principal examiners (PE) at Euro Examinations, Budapest in the past three years, I have been better able to explore how they relate to standard analytical procedures in the language testing and assessment profession. My case study has evolved from my work as a consultant on data processing and analysis with the four highest ranking expert affiliates at the Exam Office. During our efforts to set standards, write and develop test items, and get to grips with applications of test theories, I kept collecting their comments in field notes, correspondence, questionnaires, and their self-assessments, which serve as a rich source of data in this study. Over the years, we have managed to accomplish a lot in terms of quality assurance primarily due to an understanding of and plenty of practice with the Bookmark Method (Council of Europe, 2009), but as the results will show I failed to generate awareness of the fundamentals of testing principles. Apart from the complexities inherent in statistics, psychometrics, and language testing theories, this failure was a result of two factors. First, PEs were under a lot of pressure to produce exam results that would be acceptable for all the stakeholders involved. Second, and more important, they were persistent in challenging long-established principles without providing alternative solutions, and chose to revert to idiosyncratic interpretations despite obvious errors.

Measurement professionals and testing organisations alike consider modern test theory to be superior to classical test theory (CTT) for estimating candidate ability as well as test item characteristics (Bachman, 1990; Baker, 2001; Szabó, 2009). The increased power behind item response models, however, comes at a price: Strict assumptions must be met, some of the findings might be counterintuitive, and sometimes results might be difficult to explain, especially to stakeholders with limited expertise in the area. Unique among testing agencies in Hungary, Euro Examinations routinely applies item response theory (IRT) when calculating results and analysing test items. Even though many-facet Rasch measurement (MFRM) had been in use there since 2006, the manage-

ment and the test construction team still had problems understanding the fundamentals three years on. In 2009, I was invited as an external consultant to help familiarise PEs with the basic principles behind IRT. To quote the marketing manager: "We don't know why and how something that goes into the box becomes something else when coming out of the box."

Soon enough, I was to face the fact that a lot more was blurred than the box covered up. I had to learn that simple and frequent concepts in language testing, like item difficulty, item discrimination, factor, reliability, agreement, and scale, to name a few, were far from clear for many on the item writing team. Therefore, the construction team and I agreed to work on item development parallel to IRT methodology clarification.

Method

Participants

Participants included the head of examiner and teacher training (Anna), two senior advisers (Betty and Charles), and the educational coordinator (David). Anna, Betty, and David had degrees in ELT, and Charles completed the DELTA course, but they varied considerably in the amount of teaching experience they had. They were all employed by Euro Examinations, and as PEs it was their task to monitor assistant examiners' work, write and develop items, as well as rate scripts.

Apparatus

When working with my participants, I used TiaPlus (1998) for test and item analysis, and OPLM (1995) for IRT calculations. After collecting feedback, I entered the letters, notes, remarks, and verbal data into MaxQDA (2007) to be able to process the information as text files.

Procedure

Once I had problem areas outlined, we kept following a rigid routine. First, I analysed the data from live exam administrations applying CTT and IRT next to each other. Following this, I would create an ordered item booklet (OIB) as described in the CEFR Manual (Council of Europe, 2009, p. 60) supplementing graphs and analyses for poor items. Next, the five of us would hold a workshop discussing possible reasons why the flagged items may have underperformed. I kept record of the PEs comments, concerns, and compliments in written form, for they did not consent to voice-recording or video-taping our sessions.

Results

Trying to provide plausible answers to the question "What makes a good item?" paved the way for discussions to come. The quality of an item largely depends upon its power to discriminate weaker candidates from more able ones on the criterion of interest (Crocker & Algina, 1986). Indeed, as Verstralen, Bechger, and Maris (2001, p. 20) point out: "In the typical situation, we find that items with higher α values (all other parameters constant) are indeed more reliable, and more informative." They also add that "both the expected information and the reliability are maximized when π-values are within the interval [0.30-0.70], everything else constant" (Verstralen, Bechger & Maris, 2001, p. 21).

The software package TiaPlus is somewhat less stringent in these respects, and it provides further statistics for item analysis. It will recommend that an item be revised, developed, or abandoned if: (a) its p-value falls outside the interval [0.10-0.90]; (b) its item-test correlation, also known as item-total correlation, is weaker than 0.20; (c) its item-rest correlation is negative; (d) the distractor-rest correlation is equal to or exceeds the item-rest correlation; (e) the distractor-rest correlation exceeds 0.10; or (f) if a score category is not used.

During our first item development session, my participants expressed their concerns about these principles. Their reasoning was twofold. First, they argued that flagged items would work better on a larger sample. Second, reluctant to accept the statistic in question as a fact, the item writer would unwaveringly claim that the item was a good one. Towards the end of the first meeting, Betty sprang the question on me: "Who says we should respect these values, anyway?"

Clearly, my efforts failed to serve their purpose, and members of the test construction team felt they were attacked rather than helped. Apparently, my participants were emotionally attached to the items they wrote on the one hand, and they probably believed I was questioning their competence as item writers on the other.

