Second Language Learning and Teaching

Mirosław Pawlak
Ewa Waniek-Klimczak *Editors*

Issues in Teaching, Learning and Testing Speaking in a Second Language

Springer

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This book is a tribute to Dave Willis whose work provided an inspiration for many of the contributors to the present volume.

Preface

No matter how many books are published dealing with issues related to teaching, learning and testing speaking in a second or foreign language, there will always be a demand for them for the simple reason that developing the ability to successfully get messages across and interact in the target language constitutes one of the greatest challenges to learners and teachers. The main reason for this is that speaking is an extremely complex, multifaceted skill, adept use of which requires sufficient mastery of linguistic resources in terms of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, awareness of pragmatic conventions, familiarity with culture-specific rules of discourse, the capacity for managing the conversation, or the ability to tackle problems which may arise in interaction through the use of various communication strategies, to name but a few. To make matters even more complicated, such systemic knowledge has to be employed in real time, often even in a split second, in situations when the limited attentional resources are at a premium as they have to be simultaneously devoted not only to formulating the communicative intention, choosing the necessary linguistic resources and producing the actual messages, but also to monitoring all the stages of this process, appraising of the context in which interaction takes place, drawing upon the requisite content knowledge, planning what to say next, and simply listening to the interlocutor. Obviously, for successful communication to occur, it is of vital importance that all of these take place to a large extent automatically, which means that speakers should in the main fall back on their implicit rather than explicit second language knowledge, which clearly poses a formidable challenge for language learners, not least because, due to deficiencies in communicative competence, they often have to resort to compensatory mechanisms. In view of these difficulties, it is not an easy task to develop speaking skills in the language classroom in such a way that would ensure striking a balance between fluency and accuracy, preparing learners for the unpredictable contexts in which they will have to communicate, and at the same time taking account of the multitude of individual variables which can impact the effectiveness of instructional procedures. Equally difficult is the issue of evaluating these skills because it is clear that such assessment should be based on regularly

administered oral interviews and be multidimensional, a requirement that is difficult, if not impossible, to meet in most classrooms for logistical reasons.

The present volume addresses many of these issues by taking theoretical considerations and research findings as a point of reference for offering feasible pedagogical proposals which can contribute to more effective teaching, learning and testing of speaking skills in a variety of instructional contexts. It is also a tribute to the late Dave Willis, whose contribution to the field of speaking instruction can hardly be overestimated and whose work on the relationship between grammar and lexis, the lexical syllabus or task-based instruction, to name but a few of his fields of interest, has provided an inspiration for many of the contributors. The book has been divided into three parts, each bringing together papers reflective of its leading theme, ordered according to the specific topics they touch upon. Part I, *Mediating Between Theory, Research and Classroom Practice*, includes five papers whose authors strive to forge the so-much-needed links between theory, research and pedagogy in such areas as enhancing spontaneity in conversation, intercultural communication, the role of oral discourse, the use of hedging devices and applications of identity negotiation theory. Part II, entitled *Empirical Investigations of Factors Influencing Speaking Skills*, focuses on the mediating variables which can affect speaking skills and thus have a bearing on the ways they should be taught, learned and tested. It brings together six empirical studies dealing with willingness to communicate, anxiety, communication strategies, the use of tonal diacritic marking and the role of silence. Finally, Part III, *Teaching and Assessing Speaking Skills*, is devoted to different techniques that can be used for teaching and testing speaking, with five contributions addressing such issues as using videoconferencing and storybooks in the process of instruction, characteristics of interactions in business meetings, designing a curriculum for teaching and evaluating speaking skills at an advanced level, and encouraging self-assessment. We are convinced that thanks to the breadth of the topics covered, the inclusion of original research reports as well as the focus on reconciling theory, research and classroom practice, this edited collection will be of interest to scholars, providing them with an impulse for future empirical investigations, graduate and postgraduate students, searching for appropriate topics for their theses, and classroom teachers, seeking more effective ways in which speaking skills be taught, learned and tested in their classrooms.

Mirosław Pawlak
Ewa Waniek-Klimczak

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Dave Willis has worked as a teacher and teacher trainer in Ghana, Cyprus, Iran and Singapore, as well as the UK. He was a British Council Officer for almost twenty years, before moving to the Centre for English Language Studies at the University of Birmingham, where he taught on TEFL/TESOL MA programs. He has published widely on discourse analysis, ELT methodology and language description for language teaching. He was author, with Jane Willis, of *The Collins Cobuild English course*, and co-edited with her *Challenge and change in language teaching* (Heinemann, 1996). He is author of *The lexical syllabus* (Collins Cobuild, 1990) and co-author, with Ramesh Krishnamurthy, of *The Cobuild students' grammar* and, with John Wright, of *The Cobuild basic grammar*. He is twice winner of the English-Speaking Union's Duke of Edinburgh Prize for ELT publications. His latest books are *Rules, patterns and words: Grammar and lexis in English language teaching* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) and *Doing task-based teaching* (Oxford University Press, 2007), co-authored with Jane Willis.

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Part I
Mediating Between Theory, Research and Classroom Practice

Conversational English: Teaching Spontaneity

Dave Willis

Abstract We need to make learners aware of the specific features of conversational English which make it different from standard pedagogic descriptions of the language. The problem is that many of these differences arise from the fact that conversational English is necessarily spontaneous. In conversation we have ways of holding the floor to allow us to pause for a moment. We constantly use checking devices to monitor the development of the discourse. We use appropriately 'vague language' when we do not have the time, the language or the wish for greater precision. Unfortunately there is a contradiction in the notion of teaching spontaneity. In this paper I will argue we need to do two things:

- we need to raise learners' awareness of the nature of conversational language and their understanding of why it is the way it is;
- we need a task-based methodology which will reproduce in the classroom the need for spontaneous production of language for a genuine communicative purpose.

Traditional methodologies which rely on isolating and practising features of grammar, lexis and pronunciation require learners to focus consciously on what they are doing—the very reverse of spontaneous production. And traditional methodologies tend to be prescriptive in a way that inhibits spontaneity. Perhaps this goes some way to explaining why learners have such difficulty in moving from the classroom environment to using language freely outside the classroom.

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1 Introduction

Speech comes before writing. Infants begin by acquiring or creating dialogue—an overtly interactive system (Halliday 1975). They first learn to make demands so that their basic needs are met. Then they learn to socialise, to integrate with the society around them. Monologue comes later. We learn to tell stories, and to give extended and detailed instructions. And monologue eventually leads to writing. But the language that we learn naturally is the spoken language and that begins with spoken interaction.

Learning to write is a struggle. We not only have to learn a script and learn how it relates to spoken forms. We have to learn quite different ways of expressing ourselves. We have to learn a new grammar. And once we learn to write, we soon become over-educated and over-literate. We began to see written language as the norm. There is a good reason for this. The written language is static. It is there on the page available to be examined and analysed.

So our descriptions are descriptions of the written language. With one or two honourable exceptions, such as Brazil (1995) and Sinclair and Maurenen (2006), linguists tend to describe spoken language in terms of the written language. Written English is taken as the norm and spoken language as some kind of aberration. An unfortunate consequence of this is that language teachers find themselves trying to teach people to speak written English—I have done this myself as I will relate later on.

One of the difficulties with teaching and learning conversation is that learners have little idea what spontaneous spoken language looks like—or should I say sounds like. Unfortunately the same is often true of teachers. Even more unfortunately it is often true of applied linguists. At a recent conference, I attended a presentation by two people who were involved in the design of a language teaching program. The aim of the program was to enable teachers whose first language was Arabic to teach science and mathematics through the medium of English. The program was carefully thought out and structured. But one thing disturbed me. I did not know where the designers got their model of classroom language. As part of one activity students were given a number of classroom utterances and were asked to assign a function to them—were they a part of the social framework which surrounded the lesson ('Good morning everyone. It's nice to see you all')—or did they contribute to classroom management ('Okay I want you to open your books at page 29')—or were they instructional language giving the learners information about science and maths—('What is the square root of 64?'). This seemed to me to be a good way of raising awareness of the variety of language used in the classroom. One of the utterances was this:

> Use a magnet and put a tick in here if the object is magnetic, or here if it is not.

Now this is clearly meant to be the language of instruction, but I have doubts as to whether this was recorded in a classroom and indeed whether this is actually the kind of thing teachers say. And I have very serious doubts as to whether it is the

kind of thing *good* teachers say. My guess is that good teachers would produce something much more like this:

> Okay, I want you to use the magnet and I want you to see if the object is magnetic, and then I want you to put a tick here if it's magnetic, and I want you to put a tick here if it's not. Okay. Have you got that? Right.

Here you have some of the features of spontaneous interaction—repetition and checking moves. This is much more the kind of thing that would be produced in real time and—more important—it is the kind of thing that would be readily processed in real time, the kind of thing learners will find easy to understand. It is the kind of language that good teachers use.

Now, what is the point of this little anecdote? Well, we had two people working at a high level, both with a sophisticated knowledge of teaching and of language. But the examples they were using were not real examples of classroom language, and showed little understanding of the way spoken language really works. If our aim is to teach conversation effectively, there are three basic conditions.

- We must have a clear idea of what conversation is like.
- We must communicate this to our students.
- We must bring into the classroom samples of language which bear a real resemblance to spontaneous spoken language.

So I would like to start by looking at a story[1] and outlining some of the features of the telling that are typical of spontaneous speech. I will then go on to ask why most of these features are ignored in pedagogic grammars and teaching procedures. I will suggest ways of making learners aware of spontaneous speech and encouraging them to speak with freedom and spontaneity.

2 Features of Spoken Interaction

Before we look at the story, let me tell you how it was recorded. Back in the 1980s my wife, Jane, and I were commissioned to write a series of coursebooks for Collins. It was to be a task-based course. Once we had decided on what we were going to ask learners to do in the classroom, we collected together a group of native speakers and asked them to carry out the same tasks in a recording studio. This gave us samples of spontaneous language for use in the classroom. First, learners could attempt to use the language for themselves to achieve a given outcome. Then, they could listen to accomplished speakers of the language doing the same thing. This story is one of the recordings we made for use in the classroom.

> CB: I don't particularly like heights. Erm. Heights, er, at the top of a mountain, or a hill, where it's possible to fall. Erm, the top of something like a lighthouse or something I don't

[1] For a more detailed analysis of this story see Willis (2003).

> mind, because there's a barrier around you. But heights where you think you may be able to fall.
>
> BB: Yeah. I was okay until I had a rather nasty experience about er, height. Until then I was okay. I could go anywhere. But er, I was er, on a lighthouse actually. We were being taken round it. We went up all the stairs and to the light, er, room. And then the chap says `Oh, come on. Right, we'll go out here.' I went through the door. And I was on this very very narrow little parapet…
>
> CB: Yeah.
>
> BB:… with a rail about—perhaps eighteen inches high…
>
> CB: Mm.
>
> BB:… and then a sheer drop of about a hundred feet or something. I was absolutely petrified. I've never been as scared like that before or since.

Let us look in detail at the first few lines:

> CB: I don't particularly like heights. Erm. Heights, er, at the top of a mountain, or a hill, where it's possible to fall. Erm, the top of something like a lighthouse or something I don't mind, because there's a barrier around you. But heights where you think you may be able to fall.

CB begins by announcing that he does not like heights. The rest of the turn is spent simply explaining and elaborating what he means by heights. Basically he takes over fifty words to say what could have been said in ten: 'I don't like heights where you are liable to fall'. Spoken language is wordy. Written language makes a virtue of brevity and precision, but spoken language is often wordy. This is not surprising—listeners need time to process the message. This wordiness affords them time.

There is a lot of repetition: the word 'heights', 'the top of', 'or something', 'possible to fall', able to fall'. The basic communicative technique is to add one piece of information to another so we have 'heights', then 'heights at the top of a mountain or a hill', then 'where it's possible to fall'. This is contrasted with 'the top of something like a lighthouse or something' and, finally, redefined as 'heights where you may be able to fall'.

What are the basic units of communication? The transcript is divided into four sentences in order to meet the conventions of the written form. But the second and fourth 'sentences' are not sentences according to traditional written grammar:

> Heights, er, at the top of a mountain, or a hill, where it's possible to fall.

and:

> But heights where you think you may be able to fall.

So this transcript does not really work as written language. An alternative would be to transcribe the whole speech as a single sentence. But this would not work too well either. The unit *sentence* does not readily match the units of informal speech.

There are examples of what is known, unfortunately, as *vague language*:

I don't particularly like heights. Erm. Heights, er, at the top of a mountain, or a hill, where it's possible to fall. Erm, the top of something like a lighthouse or something I don't mind.

The two 'erms' are interesting. They seem to mark units of some kind. In the transcript they correspond to sentence breaks. 'Ums' and 'ahs' and 'erms' in speech are not random. They seem to correspond in some way to the punctuation we use in written language.

What about this?

the top of something like a lighthouse or something I don't mind.

The structure here is topic—'the top of something like a lighthouse or something'—followed by comment—'I don't mind'. This differs from the unmarked SVO structure in written language ('I don't mind something like a lighthouse'.) The topic comment structure is very common in speech, but rare in writing.

Let us take a look at the rest of the story:

BB: Yeah. I was okay until I had a rather nasty experience about er, height. Until then I was okay. I could go anywhere. But er, I was er, on a lighthouse actually. We were being taken round it. We went up all the stairs and to the light, er, room. And then the chap says `Oh, come on. Right, we'll go out here.' I went through the door. And I was on this very very narrow little parapet…

CB: Yeah.

BB:… with a rail about—perhaps eighteen inches high…

CB: Mm.

BB:… and then a sheer drop of about a hundred feet or something. I was absolutely petrified. I've never been as scared like that before or since.

BB begins by acknowledging CB's contribution with a 'yeah'. And we have a 'Yeah' and an 'Mm' from CB to signal interest and understanding. These are a vital part of interaction. If you doubt that, try withholding them next time you are in a conversation…

There is another example of the additive nature of spoken language:

I was okay until I had a rather nasty experience about er, height. Until then I was okay. I could go anywhere.

We have the rephrasing 'I was okay until I had a rather nasty experience' in 'until then I was okay'. The phrase 'I was okay' is then paraphrased as 'I could go anywhere'.

The language is held together by coordinating conjunctions 'and', 'and then', 'but'. The only subordinator is 'until'.

Notice how BB handles the turn-taking. She announces that she is embarking on a story: 'I was okay until I had a nasty experience'. This is not a possible interruption point. It says: 'Listen to me. I am going to tell you about my experience I am going to take a long turn'. At the end she says:

I was absolutely petrified. I've never been as scared like that before or since.

This announces the end of the story → 'Okay, I've finished my story. It's your turn now'. We do not have record of CB's next turn, but almost certainly it begins with an evaluation of BB's story—something like: 'Wow, yeah, that must have been really scary'.

Let us go on to list some of the features of spontaneous spoken interaction.

1. Conversation appears to be untidy.
2. It is made up of variable units—certainly not simply sentences.
3. It is additive—often with topic-comment structure.
4. It is often repetitive.
5. It is often vague.
6. It is overtly interactive.
7. It includes pauses and place holders.
8. It makes extensive use of discourse markers.
9. Exchanges are often formulaic.
10. Some speech acts are governed by routines.
11. Conversation is creative.

Most of these features we have illustrated already. The others we will demonstrate later. The overriding thing about spontaneous speech is that it is often wordy and, partly as a consequence of this, it looks messy. We are very much conditioned by our acquaintance with written language, with its precise sentences neatly divided with capital letters and full stops, with its carefully weighted subordination and its stylised avoidance of repetition. The first time we look at a transcript of spontaneous speech our first reaction is—'Well I'm glad I don't speak like that'. This was certainly the reaction of my students at Birmingham university in their first year course on the description of spoken English. One of their first assignments was to record—with permission of course—an interaction involving themselves and their friends and then to transcribe a short section. They were surprised to find that even they, highly educated and literate with A star grades in their A level English examinations, did not speak in sentences and did not use complex sentences with a plethora of subordinate clauses and that their discourse was punctuated with 'erm', 'yeah', 'like', 'you know' and with constant rephrasing and repetition. It was a salutary experience.

So we need to ask why is conversation structured the way it is?

1. Conversation is produced spontaneously in real time.
2. It is purposeful.
3. It is processed in real time.
4. Both participants are present and have speaking rights.
5. Participants take joint responsibility for the discourse.

The fact that conversation is *produced spontaneously* in real time accounts for the repetition and the additive nature of the grammar. We need time to build up the message. And this also allows for the fact that conversation must be processed in real time. It builds in the kind of redundancy which affords listeners the time to process out message. Conversation is *purposeful* and is shaped by the purposes

which it fulfils. For example, when an interaction is information-rich it is characterised, as we shall see, by checking moves on both sides. The speaker checks to see that the message has been understood, and receivers offer feedback to make sure they have understood the message. Because both participants have *speaking rights* and take joint responsibility for the discourse, they have to have ways of handling turn-taking, of holding and surrendering the floor.

It is pertinent to ask how often learners are asked to operate under these conditions in the classroom? Most classrooms are teacher-dominated. The teacher controls the discourse and takes responsibility for it. When learners are given speaking rights, they often operate under constraints which require them to demonstrate their control of the first conditional or the passive voice or whatever. If learners are to develop conversational skills they need to be involved in the classroom. They need to use the language for a real purpose. This is the basis of the thinking behind task-based language teaching and learning (see Willis and Willis 2006).

3 Introducing Spoken Language

The first thing we need to do is give learners an idea of the important features of spoken language. How do we do this? A good way and an interesting way is to record and transcribe a sample of their own language. Ask them to identify examples of repetition or vague language. Then, have them look at a sample of spoken English and ask them to identify the same phenomena. Then, whenever they listen to spoken English, you have an opportunity to ask them to pick out one or more features either from the spoken form or from the transcript.

Another useful way of highlighting the features of spoken language is by asking learners to rewrite it in different ways. We might, for example, ask them to rewrite a speech like this:

> I don't particularly like heights. Erm. Heights, er, at the top of a mountain, or a hill, where it's possible to fall. Erm, the top of something like a lighthouse or something I don't mind, because there's a barrier around you. But heights where you think you may be able to fall.

in less than fifteen words:

> I don't like heights where I feel frightened that I might fall.

… or in exactly eleven words:

> I don't like heights when there is a danger of falling.
>
> I hate heights when there is a real danger of falling.
>
> Heights where I feel I might fall always really frighten me.

… or in as few words as possible:[2]

> I don't like heights where I might fall (8 words).
>
> I hate heights where I might fall (7 words).

Then ask them to identify the changes they have made. We will now look at some individual features of spoken language.

3.1 Spoken Language Is Additive

Here is another sample of spoken discourse:

> So, the busiest day I've had recently was last Monday when I had to teach. I taught in three different schools. So, on Monday morning I taught in one school from nine-thirty. Then I went home and on the way home I had to do a lot of food shopping. Then I had lunch. I just had time to have lunch. Then I went out again. I went to another school on the other side of London, where I taught from four to six. Then I had half an hour to get from that school to another school in the centre of London for six-thirty to eight-thirty. Then I got home and I went out for supper afterwards with friends. So that was quite a busy day.

This was recorded in the way I have described, as teaching material. Learners were asked to describe a really busy day they had experienced recently. We asked a fluent speaker of English, in this case a native speaker, to do the same task. And this is what he produced.

This is a very good example of the way spoken language is additive. We have a series of actions and events strung together with 'and', 'and', and 'and then':

> So, the busiest day I've had recently was last Monday when I had to teach. I taught in three different schools. So, on Monday morning I taught in one school from nine thirty. *THEN* I went home *AND* on the way home I had to do a lot of food shopping. *THEN* I had lunch. I just had time to have lunch. *THEN* I went out again. I went to another school on the other side of London, where I taught from four to six. *THEN* I had half an hour to get from that school to another school in the centre of London for six-thirty to eight-thirty. *THEN* I got home *AND* I went out for supper afterwards with friends. So that was quite a busy day.

The question is how we should teach learners to produce this kind of language. The answer is that we do not need to. They will do this quite naturally. But we must be careful not to teach them to produce unnatural language. I remember early in my career teaching picture composition. There was a series of pictures depicting an accident. A boy on a bicycle in a hurry sped into a main road. A car was forced to swerve and in doing so rammed into a motor cycle unseating the rider and throwing him across the road. The learners really got into this story:

> Boy with bike he go very fast. And er he not stop and er car see him and car turn so not hit him and car hit man on bike and man on bike he fall and very bad and…

[2] One conference participant suggested a four word version: *Hate heights. Might fall.*

Of course I was not prepared to accept this. I gradually coaxed them into producing orally something like this:

> One day a young boy was riding his bicycle very fast. Unfortunately he did not stop at a road junction. As a result a car which was approaching the junction was unable to stop. At the same time a man was approaching on a motor cycle…

and so on and so on. Without realising it, I was trying to teach my learners to speak written English. Something which is quite unnatural and very difficult to do. I should have accepted their original spoken version and then perhaps worked with them later on a written version, with its measured connectives—'as a result', 'at the same time' and so on. The learners' natural spoken response was the right one. My attempt to teach them to speak written English was mistaken. It set unreal standards which even the best students would be unable to maintain. The lesson to be taken from this is allow for naturalness and spontaneity in the classroom. Do not try to teach people to speak English which is appropriate only to the written form.

Another good example of the way spoken language is additive, taken from the CANCODE corpus, is illustrated here:

> His cousin in Beccles, her boyfriend, his parents bought him a Ford Cortina.

We can show learners how this works:

> Her neighbour's dog. → Her neighbour, his dog.

> His daughter's neighbour's dog. → His daughter, her neighbour, his dog.

And we can offer them other examples to work with:

> My cousin's wife →

> My cousin's wife's mother →

> My cousin's wife's mother's boss →

> My cousin's wife's mother's boss's brother →

An activity like this can be fun if we challenge learners to do it as a recall exercise. And there is also a more obvious grammatical spin-off—it is a fun way of focusing on possessive pronouns.

And it is not only possessive forms which behave in this way. I was recently involved in a conversation lamenting the way the traditional British pub is disappearing and being replaced by impersonal chains. One participant said this:

> The house we where we used to live, the house in Liverpool, the end of the street, the old pub, it's a Wetherspoon's now.

Another example:

> It's Rich Hall, that comic, you know, the American, we saw him at the Arts Centre last week.

Here again we might draw learners' attention to the features of spoken English by asking them to do a rewrite:

> There was a pub at the end of the street where we used to live in Liverpool, but it has become a Wetherspoon's.
>
> It's Rich Hall, the American comic we saw at the Arts Centre last week.

Again, we might go back to their own language and ask if that has similar additive devices.

3.2 Conversation is interactive

One of the things intermediate learners learn to do is give directions. Something like this:

> A: Can you tell me how to get to the post-office?
>
> B: Yes, of course. Go straight ahead for about fifty yards then turn right at the traffic lights and you'll see the church at the end of the street. Well, it's right opposite the church.

But that is not how people give directions. An exchange like this containing important information is likely to be something like this:

> A: Can you tell me how to get to the post-office?
>
> B: Yeah, sure. Do you know St. Martin's church?
>
> A: No, sorry. I'm not from round here.
>
> B: Okay, never mind. You see those traffic lights down there about fifty yards?
>
> A: Yeah.
>
> B: Right. Well you go to the lights and turn right.
>
> A: Turn right. Yeah.
>
> B: And you'll see the church at the end of the street.
>
> A: Okay.
>
> B: … and the post office is right opposite the church.
>
> A: Okay. That's, erm, that's right at the lights, then down the street opposite the church.
>
> B: That's it.
>
> A: Great. Thanks.

There are twelve turns here as opposed to the original three. There are several checking, monitoring and acknowledging moves. These are recurrent features of an interactive system. And they are very necessary features of a discourse in which the purpose is to transfer detailed information. A useful thing for learners to do is see

the short version and then listen to the long version. They might then be asked to recall checking, monitoring and acknowledging moves. Finally, they might be asked to rewrite the short version in a given number of turns—say twelve turns.

3.3 Conversation Is Evaluative

A consequence of the interactive nature of conversation is that it is often evaluative. We do not just listen to what others have to say, we engage with it in all kinds of ways. Very often we evaluate: 'That's great', 'Wow! That's amazing!', 'Good', 'Oh dear' and so on. We can offer learners frames:

A: Hey, I've just heard I've passed all my exams.

B: …

C: Poor old Jack. He's failed all his exams.

D: …

with possible completions:

All of them. That's awful.

That's great. Well done.

Oh dear. I'm sorry to hear that.

Yeah? Well I'm not surprised.

Oh, wonderful.

Oh, that's terrible.

and ask them to say which completion is appropriate to which dialogue. We may begin by doing this with a recording and a transcript, and then go on to ask learners to work simply from a recording.

3.4 Conversation Is 'Vague'

Conversation is vague. Of course this is not strictly true. Conversation is as explicit as it needs to be. Look at this example:

A: How far is it to Edinburgh?

B: I don't know. *About* a hundred miles *I suppose*.

A: A hundred miles. Mm. How long does it take to get there?

B: Well, a couple of hours *or so*. It depends on the traffic. Yeah—*not more than* a couple of hours.

A: What does it look like?

B: Well, it's *sort of* brown*ish*. It's got *a handle thing* on the side and it's *about* the same size as a small*ish* suitcase.

We can usefully ask learners to identify examples of vague language here. We can also do this on an ongoing basis. Almost all texts, both spoken and written, exhibit this feature of language.

3.5 Discourse Markers

When Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) did their analysis of classroom discourse, they identified what they called *boundary markers*. When a teacher is about to change topic or shift the direction of the discourse she says 'Right' or 'Okay' or 'Good'. These are very important signals. Speakers exchanging complex information often start a turn with 'So…', which means a summary is coming up. The other speaker is invited to listen carefully and comment. Conversation is marked in this way with signals which help listeners interpret what they hear—signals which provide clues as to what's coming next. We call these *discourse markers*. What about 'Well' as a discourse marker?

WELL

You often use 'well' to show you have heard a question and are considering your answer. You often do this if you are unable to answer a question directly:

A: Who's that?

B: Well, it's not the manager.

You use 'well' to correct something you have said:

He's nearly seventy. Well, he must be over sixty.

I'm going home now. Well, in a few minutes.

You begin a sentence with 'well' to add a comment or to introduce a story you want to tell.

You know Mary Brown? Well, she's got a new job.

I went to George's last night. Well, there was nobody there so…

These definitions are slightly adapted from the COBUILD dictionary. That is one way into discourse markers. Modern corpus based dictionaries are very good on discourse markers. Look up 'well' or 'so' or 'right' and you will find this kind of information. But another good way is through the first language. How does Polish do these things? What do Polish teachers say to mark a stage in the lesson? What is the Polish equivalent of 'Well'? Discuss this with learners in class. Ask them to listen out for these things and report back next lesson.

3.6 Conversation Is Formulaic

Conversation is often formulaic. We have socially sanctioned ways of doing things. In English, for example, there is a one-move exchange with an optional response. So if I complete some minimal transaction, let us say I buy a newspaper, I will say 'Thanks' and that may be an end to it. If I do someone a big favour and they say 'Thanks' I would probably acknowledge with 'No, that's fine' or something like that. In Italian, however, the response 'Prego' is always required—even for a very small transaction. So different languages have different conventions governing different transactions.

We saw another example earlier. A storytelling turn usually begins with an identifiable phrase: 'I had an interesting experience…' or 'A funny thing happened to me…'. Moves like these announce the speaker's intention to take a long turn. At the end of the turn, they sign off with something like 'So that was a really frightening experience' or 'Yes, so I'll always remember that', meaning 'Thank you for listening. I have finished my long turn. The floor is open'. We need to highlight these conversational conventions in English and ask learners to compare them with conventions in their own language.

3.7 Conversation Is Creative

Last week we were visiting a place that I knew very well, near the village where I was born in the north east of England. We were planning a walk and my wife, Jane, was looking at a map. There was a cave marked *Jack's Scar Cave*. 'What's it like?', she asked. This was my reply:

> It's not a cave cave like you walk around it's a cave cave like a pothole.

Now there is no such thing as a 'cave cave' as far as I know. And purists might decry the utterance 'It's not a cave cave like you walk around' as ungrammatical. But it did what I wanted in the circumstances. Most people's idea of a cave is a big open space. When I said 'It's not a cave cave', I was saying 'It's not like your traditional notion of a cave' and I elaborated this by saying 'like you walk around'. Then I went on to say 'It's a cave cave like a pothole'. I suppose strictly speaking there is a contradiction here. With the second 'cave cave' implying again a traditional notion of 'caveness', I suppose the repetition is a sort of mini-joke. Then I went on to say 'like a pothole'. Potholes are thought of as narrow and slightly dangerous. In retrospect, I find it difficult to account for my spontaneous utterance. But it was received and understood. Jane acknowledged with 'Oh, right' or something like that.

Here are some more examples of creative language:

> Who is the orange juice seat?

We had a real conference night out.

Beware of the Bison.

Yeah …ish.

Can you account for them? The first might be heard at a dinner party when people are being asked to take their seats at the table. There is a glass of orange juice at one place so one of the guests asks 'Who is the orange juice seat?' The second example will be familiar to many perhaps most conference goers. It probably refers to a long and bibulous night. The third example 'Beware of the Bison' was Jane's final word to me before I left home to go to Poland. It was a warning. She has experience of Polish hospitality and the Polish liking for *Żubrowka*, the vodka with a bison on the label and a leaf of bison grass in the bottle. The third is something I first heard a few years ago. Someone was asked if a particular book was useful and replied 'Yeah …ish'. At the time, it seemed like a creative utterance, although it is commonplace now.

4 A Summary

I have listed some of the features of spontaneous speech and made some suggestions for how to raise learners' awareness of them. However, the important question is how far can we actually teach them. Well, some of them are like lexical items. You can list typical ways in which English expresses vague language—'sort of', 'and so on', 'kind of'. And it is important that learners become aware of these early on. But it is also important that teachers and learners are aware that these are inevitable and desirable elements in spoken English—and that they have their counterparts in spoken Polish. So it is partly a matter of teaching or listing vague expressions and it is partly a matter of raising awareness.

But how do learners practice vague language? You cannot say to them 'Okay, I want you to be vague' or 'I want you to use some vague language'. But if you create situations in the classroom where they are really talking to each other they will find that they need vague language and they will begin to incorporate into their speech. They may begin by importing first language expressions, but they will gradually increase their repertoire of vagueness.

The same applies to evaluation. As we saw above, you can introduce learners to typical ways of evaluating in English:

A: Hey, I've just heard I've passed all my exams.

B: …

C: Poor old Jack. He's failed all his exams.

D: …

All of them. That's awful.

That's great. Well done.

Oh dear. I'm sorry to hear that.

Yeah? Well I'm not surprised.

Oh, wonderful

Oh, that's terrible.

But you cannot say to them 'Okay, I want you to be evaluative'. The best you can do is provide activities in the classroom where they will need to evaluate one another's replies—where they will need to say 'Yeah', 'Right', 'Good' and so on. This will only happen if you provide them with opportunities to use language to exchange real meanings.

The same applies to discourse markers. You can't teach discourse markers by asking learners to listen to and repeat words and phrases like *'Well', 'Okay',* and *'A funny thing happened to me'*. The complicated thing about these markers is not their realisation—the four letter word *'well'* or the two letter word *so*—the difficult thing is how and when to use them. So an effective teaching strategy will combine awareness raising with opportunities for use. Again learners may well begin by using Polish equivalents, but with encouragement and feedback they will gradually become more English in their discourse markers.

So let me try to summarise by offering an overview of what I believe to be the pedagogic implications of this quick look at spontaneous spoken language:

1. Make sure learners (and teachers) are aware of the nature of spontaneous speech.
2. Do not try to teach learners to speak written English.
3. Identify and raise awareness of specific features of spontaneous speech.
4. Where possible show how these features are realised in English.
5. Create conditions for natural use in the classroom.

Teaching spontaneity is a contradiction in terms. We can encourage the awareness which leads to spontaneity but we cannot teach spontaneity. So here is a brief summary of the ways I have suggested of highlighting the features of spontaneous conversation to help learners begin to incorporate them in their own language:

1. Use native language comparisons to raise awareness:
   - transcribe and analyse spoken L1;
   - identify features of L1 and relate them to English (evaluations, discourse markers).
2. Identify and highlight features of spontaneous speech when they occur.
3. Rewrite spontaneous speech:
   - in corresponding written form, e.g. a letter;
   - in a set number of words.
4. Expand exchanges to include interactional features.
5. Tell the story behind an utterance: 'Who is the orange juice seat?'

5 Two Tentative Conclusions

1. *If we cannot teach learners to use vague language and discourse markers spontaneously, can we teach them to use the present perfect and the first conditional spontaneously?*

We cannot teach spontaneity in the use of pauses, rephrasing discourse markers, vague language and so on. The realisation of these features are simple: 'Well', 'Erm', 'Okay' and so on. What is difficult to describe and to learn is the way these features of language are used. The best thing we can do to help learners is build an awareness and offer them plenty of opportunities for language use so that they can gradually build these features into their utterances. So can we teach spontaneity in the use of the present perfect and the first conditional? Again the realisation of these items is simple and can easily be learned. It is the ability to use them spontaneously that is difficult to acquire. Perhaps an approach which emphasises awareness-raising and use rather than controlled practice might be the best way forward in teaching grammar as well.

2. *It may be the case that our models of English based on written language offer the wrong model for acquisition. We are asking learners to acquire something which is extremely difficult to acquire.*

This takes me back to my introduction. Written language is not acquired—it is learned consciously. The language that children learn from their mothers and other carers is spoken interaction. But the language that is presented and practised in the classroom is based on the written form. We, as teachers, seem to believe that grammar comes first and that from grammar we learn to interact. It is, however, possible—indeed I believe it is very probable—that the opposite happens. We first learn to interact and from that interaction we learn to build a grammar. This would suggest that we should first encourage learners to engage in meaning and then encourage them to analyse the ways in which meanings are realised. It suggests a classroom which is rich not in presentation and practice, but in language use and language analysis—the main components of task-based language learning.

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Local Cultures in English: Intercultural Communication in an International Educational Context

Anna Niżegorodcew

Abstract This paper presents a Polish-Ukrainian educational project. Its outcome is a volume including texts focused on Ukrainian and Polish cultures accompanied by intercultural tasks. The aim of this paper is to reflect on the process of conceptualization, writing and editing of the volume. In particular, initial assumptions of the project are identified and juxtaposed with their later modifications. One of the main assumed goals of the project, co-construction of the common knowledge in the community of practice through the use English as a lingua franca, is discussed from the perspective of the underlying values of the partners' cultures. Some misunderstandings between the project partners are reflected upon. Those misunderstandings are interpreted in the light of Geert Hofstede's (1991) model of intercultural dimensions and differences and similarities in the national indices of intercultural dimensions between Ukrainians and Poles, such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty tolerance versus uncertainty avoidance, long-term versus short-term orientation and low context versus high context. The author concludes her paper by formulating the claim that the project has contributed to an increased intra- and intercultural awareness of its participants and that the main benefit of the project was in the process of negotiating with each other the participants' local cultures and their underlying values.

1 Introduction

The goal of this paper is to present intercultural communication in an international educational project, partly in the light of Geert Hofstede's (1991) model of intercultural dimensions. Examples of intercultural communication and miscommunication are derived from a Polish-Ukrainian project based on the present author's

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personal experience as a co-editor of the project volume. The volume, being a collection of papers, readings and projects is the outcome of cooperation between two English University Departments: a Polish one and a Ukrainian one. The intended readers of the book are users of English interested in the Ukrainian and Polish cultures.

In 2009 staff members from both English Departments decided to write and compile a collection of texts in English with accompanying intercultural tasks. Our aim was to enable users of English in our countries, the population of which has greatly expanded since English has been recognized by educational authorities as a European lingua franca, to familiarize themselves with each other, with some aspects of our cultures, as well as with some contemporary social problems in our countries. We also believed that our volume could be interesting to users of English in other countries. It was assumed that the medium of English as a language of international communication would make our prospective readers perceive their own and other cultures in an intercultural perspective and, as a result, would contribute to raising their intercultural awareness and tolerance of otherness.

According to Mikułowski-Pomorski (2007, p. 75), *intercultural communication* can be analyzed from two points of view:

(1) as a knowledge about participants of different nations and cultures taking part in the process of communication; such an approach is also called *cross-cultural communication studies*;
(2) as the process of such communication, referred to as *intercultural communication studies.*

Taking this division into consideration, our project belongs to the category of cross-cultural studies since it provides the readers with cultural knowledge about Ukraine and Poland, while this paper is an intercultural study since it attempts to describe the process of communication between Ukrainian and Polish authors and editors.

2 Intercultural Communication

The anthropologist Edward Hall in his famous book about non-verbal communication *The Silent Language* (Hall 1969) described some basic differences between national cultures and lay foundations for the study of *intercultural communication.* One of the best known models of intercultural competence, proposed by Michael Byram (1997), places intercultural communication skills in its focus together with a knowledge of another culture and positive attitudes towards the process of communicating with its members. Referring to the title of Edward Hall's book, it can be indeed claimed that communication skills in the process of intercultural communication depend heavily on the knowledge and awareness of the silent language of values inherent in a given culture.

In Geert Hofstede's (1991) model of cultural dimensions (as cited in Mikułowski-Pomorski 2007, p. 325), different national cultures are based on deeply ingrained, historically transmitted values. Such values are at the background of different nations' behaviors and attitudes. They underlie deeply entrenched beliefs, which are developed in childhood and are mostly subconscious. *Power distance* is one of the dimensions. Some national cultures consider power as an inherent main part of the social order, while others believe that people are equal and do not place much value on authority. Other cultural dimensions, according to Hofstede's (1991) categorization, are *individualism* versus *collectivism*, *masculinity* versus *femininity*, *uncertainty tolerance* versus *uncertainty avoidance* and *long-term* versus *short-term orientation*. In more individualistic cultures, individual human beings are valued more highly than a social group they belong to; the opposite is true in more collectivistic cultures. In more masculine cultures, ambition is valued and gender roles are clearly delineated, while in more feminine cultures, keeping a low profile is considered a greater value than showing off and gender roles tend to overlap. Cultures that put more value on uncertainty tolerance are those where virtue is more valued than truth, whereas in the cultures which believe that objective truth is attainable, people tend to value more uncertainty avoidance. Finally, national cultures differ in time orientation, since some cultures value long-term goals and long-term planning, while others are more focused on the present moment and, consequently, are short-term oriented.

Additionally, Hofstede divided cultures into *high* and *low contexts* ones. In low context cultures, messages are conveyed explicitly, whereas in high context cultures they are assumed to be known to the community and, in consequence, they are conveyed implicitly. Hofstede's (1991) model and its practical application in terms of national indices of cultural dimensions has become extremely popular nowadays, especially in business intercultural communication, where special training workshops are conducted to educate and train employees from one culture how to behave appropriately in communicating with the representatives of another culture.

3 Intercultural Communication in a Polish-Ukrainian Educational Project

In communicating with the representatives of the partner's culture, Polish and Ukrainian participants of the project were supposed, first, to create (or select) messages (texts with tasks) which referred to their national cultures, secondly, to successfully interact via face-to-face and e-mail communication in order to negotiate the final shape of the proposed volume. The tacit assumption underlying the project was that common knowledge would be co-constructed and that we would be able to build up a common *community of practice* (Wenger 1998) on the basis of the common language of communication—English as a lingua franca.

Our volume was originally proposed as an intercultural Polish and Ukrainian project written in English by academic teachers of both English Departments.

In the Ukrainian English Department, the writing tasks were assigned to volunteering staff members, who compiled texts on the topics which were jointly selected by them. In the Polish English Department, however, staff members were not willing to participate in the part of the project involving the compilation of texts on Polish culture accompanied by intercultural questions and tasks. In consequence, a group of MA students was involved in an information and communication technology (ICT) mediated intercultural project, in which they cooperated with a group of MA students from the Ukrainian English Department. Finally, it was agreed that our volume would include texts with questions and tasks compiled by Ukrainian academics, and projects with questions and tasks, based partly on Ukrainian students' questions, written by Polish and international MA students.

The range of the selected topics in the compiled texts reflected the Ukrainian authors' approach to their culture and our common understanding expressed explicitly at the beginning of the project that considering a turbulent Ukrainian-Polish past history, we should not discuss topics in which Ukrainian and Polish opinions would be very different. We agreed that we should not include in our volume texts that are nationally biased and that we should aim as much as possible at the objectivity of the presented facts. However, it was not long after the commencement of our project that the Polish editors of the volume found that except for quality reports, all the other selected texts were somehow nationally or culturally colored, either presenting an ideal picture of Ukraine for tourists, or, by contrast, being overcritical of some aspects of its reality. In the Polish part of the volume, the projects showed that our three international students (a Canadian, an American and an Irish student) must have exerted a great influence on their Polish friends and that they dominated some topic choices. Their views must have been informed by their experiences at home and in Poland and by stereotyped opinions about Polish people held in their native countries, which in itself was an interesting intercultural perspective.

It was in the practical part of the volume, consisting of readings and projects, where the aforementioned national and cultural biases could be observed. By contrast, the first theoretical chapters of the volume, consisting of authorial texts written by Ukrainian and Polish academic authors, provide a balanced discussion of the underpinnings of intercultural communication and intercultural competence, where, among other aspects, the authors focus on the role of cultural self-awareness and knowledge of one's own culture and the role of English as a lingua franca in the development of intercultural competence. According to Aleksandrowicz-Pędich (2009, p. 24), "[a]n essential component of intercultural activities is intracultural dialogue. Intercultural studies enhance intracultural perceptions of one's own culture, a better understanding of one's own culture and its diverse patterns". Paradoxically, the theoretical principles of intercultural communication were, at least partly, disregarded in some of the practical chapters, in which their Ukrainian, Polish and international authors did not seem to possess enough intra- and intercultural awareness, that is, a critical attitude towards one's own or another culture they described and analyzed.

In the final amended versions of the practical chapters, the following topics were dealt with by the Ukrainian authors: folk and modern Ukrainian literature, Ukrainian customs and traditions, gender roles in Ukraine, recreational and forced

mobility in Ukraine, new social initiatives in Ukraine, European standards in Ukrainian education and students' life in Ukraine. The Polish and international authors researched the following topics: Polish beliefs and attitudes towards other religions, Polish attitudes towards Jews, Polish standards of politeness and problems in academic dishonesty in Poland.

From our present perspective, when the volume is ready to be published, I believe that it was assumed that building up a community of practice between the international and intercultural academics and students of our English Departments could be reached on the basis of some common experiences ("we are Europeans", "we live in neighbor countries", "we have survived communism", etc.), an awareness of some different experiences ("the Poles are mostly Roman Catholics", "Ukrainians are mostly Greek Catholics or Orthodox"; "Poland is in the European Union while Ukraine is not", "communism lasted much longer and was much more traumatic in Ukraine than in Poland", etc.), and, what seemed to be most important, our efforts, which were considered to be of relevance to all of us, to have a common publication, which was treated as a unifying goal, although, admittedly, its final shape was not quite clear at the beginning of the project.

There are a couple of questions to be raised. A question arises, for example, to what extent the project participants were aware of the target audiences and the messages they intentionally or unintentionally conveyed. The Polish editors of the volume faced this challenging issue during the editing stage in a difficult process of negotiating opinions and attitudes towards one's own and the other party's local values and beliefs.

As far as the compiled texts with tasks are concerned, the intended readers' values and cultural awareness should have been taken into consideration by the Ukrainian authors. However, it seems that the majority of them did not think about it while preparing their texts. Their own knowledge and values seemed to be guiding principles for them. It is also hard to judge if in the amended versions the authors acquired a sufficient distance from their own cultures and awareness of other cultures. For instance, the authors of the text on a traditional Ukrainian wedding asked questions about marriage ceremonies in other cultures, but they did not include a question about reasons why couples renege on a marriage ceremony or indeed a marriage contract at all, which is a common trend in European countries. It seems that at first, the authors selected texts without any particular readers in mind, or addressing only the readers familiar with their own culture. Such a limitation is clearly seen, for example, in a task following a Ukrainian text on the national craft of embroidery[1] requiring the readers from different cultures to interpret symbols in their cultures' embroidered items, as if assuming that embroidery must be as popular in other cultures as it is in Ukraine. In the texts adapted from

[1] Embroidery is one of the main folk arts in Ukraine. Embroidered items, e.g. embroidered towels (*rushnyky*) are used for ceremonial and decorative purposes.

published materials, the Ukrainian authors did not seem to pay attention to different genres, since no tasks focused on the text genre, the narrator's tone and point of view were included in the tasks sections either of popular texts about their country (taken from publications advertising Ukraine), newspaper articles or more serious quality reports.

As far as the projects part is concerned, Polish and international students attending MA courses were supposed to research the topics that were of interest to Ukrainian students and to present their own balanced answers. We realized later that some of the areas that the authors had embarked upon exceeded their research capacity. Additionally, our students, some of them being foreigners to Polish culture, apparently did not realize the thin ice of cultural issues upon which that were treading (e.g. religious beliefs in Poland and Polish people's attitude towards other religions, anti-Semitism in Poland, Polish students' dishonesty). Generally, all students' texts required numerous revisions. We had to make their authors aware of the limited scope of their research and the necessity to express less biased opinions. The authors were persuaded to partly modify their sometimes untrue, controversial or biased opinions on religious beliefs of Polish people, their alleged anti-Semitism and dishonesty of Polish students.

E-mail messages exchanged at the initial stage of the project between Ukrainian and Polish editors of the volume indicate that a threat of future misunderstandings could have existed from the beginning of the project implementation. One of the most characteristic features of those initial exchanges is their vagueness and the use of polite conventional expressions instead of direct and concrete language of two parties setting up a contract to publish a book. It seems as if the intercultural editors did not like to commit themselves too early or they assumed that the other party was fully aware of all the requirements of the project, which was not the case.

When the first compiled texts with tasks were circulated, the Polish editors became aware that there were two aspects that necessarily needed amendment on the Ukrainian part in order to make the volume publishable and to keep its proposed intercultural character. The first apparent miscommunication was concerned with copyrights. We were aware that the book published in English in Poland, a European Union country, could become much more accessible to the intended readers than the same book published in Ukraine. The Ukrainian partners insisted on the volume publication in Poland since, from their perspective, such a publication was considered more prestigious than one published in Ukraine, which was understandable to us. However, the Ukrainian authors did not realize at first that the publication of the volume in Poland would be linked with their following international copyright laws. Apparently, Ukrainian authors in general do not follow copyright laws in internal publications intended for students. The necessity of obtaining permissions to use copyright materials and the necessity of inserting references to other authors' works in the compiled texts and in the bibliographies

seemed to be the main problematic issue in our volume, which was not satisfactorily resolved even by the end of the project in spite of numerous detailed guidelines we sent to the Ukrainian partners.[2]

The other important miscommunication at the initial stage of the project was due to the lack of explicitness on the Polish part with regard to the intended readers of the proposed book. The Polish co-editors contemplated a wider readership than English Department undergraduates and we did not expect our volume to focus primarily on English language teaching. At the beginning of the project, we failed to be explicit about it with our Ukrainian partners, who had in mind as the intended readers mainly their own students, and who, consequently, accompanied the compiled texts by a great number of reading and listening comprehension tasks in order to develop students' receptive English skills. At a later stage of the project, this misunderstanding was fully clarified and the redundant comprehension tasks were removed from the volume.

We also assumed at the initial stages of our project that English as our language of communication can help us co-construct our identities as *intercultural users of English as a lingua franca.* We hoped that by describing in English our own cultures to readers from other cultures, we could acquire intracultural awareness, that is, a more critical attitude towards our own cultures, leading to raised awareness of cultural diversity and tolerance of other cultures. We realized later that the use of English as a lingua franca at the level of messages is not sufficient to build up a community of practice. In intercultural and international communication we have to patiently clarify our messages and to check if our interlocutors get them across. But even using clarifications seems insufficient. In order to build up an intercultural community of practice, we need to become aware of the underlying values of our partners' cultures. We do not have to adopt them but we have to acknowledge them.

4 Polish-Ukrainian Misunderstandings in the Light of Hofstede's Model

Let us try to account for some of the described misunderstandings in communication between Polish and Ukrainian partners in the light of Geert Hofstede's (1991) model of cultural dimensions. Obviously, misunderstandings between representatives of different nations and cultures may also result from their individual personality features and the following interpretation of some of the Ukrainian-Polish misunderstandings along the lines of a general model of differences between national cultural characteristics is only one of the possible interpretations. However,

[2] The question of not following international copyright laws by some academic and/or national communities and, consequently, committing intentional or unintentional plagiarism, does not seem to be shameful any longer. This author heard a panelist from a country aspiring to become a EU member stating openly at an international conference that plagiarism is a common practice at her university.

the cultural dimensions described above seem to be good theoretical models to account for the misunderstandings.

Power distance is higher in Ukraine than in Poland. At the same time, Ukrainians are more *collectivistic* than Poles. These two differences in the relative value of authority and individual responsibility may account for the initial willingness with which Ukrainian academic teachers undertook their collaborative tasks, in particular being aware that the project would be carried out under the auspices of their university authorities, while Polish academic teachers were reluctant to do so. An additional reason for the Ukrainian authors' greater readiness to compile cultural texts could be a higher prestige in Ukraine than in Poland of the project and a possibility of publishing the Ukrainian-Polish volume in the European Union.

Ukrainians tend to *avoid uncertainty* to a greater degree than Poles, who are more likely to *tolerate uncertainty*. Ukrainian authors may have avoided uncertainty by designing well known comprehension tasks, whereas Polish and international student authors (from the countries where uncertainty tolerance is even higher than in Poland) were ready to embark on innovative and quite vague research projects.

Both Ukrainian and Polish cultures are characterized by a high index of *masculinity* and rather *short-term orientation*. Those similar characteristics may have helped both sides in pursuing their tasks in order to achieve their ambitious goals but they may have also interfered in their smooth cooperation since neither side wished to be patronized by the other. As far as time orientation is concerned, probably both Ukrainian and Polish editors did not initially plan their whole cooperation in detail, being satisfied with short-term goals. They may have relied on their own editing experience, which was not explicitly explained to the other party.

Explicitness is a characteristic feature of *low context* cultures, whereas both Ukrainian and Polish cultures are rather *high context* ones. In high context cultures, it is not necessary to be explicit because the context is rich and self-explanatory. In intercultural communication, contextual assumptions may become confusing and misleading, something that is self-explanatory in one culture may be a puzzle in another culture. An additional reason for misunderstandings between the Polish and Ukrainian partners may have been avoiding by the Ukrainians any discussion in the volume on the process of negotiation, including controversial issues, while the Polish editors were willing to describe such a process in detail in order to make the volume more attractive for readers from other countries.

One of the texts in our volume focusing on Polish students' alleged dishonesty is particularly interesting from an intercultural point of view because the process of its conceptualization, researching, writing and editing reflects different value systems in three different cultures: American/Canadian, Polish and Ukrainian. The text was written by an American, a Canadian and two Polish authors. The international students belonged to the group of Polish authors of the projects. They were clearly responsible for the choice of the topic and the conceptualization of the project, being apparently shocked by what they read and probably heard about Polish students' cheating and plagiarizing. The authors started their paper with a quote from a British journal about Polish moral standards concerning cheating during

exams, which, as they wrote, was for them an incentive to devote their research to academic dishonesty in Poland.

The authors designed a questionnaire on cheating and plagiarizing practices and their moral weight in the eyes of the respondents and distributed it among their fellow students. In the conclusion they wrote that the results of the survey, in which more than half of the respondents admitted that they had cheated on a test during their academic career, were not surprising for them. What was surprising for the authors was the finding that only a few students admitted to committing plagiarism. It was not quite clear who was responsible for that comment, the Polish students or the American/Canadian ones. The American/Canadian approach to cheating was demonstrated in calling it a *crime* rather than an *offence*. What we received as the Polish editors of the volume was a piece of student research but without any intercultural reflections. Those were supplied by the Ukrainian editor who read the text. He advised the Polish editors to remove the text from the final edition of the volume on the grounds that the students were not professional researchers and the results may not have been reliable.

The misunderstanding with the 'dishonesty' paper reflects very different approaches of American/Canadians and Poles/Ukrainians to school and academic cheating. A crime is one culture is no doubt a minor offence in another. More individualistic, according to Hofstede's (1991) cultural dimensions model, American and Canadian cultures put stress on individual responsibility, competitiveness and individual interests, whereas more collectivistic Polish and Ukrainian cultures value more group interests, cooperativeness and group support. In such cultures, reporting on another student who cheats is socially unacceptable. Additionally in Poland, having a relatively low power distance index in comparison with Ukraine, students feel solidarity with one another and they do not comply with the authority of the teacher who forbids cheating.

The negative response of our Ukrainian colleague to the paper seems to stem from another cultural difference between Poles and Ukrainians, which may be traced to lower uncertainty avoidance in Poland and higher in Ukraine. Poles are more likely to accept indefinite and incomplete tasks, while Ukrainians seem to prefer very clearly delineated ones. The Ukrainian editor was first of all concerned with the reliability of the research results, he stressed the fragmentary character of the research and the lack of professional preparation of the authors. All those reservations were much less important for the Polish side.

5 Conclusion

As has been said before, the assumed goal of the project may be described as co-construction of the common knowledge in the community of practice. The Ukrainian-Polish community of practice was assumed to be built through the use English as a lingua franca and both partners' efforts leading to a common outcome of the project—a published volume including theoretical chapters on intercultural

communication and intercultural competence, as well as texts on Ukrainian and Polish culture accompanied by intercultural questions and tasks.

Later we became aware that the use of English as a lingua franca at the level of messages is not sufficient to build up a community of practice. It seems that in order to build up such a community, intercultural project participants should become aware of the underlying values of their own and their partners' cultures.

Our project has certainly contributed to such a growing awareness of its participants. The main misunderstandings have been at least partly clarified and in particular the editors of the volume have become aware of the reasons behind those misunderstandings. Finally, we have managed to edit our common volume. The added value of our cooperation seems to be our more realistic approach to intercultural communication and conscious reflection on our own and other cultures.

What facilitated our challenging task was our knowledge and skills in using written and oral English, admittedly not always error-free, our academic expertise in writing and editing academic papers, a collaborative and longitudinal character of our project, and negotiating the content and form of our volume throughout the whole process of writing and editing it. The main merit of our project seems to be in the process of negotiating our local cultures and their underlying values with each other, attempting to create an *academic community of practice* of English language users, while placing own national cultures in focus for others to get familiar with and to compare them with their cultures. We hope that future readers of our volume will get some insight into our own as well as their own cultures.

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Developing Second Language Oral Competence Through an Integrated Discursive Approach: The Conceptual Framework of the Project and Results of a Pilot Study

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Abstract The aim of the paper is to present a planned research and implementation project that focuses on the development of oral communication skills (i.e. speaking and listening) at the advanced level. The project is currently under way in the Institute of Romance Philology at the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland. The project aims at investigating the effectiveness of what is referred to here as an *integrated approach* towards improving foreign language (FL) communication skills at the B2/C1 level (according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* 2003). This original, innovative approach aims at enhancing FL students' personal development by integrating three educational dimensions, namely: (a) oral competences in semi-public communication contexts, (b) media competence, including critical evaluation skills when it comes to the media and, consequently, a more objective approach to information, and (c) knowledge related to current socio-cultural issues (in a broad sense), specific to the countries of a given FL. In the present paper the emphasis is laid on the justification of the adopted theoretical framework as well as on the illustration of the teaching and learning contributions of media resources. Finally, the main didactic scenarios will be outlined and the results of a pilot study will be presented.

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1 Introduction

Despite the growing interest of second language (L2) pedagogy in the development of listening skills, this issue is still rather poorly investigated. This statement seems particularly true when it comes to the fostering of listening competence at an advanced level. It can be observed that teaching practice tends to focus on tasks verifying listening skills, defined as strategies (Berne 2004). These strategies, however, concern mainly the processes of memorization, selection and reproduction of the relevant information. Special attention is accorded to both cognitive (Poussard 2003; Roussel et al. 2008) and metacognitive strategies (Vandergrift 2006; Vandergrift et al. 2006; Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari 2010), yet, the dominant approach does not define media discourse in terms of a genre. Similarly, listening tests are only rarely constructed on the basis of authentic radio broadcasts including more speakers or longer monologic discourse.

As a result, the aims of listening neglect issues connected with a critical evaluation of the way speakers interact and influence the final outcome of this interaction. Even though the predominant type of practice in developing listening skills leaves some room for cultural contents or argumentative procedures, it completely sidelines all the important questions related to oral genres with their specific interactive procedures.[1] Instead of referring to typical oral genres as a source of models for their utterances, students are expected to prepare for oral activities through written tests (e.g. press articles, Internet forums). Moreover, their use of such information and communication technologies (ICT) remains fairly modest despite the fact that ICT has become widely accessible nowadays, which should, in theory, allow regular extensive exposure to oral discourse in a particular L2. This state of affairs might suggest that an advanced L2 student is supposed to acquire, in an essentially intuitive and spontaneous way, the complex ability of co-constructing knowledge and creating interpersonal relations through, for instance, oral public discourse.

The problem that has been briefly outlined above may be due to the difficulty in implementing within the domain of L2 pedagogy recent advances in such fields as communication science (especially interpersonal and media communication), discourse analysis or linguistic genealogy, all of which emphasize the social, interactive character of oral discourse. Therefore, there seems to be an urgent need to elaborate a coherent model of developing listening competence, which would take fully into account recent theoretical positions, viewing oral discourse as a dynamic process, regulated by socio-cultural norms. This awareness has led us to devise a theoretical and empirical research project, based on the exploitation of French radio

[1] It needs to be stressed, though, that a genre approach to listening comprehension and speaking has been applied in Swiss research on L1 (Dolz and Schneuwly 1998). Moreover, growing access to the Internet and the presence of traditional media in the Internet will certainly contribute to an increased number of researches interested in developing listening through tasks that emphasize an epistemic and discursive dimension of media genres (cf. Strzemeski 2010, 2011).

podcasts, aimed at developing oral comprehension and production competence in advanced students of French philology.

The project is intended to explore, through both theoretical and empirical investigation, the utility of an innovative, holistic approach to communication and discourse phenomena (cf. Wilczyńska, in press), which is meant as a basis for L2 oral competence development in advanced students (at the B2/C1 level, according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, Coste et al. 2001). It is hoped that cumulative research studies carried out within this integrative approach to oral communication (OC), could contribute to the emergence of a new research paradigm in the field of L2 pedagogy. On an instructional level, our *integrated discourse approach* could contribute to the modification of the well-established, traditional schemes that have so far provided a basis for the pedagogic progression concerning the development of OC. The article presents the theoretical framework and methodology of the project, as well as the tentative results of a pilot study that has been based on it.

2 Theoretical Bases for the Project

During the last few decades, due to significant advances in our understanding of oral communication, we have gained a better grasp into how it functions and how it can most beneficially be developed. Given our project's aims, we find particularly insightful theoretical and empirical studies carried out within the socio-cognitive interactionist perspective (e.g. Bange 1992; Vion 1992; Bange 1996; Cicurel 1996; Filliettaz 2004), emphasizing the dialogic (Bachtin 1986; Bronckart 1996a, b, 2004) character of oral communication. Another field that seems equally important to us is the one that aims at exploring oral discourse genres (Grzmil-Tylutki 2007; Ostaszewska-Cudak 2008), which views genres as encompassing, among other specific features, particular instructions intended for eliciting interlocutors' interpretations and behaviors in given situations. These two approaches, approaches not mutually exclusive, have been developed fairly independently. The interactionist position, based mainly on conversational analysis, has focused on micro activities in co-constructing discourse, without referring to a broader frame, e.g. genre. The generic approach, in turn, has mostly drawn, on the one hand, on stylistics (Gajda 2008), and, on the other hand, on rhetoric, thereby concentrating much more on the recipient's representations and the actual texts than on their authors and the interaction between the two parties. Both views, however interesting and valuable they may be, concentrate mainly on researching abstract entities, which does not facilitate complete understanding of dynamically co-construed oral interactions involved in broader genre frames.

The generic and interactive approaches have undoubtedly proven to be more effective in accounting for the speaking process than mechanistic theories which tend to reduce communication to exchanging information or decoding meaning. Nevertheless, separately, none of those two approaches is sufficient to account for

the dynamics of emerging contents, the selection of strategies and linguistic items, and the attainment of pragmatic efficacy. Thus, when adopting the perspective of L2 pedagogy, aimed primarily at OC development, it seems worthwhile to refer to both of these approaches—whenever possible—in a complementary mode. As a result, we have tried to use them, for instance, when looking for criteria allowing a selection of broadcasts which could potentially provide students with insightful discourse patterns. Given the abundance of research directions and specific studies within both interactionism and oral genre theory, we have to specify further in which sense they may be useful form the point of view of L2 pedagogy.

2.1 Interactive and Dialogic Nature of Oral Discourse

Generally speaking, any oral activity may be claimed to be interactive, because it is always directed to somebody and takes into account their social status and mental state. However, as Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005) points out, such a broad sense of *interactivity* does not seem to be workable. Therefore, we completely agree with Kerbrat-Orecchioni's suggestion to limit the use of the term to only face-to-face communication. In this type of discourse, interlocutors mutually influence, 'here and now', each other's speech behaviors, modifying their former intentions in the course of the conversation.

This definition applies not only to interactive forms which are dialogical or interlocutionary in the sense of including subsequent turns, but also encompasses the dialogic nature of such interactions, which implies negotiation work on three interdependent levels, namely: (a) *discourse organization* (turn-taking, ordering conversation structure), (b) *interpersonal relations* (negotiating places, roles and identities), and (c) *semantic meanings* (negotiating topics, intentions, aims, values, etc.). The intensity of all these types of negotiations may vary, depending on how ritualized a given discourse (genre) is and how involved the interlocutors are. We therefore lean towards viewing the nature of communication as consisting primarily of placing 'objects' within the public sphere (Taylor 2010). This can serve either to create relations or, in accordance with Habermas's terminology, to construct *importance claims* (Habermas 1999; Mezirow 2001), which are subject to evolution or modification by interlocutors, thus contributing to socially shared representations.

As shown in the research mentioned above (see also studies by Wilczyńska 1999 and Pekarek 1999; Pekarek-Doehler 2002), failure to take into account the interactive character of speech may hamper the development of communicative competence at an advanced level. Therefore, when devising an instructional sequence, it seems necessary to organize it around the notion of interactivity. Consequently, at this advanced level, it seems essential to understand and practice genres which serve to locate contents in a specific public sphere (in a literal sense), i.e. media genres which implicate the participation of multiple interlocutors, presenting various perspectives with reference to a given issue.

2.2 Interactivity Characteristic of Oral Genres

The notions of *polyphony* and *dialogism*, introduced by Bachtin (1986), and his idea that all genres are based on dialectic interactions between interlocutors have led us to believe that these three features should be taken into consideration when defining genres. In particular, we recognize, for the purposes of the present article, that *genre* is a relatively stabilized type of utterance whose topics, composition and stylistics are determined by a given function, implying interlocutors' roles and places (Bachtin 1986; Wierzbicka 1999). A genre may therefore be seen as a sui generis repository for certain socio-cultural patterns, typical in terms of their form and pragmatic meaning in a given situation. Hence, the notion of genre seems to be more relevant when accounting for the existence of interiorized rules and scenarios of communicative behaviors, which interlocutors refer to more or less explicitly when planning their actions and adapting them to one another. In sum, those patterns constitute a reference framework, shared by the members of a given community, allowing them to collaborate effectively when negotiating text organization, relations and meaning. Therefore, it can be claimed that there exist some highly implicit behavioral patterns, flexible enough to allow negotiation on all levels (conversational genres) or, by contrast, negotiations which are limited to a minimum (ritualized genres) (Grzmil-Tylutki 2007). Awareness of the extent to which particular genres allow negotiation work constitutes an important element of advanced OC.

If we take into account the aims of L2 oral competence development and our cognitive limitations (i.e. resources required for conscious attention), it may seem more interesting to opt for concentrating on genres which feature high activity in one sphere and allow highly predictable and conventional actions in other spheres. Most media genres exhibit a relatively high degree of ritualization at the levels of organization and the relationship between interlocutors' (e.g. repetitive politeness formulas, well-established schemes of turns in speaking). All this may facilitate learners' task, concentrating their interpretative and learning efforts on meaning negotiation. This is not meant to indicate that we intend to entirely leave aside the remaining levels of negotiation, but, rather, that we wish to condition the amount of attention given to a particular genre on its character.

2.3 Media Genres and Their Value as Models

In the introduction to this article, we expressed our criticism of present school practices, based mainly on written discourse and related genres, as main sources of models for OC development. This criticism derives from the conviction that it is necessary to observe real-life oral activities with their specific features, dynamics and social embedding when we aim at preparing our students for functioning as social actors practicing genres typical of a given culture. It is of crucial importance to combine, in our observation, the way social representations are introduced into

the public sphere—undergoing intersubjective treatment/retrieval—with concrete oral tasks. This opens the opportunity for acquiring effective forms and tools of social actions, in accordance with Taylor's (2010, pp. 39–40) view, that understanding makes practice possible, but practice may also lead us to a better understanding.

In the Polish educational context, fostering OC by means of careful observation of oral discourse may be mainly achieved via extensive use of the media (Górecka 2008). Far from being seen as a limitation, one may regard it as an opportunity for developing the capacity for critical thinking and active listening, as well as an opportunity to become acquainted with competent interlocutors, skillfully and creatively using social representations. Undoubtedly, the media, with their specific discourse practices, constitute nowadays a fundamental means of shaping public opinion. Therefore, gaining a better insight into what the media are and how they function is one of the crucial abilities underlying communicative competence in a very broad sense of this term.

3 Fostering Advanced L2 Oral Competence: The Assumptions and Aims of the Project

The above considerations have led us to formulate a set of general assumptions which, in our view, underlie the need to foster of advanced L2 oral competence:

- Oral comprehension and production are interrelated abilities in more than one way; therefore, when designing ways of fostering L2 speaking ability with respect to a given type, we should base them on corresponding oral comprehension practice activities.
- An adequate interpretation of oral discourse depends to a great extent on recognizing the actual speech genre. Consequently, when expressing our personal intentions in an L2, we must not only take into consideration the actual sociocultural context, but also comply with an adequate genre and exploit it properly.
- To be more specific, with respect to semi-formal public discourse, our pedagogical procedures should focus on the respective genres, together with their norms and sociocultural representations, also observing how the latter are actually used by individual social actors.
- Raising awareness as to how the characteristics of a given genre influence the meaning in a particular sociocultural setting is considered crucial for advanced L2 learners, especially when they are in the process of building up their repertoire of discursive means. In the long run, this can result in the development of an efficient, economic personal style and could also have a positive impact on L1 oral competence.
- Comprehending oral media genres requires extended intercultural and cognitive competencies, especially when it comes to interpreting specific discourse procedures which convey implicit cultural and/or cognitive contents.

These general ideas have been further specified with reference to our advanced L2 students as follows: in order to significantly enhance the students' efficacy and economy in OC development, we have to set more integrated objectives and rely on more the tools accorded by the Internet. In particular, such integration should encompass the following three areas:

- OC related to semipublic communication—this domain seems essential in L2 university students' instruction since it is extremely useful in their academic communication and future professional activity,
- media competence, with the aim of acquiring an awareness of factors and mechanisms shaping public opinion (our students seem fairly unaware of mass media strategies and their impact on the information ultimately being published!);
- knowledge concerning a wide range of social and cultural issues, which can lead to a more critical, objective attitude towards ideas and rationales conveyed through the media.