In the course of our workshops, I tailored the measures of acceptable item performance levels adopting values from the Procedural requirements by the Accreditation Board. Still, the discussions seemed to be of little practical value, for a year later in September 2010, we would find excessively poor items, some of which even had to be excluded from the analysis and later calculation of the results. An emerging tendency we detected was that out of four options only the key and one distractor worked in effect, and the majority of the candidates did not even consider the remaining two distractors as potential responses.

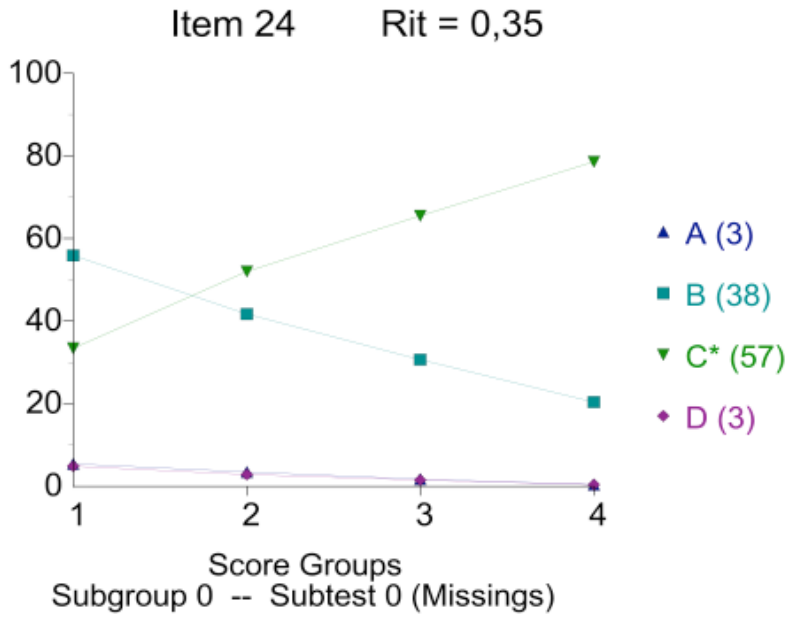

Figure 1: Item graphic for MCQ item 24 with four options

In Figure 1, the legend lists the options, together with the percentage of candidates that chose them in brackets. Six test takers did not respond to item 24 (*N* = 1960), hence the "missings" warning under the score groups axis. When asked about why distractors A and D did not work, Betty explained how she set about writing multiple choice items:

recorded	participant	text unit
September, 2010	Betty	First, I look for a text to be used. This already has the answer, because you just choose which word to erase and so that will be the key. Then I try to find the typical wrong response knowing the Hungarian student and our candidates. And then the difficult part is to find two more distractors and this is probably why they don't work.

What we noticed was that in essence Betty developed true or false items. However, despite all the unacceptable statistics, and the unveiled fallacy in test construction technique, she resisted to modify her item writing behaviour. When I invited my participants to comment on our procedures, they were generally optimistic about the use of my feedback and the OIBs. On seeing my enthusiasm wane, Charles encouraged me:

recorded	participant	text unit
December, 2010	Charles	The booklets are best feedback from the exam that we have. We are able to see the items in ranked order and the percentage of candidates who successfully answered each item. I for one look at the booklet and ask "why" for each item. So please keep producing them.

Different members had different expectations about statistics and the OIBs. Betty stated that she was interested in "how difficult a particular task is, and if an item works or not" (January, 2010). David hoped that in the long term we would achieve "candidate ability values which, unlike the current ones, would be fixed or unchanging, a point of reference for future calculations" (January, 2010). Besides, their hope that statistics would provide a solution went unfulfilled:

recorded	participant	text unit
January, 2011	Charles	The information was both clearly presented and extremely useful. The point is that it is inadequate, in the sense that it shows the problems but does not explain them.

Another area where tension surfaced was standard setting. OIBs are essentially a means for selecting a score that has to be attained so that a candidate can pass. Naturally, where to place the cut-off in a high-stakes examination situation is not a trivial task. It involves an amount of responsibility on the part of the panellists. When engaged in this a task, my participants repeatedly complained of how overwhelming making such a decision was:

recorded	participant	text unit
December, 2010	Charles	What I (and I think the others too) have problems with is in deciding a single item which indicates the borderline between B2 and not B2 level. In part that is because of the "infinite gradation" problem but also because I am sometimes left wondering as to why candidates did so well/badly with certain items.

In addition to dealing with simple descriptive statistics, fundamental concepts, and setting cut scores, my participants and I attempted to demystify the basic principles of IRT. The descriptive statistical methodology of IRT has an extensive literature of its own (Crocker & Algina, 1986; Hambleton, Swaminathan, & Rogers, 1991; Lord & Novick, 1968), yet the core can be summed up in the equation:

$$f_i(\theta) = \frac{\exp\left[\alpha_i * (\theta - \beta_i)\right]}{1 + \exp\left[\alpha_i * (\theta - \beta_i)\right]}$$

where $f_i(\theta)$ is the item response function,

θ is the ability, or latent trait, or person parameter,

α_i is the item discrimination index, and

β_i is the item difficulty parameter.