From now on, we will refer to those three aims as an *integrated approach to discourse*. More specifically, this integration will encompass various levels, such as:

- communicative and cognitive competences, (including cultural competence);
- using L1 and L2 (or several L2 s);
- media competence and NT competence.

In accordance with these assumptions, extensive use of discourse analysis will be made when studying selected broadcasts. This should allow us to pinpoint and identify L2 sociocultural norms and patterns, and, as a next step, better understand how they function. The subsequent goal is for our students to better grasp the underlying communication strategies (Wojciechowska and Wilczyńska in press).

4 Specific Aims and Research Design of the Project

As we have mentioned earlier, the main aim of the project is to determine, first on a theoretical and then on an empirical level, the impact of increasing students' discursive and media awareness on the development of their OC abilities. More specifically, we will concentrate on the interdependent competencies of speaking and oral comprehension with the aim of researching:

(1) the factors responsible for skilful and successful comprehension of selected radio programs featuring an interactive media genre, i.e. a phone-in type of radio discussions in French and Polish, easily available in podcasts;
(2) the effectiveness of communicative training aimed at the preparation of students to participate actively in semi-public discussions of a similar character with the purpose of expressing their opinions and views

To achieve these general aims, the following tasks will be carried out:

- precisely determining the instructional potential of selected radio broadcasts in relation to raising students' awareness, viewing the latter as an important factor in stimulating their OC in L2 (French) and, indirectly, also in L1 (Polish); namely, the focus will be on acquiring interactive and argumentative procedures to be applied in semi-public communication,
- elaborating on pedagogical techniques in accordance with the task-based approach (*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, 2001) and using electronic devices (within a hybrid educational model, with some elements of distance-teaching), intended to stimulate the improvement of OC at an advanced level.
- researching the efficacy of our pedagogical solutions from the perspective of the aim of the project.

The first of the above tasks seems particularly important, since its results may in fact determine the outcomes of the other two. Therefore, we have further specified this task in a series of questions:

- What are the specifics and, subsequently, pedagogical potential of the chosen media format (i.e. the phone-in segment discussing important socio-political issues) in reference to fostering advanced OC?
- To what extent could the chosen media segment provide discourse models for our advanced students? This could help us determine the pedagogical procedures and techniques to be used (cf. Wojciechowska and Wilczyńska, in press).
- What competencies are fundamental when grasping the complex contents (e.g. implicit or cultural) of selected broadcasts?
- To what extent do various types of negative factors (e.g. deficiencies in knowledge and/or skills, cultural barriers) hamper the development of discourse awareness and, more specifically, genre awareness?
- What is the potential of the selected broadcasts for the development of argumentative competence in relation to sociocultural contents?

The research will be carried out in two groups of MA students (1st and 2nd year) of French philology (n = 20). The main research, preceded by a pilot study (February—June 2011, n = 10), is to be carried out during a whole academic year (September 2011 to June 2012).

5 Using Podcasts in Developing Oral Competence: Selection Criteria

It has been assumed that the pedagogical scenarios explored in our project will be based on radio broadcasts which display a wide range of features specific to the chosen media genre, i.e. interactive discussion on the air (cf. Wojciechowska and

Wilczyńska, in press). Apart from featuring argumentative, semi-formal discourse, the selected broadcasts should also include valuable cognitive content, as this will allow the development of students' cultural knowledge. In our view, these types of contents correspond to current, complex and often controversial issues which are widely discussed in the target language society.

Our prior analysis of various podcasts available from French public radio (*Radio France*) has shown that the media format we were searching for was best embodied by two widely popular phone-in segments: *Le téléphone sonne…* (broadcast by the public channel, *France Culture*) and *Du grain à moudre* (broadcast by another public channel, *France Inter*). The Polish program most similar in format to those two French ones is probably *Za, a nawet* przeciw, hosted by Kuba Skrzeczkowski, broadcast via *Polish Radio 3rd Channel* (*Trójka*). All of these daily shows are imbued with their hosts' personality. *Le téléphone sonne* is hosted by a well-known journalist, Alain Bedouet, who intermingles comments from expert guests in the studio with those of listeners phoning into the show. In contrast, *Du grain à moudre,* hosted by two journalists, only involves guests present in the studio who exchange their views. All the segments mentioned above possess their own Internet sites where listeners can submit their comments.

As assumed in the conceptual framework of the project, the media genre we have chosen to investigate through our research should be suitable for the purpose of stimulating students' awareness of communicative and intellectual activities. This, in turn, should prepare students to face the challenges of both their current academic communication and their professional interaction in the future. Bearing this in mind, when selecting specific podcasts, we applied the following criteria:

- Linguistic register: Careful and rather formal, with fairly specialized lexis, which makes it a 'model variety'; a 'safe' and therefore recommendable register for foreigners.
- Contemporary issues and topics: This can bridge the gap, frequently observed in L2 teaching, between topics proposed by the teacher and students' interests. It may be expected that the wide range of issues discussed in the podcasts will genuinely appeal to students' interests.
- Varied perspectives and approaches: They are strongly encouraged by the authors of the segments, with the effect that they should favor not only the development of students' knowledge, but also their critical thinking skills. This should have a positive impact on students' ability to comment on and evaluate similar issues discussed in class.
- The quality of interactivity: This should raise students' awareness about the fact that, in order to better comprehend and participate in intellectual, specialized discussions, one has to take account of underlying social representations, intellectual trends and attitudes appropriate to a given culture.
- The opportunity for careful observation of discourse schemes (encompassing form and content), characteristic of a particular genre and discourse type: This should allow students to move beyond the level of text and its meaning, as restricted only to its informative contents.

- Intellectual quality: The selected programs are aimed at listeners who have attained at least a secondary level of education; the quality of the programs may encourage students to adopt a participatory attitude and increase their willingness to join the discussion. In the long run, this might improve their media competence, so important in contemporary societies.
- The possibility of contrasting similarly formatted broadcasts in two languages/cultures: This should contribute, on the one hand, to refining students' cultural identity and, on the other hand, to enhancing their generic competence with reference to semi-formal discussion.
- Easy access to podcasts (and sometimes archives), made available at any time to anybody.

All of these advantages of interactive discussions on the air testify to the great pedagogical potential of radio material. In our view, though, this potential can be fully exploited only through systematic, extensive and conscientious use of such material —something that is still quite rare in L2 formal instruction at an advanced level.

6 Results of the Pilot Study

The main aim of our pilot study was to determine the potential of selected broadcasts when deriving from them discourse models, and, more specifically, argumentative procedures. Moreover, at this preliminary stage of the project, our research activities concentrated on identifying the strategies used by our students when it comes to comprehending long radio discussions. At the same time, we assessed the strategies they used with respect to implicit, mostly cultural contents.

During the semester, the students in the course of their autonomous work listened to 3 broadcasts *Le téléphone sonne*, each lasting from 35 to 45 min. Their task was to fill in questionnaires designed by the instructors. Each questionnaire included about 13 questions concerning the three stages of the listening task.

- The pre-listening stage was the focus of 3–4 questions aiming at introducing the problems discussed in the broadcasts. They encouraged the students to formulate hypotheses concerning the content, but they were also directed at systematizing and extending their knowledge.
- 5–6 questions related to the listening stage focused on verifying comprehension, that is, on the one hand, on recounting the broadcast content and, on the other hand on, on the interpretation and evaluation of this content.
- 2–3 questions connected with the post-listening stage were intended for the students to assess the selection and quality of the presented material, as well as the way the content was co-construed by interlocutors in the course of the interaction. The questions encouraged the students to view the task as a valuable experience that would enable them to acquire sociocultural knowledge, and they were aimed at developing communicative competence on the basis of the interaction analysis while listening to broadcasts.

The students had about 3 weeks to perform the task. The completed questionnaires were evaluated by the instructors and discussed in class over two following weeks.

The tasks we set for our students essentially concerned their extensive oral comprehension skills. They were aimed at developing students' capacity to observe participants' actions from the perspectives of two types of procedures: interactive (i. e. co-construing the meaning by participants, assessing their communicative efficacy, evaluating their rank and position in a given discussion) and discursive (participants' mastery of the genre norms and their ability to both negotiate their social and discourse identities and their mutual relations). Another aim was to stimulate their interest in exploring radio material as a source of knowledge, often of the intercultural type, and approaching this information from a critical perspective. These pedagogical aims can be further specified as follows:

6.1 Developing Extensive Comprehension

Extensive comprehension tasks were carried out whenever the students were expected to listen to a long passage or even a whole broadcast, whose duration ranged from 10 to 40 min. In this case, the purpose was to direct the students' attention to genre features and the overall dynamics of argumentative interactions. Moreover, especially during the first weeks, the students were exposed to a variety of recordings with the goal of helping them gain extended experience with the genre in question and thus improving their ability to recognize the generic specificity of semi-formal French discussion. At the same time, the students were encouraged to use the following strategies:

- interpreting the participants' discursive identities by referring to their institutional roles (e.g. this is done in order to anticipate an argumentative stance or justify the actual utterances of a participant by referring to their institution of origin or the social role they are to play in the broadcast0;
- identifying the main argumentative trains of thought and the ways they are developed (e.g. interpreting the reasons why the journalist chooses the next speaker or by explaining the way the journalist introduces a new plot);
- approaching the cultural content from an intercultural perspective (e.g. reflecting on the reasons that might explain the introduction of a new plot or example, or analyzing the ways the participants approach the problem raised);
- critically evaluating the views presented in a broadcast, in accordance with specific criteria (e.g. coherence, validity, reliability);
- assessing the value of the content presented in a broadcast as sufficiently pertinent in order to incorporate it into one's own stance on a particular problem.

6.2 Developing Interactive Speaking Abilities

This category of aims emphasizes the necessity of building up students' resources in relation to both a given topic and genre. Those resources should not be confined to single words but, according to the idea developed in Wilczyńska (1999), also encompass larger formats, such as characteristic structures, specialized terms and/or expressions, generic exponents and schemes. On the other hand, students should pay closer attention to a situation's parameters, which could increase their observation skills and make them more aware of what their own needs are in this respect. During our pilot study, the following aims were proposed to our students:

- identifying some characteristic procedures used by the radio host and the invited experts (e.g. strategies used in co-constructing meaning, referring to a speaker's previous utterances, strategies used when assessing other speakers' utterances or arguments, cf. Wilczyńska and Wojciechowska 2013); as a next step, those actions were viewed as individual ones and specific to particular participants; in order to more precisely assess the efficacy of these actions, the students were requested to complete more specific, preparatory tasks on a wiki, before discussing these aspects in class;
- assessing the participants' utterances from the point of view of their pertinence to the genre of interactive discussion in the media; this was done by taking into account such criteria as the degree of informativity and clarity, viewed as efficient strategies when it comes to ensuring unambiguous communication.

6.3 Developing Interactive and Argumentative Abilities in Class Discussions

The tasks listed below fall into the category of pedagogical actions, the purpose of which is both to help students communicate more authentically and to develop their self-assessment ability in oral argumentative interactions. Because of the brevity of our pilot study, these tasks were introduced only to a limited extent and with the following aims:

- developing the ability to enhance one's own argumentation on the basis of selected resources available on the Internet and in radio podcasts;
- developing the ability to co-construct meaningful dialogs (implying both dialogical and dialogic dimensions);
- increasing awareness of the cognitive potential of a discussion, which involves confronting different aspects of an issue, especially when adopting a cognitive thinking attitude.

The three types of aims and tasks will be pursued during the main study, with the developments within the last category (C) being necessary, especially with respect to tasks aimed at fostering speaking abilities in semi-formal situations.

7 Conclusions of the Pilot Study

Our pilot study had a dual aim of: (1) determining students' initial strategies in comprehending longer radio discussions on varied sociocultural issues, and (2) attempting to develop these strategies by applying what has been labeled here as an integrated approach. Based on the tentative results, we can say that our students clearly lack regular experience when it comes to listening extensively to the radio and exploiting this medium in developing their oral communicative competence. Their fairly modest familiarity with the media specificity of the radio makes it even more difficult for the students to view the selected type of broadcast in terms of a genre, hampering their ability to fully appreciate its cognitive and opinion-forming functions. As a result, their capacity to accurately interpret the interactive procedures used by the debaters was, in some cases, visibly deficient.

Moreover, the students' listening strategies remain oriented mainly towards the informative contents, which is evidenced by the fact that they neglected the highly interactive and opinion-forming character of the broadcast in question. In our view, the predominance of the former strategies may be due to the absence of the so-called *active listening*, which consists in taking on a dialogic attitude towards the cognitive content of a given broadcast (i.e. the information and arguments it conveys) and linking it to one's own views, reflections, personal questions or doubts. As a consequence, the students were able to assess the participants' competence only in a fairly superficial way. Finally, the study revealed the difficulties the students faced when it comes to properly grasping implicit content and, more broadly, discovering the social representations that underlie debaters' utterances.

Our students positively evaluated the pedagogical value of this semester-long work on podcasts. In the final, anonymous questionnaire they unanimously emphasized their interest in the topics that were discussed in an in-depth manner in the broadcasts. They also pointed out the advantages of working with podcasts on a regular basis, especially when it comes to enhancing the development of their L2 oral competence. Furthermore, they stressed the value of podcasts with respect to broadening their understanding of the issues discussed and pointed to the role that podcasts played in encouraging them to debate such issues.

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It's Small Words that Make a Big Difference

Aneta Kot

Abstract Even a cursory look at any tapescript of a native speaker's spontaneous conversation clearly shows that spoken discourse is abundant with hedges. Traditionally, conversational hedges have been, if not omitted, little emphasized in grammar reference books or ELT textbooks. However, these *small words* (Hasselgreen 2002) play a key role in spoken interaction. They add texture to the spoken language and make the learner sound not only more polite but also more fluent and native-like. The purpose of this study is to investigate EFL students' attitude to the use of hedging expressions in spoken discourse as well as their awareness of the meanings and functions of these mitigating devices. The hedging devices under study are items most frequently found in native-speaker speech ('I mean', 'sort of/kind of', 'just','like', 'I think', 'I guess', 'I don't know', 'you know', 'or something/or something like that'), according to Michigan Corpus of American Spoken English (MICASE) and Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE) corpora findings. The subjects were 19 advanced students of English. A questionnaire, which consisted of three sections, was administered to elicit the students' responses. The results indicate that foreign language students, despite their high level of language proficiency, are not conscious of the interpersonal functions that hedging devices fulfill, which might be due to the fact that this aspect of pragmatic competence is neglected both by language teachers and textbook writers. The paper, therefore, discusses some possible pedagogical implications involved in preparing learners to become more interactionally competent speakers.

The term *small words* has been borrowed from Hasselgreen (2002).

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1 Introduction

Successful communication entails not only knowledge of grammar but also pragmatic aspects of the target language. Research demonstrates that a lack of pragmatic skills can lead to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns, despite otherwise high levels of L2 proficiency (Kasper and Blum-Kulka 1993; Bardovi-Harlig 2001). This is especially true in the case of hedging, a communicative strategy which enables speakers to soften the force of their utterances (Nikula 1997, p. 188). According to Fraser (2010, p. 15), "when non-native speakers fail to hedge appropriately, they may be perceived as impolite, offensive, arrogant, or simply inappropriate. Failing to recognize a hedged utterance, they may misunderstand a native speaker's meaning. This is especially unfortunate when speakers are otherwise fluent, since people typically expect that someone who speaks their language well on the grammatical level has also mastered the pragmatic niceties".

Although hedges, the devices through which hedging is implemented, are pervasive in spoken discourse and have a central part to play in communication, they are seriously undervalued in the teaching/learning context. As a result, the comprehension and correct use of hedging devices may pose problems for foreign language learners. Research studies (e.g. Nikula 1997; De Cock et al. 1998; Metsä-Ketelä 2006) reveal that non-native speakers do not use hedges to the degree that native speakers use them. Moreover, it is not only quantitative but also qualitative differences in the use of hedging devices by native and non-native speakers that can be observed. According to Nikula (1997, p. 195), this might be because learners "are not aware of the role of modifiers and they thus cannot make appropriate use of them". Moreover, they may be "unwilling to use a bunch of modifiers in an utterance when speaking a foreign language, regarding it as a sign of dysfluency" (1997, p. 195). Students' infrequent use of such devices might be due to their lack of knowledge of the value and functions of hedging devices in spoken discourse, or the fact that although they have acquired this knowledge, they are unable to transfer it to actual production. In order to find out whether this is the case, it is necessary to investigate students' awareness of the pragmatic value of *small words* in speech.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Definition and Functions of Hedges

When people talk, they not only exchange information but also express uncertainty, politeness and other interpersonal meanings. One way of doing this is by means of hedges, mitigating devices which allow speakers to lessen the impact of their utterances, either because they do not want to sound definite and authoritative or they do not know or are searching for the right word or expression. The motivation for their use is also the desire to save face, either the hearer's or the speaker's (Carter and McCarthy 1997).

A review of the relevant literature demonstrates that there is no consensus on the definitions, functions and classification of hedges. This is confirmed by Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 151), who say that "hedging can be achieved in indefinite numbers of surface forms" and, again, by Nikula (1997, p. 190), who states that it is difficult to provide a complete list of hedges because "they basically form an open-ended category". The terminology used to define such devices is both heterogeneous and confusing. In the literature they have been named *adaptors* (Prince et al. 1982), *downtoners* (Jucker et al. 2003), *downgraders* (House and Kasper 1981), or *fuzziness indicators/approximators* (Wang 2005, cited in Quaglio 2009). In this paper, they will be referred to as *mitigating devices*, *hedges* or *hedging devices*.

This study focuses on *approximators* such as 'kind of', 'sort of', 'just', 'or something/or something like that', which, according to Prince et al. (1982), render the modified word or expression more fuzzy and imprecise. The author also discusses *shields*, devices which signal a speaker's lack of full commitment to the validity of their proposition (Prince et al. 1982) such as 'I think', 'I guess', 'I don't know'. Attention is also paid to 'I mean', 'you know' and 'like', called by Östman (1981) *pragmatic particles* and by Schiffrin (1987) *discourse markers*. However, some writers include these phrases in the category of hedges (e.g. Brown and Levinson 1987).

2.2 Native Speaker Versus Non-native Speaker Use of Hedges

Research (Nikula 1997; De Cock et al. 1998; Metsä-Ketelä 2006) confirms that non-native use of hedges differs from that of native speakers. Researchers as well as teachers admit that, when compared with native speakers, language learners underuse the so-called *small words* and this lack is a serious indicator of being a foreigner.

Hasselgreen (2002), for example, compared the use of *small words*, such 'as well', 'sort of' and 'a bit' in spoken corpora. She investigated 14–15-year-old Norwegian learners of English together with a comparable group of native speakers. Her study demonstrated that the acquisition of these devices is crucial in the development of fluency. In Nikula's (1997) study, the use of hedges by Finnish speakers of English was compared with that of native speakers. It was revealed that there are qualitative and quantitative differences in the use of hedges in native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) speech. Non-native speakers used not only a smaller number of hedges but also a smaller variety of hedges. The study showed that NNS rarely used implicit modifiers 'I mean', 'you know', 'well', and 'like', and as Nikula (1997, p. 195) states, this "lack of implicit modifiers is thus partly responsible for the impression that the learners sounded, on the whole, more detached, more formal than the native speakers in these corresponding face-to-face situations". Another interesting observation made by Nikula was the fact that the native speakers used more implicit hedges than non-native speakers, especially in

such face-threatening situations as disagreeing, expressing personal opinions. The conclusion was that hedges "do not only serve a gap-filling function but also have an interpersonal role in interaction" (Nikula 1997, p. 195). Nikula (1997) maintains that students may overuse or underuse certain hedges and thus they may not sound native-like, which may be due to the following reasons:

- learners may be unaware of the function of hedges;
- they probably think that fluent speech should contain as few hedges, hesitations, filled pauses as possible as this may be a sign of dysfluency;
- foreign language teaching is based on the written texts which contain no 'dysfluencies';
- native language influence;
- differences due to different notions of politeness in different cultures.

2.3 Culture and Hedging Devices

According to Wierzbicka (2003), culture determines ways of speaking and thus languages develop devices to reflect cultural values. Linguistic differences are linked to cultural traditions. The Anglo-Saxon cultural tradition respects the rights, autonomy and privacy of an individual, and it detests dogmatism and interference in other people's affairs. The Polish cultural tradition cherishes spontaneity and cordiality and thus tolerates "forceful expression of personal views and feelings" (Wierzbicka 2003, p. 40).

This cultural difference can be manifested by the use of hedges by both nationalities. Wierzbicka (2003, p. 43) claims that "English is fond of understatement and of hedges; by contrast, Polish tends to overstate rather than understate". The English use hedged expressions so as to avoid making straightforward comments, asking 'direct' questions or making 'direct' requests. Poles express opinions directly, "in strong terms, and without any hedges whatsoever" (2003, p. 43). Undoubtedly, the understanding of these cultural differences is crucial in intercultural communication situations. When foreign speakers know how to interpret and use politeness devices such as hedges appropriately, they can avoid communication problems and negative evaluations by native speakers.

2.4 Hedges in the Teaching/Learning Context

Traditionally, conversational hedges have been stigmatized as bad habits (Stenström 2006) or 'verbal garbage' (Schourup 1985, p. 94) and have been associated with the speaker's incompetence. For example, O'Donnell and Todd (1991, p. 69) refer to 'you see', 'you know' and 'I mean' as "phrases which occur with varying frequency in informal speech, or with unskillful speakers". Similarly, Andersen (1998, p. 150)

reports that 'like' is "commonly accused of being redundant and without meaning". However, recently, the significance of *small words* in social interaction has been recognized. According to Moreno (2001, p. 130), they "fulfill multiple interactive functions fundamental to speaker-hearer relationship, thus being essential elements in everyday interaction". They "keep our speech flowing" (Hasselgreen 2002, p. 150) and "oil (…) the wheels of verbal interaction" (Stubbe and Holmes 1995, p. 63). In fact, the absence of these expressions in speech may lead to pragmatic mistakes which are more serious than grammatical errors. Such pragmatic errors make a foreign language user sound impolite, aggressive or uncooperative, which may result in a communicative failure (Thomas 1983, cited in Markkanen and Schröder 1997). Nugroho (2002, p. 17) supports this view when she states that "second or foreign language speakers very often sound too blunt or too direct in the ears of native speakers. It might not be because they are rude or have simple understanding of this world, but it is probably because they do not hedge".

Since the use of hedges is indispensable in spoken discourse, we might assume that hedging devices are given special attention in the foreign language classroom. However, there is a scarcity of instructional materials to teach the interpersonal functions that hedges perform (Overstreet and Yule 1999). Moreover, teachers neglect hedges in spite of the important role they play in spoken discourse (Romero-Trillo 2002). Undoubtedly, increasing learners' knowledge in this respect and enhancing their ability to soften the force of utterances and use polite language is of considerable importance to college students in Poland who have mastered enough grammatical knowledge but still are unable to express their opinions with hedging expressions. Therefore, it seems essential to examine students' attitudes to the use of hedges as well as their awareness of the functions these pragmatic devices perform to find out the possible reasons for their inability or maybe unwillingness to employ such devices in spontaneous conversations. Is it the lack of students' awareness about the functions of hedging devices (i.e. declarative knowledge) or maybe the lack of ability to use these expressions in spontaneous conversations (i.e. procedural knowledge) that is to blame?

3 The Study

3.1 Description of the Study

The study looks at students' perceptions and understanding of the role, functions as well as meaning of conversational hedges. The research questions posed are as follows:

1. Are college students aware of the pragmatic value of hedging devices?
2. How do they perceive someone who incorporates hedges in their speech?
3. How do they interpret a message containing conversational hedges?
4. Which functions and meanings of hedges are advanced students of English familiar with?

The subjects were 19 advanced students of English. The learning history of all the participants was essentially homogeneous, as they learned the language in a classroom setting through formal instruction in similar educational institutions. The data for the study was collected on the basis of a written questionnaire (see Appendix) whose aim was to evaluate the students' awareness of hedges. There were two types of questions, closed and open-ended ones, that were intended to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire consisted of 3 sections. In section A, the students were requested to read an extract taken from Michigan Corpus of American Spoken English (MICASE) and answer 12 questions about the text. In section B, the participants indicated their opinions by choosing the best answer. In section C, the students were supposed to comment on the meaning and functions of conversational hedges used in the examples taken from MICASE. The evaluation was anonymous to encourage honest responses. For purposes of validity the subjects were not told about the focus of the study.

3.2 Presentation and Discussion of Results

3.2.1 Section A of the Questionnaire

The first section of the questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions was administered in order to find out the students' perceptions of the use of hedges in terms of context and acceptability. References were made to the use of similar expressions in Polish. The term 'hedges' was replaced by 'phrases in bold' to avoid any inconsistencies resulting from students' lack of metalinguistic knowledge. The survey revealed very interesting findings which are presented below.

Value of Hedges

The majority of those surveyed do not perceive the communicative value of hedges as very high. They regard hedges as fillers, i.e. empty, unneeded words that are often used to fill in gaps and pauses in conversations. It is worth noting that only six students perceive someone who uses hedges as native-like (see Table 1). A possible explanation for this could be that students regard hedging devices as dysfluencies that are indicative of a person's lack of competence. Additional comments confirm the findings (see Table 1). The participants maintain that using such devices conveys a lack of intelligence, or some kind of 'deficiency' on the part of the speaker. Moreover, the subjects are not sure whether such expressions help them understand native-speaker conversations better. On the contrary, five learners are concerned that discourse peppered with such expressions may hinder comprehension.

Table 1 Students' perceptions of the use of hedges in terms of context and acceptability

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not sure (%)
Do you use such phrases in English?	*73.5*	16	11.5
Do you think frequent use of the phrases in bold in the extract is appropriate in the context provided?	32	*68*	
Do you think the phrases in bold are prevalent in your own speech?	21	*32*	*47*
	Formal context	*Informal context*	*Both equally*
In which context do you think you would use such phrases more?	*0*	*100*	0
	Foreign	*Native-like*	*Hard to say*
How do you perceive someone who uses the phrases in bold in the passage?	21	*32*	*47*
Additional comments	They are natural pauses	They are without important meaning	Speakers use such phrases because they hesitate
	They demonstrate lack of intelligence	Such phrases are used when speakers cannot find an appropriate word	They give time to think

EFL students are not aware of the fact that hedges facilitate comprehension and contribute to speakers' being perceived as more fluent and native-like.

Reasons for the Use of Hedges

As can be seen from Table 1, the majority of students (about 74 %) admit to using such expressions in English; however almost 60 % of those questioned either disagree or are unsure whether such devices are prevalent in their speech. The subjects use such devices as fillers to gain additional processing time and to search for words, or they utilize them in their speech but cannot explain why. They cite 'I think' and 'you know' as items they most frequently employ in informal conversations. Another interesting observation is that those students who had more contact with the target language culture (e.g. they have spent their summer holidays in the UK or the USA) demonstrate heightened awareness of the importance and pervasive nature of *small words* in speech. They are conscious that using such expressions may make them sound like a native speaker. On the other hand, those

who have not had the opportunity to stay in an English speaking country are unsure as to whether hedges are important in speech, as they believe they can communicate the intended message without resorting to such expressions. This observation is in line with that of Sankoff et al. (1997) who argue that if a non-native speaker has more contact with the local people, he or she will employ more hedging devices than individuals who do not have opportunities for such contacts.

Context of Use

Almost 70 % of the students believe that frequent use of conversational hedges is inappropriate. This finding proves that these expressions tend to be viewed negatively. In response to the question concerning the situations in which they would use such expressions, all the respondents chose an informal context, which is consistent with the observation by Jucker and Ziv (1998, p. 4) who state that mitigating devices such as 'I think', 'like', 'just', 'well', 'I mean', 'and stuff' are "a feature of oral rather than written discourse and are associated with informality".

Hedges in L1

What should be emphasized is the fact that the students demonstrate awareness of the existence of similar expressions in Polish. Moreover, they are able to provide some examples of equivalent expressions in their mother tongue. All the respondents acknowledge that they utilize such expressions in Polish conversations. They presume that the cause of their reliance on such phrases is simply that of habit. Exposed to their own conversations recorded in Polish, they were astonished to discover that their discourse was abundant with such hedges as: 'no', 'znaczy', 'no wiesz', 'właśnie', 'chyba', 'jakby', or 'w zasadzie'. It turns out that students frequently employ such expressions in speech. However, this does not mean that these students are aware of that. The subjects also remark that they try to eliminate *small words* from their mother tongue as such expressions are frowned upon in Polish.

Received Pedagogy

Generally, the students admit that such expressions are not paid attention to in their English language courses. They state they are usually discouraged from using hedges in their speech as they are regarded as a sign of dysfluency. The majority of the students (13 out of 19) claim that they have not been taught hedging devices either for receptive or productive purposes. Moreover, their coursebooks do not reflect features of spoken discourse. It is usually markers associated with written texts that learners are exposed to (e.g. 'nevertheless', 'moreover'), while those that appear in natural conversations are overlooked.

Table 2 The impact of hedging expressions on the way

I. Speaker				
	'or something/or something like that'	*'kind of/sort of'*	*'I think', 'I guess', 'I don't know'*	*Average*
Less confident (%)	74	47	79	*67*
Less professional (%)	79	42	63	*61*
II. Message				
	'*or something/or something like that*'	'*kind of/sort of*'	'*I think', 'I guess', 'I don't know*'	
Less believable (%)	84	37	68	*63*
Less accurate (%)	63	42	68	*58*
Less memorable (%)	63	53	53	*58*
Neither more polite nor less polite (%)	74	79	68	*74*
Neither more intelligent nor less intelligent (%)	63	63	47	*58*

I. The speaker is perceived, and II. The message is interpreted

3.2.2 Section B of the Questionnaire

Section B of the questionnaire focused upon two aspects of the use of conversational hedges:

1. How learners perceive a speaker who uses 'or something/or something like that', 'kind of/sort of', 'I think', 'I guess' or 'I don't know' in their speech.
2. How they interpret a message containing 'or something/or something like that', 'kind of/sort of', 'I think', 'I guess' or 'I don't know'.

The Impact of Hedging Expressions on the Way a Message Is Interpreted

When asked about the impact that the expressions mentioned above have on the message that is conveyed, more than half of the respondents declare that when people end their phrases or sentences with 'or something/or something like that', or use 'kind of/sort of', 'I think', 'I guess' or 'I don't know' instead of leaving them out, the message is seen as less believable, less memorable and less accurate (see Table 2). This finding is in line with the observation made by Nugroho (2002, p. 17), who states that "there seems to be a negative perception about hedging among language users because it shows uncertainty that is perceived as indicator of unreliability". According to Nugroho (2002, p. 17), "hedging offers a contradiction

in a way that it was 'uncertain' words or phrases which in fact show certainty or accuracy". Although hedging is used to express uncertainty, in most cases, hedged statements are very often more appropriate and accurate than those which are not hedged (Nugroho 2002, p. 21).

Hedges and Politeness

The most astonishing finding refers to the question concerning politeness. Only one speaker believes that utterances containing 'I think', 'I guess', 'I don't know', 'sort of/kind of' or 'something/or something like that' are more polite. The majority of the respondents (95 %) interpret the message containing conversational hedges as either less polite (21 %) or neither more nor less polite (74 %). This contradicts Brown and Levinson's (1987) assumption that speakers use such expressions to signal positive politeness (showing solidarity) or negative politeness (showing respect).

The Impact of Hedging Expressions on the Way a Speaker Is Perceived

Taking into consideration the impact of hedging expressions on the way the speaker is perceived, the results are even more revealing, with 67 % of students claiming that speakers who utilize such devices sound less confident in their knowledge of the information. The majority of the students (61 %) regard speakers who use hedges as less professional (see Table 2). This contradicts the claim made by Pappas (1989, pp. 101–103, as quoted in Nugroho 2002, p. 18), who argues that "one way professionals indicate their level of expertise is the degree of uncertainty they convey (…) [in order to] (…) make their assertion indisputable (and) irrefutable". In fact, some studies suggest that professionals use hedges quite frequently, and, according to Nugroho (2002, p. 20), "the reason is not that they are reliable or incompetent in making statements, but rather it is because (…) professionals' hedged statements can give a positive impression about their expertise, because their assertions sound acceptable, and therefore become indisputable and irrefutable". Furthermore, Carter and McCarthy (2006, p. 202) maintain that vagueness is often a mark of the sensitivity and skill of a speaker.

3.2.3 Section C of the Questionnaire

Section C of the questionnaire elicited the respondents' knowledge of the functions and meaning of selected hedges.

The functions that the so-called *small words* serve in spoken discourse are not well understood by EFL students (see Table 3 for more details). When asked to provide the meaning or function of the given expressions, the students focused on

Table 3 Students' perceptions of the functions of the expressions under study

Item number	Students' perceptions	Number of students
1. 'I think'	To give an opinion—personal evaluation	13
	Uncertainty	3
	Filler-to collect thoughts	3
2. 'like'	Approximator	3
	Hesitation—search for words	2
	Comparison	9
	Example or explanation	5
3. 'sort of/kind of'[a]	Imprecision marker	2
	To exemplify the characteristics	13
	Lack of vocabulary-lexical search	4
4. 'just'	Temporal function	3
	No answer provided	9
	Emphasizer	7
5. 'you know'	Information-state checker	7
	Turn-yielding device	1
	Lexical search	3
	Fluency device	4
	To convey intimacy	2
	Emphasizer	2

[a] The phrases 'sort of/kind of' are taken together in this paper as "they seem to have the same meaning" (Aijmer 2002, p. 207)

the literal or propositional meaning of these words rather than their pragmatic use in spoken language. This is clearly visible in the case of 'I think' where the majority of the students (68 %) point out that this phrase is used to indicate an opinion in the example provided below:

> …so that's all the questions I had really. okay and it's a lot of questions and it's good to see you still kinda I mean **I think** it's it's you've learned a lot this semester **I think** yeah <LAUGH> yeah and you know it's it's hard work to to do real well here **I think**… but it's good too because if you can learn this stuff then you can build on it…

A similar line of reasoning can be observed with 'kind of' where 13 students claim that this expression means 'type of' or 'example of something', as visible in the utterance presented below:

> first day and a half was yeah fun it was, to be totally honest a little boring with all the le- you know the lectures and information it's just like you **kind of** sit there and listen and hopefully absorb…

Likewise, in the next example almost 50 % of students believe that 'like' is employed for comparison:

> We talked about it with Pedro the next time we met and, mhm that, he seemed to think that was a- that was okay. yeah um, and then I know that he thought it was **like** absolutely necessary uhuh but, um… so we we decided that it would be_ we'd each take a turn doing it for a month.

A possible explanation for this might be that both teachers and materials writers focus on the grammatical status of such words or phrases in the written mode rather than on their pragmatic use in the spoken mode. For example, 'like' is frequently emphasized as a verb, conjunction or preposition. Very common usages of 'like' to introduce an example, to mark approximation, to search for the appropriate expression, to mark lexical focus or to introduce direct speech are rarely paid attention to. Not surprisingly, only two students seem to know that 'like' can introduce direct speech in the context provided below.

> He's taken on his wife's name I see and, I just, I look at him and mhm he didn't have a beard then and I look at him I'm **like** <LAUGH> did you go to Saint Lawrence? and uhuh he's **like** yes.

Admittedly, it is not always easy for learners to explain the meaning of *small words* as they are untranslatable, and lack a "clear semantic denotation and syntactic role" (de Klerk 2005, p. 275). According to Aijmer (2002, p. 2), such expressions as 'I think', 'you know', 'I mean', 'actually' or 'sort of' are "difficult to analyze grammatically and their literal meanings are 'overridden' by pragmatic functions involving the speaker's relationship to the hearer, to the utterance or to the whole text". As *small words* are taught as grammatical units rather than as a pragmatic function, it should not come as a surprise to discover that almost half of the students questioned fail to provide the meaning or the discourse function of 'just'. The rest associate the use of 'just' with its temporal function or regard it as an emphasizer (see Table 3).

To sum up, the respondents usually associate the use of hedging devices with imprecision, uncertainty and verbal planning problems. They rely either on the literal meanings of *small words* or regard them as fillers, expressions devoid of important meaning, or words used to fill in gaps or pauses because speakers cannot find the right word or do not recall all the terms necessary. There is hardly any mention of the interpersonal functions related to face-saving, politeness and indirectness that hedges serve in spoken discourse (Brown and Levinson 1987). For example, only 2 subjects demonstrate awareness of the interactional function of 'you know' which facilitates the process of communication and strengthens solidarity among the interlocutors. The reason for this may lie in the fact that in listening activities the focus is on imparting information (i.e. transactional function) rather than maintaining communicational intention (i.e. interpersonal function) and, as a result, the affective or strategic functions that *small words* perform in spoken discourse are neglected. The findings clearly show that it seems important to raise students' awareness of conversational hedges which frequently appear in native

speaker discourse, yet rarely can be found in teaching materials. Consistent with the Lexical Invisibility Hypothesis (Low 1996) hedging devices, if not properly drawn attention to, may pass unnoticed.

4 Conclusions and Implications of the Findings

On the basis of the data obtained, some important conclusions can be drawn. First, as conversational hedges are ignored in TEFL textbooks, students are not familiar with the pragmatic functions these may convey (especially the politeness function). Carter (1998, p. 45) maintains that "[s]everal English language coursebooks do not present many examples of vague language, even though it is significant, and enables polite and non-threatening interaction". Moreover, the use of hedges is neglected in foreign language classrooms. Teachers think that no pedagogic intervention is necessary as such devices will be acquired unconsciously. As a result, learners are underexposed to such expressions and do not utilize them in communication. Furthermore, students underuse these so-called *small words* as they think that it is unacceptable to employ hedges in their speech as such items are regarded as dysfluencies, a sign of careless thinking or sloppy expression. Another reason might be the differences in the devices employed to signal politeness in Polish and English cultures. The results of the questionnaire provide some implications for pedagogy. The findings suggest that students need instruction in the interpersonal functions of conversational hedges. By drawing attention to the appropriate use of hedges, students can increase their awareness of politeness conventions and, as a result, improve their competence in oral communication. Moreover, learners should be aware of the fact that using hedges is not only acceptable but also necessary for successful interpersonal communication as these expressions allow speakers to maintain fluency, soften the force of their utterances, mark shared knowledge, and signal solidarity (Overstreet et al. 2006).

The interpretation of implied meanings of and the appropriate use of hedging devices can pose great difficulties for learners as these expressions are multifunctional and context-dependent (Romero-Trillo 2002). Learners need to be aware of the fact that it will not be possible for them to understand the meaning of *small words* if they assume there is a semantic equivalence for each item. According to Wichmann and Chanet (2009, p. 25), "without an understanding of pragmatics (what *people* mean rather than what *words* mean), learners cannot begin to grasp what particles, markers etc. are actually 'doing' in spoken interaction". They advocate that "learners must therefore be made aware that meaning is not just denotational but that meaning can be subjective, and express the speaker's relationship to the hearer, to the utterance or to the text" (2009, p. 25).

It should be emphasized that teaching the meaning of conversational hedges is not easy. However, according to corpus findings, the frequency with which such phrases occur in spoken discourse makes it necessary for EFL teachers to provide learners with an explanation of the pragmatic role such devices play (Wichmann

and Chanet 2009). Teaching this aspect of pragmatic competence can be problematic but it is an obvious challenge for language teachers. It might be beneficial to raise students' awareness of the interpersonal functions of hedges through observation and drawing conclusions, noticing differences, crosslinguistic comparisons (McCarthy and Carter 1994) and discussion.

According to Kasper (1981, cited in Overstreet and Yule 1999, p. 3), often students fail to identify pragmatic markers in the target language, even when related forms are commonly used in native language interaction. Anderson and Trudgill (1990, p. 94) point out that such phrases "may pass unnoticed for a long period, but once they are discovered (brought to our awareness), we hear them all the time". Therefore, it is crucial to raise learners' awareness of the existence and pragmatic role of *small words* in spoken discourse. Authentic materials (e.g. taken from MICASE) reflecting natural discourse features should be exploited to heighten students' awareness of the abundance and value of such expressions in native speaker speech.

Furthermore, the type and amount of input learners receive in the classroom depends to a great extent on teachers' awareness and positive perceptions of the pragmatic value of hedges in spoken discourse as well as their positive attitudes toward the teaching of hedging devices. Therefore, teachers should have greater awareness of the role that such expressions play in spoken discourse and how they can be taught. Learners need to be provided with opportunities not only to understand such expressions, their pragmatic functions and meanings but also to use them properly in spoken interactions. The capacity to interpret and use hedging strategies will allow them to be more competent in spoken discourse.

Clearly, the results need to be treated with a little caution. The limitations of the elicitation techniques together with the lack of generalizability of such a small study mean that further and larger-scale research is needed to confirm the findings. Finally, research should be conducted to determine whether activities and pedagogic instruction which raise students' awareness of hedges can lead to better comprehension or even production of such expressions.

Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE

Personal details:
Age:
Male/Female:

Nationality:
Country:
Native language:
Language(s) spoken at home:

Education:
Current studies:
Current year of study:
Institution:
Medium of instruction:
English only
Other language(s) (specify)
Both
==========
Years of English at school:
Years of English at university:
Private tutorials (One-to-one teaching)

Stay in an English-speaking country
Where?
When? How long? Purpose?

SECTION A

Read the following extract and answer the following questions:
Title: Graduate Student Research Interview 1
S1: Speaker 1 S2: Speaker 2
(Extract taken from Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English: http://micase.elicorpora.info/)

***S2: I think** he's getting more comfortable [S1: mhm] talking cuz he's talking [S1: mhm] more uh certainly, with our group, um... but his phrasing, before he used to say **sort of**, start everything with for example [S1: <LAUGH> uhuh uhuh] and and and he stopped doing that [S1: uhuh] um... <LAUGH> um, so, **I think**... his responses are, to questions are getting, um... **sort of...** it sounds like they're coming easier to him [S1: yeah] um he doesn't have to... um... **sorta** stop and think about what he has to say [S1: mhm] um it seems to flow a little bit, better [S1: uhuh] um... I'm **just** trying to think back I took Spanish for four years in high school [S1: yeah] and, **you know** I'd certainly have to sit there, and think of what I wanted to say, and then think of how to translate it [S1: uhuh] and then say it [S1: uhuh] and it seems [S1: right] like, that process for him... is easier [S1: mhm] an- and faster now [S1: mhm... yeah] **I mean** an- an- and **I don't know** if he's at the point where he **just** talks and it **just** comes out... in English, but <PAUSE:10> **S1:** yeah*

1) Do you think the frequent use of the phrases in bold in the extract is appropriate in the context provided?
a) Yes b) No

2). Do you think the phrases in bold are prevalent in your own speech?
a) Yes b) No c) Not sure

3) In which context do you think you would use such phrases more?
a) formal context
b) informal context
c) both equally

4) Do you use such phrases in English?
a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

5) How do you perceive someone who uses the phrases in bold in the passage?
a) foreign
b) native-like
c) hard to say

6) Do you think the phrases are used
a) more often in Polish than in English
b) more often in English than in Polish
c) in both languages equally
Why? ……..

7) What are the typical equivalents of the phrases in Polish?
…….

8) Have you ever been taught such or similar expressions? If yes, which ones?
……

9) Do the textbooks you use incorporate features of spoken discourse? If yes, which ones?
……

10) Do such expressions help you understand native speaker conversations or rather hinder communication? Why?
……

11) Why do you use such expressions in English?
……

12) Do you use similar expressions in Polish? If yes, which ones? Why?
……
Additional comments
……

SECTION B
Adapted from Use of Vague Language NEW Survey
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=%2baVyLKhN%2bwSfXUzn6REGVQ%3d%3d#q1 Accessed 13 September 2010

1. When people end their phrases or sentences with "or something" or "or something like that", how does that affect the way you interpret what they say?

Does it make what the speaker is saying...
A. More believable?
B. Less believable?
C. Neither more believable nor less believable?

Does it make the speaker sound...
A. More confident in their knowledge of the information?
B. Less confident in their knowledge of the information?
C. Neither more confident nor less confident in their knowledge of the information?

Does it make what the speaker is saying...
A. More intelligent?
B. Less intelligent?
C. Neither more intelligent nor less intelligent?

Does it make what the speaker is saying…
A. More memorable?
B. Less memorable?
C. Neither more memorable nor less memorable?

Does it make you think what the speaker is saying is...
A. More accurate?
B. Less accurate?
C. Neither more accurate nor less accurate?

Does it make the speaker sound…
A. More professional?
B. Less professional?
C. Neither more professional nor less professional?

Does it make what the speaker is saying...
A. More polite?
B. Less polite?
C. Neither more polite nor less polite?

2. When people use the "kind of" or "sort of" instead of leaving them out, how does that affect the way you interpret what they say?
Does it make what the speaker is saying...
A. More believable?
B. Less believable?
C. Neither more believable nor less believable?

Does it make the speaker sound...
A. More confident in their knowledge of the information?
B. Less confident in their knowledge of the information?
C. Neither more confident nor less confident in their knowledge of the information?

Does it make what the speaker is saying...
A. More intelligent?
B. Less intelligent?
C. Neither more intelligent nor less intelligent?

Does it make what the speaker is saying…
A. More memorable?
B. Less memorable?
C. Neither more memorable nor less memorable?

Does it make you think what the speaker is saying is...
A. More accurate?
B. Less accurate?
C. Neither more accurate nor less accurate?

Does it make the speaker sound…
A. More professional?
B. Less professional?
C. Neither more professional nor less professional?

Does it make what the speaker is saying...
A. More polite?
B. Less polite?
C. Neither more polite nor less polite?

3. When people use phrases such as "I think", "I guess", or "I don't know" instead of leaving those phrases out, how does that affect the way you interpret what they say?

Does it make what the speaker is saying...
A. More believable?
B. Less believable?
C. Neither more believable nor less believable?

Does it make the speaker sound...
A. More confident in their knowledge of the information?
B. Less confident in their knowledge of the information?
C. Neither more confident nor less confident in their knowledge of the information?

Does it make what the speaker is saying...
A. More intelligent?
B. Less intelligent?
C. Neither more intelligent nor less intelligent?

Does it make what the speaker is saying…
A. More memorable?
B. Less memorable?
C. Neither more memorable nor less memorable?

Does it make you think what the speaker is saying is...
A. More accurate?
B. Less accurate?
C. Neither more accurate nor less accurate?

Does it make the speaker sound…
A. More professional?
B. Less professional?
C. Neither more professional nor less professional?

Does it make what the speaker is saying...
A. More polite?
B. Less polite?
C. Neither more polite nor less polite?

SECTION C
Why have speakers used the expressions in bold in the following examples?
(Examples taken from Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English: http://micase.elicorpora.info/)

1. *We talked about it with Pedro the next time we met and, mhm that, he seemed to think that was a- that was okay. yeah um, and then I know that he thought it was* ***like*** *absolutely necessary uhuh but, um... so we we decided that it would be_ we'd each take a turn doing it for a month*

   Your comment: ……

2. *He's taken on his wife's name I see and, I just, I look at him and mhm he didn't have a beard then and I look at him I'm Saint Lawrence? and uhuh he's* ***like*** *yes*

   Your comment: ……

3. *it really varies, some evenings I, decide especially if there's something I'm working on writing a proposal writing a paper I may* ***just****, work on my laptop and and continue from you know ten P-M till later, there are other nights that I don't do anything. I* ***jus****t, you know my wife and I hang around we talk,*

we read we watch television, um, and uh if I had to ***sort of*** *take a guess I would say at least a couple of nights a week, I'm working after uh, going home after the kids are in bed. the ve- the weekends are also, uh uh, uh, kind of similar, I do tend to work a little bit, on weekends*

Your comment: ……

4. *..first day and a half was yeah fun it was, to be totally honest a little boring with all the le- you know the lectures and information it's just like you* ***kind of*** *sit there and listen and hopefully absorb…*

Your comment: ……

5. *When I said I was going to a feminism in the workplace everyone was like, a what?* ***you know*** *it was like* ***you know*** *they_ immediately I think they got this picture of all of us* ***you know*** *with like, big signs* ***you know*** *like women rule <LAUGH> and, like plotting like this big,* ***you know*** *massive attack on men or something …*

Your comment: ……

6. *…so that's all the questions I had really. okay and it's a lot of questions and it's good to see you still kinda I mean* ***I think*** *it's it's you've learned a lot this semester* ***I think*** *yeah <LAUGH> yeah and you know it's it's hard work to to do real well here* ***I think****... but it's good too because if you can learn this stuff then you can build on it…*

Your comment: ……

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION!

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Preparing Tertiary Students for Study Abroad Programs—The Identity Negotiation Perspective

Tomasz Róg

Abstract The present paper concerns the applicability of Ting-Toomey (1999) identity negotiation theory (INT) to the field of foreign language teaching, particularly with reference to the preparation of students for study abroad programs. In the article, a brief overview of INT and its main tenets is followed by the discussion of the criteria and desirable outcomes of mindful intercultural communication. In the second part, the author presents the results of a survey conducted among Polish students participating in one of the study abroad programs. The study investigates whether Polish students are mindful intercultural communicators according to the criteria stipulated in INT, it seeks to identify their greatest perceived needs during their stay in a foreign culture, and attempts to arrive at solutions to the problems encountered.

1 Introduction

Weaving together the elements of social psychology, communication studies, symbolic interactionism and relational dialectics, identity negotiation theory (INT), as proposed by Ting-Toomey (1999), serves as a starting point for the discussion of successful intercultural communication. The interconnectedness of culture, language and identity as stipulated in the identity negotiation perspective allows for applying it to the field of foreign language teaching, particularly with reference to preparing learners for the intricacies of cross-cultural communication.

By demonstrating a connection between culture and self-conception, the identity negotiation perspective explains the impact of the two on an individual's behavioural, cognitive and affective domains. For one thing, it shows how and why people organize themselves into certain groups on different levels of society and culture. Moreover, it shows how individuals crave the need for inclusion and cooperation, on

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the one hand, and for differentiation and autonomy, on the other. Finally, the INT perspective points to various factors involved in the process of moving from familiar to unfamiliar environment, which are responsible for identity shock (Ting-Toomey 1999, p. 27).

The following is a brief overview of INT, its main tenets, the criteria of mindful intercultural communication stemming from it and its desirable outcomes. In the second part, the present author presents the results of a survey conducted among Polish students participating in a study abroad program Erasmus. First of all, the study investigates whether Polish students are mindful intercultural communicators according to the criteria stipulated in INT. Secondly, it seeks to answer what their greatest perceived needs were during their stay in a foreign culture, and, thirdly, it attempts to arrive at solutions to the problems encountered.

2 Theoretical Underpinnings of Identity Negotiation Theory

2.1 The Concept of Identity

According to the INT perspective, each of us brings a certain self-image (identity) to every communicative situation, which is particularly characteristic of communicating across cultures. This self-image is shaped by cultural, situational, personal and relational factors, out of which the cultural values are of core importance—they will influence and define such aspects of identity as gender, age or ethnicity (Ting-Toomey 1999, p. 26). Human identities are also shaped by encounters with other people. These encounters, in turn, are usually governed by cultural rules, i.e. what is appropriate in one culture could be viewed as inappropriate in another. Effective IC is therefore dependent on being familiar with the cultural norms of an interlocutor. A sense of identity security will spring from communicating with similar others, i.e. ones whose cultural practices are known to us. On the other hand, an individual's habits or norms will often be called into question in an encounter with dissimilar others, thus creating a sense of identity vulnerability. Consequently, identity security/vulnerability is seen by Ting-Toomey (1999, p. 26) as a starting point for discussing intercultural encounters; it is in a way a defining moment which will affect other facets of IC.

INT stems from an assumption that individuals throughout cultures are striving to be successful communicators. As far as communicating within their own culture is concerned, it can be achieved either through repeated practice or through habitual routines. The potential success relies on two types of identity: *group-* and *personality-based*. These can be reinforced as a result of contact with significant others. As Mead (1934, p. 307) argues, we develop a positive self-image when people important to us view us in a favourable light. On the other hand, if significant others have unfavourable opinions of us, we tend to hold a more negative self-image. This goes to say that individuals acquire their identity as well as ways of

thinking about others in the process of communication in various interactive situations. As Ting-Toomey points out (1999, p. 28), no one acquires their identity in vacuum. This is evident in the following quote (Ting-Toomey 1999, p. 30):

> The term identity is used in the identity negotiation perspective as the reflective self-conception or self-image that we each derive from our cultural, ethnic or gender socialization processes. It is acquired via our interaction with others in particular situations. It thus basically refers to our reflective views of ourselves—at both the social identity and the personal identity levels. Regardless of whether we may or may not be conscious of these identities, they influence our everyday behaviours in a generalized and particularized manner.

2.2 Mindfulness and Mindlessness

According to INT, the identities of interlocutors are perceived as the explanatory mechanism behind success or failure of intercultural encounters (Ting-Toomey 1999, p. 39). In the process, the communicators evoke their respective and desired identities, at the same time trying to influence or support those of others. For some, this is a subconscious (mindless) process in which they act with a high degree of automaticity. However, some communicators tend to be mindful about the process. Ting-Toomey calls such an encounter "a learned process of cognitive focusing with repeated skilful practice" (1999, p. 40). It is the mindful identity negotiation that is of interest to our discussion, since very few people seem to be born with a natural ability to engage in successful intercultural communication.

Mindfulness is understood by Langer and Moldoveanau (2000, p. 1) as individual's readiness to shift the old frame of reference, to go beyond schemata in exploring other cultures, and to use new categories in their interpretation. Unlike *mindlessness*, which denotes routinized categories, customary thinking and heavy reliance on familiarity, *mindfulness* is proactive. Its goal is to explore how to enhance intercultural encounters, bearing in mind that all individuals strive for building a positive self-image in all communicative situations. Being a mindful communicator, one accepts the existence of cultural similarities and differences and is ready to construct a new identity or analyse unfamiliar behaviour from a new standpoint.

2.3 The Core Assumptions of INT

INT recognizes that in a communicative situation one party's involvement in ensuring competent identity negotiation is enough to set the process in motion, even though bilateral cooperation is preferable. The theory comprises ten core assumptions (Ting-Toomey 2005, p. 218):

1. People's group and personal identities are formed via symbolic interaction with others.
2. All people feel the need for identity security, inclusion, trust, connection and stability; this regards the group- as well as personal identity level.
3. Culturally familiar environment ensures identity security, while culturally unfamiliar environment leads to identity vulnerability.
4. In communicating with similar people, individuals tend to feel identity trust, while identity distrust is experienced in communication with dissimilar others.
5. When desired group membership identities are positively endorsed, individuals feel included, while they experience differentiation when their desired group membership identities are stigmatized.
6. There is a natural desire for close interpersonal relationships which lead to interpersonal connection; identity autonomy is experienced in the case of relationship separations.
7. Predictable cultural situations lead to identity stability and unpredictable ones lead to identity change or chaos.
8. The meanings, interpretations and evaluation of identity-related factors are influenced by cultural, situational and personal variability.
9. Successful identity negotiation results in the feeling of being understood, respected and supported.
10. Integrating the necessary intercultural knowledge, motivations and skills is crucial for mindful intercultural communication.

2.4 INT Criteria and Components

Basing on Spitzberg and Cupach's (1984) interpersonal communication competence theory, the criteria of mindful intercultural communication comprise *effectiveness* and *appropriateness*. Ting-Toomey (1999) added a third dimension of *satisfaction*. *Effectiveness* refers to the extent to which a desired meaning or outcome is achieved by communicators. *Appropriateness*, on the other hand, is the degree to which the parties of a communicative situation regard the behaviours proper and fitting to cultural expectations. In the light of this, successful intercultural communication takes place if the communicators regard it as appropriate and effective. What can be seen as effective or appropriate in one culture may not necessarily be so in another. Ting-Toomey (1999, p. 50) provides examples of starting a conversation with a joke or using metaphors as instances of behaviours which could be variously interpreted throughout cultures.

Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) also recognize three components of communication competence: *knowledge*, *motivation* and *skills*. The first of these, *knowledge*, is a cognitive understanding of culturally-sensitive phenomena necessary for effective and appropriate communication. This understanding is gained through conscious learning, experience and observations. It entails elements such as (Ting-Toomey 1999, p. 49):

(1) cultural/personal values;
(2) language and verbal communication;
(3) nonverbal communication;
(4) in-group and out-group boundary;
(5) relationship development;
(6) conflict management;
(7) intercultural adaptation.

Secondly, motivation is an individual's willingness to learn about and interact with dissimilar others. Identity dynamics, according to Ting-Toomey (1999, p. 53), plays a crucial role in discussing motivation from the identity negotiation point of view. An interaction sequence such as "Hi, how are you?"—"Fine!" is a culturally-based greeting ritual evoking a process of identity affirmation: "I see you, I greet you and affirm your existence". Individuals should therefore be mindful of their interlocutors' identity needs (e.g. security, trust, inclusion, etc.), identity domains as well as their own ethnocentric tendencies which very often influence the process of communication. Finally, skills are perceived as the abilities to integrate both knowledge and motivation in achieving effective and appropriate intercultural communication. Among those, Ting-Toomey (1999, p. 49) enumerates:

(1) mindful listening;
(2) mindful observation;
(3) verbal empathy;
(4) nonverbal sensitivity;
(5) mindful stereotyping;
(6) constructive conflict skills;
(7) flexible adaptive skills.

We can signal our readiness to understand and acknowledge our interlocutor by mindful listening and paying attention to them. Interpersonal trust can be encouraged by conveying that we respect both their personal and group-based identity. Lastly, we can reaffirm their importance by verbally and nonverbally confirming their desired identities (Ting-Toomey 1999, p. 54).

2.5 The Outcomes of INT

It can be noted that the outcomes of successful IC are outlined in the ninth assumption, while the criteria and components are presented in Assumption 10. Successful identity negotiation is therefore contingent on both the willingness of the parties involved to conduct mindful communication as well as their perceptions of its outcomes. A high sense of identity satisfaction will therefore be achieved when "the communicators perceive desired identities have been mindfully understood, accorded with due respect, and are supported" (Ting-Toomey 1999, p. 46). By contrast, if

the communicators feel that their identities have been mindlessly avoided, insulted or misunderstood, the communication may be regarded a failure.

The first outcome of mindful intercultural communication, the feeling of being understood is a powerful indicator of success. It connotes the idea of being validated and of the existence of an empathetic other. The communicators are willing to expose their identities, and although they do not have to agree, they should remain empathetic towards one another. Secondly, the feeling of being respected involves courtesy, delicacy, and consideration for one another's identities. The two (or more) dissimilar identities are treated as legitimate in their own right, credible and equal. Respecting other individual's identity means mindful verbal and nonverbal interaction so as to avoid insult. Finally, the third outcome, the feeling of being supported adds to positive self-perception. When an individual feels that their identity is treated as worthwhile, especially by a dissimilar other, they tend to view their self-image more positively. The opposite is also true, as Ting-Toomey claims (2005, p. 229), because a negative endorsement of one's identity will add to the creation of a negative self-image.

There are two important concepts connected with identity endorsement: *confirmation* and *disconfirmation*. *Confirmation* is a process of reinforcing an individual's identity. This can be achieved by sensitively responding to their emotional states or accepting their experiences as real. It involves affirming different lifestyles, feelings and/or experiences. An opposite process is *disconfirmation*, by which individuals do not respond with sensitivity to others' emotions, do not recognize them and do not treat their experience as valid. Disconfirmation uses either indifferent or disqualifying messages, so an individual's identity is either ignored or discounted through the use of patronising, evaluative, racist or sexist language (Ting-Toomey 1999, p. 47).

As stated earlier, the criteria of mindful intercultural communication, seen from the identity negotiation perspective, are effectiveness, appropriateness and satisfaction. The negotiation of shared meanings and desired goals ought to be ensured by the components of knowledge, motivation and skills. Finally, its desired outcomes are feelings of being understood, respected and valued. A successful and mindful intercultural communicator is characterised by resourcefulness in adapting to a diverse range of communicative situations and by being "attuned to self-identity and other-identity negotiation issues" (Ting-Toomey 1999, p. 54).

3 The Study

3.1 The Objectives of the Study

It is the present author's claim that the concept of identity negotiation needs to be explored in relation to study abroad programs such as Erasmus. In particular, emphasis will be placed on finding out whether Polish students engage in mindful intercultural communication, as well as the main problems they encounter during

their sojourns abroad. Having established those, the author would like to offer a few preliminary ideas as regards improving the pre-sojourn intercultural training, from the perspective of identity negotiation. The potential problematic areas will fall into three domains: behavioural, cognitive and affective. These roughly correspond to Ting-Toomey (1999) components of mindful intercultural communication: skills, knowledge and motivation. They are also in line with Byram's (1997, p. 34) intercultural competence model comprising skills of interpreting, relating, discovery and interaction, knowledge of self and other and of interaction, and attitudes towards one's own and the target culture. It is generally believed the three domains should be in constant interaction with each other, ensuring maximum communication effectiveness.

3.2 The Participants

In order to find out whether Polish students participating in study abroad programs engaged in mindful intercultural communication, a survey was conducted among the former participants of Erasmus exchanges. Nearly a hundred of them were contacted by the author through the programme's official Polish website. A survey was published on a popular questionnaire website http://www.ankietka.pl and the former Erasmus students were asked to fill it out. Out of 96 students, 33 decided to provide responses. The participants were between 22 and 30 years of age, 75 % of them women and 25 % men. Their average length of stay abroad was nearly 6 months. All the participants remained anonymous. The participants' demographics are presented in Table 1.

3.3 The Research Instrument

The research was conducted in January 2011. The instrument used for the collection of data was a questionnaire consisting of 19 items—15 items placed on a Likert-type scale and 4 open-ended questions. The Likert-type scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The participants of the survey were asked to answer the questionnaire in the most objective manner. While constructing the

Table 1 The survey participants' demographics

Category	N	Mean	Mode	SD
Age	33	24.21	25	1.88
Sex M	8			
F	25			
Length of stay (months)	33	5.84	4	3.19

questionnaire, the present author took into account three main areas of enquiry, i.e. the behavioural, cognitive and affective domains. Each statement on the Likert-type scale was related to one of the three areas of enquiry, whereas the four open-ended questions served to gather specific information about potential difficulties connected with staying abroad and solutions to such difficulties.

The questionnaire was piloted among former Erasmus students and teachers working in Teacher Training College in Złotów (a city in the north of Poland) in December 2010 and the necessary revisions were made. These included making changes in the wording of the questions to make them clear, rejecting some of the questions and introducing new ones, as well as organising the questions so that they clearly corresponded to each of the domains in question.

To begin with, behavioural considerations touched upon the necessary skills one should possess which would ensure successful intercultural encounters. It can be deduced from the above ruminations on intercultural communication that a successful sojourner is first of all a watchful observer of the surrounding environment. Therefore, they should possess the skill of discovering artefacts from their new environment and critically examining them. All the new information must be interpreted paying special attention to adopting an outsider's point of view, i.e. avoiding the influence of one's own as well as the target culture. Another set of skills is related to the ability of interacting with dissimilar others. Both verbal and nonverbal communication is involved here with a high degree of consciousness and sensitivity. Finally, a successful communicator should have the skill of constructive problem-solving so as to avoid conflicts and solve potential misunderstandings. In order to find out about the changes in the behavioural domain, the respondents were to decide how much they agreed with the following statements:

1. I often noticed foreign cultural phenomena (e.g. sayings, gestures, behaviours, etc.)
2. I was able to critically assess them (e.g. which ones were appropriate).
3. I was able to assess foreign cultural phenomena WITHOUT referring to my mother culture.
4. I was able to solve cultural misunderstandings.

The cognitive domain of intercultural communication refers to all the necessary knowledge needed to conduct successful communication. Closely connected to the skills of interacting is the knowledge of the target language system. The pragmatics of the target language together with the knowledge of the target culture's body language are essential in this respect. Secondly, the awareness of cultural diversities and similarities will also play a crucial role in the process. Intercultural communicators should understand not only how the target but also how their own culture works in order to see any potential discrepancies and sources of conflict. Connected with this is the knowledge of conflict-solving, or what Ting-Toomey (1999, p. 49) calls *conflict management*. Additionally, sojourners should be aware of the process of cultural adaptation and the possibility of experiencing culture shock. The initial difficulties of their stay abroad may be lessened when they are equipped with this knowledge. The following statements were used to assess the changes in the sojourners' cognitive domain:

5. Knowing a foreign language was of help to me.
6. I learned culturally foreign body language.
7. I learned culturally foreign customs and traditions.
8. I understood my own culture better.
9. I had been prepared for culture shock.

The last problematic area is the affective domain. Here, we tackle the emotional side of the sojourn. A successful communicator should manifest positive attitudes towards the target culture; their attitudes should be characterized by openness, curiosity and giving the new culture a benefit of doubt. They should again take an outsider's point of view to relativize their own culture and try not to judge the new experiences they gain in the target culture. Following Ting-Toomey (1999, p. 149) mindful intercultural communication model, a successful sojourner should feel understood, respected and supported by the foreign culture. Quoting Kramsch's idea (1993), they should develop a *third place*, i.e. a meeting point for the two cultures without valuing any perspective better than the other. In order to find out about the respondents' changes in the affective domain, they were asked to judge to what extent they agreed with the following statements:

10. I felt understood by the foreign culture.
11. I felt respected by the foreign culture.
12. I felt supported by the foreign culture.
13. I was eager to meet new people abroad.
14. I am more open towards foreign phenomena.

The remaining five points of the questionnaire were designed to discover the extent to which the Erasmus students found their stay-abroad experience difficult, whether they had been prepared for potential difficulties, what their needs were and how they could have been better prepared for their sojourn. A Likert-type scale was used for statement 15 (i.e. "I had actively sought information about the foreign culture before my departure") and 4 open-ended questions were used for items 16–19:

16. What was most difficult during your stay abroad?
17. Do you think you were perceived differently than in your own culture? How?
18. What sort of pre-sojourn training would help you during your stay abroad, do you think?
19. What are the benefits of your stay abroad?

3.4 The Results

Data analysis for the study took both quantitative and qualitative form. The initial 15 statements underwent statistical analysis to find out the frequency of answers along with standard deviations. The results are presented in Table 2. The remaining

Table 2 The results of the quantitative part of the study

Category	N	Mean	SD	Frequency strongly disagree	Frequency disagree	Frequency no opinion	Frequency agree	Frequency strongly agree
Items								
1	33	3.96	1.01	0	5	2	17	9
2	33	3.23	1.04	2	5	7	18	1
3	33	3.46	1.00	1	7	6	17	2
4	33	3.53	0.69	1	3	11	17	1
5	33	4.65	0.55	0	0	1	11	21
6	33	3.73	0.90	0	2	12	13	6
7	33	4.46	0.49	0	0	1	18	14
8	33	3.88	0.84	0	2	8	15	8
9	33	3.53	1.08	1	8	4	16	4
10	33	3.42	1.00	1	6	7	17	2
11	33	4.0	0.62	0	2	3	24	4
12	33	3.61	0.78	0	2	12	15	4
13	33	4.53	0.57	0	0	1	16	16
14	33	4.57	0.49	0	0	1	15	17
15	33	3.5	1.11	0	11	2	15	5

four open questions were analysed by looking for key words. Such an approach is commonly used where a variety of answers makes it infeasible to attach a numerical value to each of them. What is specific about open-ended questions, according to Wilczyńska and Michońska-Stadnik (2010, p. 172), is that the respondents decide themselves how detailed their responses are. In a situation when the surveyed provide different answers, as is the case with open-ended questions, it is advised (Dörnyei 2003, p. 116; Nunan 2005, p. 146; Wilczyńska and Michońska-Stadnik 2010, p. 172) to search for keywords in each response and later group them into different categories.