As we had been working on clarifying these concepts, I was prepared to throw some light on what the exponential function meant. At the heart of it is the e-number, 2.7182, for "exp" in the equation stands for "e to the power of". A direct consequence of the 1 in the denominator is that $f_i(\theta) = 0.5$ if $\theta=\beta_i$, in other words the probability of scoring on a dichotomous item is 50% when item difficulty equals candidate ability. At least this was going to be my point, but apparently my participants became more involved in where the e-number derived from, how it was possible that it described a host of natural phenomena, and even details that only an expert in mathematics would be able to reassuringly elucidate:

recorded	participant	text unit
January, 2011	Charles	What's the function of the normal distribution? Because, you see, Zoli, I need to know and understand every detail before I can't accept it. I finished my studies in mathematics when I was 15. I'm sorry but I cannot accept anything without knowing what is behind it.

Needless to say, I was hopelessly unable to draw up the normal distribution function. However, I did look it up and sent each team member links to Wikipedia so they could familiarise with the model. As Charles's comment generalised over other routine procedures, including correlation, agreement, and reliability, I created explanatory documents to raise awareness, as well as practice tables so that my participants could have hands-on experience. My efforts have so far gone unanswered.

The fact that item difficulty and candidate ability are on a common scale in IRT models proved to be another challenging point to comprehend. My participants accepted that while p-values were sample-dependent and so changed every time the item was administered to a new group of test takers, item difficulty parameters were stable within the measurement error margin. Yet, the true meaning of item difficulty is best seen as relative to candidate ability: An item that is exactly at level, say, B2, will be easy for a candidate whose ability level is C1, but difficult for another at B1. A number of comments I collected point to the experienced tension between objectively measured and immutable item difficulty, and relative difficulty in an item response in practical applications.

recorded	participant	text unit
June, 2011	David	For us, a statement like "a test is difficult at a certain level but easy beyond that level" is impossible to grasp. If of the 25 items on a test five represented the desired difficulty and 20 were more difficult, then this test was somewhat more difficult than ideal for every candidate. The fact remains that the test was more difficult, ergo it provided strong candidates too with more of a challenge relative to our licensed frame of reference; it deteriorated their performance.

There are two things to notice in these entries. First, despite a clear misconception about item and test difficulty, and a disregard for how estimated levels of the latent trait are independent from the measurement tool, David's statements aim for fairness in the testing event. Fair assessment of test taker ability, his argument goes, is when the test is exactly at the intended level of difficulty. If this assumption does not hold, performance levels must be adjusted regardless of ability. Second, instead of claiming the points as his view, David decided to present the idea from the vantage point of the examination office using first person plural "us" and "our".

As a form of adjustment at the time, the office routinely calculated total score values, transformed these onto a 0-100 scale, and compared these results with the ability logit values after similar transformations. More often than not items were excluded from the analysis for poor performance, when the corrected raw score was converted in a similar manner. In Figure 2, I am providing such a comparison (N = 1701).

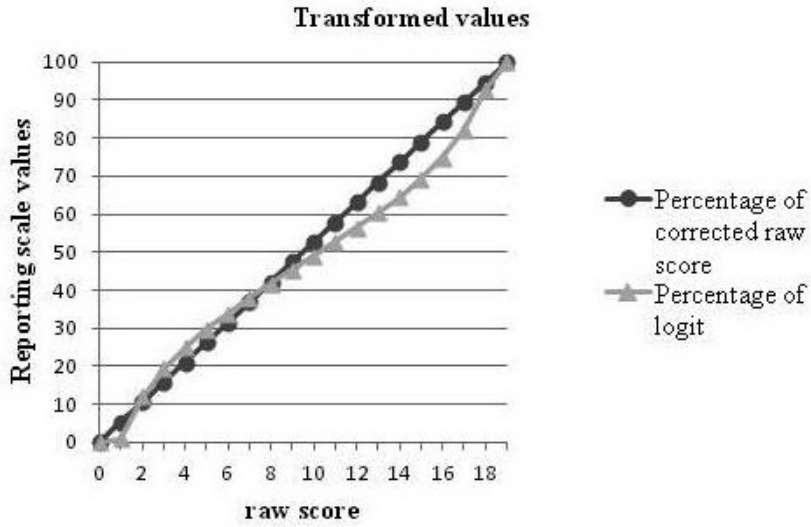

Figure 2: Transformed score and logit values on a reading test paper

Figure 2 shows the results on a reading test. This part of the examination normally consists of 20 items, but in this session a multiple choice item had weak item–test correlation and consequently, it was excluded. The dots along the straight line represent the transformed raw scores after such a correction was implemented. The wave with the triangles, in contrast, stands for the converted logit values. Between corrected raw scores 2 and 8, the logit percentage values are higher than the corrected raw score percentages, whereas the tendency is reversed as the score gets higher. This phenomenon was often referred to as "distortion" in our correspondence.

recorded	participant	text unit
June, 2011	David	2) IRT very often differentially corrects test scores between e.g. 65-80% and those between 30-50% ... Quite bluntly, we cannot represent or explain this. On the contrary, looking at the candidates between 59-61% in the large table, it is apparent that very often they would fail or pass because of this distortion.