Each item placed on a Likert-type scale should correlate with other items (Dörnyei 2007, p. 206) as well as total scale scores. In order to measure this correlation, internal consistency reliability is used for psychometric tests. The internal consistency reliability was measured by determining Cronbach Alpha coefficient using SPSS Statistics 19. In a well-developed test, the figure should be in excess of 0.70 (Dörnyei 2003, p. 112) and in this case it stood at 0.991 for the 15 items.

The results of the quantitative analysis revealed significant unanimity among the respondents. It turns out that most of their responses oscillate around the same answer (in particular, items 5, 7, 13, and 14 show quite small SD). The biggest deviations concern responses to items 2, 9, and 15. Overall, the most frequently chosen response was 4 (agree). Most respondents strongly agreed with items 5 and 14, while the same frequency of answers (16) concerned item 13. As is evidenced in Table 2, very few students strongly disagreed with most of the statements. This goes to show that the participants, on the whole, were eager to make an effort to change.

The qualitative part of the study concerned questions 16–19. In the first of these, the respondents pointed to the difficulties they experienced during their stay abroad. According to the findings, a high number of the subjects (46 %) pointed to language barrier. It was often remarked that Erasmus students had either not been equipped with the necessary language skills, or their language skills were inadequate for the situation they found themselves in (e.g. they were unable to understand slang, jargon or colloquial speech). As much as 16 % of those surveyed mentioned foreign cultural customs. These students had not expected cultural differences to be so great. The third greatest difficulty proved to be finances. Thirteen percent of the respondents complained about financial difficulties they experienced during their Erasmus experience. The same percentage of subjects noted that completing all formalities in a foreign country gave rise to substantial difficulties. Among other answers, the respondents enumerated making friends (10 %), moving around town (10 %), cultural antagonisms (10 %), a different approach to time (6 %), and finding an apartment (6 %). Individual answers mentioned food, missing significant others, and lack of hygiene in a foreign culture. Two of the thirty students who answered this question admitted to having no difficulties during their stay.

As regards the feeling of being perceived differently than in one's own culture, as many as 52 % of the surveyed admitted to having felt alienation. The perceived incompatibilities with another culture were of different nature. While some students

felt physically strange (e.g. because of another skin or hair colour), others pointed to differences in behaviour (e.g. one student wrote that "Poles were seen as hard-working" and another claimed that "I was perceived as rude because I had not used as many 'thank you' as the English"). Thirty-two percent of respondents claimed they had not felt any different while staying abroad, whereas 16 % found it hard to judge.

In the case of next question which dealt with pre-sojourn training, most of the students (76 %) expressed the need for attending a language course before going on the Erasmus program. According to the surveyed, their stay abroad would have been much more successful had they known a foreign language better. The second need mentioned by the subjects (46 %) was learning about a foreign culture. It was also claimed that pre-sojourn training should additionally entail elements of the target country history (20 %) and geography (13 %). Other less frequently mentioned items were target culture traditions and customs (6 % each). The same number of respondents pointed to practical training, e.g. role-plays and talking to foreigners. Individual respondents mentioned learning about the target culture body language, its political situation and cuisine.

The final question in the survey concerned the benefits of going for a study abroad program. In this case, the most frequently given answer (51 %) was better knowledge of a foreign language. The next two most frequent answers (41 % each) were making friends and becoming more open-minded. Thirty-five percent of those surveyed underlined they gained more self-reliance and 22 % claimed they found it easier to cope in difficult situations. The students who took part in the survey also mentioned a better understanding of the foreign (19 %) as well as the mother (16 %) culture. Moreover, 12 % admitted to becoming more tolerant. Among other answers, the respondents mentioned improved job opportunities, developing new interests, education and expanding their world view.

4 Conclusions

The results of the survey demonstrate by and large a high degree of mindfulness involved in identity negotiation during intercultural encounters. It seems readily apparent that the majority of Erasmus students were watchful observers of the sociocultural aspects of their sojourn. For one thing, the behavioural considerations amply show that most of the respondents are characterised by the ability to mindfully observe their environment. Not only did they manage to abandon their cultural perspectives but they were also able to critically assess foreign practices. Additionally, more than a half demonstrates the skill of constructive conflict solving. Clearly, this enabled them to avoid intercultural misunderstandings, although the survey does not yield insights into whether this skill had been developed during their stay abroad.

As for cognitive considerations, the participants of the survey proved they had been able to acquire knowledge either through conscious learning or through

observation and practice. In particular, the development of language skills was very often stressed. Apart from this, the surveyed learnt about the customs and traditions of a new culture as well as gained greater insight into the culture of their mother countries. It also seems clear that most of them had been prepared for experiencing culture shock; however their answers (question 16) indicate that when confronted with foreign culture, many students found it difficult to understand some of its customs. This makes us contemplate the necessity of preparing students for putting theory into practice. Moreover, although nearly 40 % of the students claimed they learnt nonverbal aspects of communicating within members of a foreign culture, a similar number could not decide whether they agreed with the statement or not. Perhaps a greater degree of mindfulness is necessary when dealing with those aspects of communication which are not as "palpable" as language.

There is also a lot of evidence from the survey concerning positive attitudes experienced and felt by the sojourners. A significant number of the respondents felt respected by the foreign culture. A little over a half felt understood, although a fifth claimed the opposite and another fifth was unable to decide. Similarly, more than a half felt supported by the new culture, but 36 % were unable to express their opinion. Far from being passive, most students were happy to meet people and make new friends abroad. What is worth mentioning is the fact that none of the students disagreed with the statement concerning being eager to meet people abroad. None of them also disagreed with the fact that the Erasmus experience opened their minds. This alone may be a sufficient basis for declaring that students going abroad are not afraid to engage in intercultural communication and willingly seek opportunities to do so, as the process positively influences their identities. It therefore seems remotely plausible that the experience of studying abroad would have a damaging effect on one's self-image.

Remarkably, the issue of knowing a foreign language was very often raised in response to questions about difficulties of staying abroad and suggestions regarding the improvement of such stays. Most students consider language skills to be of key importance in intercultural communication as they attach greater importance to verbal communication than to gestures and body language. One could hardly call this a finding; however this information is useful to the extent that it raises questions about the nature of the language taught. The respondents often underlined that what they had been taught at school was incongruent with foreign reality, stressing the need for learning more informal expressions or even slang. On the other hand, the reported difficulties connected with taking care of formalities may also be related to insufficient language skills, in this case stemming from unfamiliarity with formal language. As the students noted, they would have benefited from an intensive language course before their departure as well as acting out role-plays and simulations of life abroad.

This brings us to an ancillary finding, namely the existence of a certain discrepancy between the needs expressed by students and the solutions they offered. Interestingly enough, although they stated the need for more hands-on experience before the departure, their solutions largely focused on gaining theoretical knowledge. In other words, even though students craved more practical tasks and skills

development, they stressed the importance of gaining factual knowledge (e.g. geography, history, culture, traditions, etc.). The responses to item 15 seem to support this conclusion since not many students actively sought information about the target culture before their departure. Perhaps this finding is very informative of the general habit of Polish students, i.e. of being passive recipients of information, and the fact that they were mostly unable to provide examples of practical activities goes to show that their teachers rarely assign them in class.

To conclude, the most promising finding of the survey is that Polish students participating in the Erasmus program, proved to be mindful intercultural communicators, sensitive towards the identities of the foreigners they met. They are very enthusiastic about the experience of studying abroad, which is clearly visible in their answers to the last question, where they enumerate various benefits of the Erasmus program. Additionally, they are willing to learn more to become even better communicators in the future. Therefore, a challenge is posed to educators as there is an obvious urge to create and implement beneficial intercultural training for students taking part in study abroad programs.

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Part II
Empirical Investigations of Factors Influencing Speaking Skills

Correlates and Predictors of L2 Willingness to Communicate in Polish Adolescents

Ewa Piechurska-Kuciel

Abstract The concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) in L2 denotes "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre et al. 1998, p. 547). In the early model of L2 WTC, there are two main variables influencing its levels: perceived communication competence and communication anxiety (MacIntyre 1994). WTC is now considered a fundamental goal of second language education (MacIntyre et al. 2003) because it offers L2 learners "greater chances for L2 practice and authentic L2 usage" (MacIntyre et al. 2001, p. 382). Students taking the risk of initiating communication in a language they do not know well are likely to become more proficient and knowledgeable in comparison to those who fear taking such opportunities. The basic aim of this study is to investigate the role of predictors shaping L2 WTC of Polish adolescents (N = 621) learning English in the context of secondary grammar school. Its results show that the most powerful predictors of L2 WTC are levels of self-perceived foreign language skills and language anxiety (they explain almost 40 % of L2 WTC variance). Variables of secondary importance are final grades and teacher support, as well as knowledge and friend orientations. Gender and place or residence appear of extremely limited value (1 %).

1 Introduction

Talking is central in interpersonal communication (McCroskey and Richmond 1990). The desire to interact with others fulfills the human need for forming intimate and significant bonds that serve the purpose of attaining optimal well-being. It can be achieved by means of satisfying three psychological needs: competence, relatedness and autonomy (Hargie 2011). The first need concerns the individual's desire to carry out actions in a proficient and effective manner, while relatedness

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denotes the wish to form and maintain good relationships. The autonomy need entails a want to be in charge of one's own destiny, instead of being controlled by others. The interplay of all these factors enables the formation and expression of identity, which is the kernel of communication. This is the reason why the amount of communication in which interlocutors decide to engage is of critical importance for creating relationships and interpersonal influences. It is also assumed that communication is vital for learning, so it constitutes a prerequisite for successful second language acquisition. Therefore, the amount of communication in which interactants are willing to engage in a foreign language constitutes a springboard for foreign language achievement.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the phenomenon of willingness to communicate (WTC) in the context of the Polish foreign language classroom from the point of view of an ecological framework. It enables us to view WTC from a larger perspective of a series of nested systems (Bronfenbrenner 1995). At the centre of the model, there is the individual affected by his or her own characteristics (i.e. biosystem). In the case of the present research, this is the student's *gender*. It is surrounded by the outer layer of his or her immediate social and physical environment (i.e. microsystems of school and home). The educational microsystem is represented by variables directly connected with the foreign language learning process in the formal context: *language learning orientations*, *language anxiety*, *teacher support*, *self-assessment of FL skills, and grades*. The exosystem of indirect influences is represented by the individual's *place of residence.*

2 Willingness to Communicate

The use of language is instigated by the individual's predilections towards talking or a general tendency to approach or avoid communicative situations (Avtgis 1999). Traditionally, communication research has followed two main lines of inquiry. One of them is connected with forms of communication anxiety and avoidance. It concerns studies on several distinctive cognate constructs: communication apprehension, reticence, predispositions toward verbal behavior, shyness, and unwillingness to communicate.

Communication apprehension is viewed as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey 1982, p. 137). A construct originally synonymous to it, *reticence*, is now understood as incompetent communication connected with one's belief that "it is better to remain silent than to risk appearing foolish" (Keaten and Kelly 2000, p. 165). On the other hand, the concept of *predispositions toward verbal behavior* was formerly connected with positive feelings (Mortensen et al. 1977 in Bostrom and Harrington 1999), yet is now defined as "the tendency to be timid, reserved, and most specifically, talk less" (McCroskey and Richmond 1987, p. 133). Another negative aspect of communicative behavior is *shyness*, viewed as "a tendency to avoid social interaction, to fail to participate appropriately in social

situations" (Pilkonis 1977, p. 858). Finally, *unwillingness to communicate* is understood as "a chronic tendency to avoid and/or devalue oral communication and to view the communication situation as relatively unrewarding" (Burgoon 1976, p. 60). These concepts pertain to a presumed trait-like predisposition to communication.

Such considerations can be summed up with an observation that people are stable in the amount of communication, which is an individual's characteristic operating within the constrictions of individual situations. It follows that people differ quantitatively and qualitatively in the talking in which they decide to engage (Barraclough et al. 1988). Studies on *willingness to communicate* (WTC) evolved on these grounds, proposing that the individual's predilections towards talking may be viewed from the perspective of both approach to and avoidance of communicative situations. More specifically, it is associated with constructs related to apprehension or anxiety about communication, as well as with the constructs associated with a behavioral tendency referring to talking frequency. It encompasses the individual's general personality orientation towards talking (Barraclough et al. 1988, p. 188). Particularly, it denotes "a person's predispositional preferences with regard to communication" (McCroskey 1992, p. 20). It is also defined as "a personality-based, traitlike predisposition which is relatively consistent across a variety of communication contexts and types of receivers" (McCroskey and Richmond 1982, p. 134). It follows that the construct pertains to a stable tendency within an individual to initiate or terminate communication (McCroskey 1992), which is one's readiness to talk, seen as an individual's general attitude toward initiating communication with other people (McCroskey and Richmond 1987). Aside from its personality-oriented character, the concept of WTC is also believed to be situation-dependent. Situational variables may impact a person's willingness to communicate at a certain point of time in a given context (e.g. one's mood or previous experience with communicating with a specific person or a probable gain or loss evoked by the specific communication act).

The communication studies described above refer to monolingual contexts only. However, when a foreign language learning environment comes into play, it may be difficult to consider WTC identical with its L1 counterpart. There may be several reasons for this observation. First of all, in second language acquisition studies the primary assumption is that the change of the language of communication induces a "dramatic" transformation of the communication setting (MacIntyre et al. 1998, p. 546). As a result, various confounding consequences may follow. One of them is connected with the specificity of second language acquisition, demanding not only studying its subject matter (e.g. systems and subsystems), like in any other school subject, but also skills (i.e. speaking, writing, listening, and reading). Apart from that, learning a foreign language requires studying various aspects of another culture, which, again, is not characteristic of other school subjects (Gardner 2001). This is why, it "is essentially a socially oriented process (…) linked with the wider cultural and cognitive processes" (Foley and Thompson 2003, p. 62). Needless to say, the interplay of the social, cognitive and cultural dimensions of the language learning process becomes even more complex, providing for its affective aspect. From this point of view, language learning is connected with the necessity to rely

on one's unskilled language abilities, which induces a considerable threat to the learner's "self-perception of genuineness in presenting themselves to others" (Horwitz 1999, p. xii). This destabilization gives way to a range of negative emotions that accompany the prolonged process of the formation of a new, flexible self-concept. For these reasons, the unique experience of foreign language learning is inevitably "a profoundly unsettling psychological proposition" (Guiora 1983, p. 8), causing unclear and wayward consequences for an individual.

The complexity of L2 learning is further enhanced by the necessity to actively use the language, because one must talk in order to learn a second language (Skehan 1989). Yet, understandably, communication in an L2 depends greatly on a psychological readiness to use the language, so best learning effects may be expected when the student is ready to take an active part in the communication process in spite of the fact that they do not know the language very well. Unfortunately, it certainly is an unlikely phenomenon due the much greater difference in communicative competence in most L2 learners in comparison to L1 speakers.

From this point of view, it may be unlikely that "WTC in the second language (L2) is a simple manifestation of WTC in the L1" (MacIntyre et al. 1998, p. 546). More purposefully, the definition of L2 WTC must acknowledge the role of the language used for communication. Therefore, it is defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre et al. 1998, p. 547). It is proposed that it is a product of the action control system, adjusting preplanned actions to sudden changes. It enables the student to commence a task, to focus on it, and to follow it through to completion (MacIntyre and Doucette 2010). It means that L2 learners initiating communication need to be sure that they are able to send an understandable message they are capable of responding to.

The L2 learner's decision to initiate communication (WTC) is largely shaped by two basic groups of influences encompassing personal predilections towards talking and the specific variables shaping the communicative event: situational (changeable or variable), as well as more constant (stable) factors influencing voluntary communication initiation (MacIntyre et al. 1998). These factors are incorporated in a heuristic (pyramid) model of L2 WTC proposed by MacIntyre and associates (1998) (for a thorough discussion of the model see the chapter by Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pietrzykowska (this volume).

3 The Study

The basic aim of this paper is to present the results of empirical research into willingness to communicate in L2 with a special focus on its correlates and predictors in the context of the Polish secondary grammar school. It is speculated that WTC levels may be largely attributed to this culturally specific environment, because cultural differences may facilitate or debilitate communication. The way an individual communicates is deeply rooted in his or her culture, because "the amount

of talking in which a person engages would be dependent, at least in part, on that person's cultural orientation" (Barraclough et al. 1988, p. 187). Consequently, the cultural background of the interlocutors appears to have a considerable influence on the quality and quantity of the communication act. As the ultimate goal of foreign language learning is authentic communication between people of different languages and cultures, foreign language learners must be equipped with a strong communicative target enabling them to overcome these cultural differences, which is willingness to communicate (MacIntyre et al. 1998). It will help them to overcome any lack of skills of effective communication within the L2 context, irrespective of successful L1 skills, caused by cultural divergence.

The study aims at investigating the most significant correlates and predictors of L2 WTC, which come from various nested systems surrounding the learner's biosystem. At the centre of the model, there are individual characteristic of *gender*. So far, L2 WTC research shows that girls generally manifest more confidence and greater WTC, when compared to boys (Kristmanson and Dicks 2010). However, significant gender differences in WTC are not observed past the junior high level (Donovan and MacIntyre 2004). It is also demonstrated that girls have greater levels of WTC inside the classroom, whereas boys are more willing to use L2 outside it (Baker and MacIntyre 2000). It must be noted that this variable is placed at the base of the pyramid model, which means that it belongs to enduring tendencies.

Likewise, the variable of *residential location* can be placed within the same group. Yet, from the point of view of the ecological framework by Bronfenbrenner (1995), it can be accommodated in the student's exosystem surrounding the learner's microsystems of school and home. Although language acquisition is eminently bound to a social context (Clément 1986), to date empirical research has disregarded the importance of this variable. Hence, the present study seeks to establish its value for L2 WTC levels. It is speculated that a town or city offers greater chances for mastering foreign languages, with language school or cinemas showing films in the original language. A physical distance from a conurbation may considerably diminish chances for such contacts. Besides, rural areas remain connected with lower economic standards of living (Rybczyńska 2004), which means that parents are unable to invest in educational resources or hire tutors. Rural adolescents' academic achievement is lower (Roscigno and Crowley 2001), also in respect to the foreign language learning process (Piechurska-Kuciel 2008), hence their L2 WTC may also display lower levels.

The microsystem of school is represented by several variables, due to the fact that it is the immediate environment for L2 WTC. *Language learning orientations* traditionally are a key component of motivation (instrumental and integrative), yet "orientation refers to a class of reasons for learning a second language" (Gardner 1985, p. 54). They underpin the student's motives for learning the language. They can be divided into some basic groups: job-related, travel, friendship, and knowledge (Clément and Kruidenier 1983). They can be supplemented with one more group, specifically referring to the school context, that is school achievement (MacIntyre et al. 1998). Empirical research proves that the friendship, knowledge and school achievement orientations are significantly correlated with WTC both

inside and outside the classroom in a positive manner, while job-related orientations are correlated with WTC outside the classroom (MacIntyre et al. 1998).

Another variable placed within the school microsystem is *teacher support*. The rationale for including it is that teachers are able to help their students achieve success through their perceived strong support (Patrick et al. 2007). Teachers provide knowledge, but also a positive classroom climate, which leads to higher achievement. It is also expected that in the FL classroom teachers are able to help their students achieve success through their perceived strong support. Consequently, better support is expected to lead to more safety in this environment (Abu-Rabia 2004) and higher L2 WTC levels.

Grades are another factor directly related to the foreign language classroom context, including foreign language achievement. It is hypothesized that they reveal the teacher's assessment of student general language abilities. Although this variable has not been included in the empirical research on L2 WTC, an assumption is made that their level may be correlated with the construct under investigation mainly due to the fact that foreign language learning requires the student's active participation in the lesson. Hence, final grades are believed to expose teacher summative assessment of the student's progress.

Language anxiety is an important variable meriting a thorough investigation in L2 WTC studies. In the early model of L2 WTC, aside from perceived communication competence, it is proposed to be a key factor influencing student willingness to communicate (MacIntyre 1994). Specifically, more frequent communication in L2 is induced by greater WTC, stimulated by high levels of perceived competence in combination with low levels of anxiety that influences the perception of competence. Hence, it is speculated that language anxiety has a double effect on WTC: direct and at the same time indirect through affecting one's perception of competence. Research proves that it is negatively correlated with WTC in various cultural samples (e.g. MacIntyre and Charos 1996; Hashimoto 2002; Yashima 2002).

Last but not least, *self-assessment of FL skills* must be taken into consideration. In monolingual WTC research, greater willingness to communicate is associated with higher self-perceived competence in L1 (Barraclough et al. 1988). Similarly, perceived competence is a key factor in predicting WTC in L2 (Baker and MacIntyre 2000; Yashima 2002). Also, increased perceived competence has been found to lead to increased motivation, which in turn affects frequency of L2 use in the classroom (Hashimoto 2002). Generally, it is proposed that both self-assessment of FL skills and language anxiety have the strongest predictive power in the WTC context, which is also revealed in the heuristic model by placing them among proximal antecedents of WTC. From this point of view, it seems justified to propose the following hypothesis:

H: *The strongest predictors of WTC are self-perceived FL skills and language anxiety levels.*

Alongside searching for evidence corroborating the above hypothesis, the study aims at identifying the most significant correlates and predictors of L2 WTC in the setting of the Polish language classroom.

4 Method

Below there is a description of, and justification for, the chosen methodology and research methods used in the study.

4.1 Participants

The cohort participating in the study comprised 621 students from 23 classes of the six secondary grammar schools in Opole, southwestern Poland (396 girls and 225 boys) whose mean age was 16.50. They were first grade students taking 3–6 h a week of English instruction. Their level of proficiency in English was at an elementary to intermediate level. Their other compulsory language was French or German (two lessons a week). The sample mostly included urban students (N = 408; 286 from the city of Opole, 122 from neighboring towns), and 213 from rural regions.

4.2 Materials

The basic instrument used in the study was a questionnaire. It explored demographic variables, such as age, gender (1—*male*, 2—*female*), place of residence (1—*village: up to 2500 inhabitants*, 2—*town: from 2,500 to 50,000 inhabitants,* 3—*city: over 50,000 inhabitants*).

Also used was the *Willingness to communicate in the classroom* scale (MacIntyre et al. 2001) adopted for the use of English (WTCI). The inventory included 27 items, assessing students' willingness to initiate communication during class time within the four skill areas. There were eight items measuring WTC in speaking, six in reading, eight in writing, and five in comprehension (listening). Sample items in the scale were: "A stranger enters the room you are in, how willing would you be to have a conversation if he talked to you first?" or "How often are you willing to read personal letters or notes written to you in which the writer has deliberately used simple words and constructions?" The participants indicated the frequency of time they chose to use English on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*almost never willing*) to 5 (*almost always willing*). The minimum score was 27, the maximum: 135. The scale's reliability was measured in terms of Cronbach's alpha, showing very good reliability ($\alpha = 0.94$).

The next scale was *Willingness to communicate outside the classroom* (Maclntyre et al. 2001), assessing the participants' willingness to communicate outside the classroom in the four skill areas (WTCO). It was composed of the same items as the previous scale, adapted to the out-of-school context. Its reliability was $\alpha = 0.96$.

Another scale applied in the study was the *Language Learning Orientations* inventory (MacIntyre et al. 1998). It included five subscales measuring orientations for language learning (i.e. job-related, travel, friendship, increased knowledge about the TL group, and school achievement). Sample items in the scale were: "English will be useful in getting a good job or English will help me get into better universities later". They were assessed on a Likert scale: 1—*I totally disagree* to 5—*I totally agree*. The minimum number of points on the scale was 20, the maximum: 100. The scale's reliability: $\alpha = 0.87$

The *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (Horwitz et al. 1986) was used in order to estimate the degree to which students feel anxious during language classes. Sample items on the scale were as follows: "I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class" or "I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am". Again, a Likert scale was used (1—*I totally disagree* to 5—*I totally agree*). The minimum number of points was 33, the maximum: 165. The scale's reliability was $\alpha = 0.94$.

Teacher support was assessed on the basis of a part of the school and classroom climate scale, called the *School Climate-Social Action-Instrumental* (Griffith 1995). The scale was adopted to measure aspects of the English teacher's expressive support. The scale was composed of nine items assessed against the 5-point Likert-format scale from 1—*I totally disagree* to 5—*I totally agree*. The sample items in the scale were: "My English teacher can tell when things are not going right for me" or "My English teacher cares about me as a person". The minimum number of points was 9, while the maximum was 45. Its reliability was 0.90.

Finally, two types of assessment tools were used: external (grades) and internal (self-assessment of the foreign language skills). As far as *grades* are concerned, the participants gave the final grades they received in lower secondary school, and the first semester of the upper secondary grammar school. They also included the grade they expected to receive at the end of the school year. All these grades were assessed on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*unsatisfactory*) to 6 (*excellent*), and later aggregated with the reliability of 0.87.

The last measurement used in the study was a scale estimating *self-perceived levels of FL skills* (i.e. speaking, listening, writing and reading). It was an aggregated value of separate self-assessments of the FL skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading) on a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (*unsatisfactory*) to 6 (*excellent*) ($\alpha = 0.86$).

4.3 Procedure

The data collection procedure took place over the months of March and April 2010. In each class, the students were asked to respond to the questionnaire. The time designed for the activity was 15 to 45 min. The participants were asked to give true answers without taking too much time for reflection. A new set of items in each part

of the questionnaire was preceded with a short statement introducing it in an inconspicuous manner.

The design of the study was non-experimental and correlational—it quantified the relationship between the main variable (the aggregated value of WTCI and WTCO) and other variables introduced in the first part of the paper (e.g. language learning orientations or language anxiety). As this design type does not allow for drawing causal inferences (Graziano and Raulin 1993), the basic procedure enabling the interpretation of the results obtained in the present study was multiple regression. More specifically, a hierarchical approach to multiple regression, where predictor variables (independent) are introduced in blocks (each block represents one step in the hierarchy), was applied in order to predict their influence on the criterion (dependent) variable, i.e. WTC.

There are two kinds of variables identified in the study. The dependent one was the aggregated value of the WTC measurements in and out of the classroom (WTCI and WTCO). The independent variables were constituted by gender, place of residence, language learning orientations, teacher support, language anxiety, self-perceived levels of the four skills, and final grades. All the variables were operationally defined as questionnaire items.

The data were computed by means of the statistical program STATISTICA, with the main operations being descriptive statistics; i.e. means, standard deviations (*SD*), and correlation, represented by a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient *r*, as well as by a coefficient of determination r^2 indicating the percentage of variability in L2 WTC levels. Additionally, an inferential statistics procedure was included, i.e. step-wise hierarchical regression. The indicator of significance of variables inserted in consecutive blocks was the range of the explained variance R^2 (the unique contribution of new predictors), as well as the value and significance of the β weights (they show how strongly each predictor variable influences the criterion variable, i.e. WTC). Nevertheless, as R^2 has a tendency to overestimate the appropriateness of the model when applied to the real world, so an *Adjusted* R^2 value taking into account the number of variables in the model and the number of observations (participants) was calculated. It is treated as a most useful measure of the success of the model.

5 Results

The basic descriptive results show that the WTC distribution is slightly negatively skewed (−0.0499) and kurtosis equals −0.2456. As far as language learning orientations are concerned, it seems that the most prominent reason for studying English was the desire to travel, which was also confirmed by greater homogeneity of the responses (M = 18.01, SD = 2.76). Teacher support results ranged the mean level of 30.92 (SD = 7.45), while in the case of language anxiety M = 83.96 (SD = 23.88). As far as self-perceived levels of the four foreign language skills are concerned, their mean equaled 15.75 (SD = 3.51), while in reference to final grades

Table 1 Summary of the descriptive statistics results

Variable	*M*	*SD*
WTCI	80.64	21.87
WTCO	78.78	24.85
WTC (aggregated)	159.42	45.46
Gender	1.64	0.48
Place of residence	2.18	0.89
Travel orientations	18.01	2.76
Job orientations	17.99	2.89
Friend orientations	17.50	3.02
Knowledge orientations	15.84	3.20
School orientations	17.36	3.20
Teacher support	30.92	7.45
FL skills	15.75	3.51
Grades	12.21	2.33
Language anxiety	83.96	23.88

the results were $M = 12.21$, $SD = 2.33$, respectively (see Table 1 for the summary of the descriptive statistics results).

In the next step, the WTC scores were correlated with the independent variables' results (for this purpose only the variables placed on interval scales were selected). The results clearly show that all the variables are correlated with WTC in a statistically significant manner (their scattergrams show linear relationships). Nevertheless, among the ones related to the WTC scores in the strongest manner there are two types of language learning orientations (to have friends and to know more about English language countries), as well as self-perceived levels of FL skills (see Table 2 for the summary of the calculations).

Table 2 Summary of the WTC correlations results

Variable	*R*	r^2
Travel orientations	0.39^{***}	0.12
Job orientations	0.30^{***}	0.09
Friend orientations	0.45^{***}	0.20
Knowledge orientations	0.44^{***}	0.19
School orientations	0.28^{***}	0.08
Teacher support	0.11^{**}	0.01
FL skills	0.46^{***}	0.21
Grades	0.36^{***}	0.13
Language anxiety	0.38^{***}	0.14

* denotes $p \leq 0.05$
** $p < 0.01$
*** $p < 0.001$)

Finally, in order to compute the predictive value of the independent variables for assessing WTC levels, step-wise multiple regression was performed. In the first step, the items chosen for predicting the WTC level were gender and the place of residence. It can be seen that both variables show weak, though statistically significant predictability of the WTC results. In the case of gender the results were $\beta = 0.04^{**}$, while in reference to the participants' place of residence it was $\beta = 0.04^{*}$. Together, these two variables were responsible for about 2 % of the WTC variability with $F\ (2, 618) = 5.48^{**}$.

In the next step, a block of five variables was introduced into the equation—the language learning orientations. Two of them—the orientation to have English-speaking friends and to know the English-speaking countries turned out to be strong predictors of the WTC results. In the case of the first one, the results were: $\beta = 0.29^{***}$, while in the second: $\beta = 0.28^{***}$. They were responsible for 25 % of the WTC variance with $F\ (7, 613) = 29.87^{***}$.

In Step 3 teacher support and grades were entered in one block. Both turned out to be significant predictors of the WTC score with teacher support ranging $\beta = 0.12^{**}$ and language anxiety equaling $\beta = 0.21^{***}$. Together, these variables explained 33 % variance of the WTC results with $F\ (9, 611) = 31.82^{***}$.

Finally, in the last step the most powerful variables were entered: language anxiety and self-perceived levels of FL skills. Their value was acknowledged in the theoretical model by MacIntyre (1994), as well as in many empirical researches. Indeed, their predictive value turned out to be most powerful in predicting one's WTC levels by their ability to explain 38 % of its variance. In the case of language anxiety $\beta = 0.09^{*}$, while in the case of self-perceived FL skills levels it was $\beta = 0.26^{***}$. In this way a significant model of L2 WTC emerged with $F\ (11, 609) = 34.65^{***}$. The summary of the multiple regression procedure can be found in Table 3.

Table 3 Hierarchical regression predictors of WTC levels in polish adolescents (N = 621)

Variable	Adjusted R^2 change	β	p
Step 1*		0.04	0.00
Gender		0.04	0.04
Place of residence			
Step 2	0.24	0.03	0.61
Travel orientations		−0.10	0.09
Job orientations		0.29	0.00
Friend orientations		0.28	0.00
Know orientations		−0.01	0.82
School orientations			
Step 3	0.31	0.12	0.00
Teacher support		0.21	0.00
Grades			
Step 4	0.37	0.26	0.00
Language anxiety		−0.09	0.03
FL skills			

* *Adjusted* R^2 = 0.01

6 Discussion

The main aim of this study was to define most powerful correlates and predictors of L2 WTC in the context of the Polish secondary grammar school. As far as correlates are concerned, the results demonstrate that all the variables chosen for the study are significantly correlated with L2 WTC. Such a result cannot be surprising, mostly due to the fact that they come from the school microsystem. This means that the idea of "who learns what in what milieu" (Clément and Kruidenier 1983, p. 288) must underlie the concept of L2 WTC, because all these variables are rooted in the learning context.

Following the rule of the thumb of ignoring correlations of less than 0.30, indicating "little, if any, relationship between variables" (Hinkle et al. 1994, p. 120), it may be suggested that among the variables correlated with L2 WTC in the most reliable manner there are language learning orientations (i.e. travel, friends, and knowledge), together with self-perceived FL skills levels, final grades and language anxiety.

As far as language learning orientations are concerned, travel appears secondary in comparison to the other two (friends and knowledge), whose coefficient of determination power shows their ability to relate to the L2 WTC variance at the 20 % level. This means that students who desire to have friends who speak English, and who want to acquire the target language in order to understand people of other nations and to know themselves better, show an inclination to initiate communication in the foreign language in the classroom and outside it.

Final grades and language anxiety levels are moderately correlated with L2 WTC scores, with the coefficient of determination ranging 13–14 % of the variance in L2 WTC. It follows that students who are ready to communicate in a foreign language at the same time obtain higher final grades and display lower language anxiety levels. This finding undisputedly demonstrates the importance of positive emotions for the learning process, leading to the conclusion that positive emotions are prerequisite for one's desire to interact with others, irrespective of the language. In consequence, such behaviors are rewarded with better grades, which in turn induces more confident communicative performance.

Last but not least, one's willingness to communicate is inextricably connected with one's perceived competence. It has been proven that the perception of one's own communication skills is more important than the skills themselves in predicting one's WTC, as proposed by McCroskey (1992) in reference to the L1 context, as well as by MacIntyre (1994) in reference to the L2 environment. Also in this study the variable turns out to be correlated with L2 levels in the most significant manner, when compared to other factors.

The results of the correlational investigation enable the formulation of general characteristics of a foreign language student who displays high levels of L2 WTC. First of all, the person is convinced about their high levels of FL skills, and has a strong desire to have friends speaking English. Such students are determined to know more and study hard. Secondly, they want to travel abroad, while their final

grades obtained in the FL course are also high. This is connected with the fact that the student's experiences with negative emotions in the process of FL study are scarce, as reflected in low language anxiety levels. However, it must be remembered that correlations are computed for independent sets of WTC relationships, hence the characteristics of a student with high L2 WTC levels must be seen as separate entities, not related to one another.

Then again, the ultimate aim of the study is to determine the most influential predictors of L2 WTC in Polish secondary grammar school students. The main hypothesis formulated for this purpose proposed that: *the strongest predictors of WTC are self-perceived FL skills and language anxiety levels.*

It is understood that one's L2 WTC levels do not develop in isolation, but are influenced by a combination of several factors. Thanks to the multiple regression procedure, the L2 WTC score can be best predicted on the basis of the scores on several other variables. Its results prove that the best predictors of L2 WTC levels are self-perceived levels of FL skills and language anxiety scores. It can be inferred that when a student estimates his or her language abilities at a high level, it is possible to predict that their WTC levels will also be high, and that such a learner is very likely to be keen on initiating communication in the foreign language in and outside the classroom. The theoretical model of WTC, as well as empirical research, confirm the predictive power of this variable. Therefore, higher levels of self-perceived FL skills allow the learner to confront communicative situations with greater self-confidence, boosting their WTC. In this situation, students are secure in taking risks and freely enter interactions in a foreign language, they are positive about linguistic and social abilities, and take chances to constantly improve them. On the other hand, low levels of self-perceived FL skills are connected with withdrawal from any potentially dangerous situations of a social nature that may take place in the classroom. Those learners who do not trust in their linguistic abilities may ultimately deprive themselves of opportunities for language improvement.

Another significant predictor of L2 WTC levels is language anxiety, which obviously influences the individual's choice of whether or not to communicate in various situations. An apprehensive student may avoid the language class or speaking activities, withdraw or—when forced to communicate—speak hesitantly and unintelligibly. On the other hand, a student who is more willing to communicate in a foreign language undoubtedly feels safe, and is thus ready to take risks in initiating discourse in spite of the fact that they may not know the language very well. Generally speaking, the most disastrous effects of language anxiety consist in the impediment of language processing, leading to behaviors endangering successful in-class communication. This is why, the necessity of using the unknown language in reference to an unfamiliar and unclear cultural context leads to greater anxiety which, in turn, induces lower WTC levels.

In the case of the researched sample, the predictor variable of language anxiety demonstrates lower β levels, which implies that it is a weaker L2 WTC predictor, when compared to the self-perceived FL levels. This finding can be explained by applying the model of language anxiety development, which proposes that anxiety has a tendency to diminish alongside with growing mastery of the foreign language.

It can be understood that the Polish adolescents investigated in this study already possess a working knowledge of English, and they have also familiarized themselves with the language learning environment and the FL teacher's expectations (the study was carried out 6 months after the beginning of their secondary grammar school experience). On these grounds, it can be speculated that their language anxiety levels have already decreased, causing their greater safety in the language learning context. Altogether, the variables of self-perceived FL levels and language anxiety scores are responsible for over one-third of the L2 WTC variability, which means that in the above WTC model, they allow for a very precise estimation of the learner's WTC.

A set of slightly weaker predictors of L2 WTC is constituted by final grades and teacher support, which explains less than one-third of L2 WTC variability. Of these two, grades are a more reliable predictor of the criterion variable, i.e. WTC. Hence, it can be expected that as there is a high degree of correlation between the instructor's grades and students' perceptions of their abilities (cf. Singh and Terry 2008); high-achieving students, like the ones who rate themselves highly, can be predicted to demonstrate higher L2 WTC scores.

Teacher support appears to be a slightly weaker predictor of L2 WTC. It can understood that the teacher's supportive behaviors, consisting in showing understanding, empathy and consistency, help the students to start forming an identity that will assist them in coping with negative emotions in their language learning process. Thereafter, by creating a safe atmosphere in the classroom, teacher support levels are a clear predictor of elevated L2 WTC. By contrast, when students cannot count on the instructor's help, advice, assistance, or backing, they are not able to manage the learning process successfully. As a result, they will be less inclined to initiate communication in a foreign language, and avoid exposing themselves in the face of danger caused by communicative demands.

Language learning orientations constitute even a weaker set of L2 WTC predictors. Among them, only the orientations to have English-speaking friends and to know more have a power to predict the magnitude of one's readiness to communicate in a foreign language, by explaining one-fourth of WTC variability. Reasons related to the acquisition of knowledge and friendship belong to the integrative motivational subsystem, as proposed by Dörnyei (1990); hence, it may be presumed that only internally-driven reasons for learning a language can predict the way in which a student will approach the task of initiation communication in an L2. Moreover, the connection between integrative reasons for language acquisition and willingness to communicate can be explained on the basis of the individual's choice. Both WTC and the orientations to have English-speaking friends are volitional, so it can be inferred that one's desire to have English-speaking friends and to know more are a reliable predictor of their wish for engaging in L2 communication.

The demographic characteristics of the learner—their gender and place of residence—can be treated as very weak predictors of L2 WTC, because they can explain as much as 1 % of its variability. As such, they can be disregarded due to their low predictive power.

Overall, the multiple regression model designed for the purpose of this study demonstrates that among the most valuable predictors of one's L2 WTC several variables can be placed. The strongest ones are self-perceived levels of FL skills and language anxiety levels. Further, with slightly less predictive power, final grades and teacher support can be proposed. Finally, the language learning orientations focusing on one's desire to have English-speaking friends and to know more play a role when calculating potential WTC levels. All these variables come from the student's school microsystem, which can be explained by the fact the Polish adolescent's WTC is mainly shaped by the classroom context, with scarce opportunity to use the foreign language outside school.

On this basis, a clear set of characteristics for the Polish student with low WTC levels can be proposed. Mainly, they are low achievers with low self-perceived foreign language skills. Learning a foreign language is an ordeal evoking strong negative feelings, such as elevated levels of language anxiety. The fear to learn and use the foreign language is worsened by the fact that students are convinced about the teacher's indifference towards them. Their feelings of alienation are accompanied by their lack of interest in having English-speaking friends or to know more. This, sadly, creates a vicious cycle hampering their harmonious development as language learners and human beings.

7 Conclusions

Willingness to communicate is one of the factors contributing to one's successful existence and well being. High WTC levels are correlated with better evaluation in different contexts, such as school, organization and social contacts. On the other hand, individuals unwilling to communicate are burdened with a communicational dysfunction that can reduce their social and emotional happiness (Richmond and McCroskey 1989). For this reason, WTC is now believed to be a major goal of second language education (MacIntyre et al. 2003). Moreover, it offers foreign language learners "greater chances for L2 practice and authentic L2 usage" (MacIntyre et al. 2001, p. 382).

As such, implementing behaviors inducing higher WTC levels while teaching a foreign language are of utmost importance. This can be done through creating more opportunities for learning and using a FL within the Polish cultural context, as well as through pursuing intercultural communication. The teacher's primary goal should be enhancing students' interest in different cultures and international affairs. However, one cannot forget about the importance of managing negative emotions during the foreign language learning process. It follows that the teacher is the person whose guidance and support may be the key to reducing anxiety and building confidence in communication. This can be done through allowing students to exercise control over their own learning and developing their self-assessment skills, as well as through the creation of a collaborative classroom, where knowledge and decision-making are shared by both parties—the teacher and the students.

The study is not free from limitations that must be addressed. Although the selection of variables performed for the purpose of the multiple regression procedure allowed for effective predicting of the student's levels of L2 WT, one must bear in mind the fact that the study was carried out in the Polish educational context. The way a person communicates is deeply entrenched in their culture, because "the amount of talking in which a person engages would be dependent, at least in part, on that person's cultural orientation" (Barraclough et al. 1988, p. 187). It follows that specific communication demands and expectations are a function of the culture in which one is raised. From this point of view, the research context is very special and hence its results may not be generalized to include other cultural environments. Another drawback of the study can be attributed to the fact that the role of language experience is unclear. It can be presumed that all the research participants were at a similar level of language proficiency. Yet, it would be interesting to establish if the length and intensity of one's experience with the foreign language might be a reliable predictor of L2 WTC. This can be caused by the fact that it may be correlated with one's language proficiency level, as well as with language anxiety, the most powerful predictors of L2 WTC.

Communication is a vital aspect of one's life. If indeed, as the results of this investigation suggest, learners' willingness to communicate can be predicted mostly on the basis of their perceived levels of FL skills and language anxiety, it is necessary for FL educators to discover new ways of boosting learners' well-informed confidence in their abilities, and reducing language anxiety. More importantly, it is also proposeds that the affective aspects of the foreign language process cannot be ignored, and should be acknowledged both in everyday teaching and scientific research.

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Investigating Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Among Advanced Learners of English

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Abstract The article investigates foreign language anxiety among advanced learners of English who are also MA students specialising in EFL teaching. Past research results concerning the correlation between anxiety and the level of proficiency are not unanimous. Some studies show that anxiety levels decrease with language proficiency (e.g. Gardner et al. 1997; Tanaka and Ellis 2003) while others indicate that a higher level of proficiency correlates with a higher anxiety level (e.g. Kitano 2001; Marcos-Llinas and Garau 2009). Therefore, this study aimed to analyse whether students with an advanced knowledge of English suffer from speaking anxiety, how their self-assessment of speaking skills relates to speaking apprehension, what speaking skills components are the greatest stressors for them, how typical elements of classroom learning contribute to their speaking anxiety, and whether students experience any bodily, emotional, expressive and verbal reactions to stress while speaking. The study found that participants experience stress and worry in the context of speaking a foreign language; few of them are satisfied with their speaking skills; over a half are mainly worried about their fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and content of their oral performances; the most common classroom stressors are peers, making errors and being called on to speak spontaneously; the majority of students are also afraid of communication with native speakers. The students also suffer from numerous bodily reactions to stress and experience emotional problems while speaking. Moreover, their expressive reactions are distorted and psycholinguistic symptoms of stress can be observed.

1 Introduction

Although foreign language anxiety has been widely discussed in literature dedicated to teaching English, research on foreign language speaking apprehension is scarce. Speaking anxiety was found to be present among low proficiency students

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who are highly insecure of their speaking abilities and display low linguistic competence (e.g. Yamashiro and McLaughlin 2001; Kondo and Yang 2003). Therefore, a question arises whether any components of speaking anxiety can be observed among advanced students of English, who seem to speak without any problems and with ease.

The first part of the article discusses the notion of foreign language speaking anxiety and its components. It also presents a review of the research in this field, mainly focusing on speaking apprehension. The studies on anxiety and its influence on other language skills are also briefly presented. The second part presents the results of the research conducted among advanced adult learners of English who were also MA students specialising in EFL teaching. It looks at the level of anxiety they experience, identifies the most common factors causing speaking apprehension, and investigates whether or not they experience any symptoms of speaking apprehension.

2 Defining Anxiety

As Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 125) explain, "[a]nxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system". In the context of foreign language learning three components of language anxiety have been identified (Horwitz et al. 1986): *communication apprehension*, *fear of negative social evaluation* and *test apprehension*. The first is connected with the situation in which a person feels uncomfortable and stressed while talking to others or in front of others. Horwitz et al. (1986) emphasize that communication apprehension may be caused by a sort of mismatch between students' mature thoughts and readiness to participate in a conversation, and a lack of linguistic competence which would enable them to express their thoughts in the way they have planned. In the case of fear of negative social evaluation, students are afraid of losing face and being perceived as someone worse, not competent or even uneducated. This feeling may be intensified by students' highly critical approach to the errors they make (MacIntyre and Gardner 1991a). Inability to distance oneself from one's own errors and striving for perfectionism may add to the level of anxiety, and, in some cases, lead to refraining from participation in classes and resorting to avoidance strategies (Kitano 2001). The last component of foreign language anxiety is test apprehension. This is the feeling experienced in the context of both less and more formal examinations. Herwitt and Stephenson's (2011) research revealed that students' awareness that they were taking part in an examination which decided about their final grade for a whole course raised their level of anxiety.

Two types of anxiety distinguished can be distinguished (Alpert and Haber 1960): *debilitative* and *facilitative*. The former affects learning and teaching in a negative way. Students may have problems with concentration, be unwilling, or willing but unable to participate in classes. Some of them may feel blocked and

even paralysed in a language learning situation. The latter type of anxiety motivates students to learn more and prepare for classes or exams.

It should also be stressed that foreign language anxiety is characterised by both *psycholinguistic symptoms*: distortions of sounds, problems with pronunciation, changes in intonation or forgetting words and phrases (Haskin et al. 2003), and *physiological reactions*: headaches, cold fingers, shaking, sweating, foot tapping, desk drumming (von Worde 2003), increases in heart rate, perspiration, dry mouth and muscle constraints (Onwuegbuziel et al. 2000; Andrade and Williams 2009).

Though it seems reasonable to assume that language anxiety diminishes as students become more proficient, the research on the correlation between apprehension and language proficiency has not brought consistent results. First of all, low proficiency has been qualified as a direct source of language anxiety by Yamashiro and McLaughlin's (2001) and Kondo and Yang' (2003) studies. Furthermore, Gardner et al. (1977) observed that beginning French learners showed higher levels of stress than more advanced students. It was also observed (Gardner et al. 1979) that after 5 or 6 weeks of French, course participants' anxiety levels decreased both in and outside the classroom. Baker and MacIntyre (2000) and Tanaka and Ellis (2003) reported similar results: students participating in a language course abroad showed significant changes in self-confidence which decreased their language anxiety. Piechurska-Kuciel (2008) analysed language anxiety of Polish students during their 3 years of education in grammar school. The results of this longitudinal observation revealed a steady decrease of apprehension towards the end of the study.

However, there are studies, though in the minority, which report an opposite situation. Kitano's (2001) research revealed that anxiety levels increased with instruction; more advanced students of Japanese experienced a greater amount of foreign language anxiety. Ewald (2007) observed that advanced students of Spanish felt anxiety, which in this case was highly teacher-dependent. Finally, Marcos-Llinas and Garau (2009) analysed the anxiety experienced by beginning, intermediate and advanced learners of Spanish and discovered that advanced learners experienced the greatest amount of apprehension (measured with FLCAS). The results, however, showed that "even though advanced learners showed high anxiety, these learners did not necessarily obtain lower final grades than beginners" (2009, p. 103). The researchers hypothesised that in this case, at an advanced proficiency level, foreign language anxiety may have been of a more facilitative nature.

Foreign language anxiety can be measured with the *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) in the period of 1983–1986. It is based on the experiences of 30 students participating in a *Support Group for Foreign Language Learning*, who shared with the researchers their concerns and feelings connected with debilitative anxiety experienced in relation to foreign language learning. As a result, 33 Likert-scale questions were constructed which measure a student's communication apprehension (e.g. "I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class"), test anxiety (e.g. "I am usually at ease during tests in my language class"), fear of negative social

evaluation (e.g. "I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language") and a student's overall feeling during foreign language classes ("In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know", "During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course") (Horwitz et al. 1986, pp. 129–130).

3 Foreign Language Anxiety and Language Skills

Speaking is believed to be the most anxiety-provoking element of foreign and second language education (e.g. Cheng et al. 1999; Kitano 2001). The role of speaking as a factor causing the greatest amount of worry, tension and stress is vividly pictured by the fact that communication apprehension has been qualified as a component of foreign language anxiety. Moreover, studies have shown that there is a consistent correlation between language anxiety and achievements on oral examinations (Young 1986; Phillips 1992; Cheng et al. 1999; Sparks and Ganschow 2007; Herwitt and Stephenson 2011).

The research in this field conducted by Kitano (2001) indicated that speaking anxiety correlated with test anxiety: students became more anxious during oral performance as their fear of negative evaluation was stronger. It was even more intensified by the vision of going abroad and talking to native speakers. Kitano also observed that students' anxiety increased when they compared their speaking skills with those of their peers and native speakers. As far as gender differences are concerned, the study indicated that male students who self-assessed their speaking skills as unsatisfactory experienced more stress than females in the same position. Kitano also hypothesised that the majority of students believed speaking skills to be the most important; hence they experienced more self-imposed pressure on being successful in this area, which may have generated an additional amount of fear and tension during speaking activities.

Herwitt and Stephenson (2011) analysed three groups of students differing in anxiety levels (i.e. low, medium, and high) and their oral accomplishment during examinations. The study showed that students in the high anxiety group performed significantly worse on the speaking exam. The researchers also managed to confirm Phillips's (1992) observation that higher levels of speaking anxiety "were seen to be associated with poorer performance in quantity and correctness of output as well as in complexity of grammatical features" (Herwitt and Stephenson 2011, p. 12). It was also observed that the more stressed Spanish students of English were, the longer the responses they produced. In Phillips's study the situation was opposite: the more Anglophone students got stressed, the less French they spoke. However, it should be added that the comparison of the length of responses among the three groups of students allowed the researchers to conclude that low-anxiety students produced longer and less accurate responses than their medium-anxiety counterparts. This might have been caused by the relaxation of the participants which allowed them to speak more but, on the other hand, be less conscious about errors.

The issue of errors in the context of speaking anxiety was also analysed by Gregersen (2003). The researcher observed that more anxious students made more errors and, while listening to their recorded oral performances, they displayed greater difficulties in self-correction. Similarly, Sheen (2008, p. 862) observed that "the more anxious learners (who were afraid of speaking and making errors) were not able to pay attention to the input in the recasts during the communicative activities, and this prevented them from fully utilizing the learning opportunity the recasts afforded them". As a result, they were less efficient in correcting their own errors.

Research findings also point to the importance of self-evaluation and self-efficacy in developing foreign language speaking. Students who self-assess their speaking skills as low tend to experience a higher level of stress (MacIntyre et al. 1991b; Cheng et al. 1999; Matsuda and Gobel 2004; Liu and Jackson 2008), which correlates with their unwillingness to communicate (Liu and Jackson 2008). By contrast, a higher level of self-perceived proficiency correlates with lower levels of foreign language anxiety and of communicative anxiety (Dewaele et al. 2008).

It was also reported that an informal conversation with friends should be qualified as less anxiety-provoking than talking than strangers (Dewaele 2007), and talking to native speakers was believed by learners to be the most stress-inducing factor (Kitano 2001). Moreover, Dörnyei and Kormos (2000) indicated that speaking anxiety is 'contagious': if one speaker is stressed, another speaker may feel and reflect this anxiety, and if both interlocutors are stressed, it affects language production negatively.

What should also be stressed is that higher levels of speaking anxiety make students use avoidance strategies (Gregersen 2003) during foreign language classes. Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 130) claim that students suffering from apprehension may "skip classes, overstudy, or seek refuge in the last row in an effort to avoid the humiliation or embarrassment of being called on to speak".

As far as communication apprehension is concerned, it has also been analysed in the context of second language speaking anxiety. Woodrow (2006) stressed the dual conceptualisation of anxiety and investigated it from two perspectives: communication within and outside the second language learning classroom. It was shown that this distinction is justified as students residing in Australia experienced both types of communication apprehension in different degrees. The most stressful factor inside the classroom turned out to be giving oral presentations and performing in front of classmates; communicating with native speakers was the most frequent out-of-class stressor. Moreover, some national differences were revealed. Chinese, Korean and Japanese students displayed higher levels of anxiety than other ethnic groups.

Language anxiety has also been analysed in the context of other language skills. Elkhafaiti (2005) claims that although listening anxiety appears in the discussion of foreign language anxiety, it has rarely been investigated. The researchers who studied anxiety in the context of listening comprehension (e.g. Bacon 1989; Gardner et al. 1987; Lund 1991; ElKhafaiti 2005) managed to find a negative correlation between listening anxiety and language performance. Bekleyen (2009) discovered through the respondents' answers to open-ended questions that they

experienced this type of anxiety as listening was not believed to be important and practiced enough in the language courses they had participated in so far. They also felt anxious as they had problems with recognition of spoken forms of known words, segments of sentences and weak word forms. Furthermore, In'nami (2006) did not find any significant negative correlation between test anxiety and listening performance.

Writing anxiety also drew researchers' attention (e.g. Cheng 2002; Cheng et al. 1999; Daly and Wilson 1983). Masny and Foxall (1992) discovered that both low and high anxiety students were more focused on the form of their compositions than on the content; however the former group was more focused on and oriented towards the form of their written responses. Moreover, a high level of anxiety correlated with an unwillingness to participate in more writing classes. Finally, females were found to be more apprehensive than males. Cheng (2002) showed that L2 writing anxiety was distinct from L1 writing anxiety and that L2 writing anxiety was influenced more by writers' own opinions about their writing competence than by their actual writing achievements. The study also indicated that female writers tended to experience more acute anxiety than males. In an analysis of the level of anxiety experienced by freshmen, sophomores, and juniors, the author observed no significant differences. Cheng (2004) published a scale for measuring writing anxiety: *Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory* (SLWAI). Yet it should be acknowledged that Daly and Miller (1975) developed the *Writing Apprehension Test* (WAT) much earlier. However, this scale was developed to measure writers' apprehension in the first language context.

It was also observed that reading generates apprehension among students. As a result, *Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale* (FLRAS) was developed (Saito et al. 1999). As far as research in this field is concerned, it should be stressed that Saito et al. (1999) found foreign language reading anxiety to be distinguishable from foreign language anxiety. Sellers's (2000) research showed that more highly anxious students managed to recall less passage content than did low-apprehension students. Results from the analysis of the data also indicated that highly apprehensive subjects experienced more off-topic, interfering thoughts than less apprehensive respondents. Moreover, Rai et al. (2011) showed that anxious students needed more time to process the text, which extended the time they needed to answer questions necessitating from them inferential thinking. It should be also added that Millis et al. (2006) did not find any significant correlation between reading anxiety and reading proficiency.

4 Research Description

As the issue of foreign language anxiety experienced by advanced learners is disputable, the aim of the research was to investigate the level of speaking anxiety among advanced adult Polish learners of English who were studying English as a part of their MA studies in EFL teaching.

4.1 Research Questions

The research project was conducted to gather data which would allow answering the following research questions connected with the speaking anxiety experiences of students with an advanced knowledge of English.

1. How do students with advanced knowledge of English generally feel about speaking English? How do they assess their speaking skills?
2. How do elements typical of a classroom setting contribute to speaking anxiety?
3. What speaking components contribute to speaking anxiety?
4. Do students experience any bodily, emotional, expressive and verbal reactions to stress?

4.2 Participants

Fifty-four 1st year extramural MA students, specialising in EFL teaching, were asked to fill in a questionnaire about their experiences connected with speaking anxiety inside and outside the foreign language classroom. Their ages varied from 23 to 49, the average age being 27. There were 4 male and 50 female participants. The study was conducted in March, after winter term examinations, and all the participants had successfully passed practical English tests (reading, listening and writing) at the level of Certificate of Proficiency in English with results above 60 % of the total number of possible points.

4.3 Research Tools

The research participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire, which was prepared by the present author. It consisted of 15 questions in total. 7 items (Q4, Q 5–10) followed the Likert-scale format (e.g. "I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers") and 8 questions (Q1–3, Q11–14) were close-ended with a pool of answers; 2 of these questions (Q2, Q3) were based on a verbal-numerical scale (e.g. "What level of anxiety do you experience while speaking English": 4—high anxiety level, 3—medium anxiety level, 2—low anxiety level, 1—no anxiety).

The Likert-scale questions were adapted from the FLCAS. The procedure of selection was as follows: first, the items referring exclusively to speaking skills were identified and then grouped according to the item they were intended to measure. This step was necessary as items in FLCAS refer recursively to one issue, for example there are 7 questions which assess how participants feel while speaking (e.g. 1. "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class", 18. "I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class",

24. “I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students”, 27. “I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class”). Finally, one question was chosen to measure one item connected with speaking apprehension which resulted in 7 questions measuring anxiety caused by speaking to native speakers, thinking that other students speak better, being asked a question unexpectedly, teacher corrections, other students’ mockery, and the vision of making mistakes and of volunteering answers during class activities. Four close-ended questions, constructed on the basis of Andrade and Williams’ (2009) publication, concerned bodily, emotional, expressive and verbal reactions to stress. The last 5 items were constructed by the author and concerned students’ feelings while speaking (Q1), satisfaction level (Q2), stress intensity (Q3), self-assessment (Q4) and speaking components as potential sources of stress (Q5).

For Likert-scale questions (1—strongly agree, 5—strongly disagree), the analysis with a one sample *t*-test was performed with the test value of 3. For items 2 and 3, mean values and confidence intervals were calculated. For questions 1 and 11–12, the number of responses to a given item and the percentage value of this number were computed.

5 Research Results

5.1 Advanced Students’ Self-Assessment of Speaking Skills

The first item in the questionnaire was aimed to find out how advanced learners feel when they speak English. There were several options suggested and the respondents could pick one item they found relevant. The results are as follows:

1. Relaxed and at ease—6(7 %) respondents
2. A little tense—11(20 %) respondents.
3. It is a pleasure for me but I am a little tense—17(31 %) respondents.
4. It is a pleasure but I am also stressed—8(15 %) respondents.
5. I am stressed—10(19 %) respondents.

Further analysis of responses to this question shows that for the majority of respondents, 46(85 %), speaking was connected with some degree of uneasiness, tension and stress (the sum of points 2, 3, 4 and 5). Ten (19 %) seemed to have no positive feelings connected with this skill (points 1 and 2). For 25 learners, speaking was a mixture of positive and negative elements: it was a source of pleasure but simultaneously involved some stressful elements (points 3 and 4). Only six (7 %) respondents were relaxed and at ease. The participants could also add any comments they felt relevant. There were two extra answers: “Pleasure but I’m monitoring myself, which is tiring”, and “It is a pleasure but I’m watching myself all the time”. As can be seen, the same element was brought to light in these two

comments: while speaking English, the students tried to be very cautious about the accuracy and manner of their speech.

In the next question, the students asked were to rate their satisfaction level with their speaking skills on a scale of 1 ("I'm not satisfied with my speaking skills") to 5 ("I am fully satisfied"). The mean for this item was 2.54 (*SD* = 0.86; 95 %; *CI* = 2.32–2.78), which suggested that their satisfaction was rather low.

As the respondents were adult and mature learners, there was also a direct question in the questionnaire which asked them to self-assess their anxiety while speaking English on a scale of 1–4 (1—no anxiety, 4—high anxiety). The results indicate that the respondents experience a rather high level of stress as the mean for this item was 3.2 (*SD* = 0.62; 95 %; *CI* = 3.01–3.38).

The anxiety level while speaking a foreign language was also analysed by taking into account how advanced students find themselves when being around and talking to native speakers. It was observed that the participants would not feel confident and comfortable under these circumstances: 28 (52 %) respondents disagreed with the item "I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers" (1 strongly disagreed and 27 disagreed) and 21 (38 %) would not find this situation stressful (18 agreed and 3 strongly agreed). The mean for this Likert-scale question was 2.92 and the difference with the value of the test, 3, was not statistically significant ($t(53) = -637$) (see Table 1 for details).

Table 1 Statistics for items concerning stressors typical for classroom learning

Item	SAn	An	Nn	Dn	SDn	M	SD	*t*	df	*p*
Q4. Native speakers	1	27	5	18	3	2.91	1.07	−0.637	53	0.527
Q5.Voluntary answers	4	21	10	18	1	3.17	1.04	1.176	53	0.245
Q6.Unexpected questions	5	18	14	13	4	3.13	1.12	.853	53	0.397
Q7. Errors	7	30	9	6	2	3.63	0.98	4.736	53	0.000
Q8.Teacher's corrections	1	15	15	19	4	2.81	0.99	−1.372	53	0.176
Q9.Other students laughing	0	17	8	21	8	2.63	1.09	−2.504	53	0.015
Q10. Other students better	11	28	8	7	0	3.80	0.92	6.367	53	0.000

5.2 Elements Typical of a Classroom Setting and Their Contribution to Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

The literature on anxiety in the foreign language classroom points to some elements which are especially stress-provoking. The first one would be eagerness to initiate responses without being called on by anyone; the student has something interesting to say and would like to participate in a discussion, but the prospect of saying something publicly seems to cause a lot of anxiety and stress. The next stressor is being called to speak spontaneously by the teacher or other class members. The last one is a student's attitude to making errors and producing erroneous utterances in front of other people, especially peers, who listen to these possibly inaccurate linguistic productions and who are witnesses to someone's difficulties, problems and imperfections.

The findings of the study show that there were still students, 24 (44 %), who felt embarrassed to start talking on their own during classes in English: 4 strongly agreed and 21 agreed with the statement "It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class". Statistical analysis of the responses revealed that the mean for this item was 3.17 (SD = 1.04) and t-test analysis showed that there was no statistically significant inclination towards the agree or disagree tendency ($t(53) = 1.176$) (see Table 1 for details).

It was also found that being 'pushed' by the teacher to produce an oral response makes 23 (42 %) students nervous, while for 17 (31 %) this situation does not count as a stressful event. The mean for this item amounted to 3.13 (SD = 1.12) and the t-test analysis revealed that there was no statistically significant inclination towards the agree or disagree tendency ($t(53) = .853$) (see Table 1 for details).

The attitude towards errors may account for speaking anxiety in the case of 37 (60 %) respondents: 7 strongly disagreed and 30 disagreed with the statement "I don't worry about making mistakes in language class". The mean value for this question was 3.63 (SD = 0.98). In this case, the difference from the test value (3) was statistically significant ($t(53) = 4.736$). Only 8 students did not find errors to be a source of stress (see Table 1 for details).

There was also one more item which investigated students' attitude to errors. It touched upon the teacher and his/her role as an error corrector. The research showed that 16 (30 %) students feel anxious in the situation when teachers correct their inaccurate responses and 23 (42 %) find this situation natural. The calculated mean for these answers was 2.81 (SD = 0.99) and no statistically significant difference from the test value of 3 was found ($t(53) = -1.372$) (see Table 1 for details).

The last stressor to examine was the presence of peers in the foreign language classroom. There were two questions in the questionnaire connected with this issue. The first revealed that there were still students, 17 (31 %), who were afraid that other students will "laugh" at them while 29 (54 %) participants did not consider this hypothetical situation as fear-provoking. The difference of mean, M = 2.63 (SD = 1.09), from the test value of 3 was statistically significant in this case ($t(53) = -2.504$). However, when the option of laughter was eliminated and the

students were to assess themselves against other students' speaking abilities, the analysis showed that there were 39 (72 %) respondents who thought that other students were better than them and found this situation stressful. Only 7 (13 %) students were not nervous about this situation, or simply did not think about other students' superior speaking skills. The difference of mean, $M = 3.8$ ($SD = .92$), from the test value of 3 was statistically significant in this case ($t(53) = 6.367$) (see Table 1 for details).

5.3 Speaking Components Contributing to Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

The research also aimed to examine speaking components which may be qualified as the most common stressors in the context of foreign language anxiety. The students were presented with an array of options and they could tick as many elements as they found relevant. The question was formulated in the following way: *What may be the reason for your speaking anxiety (tick as many items as you want)?*

- My vocabulary knowledge.
- My grammar knowledge.
- Fluency.
- My pronunciation.
- In my opinion my pronunciation is too far away from how native speakers speak.
- I would like to be more correct with how I speak.
- The content of what I say (I would like to be more precise).

Before the results are presented, it should be clarified why there were two items concerning pronunciation. The author wished to differentiate between the aspect of pronunciation which was connected with potential pronunciation errors and the inability to produce sounds which do not exist in the students' native language, and that which would be responsible for striving for perfection and trying to speak in a native-like manner.

The analysis yielded the following results. The components have been arranged from the most to the least stressful:

- Fluency—43 (63 %) respondents.
- Vocabulary—30 (56 %) respondents.
- Pronunciation—28 (52 %) respondents.
  - Pronunciation and intelligibility—19 respondents.
  - Not native-like pronunciation—9 respondents.

- The content—27 (50 %) respondents.
- Grammar knowledge—24 (44 %) respondents.
- Accuracy—20 (37 %) respondents.

The first issue which should be stressed at this point is that there were numerous components that were qualified as stressors by more than half of the respondents. Therefore, the author calculated the number of stress-provoking components per person, noting that on average, an advanced adult learner of English found 3.01 speaking components stressful. The most problematic and, as a result, fear-causing elements were fluency (N = 34) and vocabulary (N = 30). Pronunciation was next in line, and it was discovered that 19 students mostly got nervous about not being intelligible to their interlocutors while 9 learners felt the pressure to speak in a native-like manner. One more element worth stressing is that the content of what students say made half of them feel tense and anxious. The least stressful were grammar knowledge and accuracy, although still 24 (44 %) and 20 (37 %) students, respectively, found them stress-provoking.

5.4 Bodily, Emotional, Expressive and Verbal Reactions to Stress

The last part of the research project was connected with symptoms of foreign language anxiety. Andrade and Williams (2009) divided them into four groups: bodily, emotional, expressive and verbal. Detailed results of the questionnaire are presented in Table 2 where the reactions have been arranged from the most to the least frequent. For the most common items the percentage values were calculated.

An analysis of the students' responses showed that out of bodily reactions, heart beating faster and feeling hot with cheeks burning seem to be prevalent as 44 (81 %) and 37 (68 %) respondents respectively admitted to experiencing them. Furthermore, the most common emotional reactions were problems with concentration and the mind going blank. They were experienced by more than half of the students: 31 (57 %) and 30 (51 %). Out of an array of verbal symptoms, speech disturbances, speech tempo changes and production of short utterances seemed to dominate, though they were less frequent than the two previously discussed groups; they were experienced by about 40 % of participants: 21, 21 and 20 respectively. Finally, expressive symptoms were found to be the least common: 20 (37 %) respondents reported noticing changes in gesturing, 14 (26 %) laughing or smiling, and 12 (22 %) changes in facial expression. In the questionnaire, there was also an option for students to add their own comments and 3 respondents wrote that they produced unfinished responses as a result of anxiety.