The supremacy of the raw score is further declared in these sentences:

recorded	participant	text unit
June, 2011	David	The point is that we are not in the least interested in candidate ability (as estimated by IRT) as the kind of information that would serve as a basis for any further calculation or that results in anything. For us, that is given by the authentic result.

Clearly, the theoretical complexities behind IRT remain blurred for David. He puts the cart before the horse when he claims that the latent trait is not the variable of interest, and fails to see how ability manifests itself in total score values. However, apart from difficulty and ability, the observed score contains systematic and random measurement error as undifferentiated. Strict adherence to the raw score, therefore, can serve the purpose of ease of explanation and transparency, but undermines measurement precision.

Discussion

The findings based on the three-year-long collaborative work were outlined on two levels: a personal, and an institutional one. On a personal level, saving face proved to be essential for my participants. They were all high-ranking officials in a prestigious examination office. As a result of it, they identified themselves with what they believed to be a vital element of the position: professional expertise. They had responsible jobs, were respected as unique, and regarded their professional status as the cumulative achievement of long years' of successful work as teachers of English. An outsider to their world, I as an external consultant threatened to disturb their standing with statistics that was not

transparent enough and a vernacular that they were largely unfamiliar with. As a reaction to critical and detailed item and test analysis, they started to challenge generally accepted means and models of measurement together with its fundamental concepts and internationally renowned experts in favour of idiosyncratic methods, interpretations, and quintessentially personal conceptions. Betty's multiple choice item development skill was an excellent case in point. Despite the uncovered error in her MCQ item writing procedure, the repeated failure of her items to meet prescribed statistical expectations, and the corollary effect of inflating overall test reliability, Betty only became more stubbornly convinced in her view that the items were still good.

David, by contrast and particularly in his later comments, relied more heavily on the examination office as an official body when warding off responsibility. His letters turned from the personal to the official in tone and wording, as indicated by his frequent use of "us". He also became increasingly direct in terms of what he thought the task of the exam office was, even though these ideas were often in sharp contrast with standard measurement practice. His principal motivation was ease of interpretation for when test takers demanded explanations. Since basic arithmetic provided the means for enhanced transparency, David reverted to simple calculations and identified the possibly and preferably unaltered raw score as the ultimate truth.

Initially, all four PEs showed considerable interest in our work. Compared with the Tucker-Angoff method (Angoff, 1971; Council of Europe, 2009, pp. 61-66) or the previously applied Body of Work method (Council of Europe, 2009, pp. 70-73; Kingston et al, 2001), OIBs were a transparent, user-friendly means of standard setting. Still, it was meant to be used for deciding on a cut score, and making such a decision entailed taking the responsibility for expert judgement. Once again, it was this responsibility that my participants were reluctant to shoulder.

On an institutional level, two opposing forces ran counter to each other. On the one hand, IRT is a powerful measurement theory whose application imparts a special competence to an exam office. It is the preferred, modern approach to latent trait estimation. One the other hand, in a profit-driven environment all business enterprises have to invest heavily in marketing. While IRT can serve corporate interest by gaining international acknowledgement among testing organisations, its complexities can undermine its use if it keeps potential candidates away.

Conclusion

The rules and regulations of language testing in Hungary are stated in Government Decree 137/2008 (V.16.), and are supplemented by Ministry of Education Decrees 26/2000 (VIII.31.) and 30/1999 (VII.21.), along with internal regulations at exam offices, as well as the Accreditation manual (Educational Authority, 2010). These documents specify the staff requirements necessary for the efficient operation of an examination office. The positions and number of employees change according to languages, but one area that has remained largely uncovered is statistical and psychometric personnel. As there is no regulation forcing examination boards to employ professionals in measurement, their job tends to be done by administrative officers or self-proclaimed experts.

The participants in my study were all respected PEs, who had proven their specialist knowledge in language teaching and running a board of foreign language examinations. Besides, their skills in language testing were rooted in practice rather than professional training. Their lack of education in measurement soon manifested itself as an obstacle to understand and accept principles that form the foundation of the trade. The main conclusion of my research is that such focused training needs to be offered from independent organisations before an examination office is operative in order for language certification to be meaningful for all the stakeholders.

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Learning Another Language and Motivation to Continue Learning English: Competition or Synergy?