Table 2 Results for items (Q12–15) concerning the most common reactions to stress

Bodily symptoms	n	Expressive symptoms	n
Heart beating faster	44 (81 %)	Changes in voice other than yelling or screaming	20 (37 %)
Feeling hot, cheeks burning	37 (68 %)	Changes in gesturing	14 (26 %)
Feeling cold, shivering	13 (24 %)	Laughing, smiling	13 (24 %)
Change in breathing	12 (22 %)	Changes in facial expression	12 (22 %)
Stomach troubles	8 (15 %)	Abrupt bodily movements	8
Lump in throat	6	Moving towards people or things	4
Muscles tensing/ trembling	4	Withdrawing from people or things	3
Perspiring	3	Moving against people or things aggressively	3
Feeling warm, pleasant	2	Crying, sobbing	1
Muscles relaxing, restful	0	Screaming, yelling	0
Do not remember	0	Do not remember	3
Emotional reactions	n	Verbal symptoms	n
Concentration problems	31 (57 %)	Speech disturbances –	22 (41 %)
Mind went blank	30 (55 %)	Speech tempo changes	22 (41 %)
Unwanted thoughts	7 (13 %)	Short utterances	20 (37 %)
Do not remember	6 (11 %)	Silence	14
		One or two sentences	11
		Speech-melody change	7
		Lengthy utterances	3
		Other verbal reactions (incomplete sentences)	3
		Do not remember	4

6 Conclusions

The analysis of the responses to the questionnaire distributed among students with an advanced proficiency level in English and specialising in teaching EFL demonstrates that they experience speaking anxiety quite intensely: 46(83 %) respondents claim to feel stressed and tense while speaking a foreign language, which corroborates the results of studies conducted by Kitano (2001), Ewald (2007) and Marcos-Llinas and Garau (2009), revealing that advanced knowledge of a foreign language does not imply speaking without stress.

The study showed that students are not fully satisfied with their speaking skills and they admit that they suffer from speaking apprehension and feel stressed while speaking. It was found that the most common stressor was the belief that other students are better at speaking, and the inability to forget about this during classes. The second anxiety-provoking element are errors and not being able to speak correctly. Participants also seem to suffer from fear of negative social evaluation, and half of them claim that they would feel stressed in a conversation with native speakers. One third of the respondents are stressed when the teacher corrects them, when they want to join a discussion voluntarily and when they are asked unexpected questions. The intensity of speaking anxiety may be interrelated with students' belief in self-efficacy as only 6 respondents admit to being satisfied with how they speak English. The examination of the most stress-causing components of speaking skills shows that over half of the students feel anxious mostly due to their problems with fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and content. The need to speak in a native-like way is one of the least dominant stressors.

Finally, advanced students of English experience an array of bodily, verbal, expressive and emotional reactions to foreign language speaking anxiety. The most common are increased heart rate and feeling hot (bodily symptoms), problems with concentration and the mind going blank (emotional symptoms), changes in voice, gesturing and facial expressions, laughing (expressive symptoms), speech disturbances, speech tempo changes and short utterances (verbal symptoms).

The results presented above can serve as a basis for some teaching implications. It may be observed that advanced levels of linguistic proficiency do not guarantee anxiety-free speaking. Therefore, teachers cannot forget that their students, despite high proficiency and seemingly effortless communication, may feel stressed, anxious and worried to the same extent as beginners. As a result, all the techniques, strategies and interaction patterns of foreign language teaching should be planned to help students overcome speaking anxiety. It would also be advisable to talk with students about their fears and anxieties. A questionnaire which would inform the teacher about students' stressors would be a good idea as it would provide a basis for dealing with the apprehension problem in a discreet way. This is because talking with students about their weaknesses and fears in public might intensify their apprehension. Once the teacher learns about the number of anxious students in a given group, it should be easier to make proper decisions concerning teaching speaking, which consequently may make the whole teaching process more efficient.

It should be added that the results of the present study should be approached with caution. Though the research group consisted of advanced students, it has to be stressed that the participants were also students specialising in teaching EFL, which might have influenced the collected data. For example, the participants' concern over errors might have been exacerbated by the prospect of being a teacher, who is supposed to act as a language model. Similarly, the students' dissatisfaction with the way they speak and anxiety connected with speaking components may have been intensified by the belief that a teacher of English should be highly proficient in speaking.

Foreign language anxiety among advanced adult learners of English surely needs further investigation. In order to assess the level of stress, the results acquired on the basis of advanced students' responses should be compared with the opinions of intermediate and beginner level students. It is also suggested that anxiety and stress be investigated from the age perspective. The questionnaires for older children and teenagers could be designed in this context and results should be compared across different age groups. It also seems interesting to study the age differences within the adult group as adults who are in their twenties and in their fifties may display various levels of anxiety and react to different stressors.

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Advanced Learners' Use of Communication Strategies in Spontaneous Language Performance

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Abstract Communication strategies, or devices that can be drawn on to compensate for gaps in the knowledge of the target language system, are important both for beginners and quite advanced learners, since difficulties in expressing the intended message are bound to occur at all levels of proficiency (Faucette 2001). As suggested by some theorists and researchers, however, not all devices of this kind are equally effective in aiding the attainment of specific communicative goals and they do not contribute to the same extent to language development (cf. Dörnyei and Thurrell 1994; Faucette 2001; Ellis 2008). That is why, it seems necessary to explore ways in which such strategies are employed by learners, appraise their value and then identify the targets for appropriate training. The present paper contributes to this goal by reporting the findings of a study which explored English majors' application of communication strategies in the course of performing an information-gap and a decision-making task. The data were collected from 64 subjects by means of a survey constructed by Nakatani (2006), which they were requested to complete immediately after participating in two group-work activities. The findings demonstrate that while the use of communication strategies among these learners is beneficial, there are also surprising gaps, which justifies planning and implementing pedagogic intervention in this area.

1 Introduction

Irrespective of their level of proficiency, second or foreign language learners are sooner or later bound to find themselves in a situation in which they will not know how to express the intended meaning or to attain the desired communicative goal

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due to their lacking linguistic resources. In such circumstances, they are likely to fall back on their strategic competence or, more precisely, draw upon communication strategies (CSs), which Faucette (2001, p. 1) defines as "[t]he ways in which an individual speaker manages to compensate for this gap between what she wishes to communicate and her immediately available linguistic resources". For obvious reasons, not all strategic devices of this kind are equally effective, both with respect to the comprehensibility of the message being conveyed and the opportunities for target language (TL) development. This is because it is clear, for example, that switching to the mother tongue in a conversation with a foreigner can, in most cases, hardly be expected to help the learner get the intended message across, not to mention the fact that it is difficult to envisage the benefits that could possibly accrue from reliance on such a strategy for the growth of communicative competence, understood not only as the familiarity with target language subsystems but also the ability to employ them appropriately in single sentences and in longer texts (cf. Dörnyei and Thurrell 1994; Faucette 2001; Nakatani and Goh 2007; Ellis 2008). The variable utility of different communication strategies constitutes sufficient justification for undertaking research aimed at identifying the ways in which they are employed by different groups of learners with a view to assessing their value and pinpointing those that should become the focus of well-designed training. This was the rationale behind the study reported in the present paper which sought to explore the use of communication strategies by advanced foreign language learners, all of whom were majoring in English, as they were engaged in the performance of two communicative tasks, one with and the other without the requirement for information exchange. In the first part, an attempt will be made to provide a succinct overview of key issues related to CSs, such as problems involved in their definition, competing approaches to the study of these strategic devices, classifications offered on their basis, the main foci of research into CSs, as well as the findings of such empirical investigations. The second part will focus on the description of the research project undertaken by the present author, and the presentation and discussion of its findings, which will then serve as a basis for a handful of pedagogical implications and guidelines for future research in this area.

2 Definitions, Characteristics and Classifications of Communication Strategies

Although the definition provided by Faucette (2001) and quoted in the introduction seems to be lucid and straightforward, theorists and researchers are in fact sharply divided over the nature of communication strategies, which, inevitably, has a bearing on issues connected with their identification, classification, evaluation and training. As Nakatani and Goh (2007, p. 207) observe, "[i]n the last three decades, interest in CSs has engendered scholarly discussion and studies that address issues related to CS description, use, and teachability. There is, however, little agreement

about what CSs really are, their transferability from L1 and L2, and whether they can be learnt in the classroom". In fact, in their seminal overview, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) identify as many as seven approaches to conceptualizing communication strategies, which Kormos (2006) subsequently reduces to four main ones, that is:

1. The *traditional view*, in which CSs are viewed as verbal or non-verbal devices that can be drawn upon to compensate for insufficient knowledge of the target language system, or, to quote Færch and Kasper (1983, p. 23) "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal";
2. The *interactional view*, according to which CSs can be employed to deal with difficulties involved not only in production but also comprehension, thus including as well what is referred to in the literature as *negotiation of meaning* (cf. Long 1983), with the effect that they "relate to a mutual attempt of interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared" (Tarone 1980, p. 42);
3. The *extended view*, in which Dörnyei and Scott (1997, p. 179) broaden the concept to encompass "every potentially intentional attempt to cope with any language related problems of which the speaker is aware during the course of communication"; this means that CSs include problem-solving devices which are related to inadequate TL proficiency, difficulties in one's own output production, mechanisms used for negotiation of meaning when comprehension problems arise, and strategies employed to gain processing time and lessen the pressure on the interlocutor;
4. The *cognitive view*, which focuses on psycholinguistic processes underlying the use of CSs, together with its extension by Poulisse (1997), who makes an attempt to integrate the application of CSs into the model of speech production (Levelt 1989) and describes these strategic devices in terms of resorting to an alternative speech plan when the original plan cannot be successfully encoded.

It should hardly come as a surprise that these different views have generated sometimes quite disparate classifications of CSs that cannot be accommodated in this limited space and only some of which will be outlined below (see Dörnyei and Scott 1997, for a detailed discussion of these classifications).

It is also possible to identify the defining criteria of communication strategies which are consistently mentioned in the literature and enable researchers to make a distinction between CSs and behaviors that are not strategic, and these, according to Dörnyei and Scott (1997), are *problem-orientedness* and *consciousness*. As regards the former, there is a consensus that the use of communication strategies has to be motivated by the realization on the part of one of the speakers that a problem has come up that can jeopardize communication (cf. Bialystok 1990), but the character of this problem has been interpreted differently, as evidenced in the contrasting views on the nature of CSs presented above. Since confining the discussion of CSs solely to the need to overcome gaps in TL knowledge which stand in the way of verbalizing messages ignores many other problem-solving phenomena that often

occur in communication, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) list four types of difficulties which may need to be tackled by interlocutors, namely: (1) *resource deficits* which are reflective of lacking TL proficiency, (2) *own-performance problems* which entail realization on the part of the speaker that his or her output has been incorrect to a greater or lesser extent and subsequent activation of self-repair mechanisms, (3) *other-performance problems* which are connected with the comprehension of the speaker's message, either because it contains inaccuracies or cannot be fully understood, a situation in which negotiation of meaning is initiated (e.g. with the use of a clarification request), and (4) *processing time pressure problems* which stem from the fact that learners need extra time to process and plan messages in a foreign language and manifest themselves in the deployment of stalling and time-gaining strategies (e.g. fillers or hesitation devices). When it comes to the latter criterion, that is consciousness, it should be emphasized that this construct does not lend itself to a straightforward interpretation as well since it is not entirely clear what learners should be conscious of (e.g. the appearance of a problem, the range of CSs that can be applied to handle it, the actual use of a specific strategy). Besides, it is possible to distinguish different aspects of consciousness, that is intentionality, attention, awareness and control (cf. Schmidt 1994), and different degrees of consciousness can be involved (cf. Færch and Kasper 1983). In light of such considerations, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) list three aspects of consciousness that seem to be of particular relevance for CSs, as follows: (1) *consciousness as awareness of the problem* which means that learners have to be cognizant of reliance on a problem-solving mechanism to address a difficulty, as this provides a basis for distinguishing strategic from erroneous language use, (2) *consciousness as intentionality*, which stresses the need for the speaker to deliberately address the problem, as only in this way is it possible to tease apart time-gaining strategies and pauses, hesitations, fillers or repetitions which abound in spoken language and (3) *consciousness as awareness of strategic language use*, a criterion which is related to learners' cognizance that they are falling back on a contingency plan which is not a perfect solution in linguistic terms but aids mutual understanding.

What should also be noted at this juncture is that although communication strategies can be employed to cope with problems in the use of virtually all target language subsystems, the main focus in theory and research has been on vocabulary (cf. Yule and Tarone 1997), which can perhaps be regarded as unfortunate because it is indisputable that grammar, pronunciation or pragmatics also play an important role in communication and being able to compensate for insufficient linguistic resources in these areas may in some situations prove to be crucial. There is also the intriguing question concerning the extent to which the use of CSs can make a contribution to the development of the target language by, for example, aiding the acquisition of different elements of TL subsystems, an issue that is rather controversial, in contrast to the assumption that the use of at least certain types of these strategic devices can help learners achieve their intended communicative goals and thus enhance the effectiveness of interaction. Skehan (1998), for instance, is skeptical about the value of CSs for acquisition, on grounds that their frequent and successful application obviates the need for the learner to expand his or her

interlanguage resources. This view is contested by Kasper and Kellerman (1997), who list such benefits of the use of CSs as, among others, greater exposure to input, opportunities for negotiated interaction and production of pushed output, access to new linguistic resources (e.g. through corrective feedback), as well as increased automaticity. However, as Ellis (2008, p. 512) insightfully observes, "[t]he two views about the role of CSs in acquisition need not be seen as contradictory. It is possible that some learners develop their strategic competence at the expense of their linguistic competence while others exploit CSs for their learning opportunities".

There are two major competing approaches to the study of communication strategies, namely the *interactional perspective*, sometimes also referred to as *sociolinguistic*, and the *psycholinguistic view*, often also described as *cognitive* (Ellis 1994; Kasper and Kellerman 1997; Nakatani and Goh 2007). To quote Nakatani and Goh (2007, p. 207), "[t]he interactional view focuses on the way learners use strategies during interaction that could help to improve negotiation of meaning and the overall effectiveness of their message. The psycholinguistic view addresses mental processes that underlie learners' language behavior when dealing with lexical and discourse problems". Such disparate foci bring with them a number of crucial differences which have a bearing on how CSs are identified, classified, investigated and what recommendations are proposed for foreign language pedagogy.

Embracing the interactional perspective, which is represented, for example, by the work of Dörnyei and Scott (1997) or Nakatani (2010), involves a focus on the external and interactive processes in which learners engage as they experience difficulty in accomplishing communicative goals and the belief that CSs are not only problem-solving devices but also techniques employed with the purpose of making communication more effective. This entails the inclusion of negotiation, self-repair and time-gaining strategies, justifies the construction of comprehensive taxonomies of CSs containing multiple categories and subcategories, and provides support for different forms of training students in effective use of these strategic devices (Yule and Tarone 1997). One classification drawing on this approach was developed by Dörnyei and Scott (1997), who include in it 33 manifestations of strategic devices, divided into three main groups as a reflection on how CSs contribute to resolving communication breakdowns and ensuring mutual understanding, that is: (1) *direct strategies*, which "provide an alternative, manageable, and self-contained means of getting the (sometimes modified) meaning across" (e.g. circumlocution or approximation), (2) *indirect strategies*, which "(…) do not provide alternative meaning structures, but rather facilitate the conveyance of meaning indirectly by creating the conditions for achieving mutual understanding: preventing breakdowns and keeping the communication channel open (e.g. using fillers or feigning understanding) or indicating less than perfect forms that require extra effort to understand (e.g. using strategy markers or hedges)", and (3) *interactional strategies*, in which case "(…) the participants carry out trouble-shooting exchanges collaboratively" (e.g. request for clarification or the provision of such clarification) (1997, p. 198).

When it comes to the psycholinguistic perspective, its main focus is on the internal and the cognitive, or the mental processes underpinning the production and comprehension of speech as well as strategic target language use. As a consequence, the scope of empirical investigation is limited to compensatory behaviors and excludes various forms of avoidance, negotiation of meaning, the use of fillers or attempts to stall and gain time, with the effect that the proposed classifications are much more parsimonious since the number of CSs is reduced to the minimum (cf. Yule and Tarone 1997). What is of particular relevance from the point of view of language pedagogy, the advocates of this stance deny the need for training students in the use of CSs, in accordance with the conviction that strategic competence will gradually be transferred from the L1 and, therefore, as Bialystok (1990, p. 147) comments, "[w]hat one must teach students of a language is not strategy, but language". An example of a division of CSs grounded in the psycholinguistic perspective is the one proposed by Poulisse (1993), who, basing on Levelt's (1989) model of speech production, distinguishes between: (1) *substitution strategies* which involve omitting or modifying some features of a lexical chunk when searching for a new vocabulary item (e.g. approximation), (2) *substitution-plus strategies* in which case regular substitution strategies are complemented with unusual L1 or L2 encoding procedures that are applied to morphology and/or phonology (e.g. foreignizing), and (3) *reconceptualization strategies* where the initial preverbal message is changed with respect to more than one lexical chunk (e.g. circumlocution).

Studies of communication strategies conducted to date have drawn on both of the two perspectives, with crucial ramifications for the research questions asked and the methodology employed, with the caveat that attempts have also been made to reconcile them (e.g. Yule and Tarone 1997; Pawlak 2009). Since a detailed overview of such studies is beyond the scope of this paper, the present discussion will only highlight the main directions of research of this kind, provide references to the representative studies, and touch upon the key challenges that this line of inquiry has to face. Understandably perhaps, the bulk of empirical investigations conducted to date has aimed to identify the CSs employed by learners in different situations, good examples being the research projects undertaken by Tarone (1978), Williams et al. (1997), and Nakahama et al. (2001), which reflect the interactional perspective, and those carried out by Bialystok (1983), Bongaerts and Poulisse (1989), and Yarmohammadi and Seif (1992), which adopted the psycholinguistic perspective. Researchers working within the interactionist framework, but also those embracing a more eclectic view, have as well sought to identify the variables which may affect the application of CSs, such as, for instance, the level of target language proficiency, cultural background or task type, sometimes in combination (e.g. Khanji 1996; Nakatani 2005; Pawlak 2009; Hsieh 2014). It should be pointed out, however, that there has been just a handful of such studies and their results have been conflicting, which makes it impossible to reach any definitive conclusions. The effect of factors mediating the application of CSs, such as, yet again, proficiency and task type as well as cognitive styles, has also been investigated from the psycholinguistic stance by Corrales and Call (1989), Marrie and Netten (1991), and

Littlemore (2001). Although, also in this case, only a handful or relevant studies is available, there is some tentative evidence for an inverse relationship between the level of proficiency and the frequency of CSs use, and a bias of some tasks to trigger the employment of certain types of strategic devices (cf. Nakatani and Goh 2007). Finally, there have been some attempts, informed by different theoretical perspectives, to examine the impact of training students in the use of communication strategies, with studies of this kind being carried out, among others, by Dörnyei (1995), Cohen et al. (1998), Rossiter (2003), Nakatani (2005) and Pawlak (2005). Generally speaking, the results are encouraging because such pedagogic intervention has been shown to lead to increased use of CSs, but, at the same time, they have to be taken with circumspection as such research has been limited in scope and little has been done to demonstrate a link between instruction and the development of oral proficiency, notable exceptions being the studies by Nakatani (2010), Teng (2012) or Benson et al. (2013).

Two studies that merit more attention at this juncture are recent research projects that have been conducted by Nakatani (2006, 2010), for the reason that they have drawn upon the data collection tool employed in the present investigation, namely the *Oral Communication Strategy Inventory* (OCSI) (see below for description). The first of these (Nakatani 2006) was undertaken among Japanese students with a view to constructing and validating the research instrument and consisted of two phases. Phase One involved: (1) administering an open-ended questionnaire to 80 participants to elicit a variety of strategies which can be employed in oral interaction, (2) developing on this basis a pilot instrument and subjecting the data collected from 400 students to initial exploratory factor analysis in order to select test items, and (3) constructing the final instrument, administering itto 400 students and using such data for final factor analysis, which allowed the identification of specific factors and the construction of a stable form of the self-report tool (OCSI). In Phase Two, concurrent validity of the instrument was established by correlating the responses with those obtained by means of the *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL) (Oxford 1990) and its applicability was determined by comparing the performance of higher- and lower-scoring students on an oral task in terms of their self-reports on the use of CSs. As regards the second study (Nakatani 2010), it aimed to find out whether training in the use of specific communication strategies enhances learners' proficiency manifested in communicative tasks. It was conducted over a period of 12 weeks and the data were gathered by means of multiple tools, namely transcripts of the participants' performance on a conversation test, which were analyzed with reference to production rate, the number of errors and actual strategy use, the OCSI, and retrospective protocols filled out by the participants on completion of the communicative task.

3 The Study

3.1 Aims and Research Questions

The study sought to investigate the self-reported use of communication strategies by advanced learners of English, as they were engaged in spontaneous oral interaction when completing two communication tasks, and to explore the relationship between such use and achievement, operationalized as final grades in a conversation course. More specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

- What are the patterns of communication strategy use among advanced learners of English with respect to speaking and listening?
- What are the dominant types of CSs used with respect to speaking and listening?
- What specific types of CSs are used the most and least frequently?
- What is the relationship between attainment and the use of CSs, both overall and with respect to specific categories?

3.2 Participants

The participants were 64 English majors enrolled in the last year of a third-year BA program in Departments of English Studies in two Polish institutions of higher education, 40 females and 24 males. They had considerable experience in learning English, with the average of 11.2 years, the maximum of 14.5 and the minimum of 7 years. As is the case with the majority of programs of this kind, over the course of their studies the participants were required to attend numerous English classes, with separate courses devoted to pronunciation, speaking, writing, grammar and integrated skills, as well as a number of content classes in linguistics, literature, cultural studies and foreign language teaching methodology, most of which were taught in the target language. Even though many of the students reported contact with English in addition to institutional exposure, it was mainly confined to the media or the Internet and it seldom involved interaction with foreigners, either native speakers or other advanced language users. The students' level of proficiency could be said to oscillate between B2 and C1, according to the *Common European framework of reference*, although there was considerable individual variation in this respect, in particular when it comes to the mastery of specific TL skills and subsystems. The participants self-rated their proficiency in English as 4.06 on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest), and they were more confident about their listening than speaking skills, as evidenced by the average self-assessment of 4.48 for the former and 4.02 for the latter. Their mean grade in a conversation class was 3.76, in the possible range of 2 (lowest) to 5 (highest), and they were fully aware of the importance of speaking skills, since they evaluated it as 4.81 on a five-point scale (1—lowest, 5—highest).

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The students were asked to perform a sequence of two communicative tasks in groups of three or four for the duration of 10 min each. One of them was a discussion in which their task was to comment on a photograph and express their opinions with respect to preset questions, and therefore it represented an optional information-exchange task, where all the participants have access to the same information and only some of them have to make a contribution to ensure successful completion of the activity. The other involved coming up with a story on the basis of a set of six pictures, randomly distributed among the group members, thereby constituting a required information-exchange task, in which each participant holds a piece of information indispensable for finding a solution and has to make a contribution to the ongoing discourse. The interactions of all the groups were audio-recorded with the help of a Dictaphone placed in front of the participants and transcriptions were later made, which, however, will not be taken into account for the purpose of the current analysis.

Immediately on completion of the two tasks, the students were requested to fill out two questionnaires, intended to elicit self-reports of the CSs used during the performance of these activities, which could be provided in English or in Polish. The first included six open-ended queries dealing with such issues as the strategies used before, during and after performing the tasks, things the participants had paid attention to when they were speaking, things they had tried to do when they were listening and things that had helped them the most when communicating with their interlocutors. As is the case with the transcripts, however, the qualitative data collected in this way will not be the focus of the analyses reported in the present paper. The second questionnaire was the OCSI, which was administered in English in the form developed by Nakatani (2010) and consisted of two parts, one devoted to coping with speaking and the other with listening problems, with 32 and 26 Likert-scale statements, respectively. The CSs related to enhancing speaking were subdivided into eight groups (factors), namely:

1) *social affective strategies* (e.g. 'I try to relax when I feel anxious');
2) *fluency-oriented strategies* (e.g. 'I pay attention to the conversation flow');
3) *negotiation for meaning while speaking* (e.g. 'I repeat what I want to say until the listener understands');
4) *accuracy-oriented strategies* (e.g. 'I notice myself using an expression which fits a rule that I have learnt');
5) *message reduction and alteration strategies* (e.g. 'I use words which are familiar to me');
6) *non-verbal strategies while speaking* (e.g. 'I try to make eye-contact when I am talking');
7) *message abandonment strategies* (e.g. 'I abandon the execution of a verbal plan and just say some words when I don't know what to say');
8) *attempts to think in English strategies* ('I think of what I want to say in my native language and then construct the English sentence').

The CSs connected with listening, in turn, were subdivided into seven categories (factors) as follows:

1) *negotiation for meaning while listening* (e.g. 'I ask the speaker to use easy words when I have difficulties in comprehension');
2) *fluency-maintaining strategies* (e.g. 'I use circumlocution to react the speaker's utterance when I don't understand his/her intention well');
3) *scanning strategies* (e.g. 'I try to catch the speaker's main point');
4) *getting the gist strategies* (e.g. 'I guess the speaker's intention based on what he/she has said so far');
5) *non-verbal strategies while listening* (e.g. 'I use gestures when I have difficulties in understanding');
6) *less active listener strategies* (e.g. 'I only focus on familiar expressions');
7) *word-oriented strategies* (e.g. 'I guess the speaker's intention by picking up familiar words').

In both cases, the respondents were to indicate their agreement with a particular item using a five-point scale, adopted from the SILL, that is: 1—*never or almost never true of me*, 2—*generally not true of me*, 3—*somewhat true of me*, 4—*generally true of me*, and 5—*always or almost always true of me*.[1] The original instrument was supplemented with additional questions related to experience in learning English, self-assessment of proficiency in that language, both in general and with respect to speaking and listening, access to English outside school, the final grade in a conversation course and the importance of speaking in language learning. The data collected through the OCSI were subjected to quantitative analysis, which involved tallying the means and standard deviations for the two parts of the tool, the categories they contained, and the specific statements, with statistical significance of the differences between different groups of CSs being established by means of paired-samples *t*-tests. The relationship between strategy use, both overall and with regard to specific categories, and attainment, operationalized as final grades in a conversation course, was determined by computing Pearson product-moment correlations and by running one-way ANOVA, with attainment set as the independent and the use of CSs as the dependent variable. Additionally, the statistical significance of the differences between the participants receiving different grades, namely 3, 4 and 5 (from lowest to highest), was established by means of the Tukey's HSD posthoc test.

[1] It should be noted that the sequence in which the surveys were administered (i.e. the open-ended one first, followed by the OSCI) was not accidental, and it helped the researcher avoid a situation in which the participants' responses to the open-ended queries would have been influenced by their familiarity with the Likert-scale items.

3.4 Research Findings

As can be seen from Table 1, which presents the means and standard deviations for the two parts of the OCSI as well as the factors included in each of them, the students reported using CSs for coping with problems with speaking and listening with almost the same frequency, as indicated by the means of 3.53 and 3.48, respectively, with the difference of 0.05 being far too small to reach statistical significance ($t = 1.00$; $p = 0.20$). In the case of speaking, the category of non-verbal strategies turned out to be the most frequently used ($M = 4.06$), followed by negotiation for meaning ($M = 3.92$), social affective strategies ($M = 3.89$), accuracy-oriented strategies ($M = 3.83$), and fluency-oriented strategies ($M = 3.80$). Less frequently reported was the employment of message reduction and alteration strategies ($M = 3.53$), message abandonment strategies ($M = 2.69$) and attempt to think in English strategies ($M = 2.57$), the differences between these three and the remaining five categories being statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). As regards listening, the participants reported having fallen back the most often on getting the gist strategies ($M = 3.91$), followed by non-verbal strategies ($M = 3.80$), fluency-maintaining strategies ($M = 3.66$), negotiation for meaning ($M = 3.58$), word-oriented strategies ($M = 3.58$), scanning strategies ($M = 3.42$), and less active listener strategies ($M = 2.45$). These results show that the differences in the reported frequency of CS use for most of the factors were relatively small, the only exception being the last group, since in this case the mean was statistically significantly lower than in all the remaining categories ($p < 0.05$). It should also be pointed out that

Table 1 Means and standard deviations for the reported CSs use in speaking and listening

Part 1: CSs for coping with speaking problems		Part 2: CSs for coping with listening problems	
Category (factor)	M (SD)	Category (factor)	M (SD)
Social affective strategies	3.89 (0.57)	Negotiation for meaning	3.58 (0.85)
Fluency-oriented strategies	3.80 (0.58)	Fluency-maintaining strategies	3.66 (0.68)
Negotiation for meaning while speaking	3.92 (0.58)	Scanning strategies	3.42 (0.53)
Accuracy-oriented strategies	3.83 (0.48)	Getting the gist strategies	3.91 (0.57)
Massage reduction and alteration strategies	3.53 (0.57)[a]	Non-verbal strategies while speaking	3.80 (0.97)
Non-verbal strategies while speaking	4.06 (0.90)	Less active listener strategies	2.45 (0.97)[a]
Message abandonment strategies	2.69 (0.74)[a]	Word-oriented strategies	3.58 (0.51)
Attempt to think in English strategies	2.57 (0.88)[a]		
Total	*3.53 (0.27)*		*3.48 (0.39)*

[a] Indicates categories where statistically significant differences were detected

there was little individual variation for the overall use of CSs for speaking and listening (*SD* = 0.27 and 0.39, respectively), and it can be regarded as considerable only for a few of the categories included in the OSCI, namely non-verbal and attempt to think in English strategies in the case of speaking (*SD* = 0.90 and 0.88, respectively), and non-verbal strategies, less active listener strategies and negotiation for meaning strategies in the case of listening (*SD* = 0.97, 0.97, and 0.85, respectively).

The means and standard deviations for the reported frequency of use of particular CSs employed to tackle problems in speaking and listening in the course of performing the two communication tasks are presented in Tables 2 and 3. When it comes to output production, the participants reported having applied the most often the following nine strategies, with the means exceeding 4: 'I correct myself when I notice that I have made a mistake' (statement 17, *M* = 4.53—accuracy-oriented), 'I use words which are familiar to me' (statement 3, *M* = 4.36—message reduction and alteration), 'I give examples if the listener doesn't understand what I'm saying' (statement 20, *M* = 4.36—negotiation for meaning), 'While speaking, I pay attention to the listener's reaction to my speech' (statement 19, *M* = 4.28—negotiation for meaning), 'I try to enjoy the conversation' (statement 27, *M* = 4.27—social affective), 'I try to make eye-contact when I am talking' (statement 15, *M* = 4.20—non-verbal), 'I pay attention to my pronunciation' (statement 11, *M* = 4.14—fluency-oriented), 'I try to give a good impression to the listener' (statement 25, *M* = 4.08—social affective), and 'I try to speak clearly and loudly to make myself heard' (statement 12, *M* = 4.02—fluency-oriented). By contrast, the least frequently used CSs, those with the means below 3, were the following: 'I give up when I can't make myself understood' (statement 32, *M* = 2.11—message abandonment), 'I think of what I want to say in L1 and then construct the English sentence' (statement 1, *M* = 2.56—attempt to think in English), 'I think first of a sentence I already know in English and then try to change it to fit the situation' (statement 2, *M* = 2.58—attempt to think in English), 'I leave a message unfinished because of some language difficulty' (statement 24, *M* = 2.59—message abandonment), 'I abandon the execution of a verbal plan and just say some words when I don't know what to say' (statement 6, *M* = 2.69—message abandonment), and 'I replace the original message with another message because of feeling incapable of executing my original intent' (statement 5, *M* = 2.95—message reduction and alteration). It is also worth pointing out that there was considerable individual variation in the case of many items, as indicated by the values of standard deviation which were the highest for statements 32 ('I give up when I can't make myself understood', *SD* = 1.16), 1 ('I think first of what I want to say in my native language and then construct the English sentence', *SD* = 1.13), and 31 ('I ask other people to help when I can't communicate well', *SD* = 1.12).