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Europeans and multilingualism

Individual multilingualism, the individual ability to use more than one language (European Commission 2005, Council of Europe 2001, Komorowska 2010), is on the rise in Europe. An increasing number of individuals decide upon learning languages in addition to their mother tongue. The most prominent profile of 'a multilingual European' depicted in a study *Multilingualism: Between policy: objectives and implementation* (European Parliament 2008, p. 6) concerns an individual who is 'young, well-educated or still studying, born in a country other than the country of residence, who uses foreign languages for professional reasons and is motivated to learn.'

Nevertheless, irrespective of the effort put into the promotion of linguistic diversity on a pan-European level, English is still the most widely spoken foreign language in the EU (38%, according to the European Com-mission – Eurobarometer, 2006). Interestingly, as many as 77% of Europeans believe it should be the first foreign language their children learn (European Commission - Eurobarometer, 2006) and 94.6% of European pupils in upper secondary education indeed take it up (Eurostat, 2009). In Croatia, English is the most popular foreign language taught and 85-90 % of children take it from grade one of formal education (Medved Krajnović & Letica, 2009). Moreover, Croatian laws stipulate that all students not learning English as their first foreign language have to take it from grade 4 (age 10) as a second foreign language. Since it plays an important role in globalised labour markets (Klein, 2007; Bracht et al., 2006), English is becoming a basic skill (Graddol, 2006), but, due to its commonness, it is the competence in other languages that gives the speaker a comparative advantage and prestige (Wilton, 2009); consequently,

many learners opt for further linguistic diversification of their repertoire. With regard to the growing popularity of English in education and its power as a lingua franca (Komorowska, 2006), Hoffmann (2000) coined the concept of 'Multilingualism with English' and, as argued by Jessner (2006, p. 134):

> English has to take on tasks which any other first foreign language in its role as guiding language would have to. It has to be conceptualized as a basis for further language learning, it must – by definition and by all means – be responsible for never losing sight of other languages, of linguistic diversity and of multilingualism.

Motivational and attitudinal basis for language learning

Language attitudes and motivation play a vital role in the language learning process (Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Mihaljević Djigunović, 1998; Komorowska, 2007; Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 2010). Motivation 'is a key, if not the key, to successful language learning…. It is closely related to personal emotional involvement' (European Commission, 2007, pp. 9-10) and determines the amount of energy an individual is ready to put in his/her language learning (Dewaele, 2007, p. 107). According to Komorowska, it should be 'seen as based on learners' values as well as the resulting attitudes and beliefs. It also depends on their expectations vis-à-vis outcomes, i.e. their own perspective on the feasibility of what they want to achieve' (2007, p. 9).

Motivation research has identified a number of widely-recognized generalized components of L2 learning motivation: integrativeness, instrumentality, attitudes towards L2 speakers/community, linguistic self-confidence, cultural interest, milieu and vitality of L2 community. When it comes to attitudes to English and the motivation to learn it, its status as a global lingua franca has had a significant impact on these motivational dimensions: some of them have become more prominent while others have been modified or played down (for a review see Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006). Firstly, the influential concept of classic integrativeness (Gardner, 1985) has been replaced by the interest in communication with foreigners, willingness to learn about other cultures and the desire to access information globally. Linguistic globalization has also led to the recognition of instrumental motives, which were, in the case of English, found to overlap with integrative motives (Dörnyei, 1990; Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Mihaljević Djigunović, 1998; Irie, 2003; Yashima 2000; Lamb, 2004). As part of these developments, attitudes toward native speakers of English lost their impact and the symbolic, metaphorical value of the language itself became more important (Dörnyei, 1990). It is these days hardly necessary to 'elicit or incite' motivation to learn English (European Commission, 2007), since increasing numbers of people 'study it as an obvious and self-evident component of education' (Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006, p. 89). Consequently, many EFL environments are characterized by the vague, but pressing sense of need to learn English. This is a consequence of the wide-spread social belief that

everybody has to learn English and such vaguely expressed goals fail to support a serious learning effort (Yashima, 2000; Lamb, 2004). Undoubtedly, globalization processes have significantly changed the motivational basis to learn English. Moreover, the same processes and the growing need for competitiveness are presently inducing many learners to learn other languages besides English. Hence, it is interesting to investigate whether the development of skills in other languages is concurrent with a specific motivational basis for learning English. Furthermore, in line with the recommendations of the HLGM, apart from emphasizing 'eliciting or initiating motivation,' a great importance needs to be attached to 'sustaining motivation', encouraging learners to reach advanced levels of proficiency in their languages (European Commission 2007).

Definition of multilingualism and plurilingualism

Individual multilingualism has been the long-standing objective of the European Union (European Commission, 1995, 2005, 2008). European citizens are expected to develop 'practical skills in at least two languages in addition to his or her mother tongue' (European Commission, 2005, p. 4). This, however, does not mean developing ideal or equal competence in each language but rather a mental store with a range from partial to full competences, according to individual needs (European Commission, 2007). This important turn in language education, which also encompasses the positive attitude to the acquisition of any additional language to any degree by treating it in terms of success on the learner's part rather than failure to reach native-like competence, increases individual motivation to language learning in general and encourages learners to have more confidence in their abilities (Cybulska, 2010). In the language policy of the Council of Europe, plurilingualism is the counterpart of the EU's individual multilingualism and is conceptualized as strictly connected to pluriculturalism, for 'Language is not only a major aspect of culture, but also a means of access to cultural manifestations' (2001, p. 6). A plurilingual, pluricultural individual

> does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 4).

Wishing to emphasize the connection between language and identity (Todeva & Cenoz, 2009, p. 18), Aronin and Ó Laoire (2004) have developed the term 'multilinguality' which refers not only to individual 'linguistic abilities, potential to gain knowledge, self-image as a language-learner', but also to 'career and social stratification choices and opportunities, language and milieu, and educational and upbringing awareness, as well as the range of accompanying and pervading emotions, affective states, attitudinal preferences and, subsequent to this, social, family and career activities and lifestyles' (Aronin & Ó Laoire, 2004, pp. 18-19).

Models of multilingualism and multiple language learning

Among the various models devoted to multilingualism that have hitherto been developed (cf. Jessner, 2008; Hufeisen, 2004), the factor model constructed by Hufeisen and Marx (2007) portrays the richness of multilingual acquisition, by illustrating that the process of learning L1, L2, L3, Lx is unique as it is affected by a novel, specific set and configuration of individual factors, not restricted to linguistic factors only (e. g., typological distance between languages). According to the model, 'the largest qualitative jump in this systematic-dynamic learning process occurs between the learning of the first (L2) and the second foreign language (L3)' (Hufeisen, 2004, p. 8). Accordingly, the process of learning an L3 (Hufeisen & Marx, 2007, p. 314) will comprise: *neuropshysiological factors*, e. g., general language acquisition capability or age; *learner external factors*, e. g., learning environment(s), type and amount of input or L1 learning tradition; *affective factors*, e. g., motivation, anxiety or assessment of own language proficiency; *cognitive factors*, e. g., language awareness, learning awareness or learning strategies; *foreign language specific factors*, e. g., individual foreign language learning experiences, strategies, or interlanguages; *linguistic factors*: L1, L2.

The second model discussed herein is by Jessner's (1997), Herdina and Jessner's (2002) dynamic model of multilingualism (DMM), offering an extensive holistic account of dynamism inherent to the development of multilingual competence (Hufeisen & Jessner 2009, p. 121); a dynamic multilingual system can be portrayed through the following features *non-linearity*: language learning may slow down or accelerate (Gabryś-Barker 2005:31); *stability*: the stability of language systems depends on e. g. the number of languages or age, the level of proficiency attained but, most importantly, the individual investment of energy and time into the maintenance of a given language system – otherwise, the system or systems face gradual attrition; this process, however, may be *reversible* (Herdina & Jessner 2002:92); *interdependence*: individual language systems interact and are mutually conditioned; they are not autonomous (Gabryś-Barker, 2005, p. 32; Hufeisen & Jessner, 2009); *complexity:* refers to the numerous and changeable factors involved in the development of language systems and the interaction of the systems (Herdina and Jessner 2002:72, 26); 'the multilingual system is not the product of adding two or more language systems but a complex system with its own parameters' (Jessner, 2003, p. 48); *change of quality*: 'as the whole psycholinguistic system adapts to meet new psychological and social requirements, it also changes its nature' which leads to the acquisition of new skills (Herdina & Jessner, 2002, p. 129), such as language learning skills, language maintenance skills, language management skills; moreover, the acquisition of an additional language raises metalinguistic awareness (Herdina & Jessner, 2002, p. 129, Marx & Hufesein, 2004, p. 143).

As explicated in the DMM, the individual factors that influence one's multilingual system include (Herdina & Jessner, 2002, pp. 138-140): (*Multi)-language aptitude/metalinguistic abilities; language acquisition progress* (negative or positive); *motivation* which determines general language effort invested not only

in the acquisition of a particular language system but also its maintenance; *perceived language competence,* according to which 'the more the speaker is perceived to meet his/her communicative needs the smaller the effort s/he is going to put into language acquisition' (Herdina & Jessner, 2002, p. 139); *self-esteem/self-confidence:* refers to an individual 'who is not anxious when using English, has prior experience in doing so, and is self-assured with respect to his or her own English proficiency' (Clement, Smythe & Gardner, 1980, p. 298 in Herdina & Jessner, 2002, p. 139); *anxiety*: not exclusively related to performance but also to learning.

Research

In order to investigate whether the development of skills in other languages is related to a specific motivational basis for learning English, we conducted a quantitative study of Croatian business students' attitudes to English and motivation to continue learning it.

Participants

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb. Since the Faculty places considerable emphasis on foreign language skills, all students are required to attend two compulsory courses of Business English or Business German in the first year (two semesters, 60 contact hours and 5 ECTS per semester). Moreover, the Faculty's curriculum recognizes the benefits of plurilingualism for business people and students can also take elective courses of German, Italian, French and Spanish. Finally, the Faculty offers a considerable number of economics and business courses in English as part of the Economics and Business International Programme (EBIP) and Bachelor Degree in Business (BDIB).

Our convenience sample included 218 third- and fourth-year students (average age: 21) who had been learning English as their first foreign language and, according to the program entry requirements, should have acquired the B2/C1 level of English language competence as defined by the CEFR. The sample was chosen to present two comparable groups of language learners: students who had attended only English courses (English-only group) and students who had decided to attend at least one course of German, Italian, French or Spanish (English+ group). Out of 109 members of the English-only group 37 were males and 72 females, which accurately reflects the male / female ratio at the Faculty (1M:2F). Interestingly, the English+ group included a higher proportion of females: 18 males vs. 91 females (1M:5F).

Data collection and analysis

The respondents were surveyed with a questionnaire designed by Kabalin Borenić (in press) to investigate students' attitudes toward global English, their EFL motivation structure and invested effort. The questionnaire also collected biological (sex, age) and academic information (length of English study, language courses enrolled at the Faculty, grade obtained in Business English 1 course, overall academic success and EBIP/BDIB attendance). Principal components analysis of the data was used to identify attitudes to English and types of motivation present in the sample. Relations between variables were established using correlation analysis. The sample was divided into English+ and English-only groups and compared with respect to their attitudes to English, structure of EFL motivation, gender, the length of English study, Business English 1 grades, overall academic success and EBIP/BDIB attendance. Comparisons between the two groups were made using unrelated t-tests. The obtained results are finally discussed in view of the presented models of multilingualism and multiple language learning.

Results and discussion

The principal components analysis revealed four distinct attitudes toward English and four types of motivation. When it comes to comparing the English-only with the English+ group, the results of statistical analysis presented in tables 1 and 2 reveal that there are several statistically significant differences between the two groups.

The comparison of data on gender and age reveals that there are no differences in terms of students' age (Table 2) but that the English+ group includes more females (Table 1). Furthermore, the English+ group started learning English earlier, which means that due to e.g. learner external factors such as greater amount of input (cf. factor model), they might have built a stronger basis for their future language learning. Moreover, greater numbers of these students enrolled in professional courses delivered in English, which proves their willingness to engage in a richer selection of communicative activities, to take up new tasks in order to strengthen their linguistic skills or to build up their confidence in English; this also shows their eagerness to use English for more specific purposes and, in consequence, reveals their being more goal-oriented. As underlined by the HLGM (European Commission 2007), CLIL classes, which the professional courses represent, constitute a more effective way of language learning; this is also corroborated in our study as – regarding the academic success – the English+ group outperforms the English-only group; namely, the English+ group has significantly higher grades for Business English 1 and a higher rate of overall academic success (Table 2). This finding may also be related to the widely acknowledged fact that language learning fosters cognitive abilities (Peal & Lambert, 1962; Paradowski, 2008; the factor model) and changes the quality of a learner's psycholinguistic system (cf. the DMM), which

in turn affects academic outcome. Due to learning other languages, the English+ students may be more efficient learners as they have greater metalinguistic awareness (Jessner, 2006), better developed transversal/transferable competences (Council of Europe 2001), as well as a range of strategic skills related to language learning, language maintenance or language management to draw upon (the DMM, the factor model).

Table 1: Comparison of English+ and English-only groups according to gender and EBIP / BDIB attendance

	Gender		Total	Programme		Total
	Male	Female		EFZG	EBiP	
English only	37	72	109	100	9	109
English +	18	91	109	86	23	109
Total	55	163	218	196	32	218

The two groups do not differ significantly in terms of attitudes toward English (Table 2). Briefly, the English+ and English-only groups share a strong belief that English is a necessary lingua franca, a moderately positive attitude to culturally neutral varieties and a moderately tolerant view to mixing British and American English. The only point of difference is that the English+ group tends to see English as even less of a threat to the Croatian language and culture; namely, the English+ group had a significantly lower result for AF1 as defined by sentences including *English is a threat to my native culture*; and *English is a threat to my mother tongue*. In the light of the definition and goals of plurilingualism/pluriculturalism or intercultural communicative competence, we might argue that in the process of both linguistic and cultural expansions of their repertoire, learners become more curious about other cultures and more open-minded (Byram 1997). The English+ group may thus be more inclined to relativise their own cultural value-system than the English-only group. Also, the recent studies of Mihaljević Djigunović (in press) as well as of Cybulska and Kabalin Borenić (2011) confirmed that the more foreign languages the learners knew, the more positive their attitudes to languages were.

Regarding the scores for different types of motivation (Table 2), there were no significant differences for classic integrative motivation (MF1) and instrumental-communicative motivation (MF2). The scores for classic integrative motivation were rather low, whereas the scores for instrumental-communicative motivation were very high in both groups. The fact that there are no significant differences between the two groups in terms of scores for classic integrative motivation and instrumental-communicative motivation confirms the findings from EFL motivation research. First, the desire to integrate in the community of native speakers is waning globally (eg. Yashima, 2002; Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006; Mihaljević Djigunović, 1998) and learners' personal characteristics (e.g. gender, length of English study, language grades, overall academic success and interests) play no role in the trend. Second, high levels of instrumental-communicative motivation have been recorded in many

different contexts (Mihaljević Djigunović, 1998; Mihaljević Djigunović, in press; Kaylani, 1998; McClelland, 2000; McGuire, 2000; Yashima, 2000; Kimura et al., 2001; Lamb, 2004; Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006). Our data reveal that social beliefs and pressures exert an equally powerful influence on both types of learners.

The English+ group, however, had significantly higher levels of self-confidence deriving from parents' and personal use of English. In relation to the motivation factor named self-confidence (MF4) it is interesting to mention two things. The statements loading on MF4 (*My parents speak English well*; *I am certain I can learn English well*; *I often watch satellite programmes in English*; *I often read professional literature in English*) bear a resemblance to the concept of self-confidence used in the DMM (Herdina & Jessner, 2002, p. 139). Moreover, a study conducted in a more general sample of Croatian population revealed that a significant correlation exists between attitudes and the frequency of using foreign languages, especially in private life (Mihaljević Djigunović, in press). Thus, significantly higher levels of self-confidence in the English+ group may be seen as evidence that self-confidence is related to the growth of multilingual/plurilingual competence.

Furthermore, the English+ group was less inclined to de-prioritize learning English in a hierarchy of goals that included learning both professional content and other languages. Namely, the MF3 comprises items that refer to a number of priorities other than learning English: *I'd rather be learning something more useful than English*; *English is not an important academic subject*; and *I'd rather be learning another foreign language*. Surprisingly, it is students who have not taken up another language that think they would rather learn another language than English. It seems that learning other languages does not negatively impact the desire to learn English. Quite the contrary, the students from our study who have the ambition to learn additional languages value languages in general and are aware of the beneficial effect of learning them.

Regarding the effort variable measured in the research, as can be expected, the English+ group invested significantly more effort in learning English, which is necessary not only to maintain this language on the satisfactory level in their mental store but also to constantly enhance it (cf. the DMM).

Finally, the English+ group had significantly higher results for measures that have been found (Kabalin Borenić, in preparation) to correlate positively with effort and/or learning outcome: lower estimate of English as a threat, self confidence and prioritising English in a hierarchy of current goals.

Table 2: Comparison of English+ and English-only groups according to attitudes, structure of motivation, length of learning English, grade received in BE1 and overall academic success.

		N	M	SD	t	df	Sig.
Age	E only	109	20.91	0.96	0.51	216	.609
	E +	109	20.84	0.89			
Length of learning	E only	108	11.45	3.03	-2.36	215	.019
	E +	109	12.35	2.52			
BE1 grade	E only	102	3.62	0.91	-2.37	202	.019
	E +	102	3.94	1.03			
Academic success	E only	108	3.50	0.55	-3.51	215	.001
	E +	109	3.77	0.90			
AF1 - English a threat	E only	109	1.92	0.90	2.50	216	.013
	E +	109	1.64	0.73			
AF2 - English a must	E only	107	3.55	0.64	-1.24	213	.216
	E +	108	3.66	0.67			
AF3 - Neutral variety best	E only	109	3.22	0.71	-0.34	216	.731
	E +	108	3.26	0.77			
AF4 - Mixing O.K.	E only	108	3.20	1.02	-0.47	214	.640
	E +	108	3.13	1.02			
MF1 - Integrative	E only	107	2.80	0.60	-1.64	209	.102
	E +	104	2.94	0.61			
MF2- Instrumental	E only	106	4.32	0.37	-0.32	212	.750
	E +	106	4.34	0.41			
MF3 - Demotivator	E only	107	2.02	0.49	-2.08	211	.039
	E +	109	1.88	0.49			
MF4 - Self-confidence	E only	107	3.00	0.76	-2.42	214	.016
	E +	108	3.26	0.78			
Effort	E only	108	3.01	0.65	-3.12	215	.002
	E +	109	3.30	0.72			

Conclusion

As has been evidenced in our research, motivation to continue learning English does not seem to be diminished if the learner takes up another language. Our study shows that the results for globally present aspects of motivation to learn English are equal in both English+ and English-only group. Furthermore, the English+ group has significantly better results for motivational characteristics which correlate with effort and learning outcome, the lower estimate of English as a threat, higher self-confidence, and prioritizing English in a hierarchy of current goals. There seems to be no competition for motivational resources when it comes to both learning English and choosing English vis-à-vis other languages.

The models of multilingualism and multiple language learning chosen as the basis for our analysis helped us explain in greater depth the affective characteristics of our sample; the models offered the necessary framework by way of including the features especially important in our study as well as provided a window on the specific differential learner/learning characteristics between bilinguals and multilinguals in terms of their approach to English.

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