As regards coping with problems encountered when listening to their interlocutors, the participants reported the most frequent use of just four strategies, where the mean values were above 4, namely: 'I pay attention to the words which the speaker slows down or emphasizes' (statement 4, *M* = 4.38—word-oriented), 'I try to catch the speaker's main point' (statement 12, *M* = 4.27—scanning strategies), 'I

Table 2 Means and standard deviations for CSs reported for coping with problems in speaking

No	Part 1: CSs used to cope with problems in speaking	Mean (SD)
1.	I think first of what i want to say in my native language and then construct the english sentence	2.56 (1.13)
2.	I think first of a sentence i already know in english and then try to change it to fit the situation	2.58 (0.97)
3.	I use words which are familiar to me	4.36 (0.65)
4.	I reduce the message and use simple expressions	3.27 (0.88)
5.	I replace the original message with another message because of feeling incapable of executing my original intent	2.95 (0.86)
6.	I abandon the execution of a verbal plan and just say some words when I don't know what to say	2.69 (0.97)
7.	I pay attention to grammar and word order during conversation	3.89 (0.86)
8.	I try to emphasize the subject and verb of the sentence	3.17 (0.90)
9.	I change my way of saying things according to the context	3.81 (0.64)
10.	I take my time to express what I want to say	3.59 (0.92)
11.	I pay attention to my pronunciation	4.14 (0.91)
12.	I try to speak clearly and loudly to make myself heard	4.02 (0.93)
13.	I pay attention to my rhythm and intonation	3.23 (1.02)
14.	I pay attention to the conversation flow	3.98 (0.85)
15.	I try to make eye-contact when I am talking	4.20 (0.98)
16.	I use gestures and facial expressions if I can't communicate how to express myself	3.92 (1.09)
17.	I correct myself when I notice that I have made a mistake	4.53 (0.53)
18.	I notice myself using an expression which fits a rule that I have learned	3.66 (0.84)
19.	While speaking, I pay attention to the listener's reaction to my speech	4.28 (0.72)
20.	I give examples if the listener doesn't understand what I am saying	4.36 (0.65)
21.	I repeat what I want to say until the listener understands	3.72 (1.02)
22.	I make comprehension checks to ensure the listener understands what I want to say	3.33 (0.99)
23.	I try to use fillers when I cannot think of what to say	3.58 (0.91)
24.	I leave a message unfinished because of some language difficulty	2.59 (0.97)
25.	I try to give a good impression to the listener	4.08 (0.70)
26.	I don't mind taking risks even though I might make mistakes	3.56 (1.07)
27.	I try to enjoy the conversation	4.27 (0.76)
28.	I try to relax when I feel anxious	3.92 (0.90)
29.	I actively encourage myself to express what I want to say	3.91 (0.85)
30.	I try to talk like a native speaker	3.88 (0.95)
31.	I ask other people to help when I can't communicate well	3.36 (1.12)
32.	I give up when I can't make myself understood	2.11 (1.16)

Table 3 Means and standard deviations for CSs reported for coping with problems in listening

No	Part 2: CSs used to cope with problems in listening	Mean (SD)
1.	I pay attention to the first word to judge whether it is an interrogative sentence or not	2.63 (0.81)
2.	I try to catch every word that the speaker uses	3.63 (0.97)
3.	I guess the speaker's intention by picking up familiar words	3.69 (0.81)
4.	I pay attention to the words which the speaker slows down or emphasizes	4.38 (0.65)
5.	I pay attention to the first part of the sentence and guess the speaker's intention	3.34 (0.96)
6.	I try to respond to the speaker even when I don't understand him/her perfectly	3.91 (0.75)
7.	I guess the speaker's intention based on what he/she has said so far	3.86 (0.77)
8.	I don't mind if I can't understand every single detail	4.08 (1.01)
9.	I anticipate what the speaker is going to say based on the context	3.80 (0.78)
10.	I ask the speaker to give an example when I am not sure what he/she said	3.75 (1.22)
11.	I try to translate into native language little by little to understand what the speaker has said	2.44 (1.07)
12.	I try to catch the speaker's main point	4.27 (0.65)
13.	I pay attention to the speaker's rhythm and intonation	3.14 (1.14)
14.	I send continuation signals to show my understanding in order to avoid communication gaps	3.97 (0.89)
15.	I use circumlocution to react the speaker's utterance when I don't understand his/her intention well	3.55 (0.91)
16.	I pay attention to the speaker's pronunciation	3.89 (1.07)
17.	I use gestures when I have difficulties in understanding	3.47 (1.21)
18.	I pay attention to the speaker's eye contact, facial expression and gestures	4.13 (1.03)
19.	I ask the speaker to slow down when I can't understand what the speaker has said	3.48 (1.20)
20.	I ask the speaker to use easy words when I have difficulties in comprehension	3.08 (1.24)
21.	I make a clarification request when I am not sure what the speaker has said	3.81 (1.01)
22.	I ask for repetition when I can't understand what the speaker has said	3.98 (1.09)
23.	I make clear to the speaker what I haven't been able to understand	3.52 (1.02)
24.	I only focus on familiar expressions	2.47 (0.94)
25.	I especially pay attention to the interrogative when I listen to WH-questions	2.92 (0.82)
26.	I pay attention to the subject and verb of the sentence when I listen	3.14 (0.94)

pay attention to the speaker's eye contact, facial expression and gestures' (statement 18, $M = 4.13$—non-verbal), and 'I don't mind if I can't understand every single detail' (statement 8, $M = 4.08$—getting the gist). The least often used strategies,

understood as those with the mean values below 3, were the following: 'I try to translate into native language little by little to understand what the speaker has said' (statement 11, $M = 2.44$—less active listener), 'I pay attention to the first word to judge whether it is an interrogative sentence or not' (statement 1, $M = 2.63$—word-oriented), and 'I especially pay attention to the interrogative when I listen to WH-questions' (statement 25, $M = 2.92$—scanning). Also in this case, the SD values were high for some of the items, which constitutes evidence for quite substantial individual variation among the respondents, the most notable examples being statements 20 ('I ask the speaker to use easy words when I have difficulties in comprehension', $SD = 1.24$), 10 ('I ask the speaker to give an example when I am not sure what he/she said', $SD = 1.22$), 17 ('I use gestures when I have difficulties in understanding', $SD = 1.21$), and 19 ('I ask the speaker to slow down when I can't understand what the speaker has said', $SD = 1.20$).

The relationship between the use of CSs and attainment was investigated in two ways, more generally, without any assumptions concerning directionality, as well as in accordance with the expectation that greater mastery of conversation skills impacts the application of such strategies. The analysis showed that correlations between grades in a conversation class and CS use were negligible and failed to reach statistical significance in the majority of cases, the only exceptions being accuracy-oriented strategies for coping with problems in speaking ($r = 0.343$, $p = 0.005$), and getting the gist strategies ($r = 0.339$, $p = 0.005$) and less active listener strategies ($r = -0.259$, $p = 0.005$) for dealing with difficulties in listening, where the correlations were weak or moderate and statistically significant. In the first two cases, the relationship was positive and attainment accounted for about 12 % of the variance in CSs, and it the last, it was negative, explaining about 7 % of the variance. The results of one-way ANOVA demonstrated that attainment had a statistically significant effect for the reported use of accuracy-oriented strategies for coping with problems in speaking ($F = 5.373$, $p = 0.007$) as well as getting the gist strategies for dealing with problems in listing ($F = 4.03$, $p = 0.019$). Additionally, as shown by Tukey's HSD posthoc tests, in the case of the former, the differences between participants in all the grade bands (i.e. 3, 4 and 5) were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), while, in the case of the latter, the necessary level of significance was reached only for the difference between the students in the grade bands of 3 and 5.

4 Discussion

What has to be kept in mind when interpreting the results presented above is that, in contrast to most other studies conducted with the help of the OCSI (e.g. Nakatani 2006, 2010), the participants were English majors who, in the majority of cases, represented a rather high level of proficiency in the target language, both overall and with respect to speaking and listening. As regards the first research question, concerning overall patterns of CSs use, the reported use of communication

strategies for coping with problems with speaking and listening was lower than that identified by other researchers, such as Nakatani (2006), and the difference between the frequency of use of the two types of CSs was minute, amounting to a mere 0.05. Such findings can be accounted for in terms of the fact that the students were quite advanced and had a good command of the TL subsystems, and thus it can reasonably be assumed that many of them had adequate linguistic resources to meet the demands of the communication tasks they had been requested to perform and might have experienced no need for as frequent reliance upon CSs as lower-level learners could have manifested in similar circumstances. This may also explain why CSs for coping with problems with speaking and listening were applied with almost the same frequency, not least because the groups were to a large degree homogenous, in the sense that even when the students did differ to some degree in their mastery of English, the proficiency of the lower-level participants was still sufficient to attain the communicative goals set without major difficulties.

When it comes to the second research question, pertaining to the application of specific categories of CSs, the analysis indicated that, both in the case of speaking an listening, the participants displayed a marked preference for strategies based on the use of the target language (e.g. negotiation for meaning), such that aided them in achieving their communicative goals (e.g. getting the gist), as well as those that helped them strike a balance between fluency and accuracy in their oral language production (i.e. fluency-oriented and accuracy-oriented). What may come as a surprise is the frequent reliance on non-verbal CSs, which were used the most often in speaking and were the second most frequently employed category in listening. This is because such strategies are almost never emphasized in classroom practice, irrespective of the educational level, and there is reason to believe that the students may have transferred them from Polish rather than picked them up in real-life interactions conducted through the medium of English. On the other hand, the participants seldom reported falling back on CSs involving abandonment, alteration or reduction of the intended messages, perhaps because they rarely had to do so due to lacking linguistic resources, or making an extra effort to think in English, in all likelihood because most of them already did so without the need for special strategies. They also relatively infrequently resorted to scanning strategies or such that are employed by less active listeners in interaction, presumably because these strategies are more characteristic of lower proficiency levels, where even comprehending messages poses a major challenge. Although, given the level of the participants, these trends were to a large extent predictable, and they were beneficial since such patterns of strategy use are likely to contribute to greater effectiveness of interaction or even assist acquisition, it should also be pointed out that the use of CSs in some categories was lower than could be anticipated and only in one case did the mean exceed the value of 4. This applies in particular to types of CSs which are the most serviceable, such as negotiation for meaning, achieving and maintaining fluency, ensuring accuracy as well as trying to get the gist, which implies the need for more focus on such areas, even at advanced levels. This focus should also be extended to non-verbal CSs of different kinds, for the reason that their use was quite widespread among learners, even though they are seldom explicitly

taught, which brings with it the danger that transfer of inappropriate patterns of behavior from interactions in the first language may occur.

These findings are to a large extent corroborated by the analysis of the specific CSs that the participants reported using the most and least frequently for dealing with problems that come up in interaction, an issue that was the focus of the third research question. In the case of speaking, the strategies with the highest means, such as the performing self-correction, drawing upon familiar words, giving examples if the listener does not understand, paying close attention to the interlocutor's reaction, trying to enjoy the conversation, attempting to establish eye-contact or trying to make a good impression to the listener, can all without doubt boost the effectiveness of communication when problems arise. By contrast, those used the least often, such as giving up on the message, leaving a message unfinished or translating from the mother tongue are indeed of little value, both with respect to conveying intended meanings and gaining opportunities for language development. The situation is very similar in the case of listening because such CSs as paying attention to the words that are emphasized, being on the lookout for non-verbal language or not bothering with every single detail are clearly beneficial, whereas such strategic devices as translation into the first language to help comprehension or attending to specific parts of a sentence to determine the function of an utterance are likely to be much less successful. This said, though, it should be noted that there are some useful strategies, the use of which was reported rather infrequently, good examples being providing circumlocutions, attending to rhythm or intonation, using comprehension checks and clarification requests, or signaling communication problems. On the one hand, this, yet again, points to the need for appropriate training, but, on the other, it should not be forgotten that there was much variation with respect to the frequency of use of many CSs, which indicates that the utility of various strategic devices may be mediated by an array of individual difference variables and, therefore, what is beneficial for one learner may be much less so for another.

Finally, as regards the fourth research question, attainment, operationalized as the final grades in a conversation course, was positively related to accuracy-oriented CSs and getting the gist CSs, and correlated negatively with less active listener CSs, with the caveat that these correlations were moderate or weak and at best accounted for just about 12 % of the observed variance. These results were to a large extent mirrored when causality was investigated since it turned out that the grades the participants received exerted an influence on the frequency of use of accuracy-oriented strategies for speaking and getting the gist strategies for listening as well. At first blush, one is tempted to speculate on the basis of these results that those who are successful in language learning pay attention to the accuracy of their utterances, and, perhaps, this relationship is reciprocal as being more accurate translates into greater achievement. By the same token, more proficient students could be hypothesized to be more likely to focus on the gist of spoken messages rather than unimportant details, and, conversely, the use of this strategy helps them to excel in conversation classes. On the other hand, adopting the role of a less active listener, which involves translation into the mother tongue and reliance on familiar

expressions, may be more characteristic of weaker students and less so of successful ones. It is difficult to explain, however, why attainment was not found to correlate positively with CSs falling into the category of negotiation of meaning, maintaining fluency as well as social and affective concerns, all of which could be expected to enhance oral interaction. This shows that the interpretation offered above has to be taken with circumspection, one reason for this being that grades in a conversation course may sometimes reflect not only learners' mastery of the skills of speaking and listening but also the priorities set by the teacher, be they accuracy, fluency or the ability to just get messages across.

While the main strength of the study lies in the fact that it explored the use of CSs in the course of completing specific communicative tasks rather than in more general terms, thereby adopting a context-sensitive, situated and real-time perspective on this issue, it suffers from several weaknesses that merit brief consideration at this point. For one thing, it is clear that *reported* use of strategies may sometimes be a far cry from their *actual* use as this could only be determined through the analysis of the recordings and transcripts of the interactions in which learners engage. Although such data were in fact collected, along with qualitative self-report information on the use of CSs, they were not included in the present analysis, which clearly reduces to some extent the validity of the study. Second, a question might arise as to whether the OCSI is an appropriate data collection instrument to use with advanced language learners, such as the participants of the present investigation, and, more generally, the extent to which it is suitable to the Polish context. Moreover, the careful process of its development notwithstanding, it is hard not to wonder why some well-known recognized CSs, such as the use of circumlocution, approximation, word-coinage or appeal for assistance when trying to get messages across, are not explicitly included in the survey. Obviously, it does contain items such as 'I replace the original message with another message because of feeling incapable of executing my original intent' or 'I ask other people to help when I can't communicate well', but they appear to be very general and perhaps somewhat removed from the actual things that learners might do in a conversation. Incidentally, it is rather illogical that the latter item should be included in the category of message abandonment because the use of this CS still testifies to the effort on the part of the interlocutor to express his or her intended meaning. Yet another problem with the tool is that some of the CSs it includes are extremely detailed and they may be hard to conceptualize or even understand for learners, a good case in point being the statement 'I especially pay attention to the interrogative when I listen to WH-questions'. Third, there can be doubts as to the way in which attainment was operationalized since, as indicated above, a grade in a conversation course may not give justice to the learner's true ability and reflect as well other considerations, such as the focus of a particular course or examination requirements. Thus, a more objective measure could have been selected or a combination of several measures could have been taken into account, although it should be made clear that various approaches are adopted by researchers and relying on course grades is certainly a viable option. Finally, the reported use of CSs might have differed on the two tasks, but this variable was not explored in the

present study, one reason being that having the students fill out the same surveys within the space of about 10 min could have adversely affected the validity and reliability of the data. Clearly, all of these limitations should be taken heed of when designing future empirical investigations of this kind.

5 Conclusion

It is somewhat surprising that although research into communication strategies was extremely popular in the 1980s and 1990s, when numerous studies were conducted and landmark edited collections came out, this popularity has visibly waned in the last decade or so, with only a handful of influential papers in this area having been published after the beginning of the new millennium. Whatever the reasons behind this change of heart among researchers, it is surely unfortunate because it is obvious that no matter how hard we strive to equip learners with the necessary linguistic resources to accomplish their communicative goals in different situations, regardless of their level of proficiency, they will sooner or later be confronted with difficulty in expressing their intended meanings and they will be forced to fall back upon CSs. Then it is of vital importance that the strategies they use are effective in the sense of helping them make themselves understood and simultaneously contribute to interlanguage development, and one way to ensure that this in fact happens is through appropriate training. For such training to be effective, however, we need to know more about CSs learners employ in different contexts, the effectiveness of these CSs, the variables which can influence the two, or the requirements for successful strategies-based instruction, crucial issues that necessitate conducting empirical research. The study reported in the present paper aimed to contribute to this line of inquiry by investigating the application of communication strategies by advanced learners of English as they were engaged in completing two communicative tasks. The results can be viewed as optimistic as the participants tended to use the most often CSs which appear to be of great value for successful interaction, which is in all likelihood the corollary of the proficiency level they represented. At the same time, however, there are categories of useful CSs as well as specific strategic devices that were not taken advantage of as frequently as they should, which points to the need for training in this area, with the qualification that such training should be sensitive to individual learner preferences. Obviously, further research is indispensable that would tap into the use of CSs in different types of tasks, take into consideration the impact of individual learner differences, as our knowledge in this respect is severely limited, and examine the effects of instruction, both in terms of increased use of CSs and target language proficiency, particularly as manifested in performance on oral tasks. It is the belief of the present author that such research should be driven by different theoretical perspectives, focus on self-reports obtained from large groups of participants as well as evidence of CS use in specific contexts and tasks, and drawn upon multiple data collection instruments, as superbly demonstrated in the study conducted by Nakatani (2010). Once the results

of such research can be integrated into a coherent whole, it will be easier to identify the targets for training, and plan and execute such training, thus equipping learners with tools that can enhance the effectiveness of communication in a foreign language.

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Oral Communication Strategies Used by Turkish Students Learning English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract The study aims to identify the oral communication strategies used by the students learning English as a foreign language in Turkey, using a reliable and valid measurement tool. Thus, the *Strategy Inventory of Oral Communication* (SIOC), developed by the present authors specifically for the Turkish culture, was used. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the whole inventory, including five factors: negotiation for meaning strategies, message abandonment strategies, organizing/planning strategies, affective strategies, and compensatory strategies, amounted to 0.79. The inventory was administered to 294 EFL students at the English Language Teaching Department of Mersin University. The study aimed to investigate the differences in the use of oral communication strategies in terms of language proficiency level and gender. It was found that negotiation for meaning and compensatory strategies are the most frequently used, with no statistically significant differences in terms language proficiency. Message abandonment and planning strategies, on the other hand, were the least frequently used strategies, favored mostly by intermediate level students. Moreover, there were significant differences in the use of oral communication strategies in terms of gender. While female students used message abandonment strategies more frequently than males, males used affective strategies more frequently than females.

1 Introduction

Learning a language is learning to communicate, so speaking can be considered as one of the most important components of learning a foreign language. However, acquiring speaking ability can be seen as much more difficult for some students than other skills because there are many factors affecting speaking such as age, motivation or the context in which language is learned (i.e. a second language context or

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foreign language context). Developing speaking competence also involves a variety of processes. First of all, there is a need for sufficient linguistic knowledge to maintain the conversation in various contexts. However, apart from the ability to use language correctly (i.e. linguistic competence), students should have other competences, that is, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences, which are components of communicative competence (Savignon 1983, p. 130). It is believed that learners can develop communicative proficiency by developing the ability to use communication strategies which enable them to compensate for deficiencies in their knowledge of the target language (Bialystok 1990, p. 5). So, it is obvious that students need to be able to use communication strategies to develop speaking skills.

Researchers have studied communication strategies (henceforth CSs) from two perspectives: the *interactional view* and *psycholinguistic view*. Whereas researchers (e.g. Tarone 1980; Canale 1983; Nakatani 2005) who support the interactional view consider CSs as a mutual attempt by participants in a communicative situation to maintain communication, Faerch and Kasper (1983) define CSs in terms of the individual's mental response to a problem rather than as a joint response by two people. Because of the differences in theoretical viewpoints, the taxonomies also vary considerably in different studies. Tarone (1980), adopting the interactional view, divides CSs into *approximation, word coinage, circumlocution, literal translation, language switch, appeal for assistance, mime* and *avoidance*. On the other hand, embracing a psycholinguistic view, Faerch and Kasper (1983) propose two strategies in general for solving a communication problem: *avoidance strategies* and *achievement strategies*. *Avoidance strategies* include *formal reduction strategies* and *functional reduction strategies. Achievement strategies*, on the other hand, comprise *compensatory strategies* and *retrieval strategies*. The compensatory strategies of Faerch and Kasper (i.e. code switching, transfer, interlanguage-based strategies, cooperative strategies, and nonlinguistic strategies) show some similarities to some of the devices in Tarone's taxonomy although they are classified from a different perspective. Thus, rather than adhering only to the psycholinguistic or interactional view, two approaches were adopted in the current study. It was assumed that if a person uses non-linguistic strategies, he or she not only tries to overcome limitations in his or her target language knowledge (i.e. psycholinguistic view) but also negotiates for meaning (i.e. interactional view).

Moreover, a number of instruments have been designed in order to identify and categorize the CSs used by students learning English as a second language (ESL). However, the number of the instruments developed for students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is limited. Although the most commonly used measurement tools are strategy inventories, most of the speaking strategy inventories, such as *Speaking Strategy Checklist* (Cohen et al. 1996) or *Language Strategy Use Survey* (Cohen et al. 2002), suffer from problems connected with the lack of reliability and validity studies. Another problem with speaking strategy inventories is that they represent strategies that the learner could use throughout the language learning process and they are not directly relevant to the skill of speaking. Furthermore, most studies (e.g. Kılıç 2003; Gümüş 2007) focusing on speaking strategies conducted in Turkey are based on inventories used in western countries

and developed for learners learning English as a second language, with no consideration being given to their compatibility with the Turkish culture. The review of the literature concerning the classification of communication strategies also reveals that although they are employed in all languages and cultures, "the particular types of strategy preferred for use in certain situations may be culture specific or language specific" (Tarone 1980, p. 422). As a result, it can be implied that the lack of valid and reliable measurement tools developed for students learning English as a foreign language and the lack of an appropriate classification system for this context cause uncertainty about the results obtained from the available studies.

2 Research on Communication Strategies

Over the last two decades a considerable number of descriptive and empirical studies have been carried out on communication strategies. In order to provide a clear picture of communication strategy research, studies related to the purposes of the current empirical investigation will be presented in the following sections.

2.1 The Relationship Between the Use of Oral Communication Strategies and the Level of Proficiency

The findings of studies dealing with the relationship between oral communication strategy use and English language proficiency vary, making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions. Chen (1990), for example, conducted research aimed to identify the communication strategies used by EFL learners representing different levels and found that the frequency, type and effectiveness of CS use depended upon proficiency. Chen (2009) also conducted a study using the *Oral Communication Strategy Inventory* developed by Nakatani (2006). The results revealed that there were five significant relationships between speaking proficiency and strategy use. On the one hand, positive relationships were found between speaking proficiency and the use of *social affective strategies, fluency-oriented strategies*, and *negotiation for meaning while speaking strategies.* On the other hand, negative correlations were found between speaking proficiency and the use of *message reduction and alteration strategies* and *message abandonment strategies.* The results indicated that *social affective strategies, fluency oriented strategies* and *nonverbal strategies while speaking* were commonly employed by high proficient speakers while low proficient speakers were inclined to use *message reduction and alteration strategies*, *message abandonment strategies and nonverbal strategies* more frequently. Thus, the findings imply that speaking proficiency is related to the use of oral communication strategies at a certain level. Gökgöz (2008) also investigated whether there is a correlation between reported use of strategies for coping with speaking problems and the speaking grade levels of the students.

She found a difference between high and low proficiency groups. The high oral proficiency group reported more use of *social affective strategies, fluency oriented strategies* and *negotiation for meaning strategies*.

2.2 Gender Differences in Strategy Use

Gender differences have been found in many areas of social and cognitive development. Research findings indicate that females show more interest in social activities than males and they are more cooperative. A number of researchers continue to assume female superiority in language learning (e.g. Ehrman and Oxford 1989; Ellis 1994). The results of the study by Ehrman and Oxford (1989, cited in Macaro 2006, p. 321) indicate that females seem to use *cognitive*, *compensation* and *metacognitive strategies* more frequently than males. In Li's study (Li 2010), female university students in Taiwan were reported to apply communication strategies more often than male students. However, some findings reveal that males employ more learning strategies than females (e.g. Wharton 2000). Such findings are important because they show that there might be some differences in the ways females and males learn a foreign language.

In contrast, the results of the study undertaken by Lai (2010) show that Chinese male and female learners tend to use strategies in the same way. Lai claims that this may be because Chinese learners, both males and females, learn English in the same language context. This assumption is supported by Freed (1996, cited in Lai 2010, p. 29), who points out that "if females and males are set in a similar context to fulfill the same communicative task, much similarity will be found in the use of language". Because of the different viewpoints on gender differences, more research in different language contexts is needed to determine whether there exists a difference between male and female students in the use of CSs.

3 Methodology

The present study aims to investigate the use of oral communication strategies by EFL students studying at the English Language Teaching Department of Mersin University with the help of a reliable and valid speaking strategy tool developed for Turkish culture. More specifically, the study seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the most common oral communication strategies used by the ELT Department students studying at Mersin University?
2. What are the differences in the use of oral communication strategies in terms of the students' level of proficiency, i.e. intermediate versus advanced?
3. What are the differences in the use of oral communication strategies between male and female students?

3.1 Participants

The study involved 294 (217 female and 77 male) participants, students at the English Language Teaching Department of Mersin University, Turkey. The English language level of the participants was determined as intermediate (independent users) and advanced (proficient users), based on the proficiency levels included in the *Common European framework of reference* (CEFR). In Turkey, students starting to study at the English Language Teaching Department are required to take a placement test including four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Using the criteria included in the *CEFR*, the students who pass this exam are regarded as proficient users while the students who fail are classified as independent users who are required to study at preparatory class until they become proficient users. For this reason, the participants attending preparatory class were classified as independent users while the participants in freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior years were classified as proficient users.

3.2 Data Collection Tools

After a review of the strategy inventories related to speaking skills, it was concluded that in comparison to other measurement instruments, the *Oral Communication Strategy Inventory* (OCSI) developed by Nakatani (2006) had a clear factor structure and it seemed the least problematic. Thus, the OCSI was trialed in the Turkish context to investigate whether the oral communication strategies it included would also measure Turkish EFL students' speaking strategy use (Yaman and Kavasoğlu 2013a). It was found that changes were required in some of the items that represent each factor. For example, the items classified as *nonverbal strategies* in the original inventory (Nakatani 2006) gave loadings to *negotiation for meaning strategies*, which implied that strategies should be investigated in accordance with the culture they are used in. Therefore, in another study, in order to identify the oral communication strategies used by the students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Turkey, the *Strategy Inventory of Oral Communication* (SIOC) was developed by Yaman and Kavasoğlu (2013b). The items included in the inventory were mostly based on the factors obtained in the adapted version of OCSI (2013a). 557 students studying at the English Language Teaching Department of Mersin University participated in the development study. In the analysis of the data, the researchers performed an exploratory factor analysis for all the participants in order to determine the number of strategy factors. Various methods of factor analysis and rotation techniques such as varimax or direct oblimin were employed to obtain the most meaningful interpretation. Besides, in order to ensure the internal consistency of the inventory, reliability analysis was performed. As a result of the study, a valid and reliable 23-itemed self-report strategy inventory was developed. It consists of five factors, that is *negotiation of meaning strategies*, *message abandonment strategies*,

organizing/planning strategies, *affective strategies* and *achievement/compensatory strategies*. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient amounted to 0.79, which indicates that the inventory has the requisite psychometric characteristics and can be employed to measure the use of oral communication strategies by EFL learners (see Appendix A).

Since some items in the inventory may at first glance seem to be unrelated to the category they belong to, it is instructive to mention those cases. For example, *negotiation for meaning strategies*, which are related to learners' attempts to maintain their interaction and avoid communication breakdown, include items such as "I notice myself using an expression which fits a rule that I have learnt". Although the item seems to be representative of *accuracy-oriented strategies*, as Nakatani (2006) suggests, it gave loadings to *negotiation for meaning strategies*. The reason why students use grammar structures they are familiar with may be the fact that they want to be understood easily in order to maintain the conversation. Furthermore, *message abandonment strategies* include the item "When I don't know the English word for something, I say the Turkish equivalent of the word", which seems to be unrelated to *message abandonment strategies*. However, it is not surprising that this item gave loadings to *message abandonment strategies* because students may think that they give up their message when they use the first language equivalent of the target word. In previous classifications of CSs, there were different views on the direct use of a first language equivalent, or code-switching. While some taxonomies regarded code-switching as an achievement strategy (e.g. Faerch and Kasper 1983; Dörnyei 1995), Nakatani (2005) included it in the category of reduction strategies (see Appendix B for all the items in each category of the SIOC).

3.3 Data Analysis Methods

In the current study, various data analysis methods were applied with the help of SPSS 11.5 for Windows. In order to determine the most frequently and the least frequently used oral communication strategies, *descriptive statistics* was used. An *independent samples t-test* was conducted in order to compare communication strategy use between intermediate and advanced level students as well as male and female students. When the variances were not equal, the *Mann-Whitney U test*, which is used as a non-parametric equivalent to the independent samples *t*-test was conducted. Besides, in order to find out the differences between different levels in the program (i.e. freshman, sophomore, junior and senior), one-way ANOVA tests were carried out.

3.4 Procedure

First, the participants were guided to respond to each of the strategy descriptions based on a 5-point Likert scale which asked students to report the frequency with which they used particular strategies in speaking in a foreign language. The participants were

expected to respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never or almost never true of me*) to 5 (*always or almost always true of me*). The criteria used for evaluating the degree of strategy use frequency were: low frequency use (1.0–2.49), medium frequency use (2.5–3.49), and high frequency use (3.5–5.0) (see Oxford and Burry-Socky 1995, p. 2).

4 Results and Discussion

The findings will be presented in the order of the research questions and discussed in relation to current literature.

4.1 What Are the Most Common Oral Communication Strategies Used by the ELT Department Students Studying at Mersin University?

In order to identify the oral communication strategies employed by the participants, the means were calculated. This allowed the researchers to determine the most and the least frequent oral communication strategies used by the participants.

As shown in Table 1, *negotiation for meaning* and *compensatory strategies* were those with the highest mean ($M = 4.1$), whereas *message abandonment strategies* manifested the lowest mean ($M = 2.5$). This indicates that the participants display medium to high frequency of use of each of the five categories of communication strategies, with the means ranging between 2.5 and 4.1.

The findings of the current study are consistent with those reported by Chen (2009) because he also found that *message abandonment strategies* are the least frequently used. The study conducted by Mei and Nathalang (2010), which investigated the use of communication strategies by Chinese EFL learners, also supports the finding that *compensation strategies* and *negotiation for meaning* are the most frequently used strategies.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for oral communication strategy use

Strategy categories	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S
C1. Negotiation for meaning	294	2.57	5.00	4.1	0.52591
C2. Message abandonment	294	1.00	4.50	2.5	0.78785
C3. Planning/organizing	294	1.20	5.00	3.5	0.69824
C4. Affective	294	1.33	5.00	3.8	0.77000
C5. Compensatory	294	1.50	5.00	4.1	0.54448

1.0–2.4 = low strategy use; 2.5–3.4 = medium strategy use; 3.5–5.0 = high strategy use, see Oxford and Berry-Sock (1995, p. 2)

4.2 What Are the Differences in the Use of Oral Communication Strategies in Terms of the Students' Level of Proficiency?

Since the results of Levene's Test showed that the variances were not equal, the *Mann-Whitney U test* was conducted in order to examine the differences in the use of oral communication strategy use between intermediate and advanced students. The results of the Mann-Whitney *U*-test (see Table 2) indicate that there is a significant difference between intermediate and advanced students in the use of *message abandonment* and *planning/organizing* strategy categories: intermediate level students use *message abandonment* and *planning/organizing* strategies more frequently than advanced level students ($p = 0.000$). However, the analysis also revealed that irrespective of their proficiency, the participants tended to use *compensatory*, *negotiation for meaning* and *affective* strategy category; that is, there is no significant difference between intermediate and advanced level students in the use of these strategies.

The participants of the study were ELT department students who are expected to be teachers of English. Even in preparatory classes, they have intrinsic motivation to speak English when compared to other departments. Therefore, their use of affective strategies is always high. Furthermore, all of the participants have previous experience in using English, so both intermediate and advanced level students know how to compensate for gaps in their lexical knowledge by means of whatever resources are available in order to maintain the conversation. That is why, there are no differences between the two levels in the use of *compensatory strategies or affective strategies.*

In contrast to the present study, Nakatani (2006) found that the high oral proficiency group reported more use of *social-affective*, *fluency oriented* and *negotiation for meaning* strategies, which may be related to the fact that the participants of Nakatani's (2006) study were engineering, law and literature students having both low oral proficiency and high oral proficiency. However, the majority of the studies (Nakatani 2006; Chen 2009; Mei and Nathalang 2010) produce similar results

Table 2 The results of the Mann Whitney *U*-test conducted to examine the differences in the use of oral communication strategies between intermediate and advanced level students

Strategy categories	Proficiency group	N	M	S	Z	p
C1. Negotiation meaning	Intermediate Advanced	93 201	4.0358 4.0980	0.58810 0.49484	−0.625	0.532
C2. Message abandonment	Intermediate Advanced	93 201	2.7158 2.3338	0.88774 0.70740	−3.931	0.000[a]
C3. Planning/ organizing	Intermediate Advanced	93 201	3.7379 3.3694	0.72061 0.65743	−4.328	0.000[a]
C4. Affective	Intermediate Advanced	93 201	3.6667 3.8656	0.91551 0.68591	−1.679	0.093
C5. Compensatory	Intermediate Advanced	93 201	4.0920 4.0558	0.62416 0.50467	−0.891	0.373

[a] correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$ level

indicating that low proficiency participants tend to use *message abandonment* strategies more often than high proficient ones. Mei and Nathalang (2010) found that low proficiency participants resorted to *language switch*, which is one of the items in the *message abandonment* strategy category in the current study.

The Mann Whitney *U*-test identified differences in the use of *message abandonment* and *planning/organizing strategies*, but did not allow the researchers to pinpoint the nature of these differences. Thus, in order to find out if there existed differences between years of study (i.e. freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior), one-way ANOVA tests were also carried out. They revealed no significant differences among the classes in terms of *negotiation for meaning* ($p = 0.288$) and *compensatory* strategy use ($p = 0.841$). However, there was a significant difference in the use of *message abandonment* ($p = 0.000$), *planning/organizing* ($p = 0.000$) and *affective strategy* use ($p = 0.047$). Then, posthoc tests (LSD) were carried out for those categories of strategies (i.e. *message abandonment*, *planning/organizing* and *affective* strategies) showing significant differences.

As shown in Table 3, with respect to *message abandonment*, when compared to senior students, preparatory class students use these strategies more frequently than freshman and senior students, with the differences being significant at the 0.002 and 0.000 level. With regard to *planning/organizing*, LSD results revealed no significant difference between preparatory class and freshman students. However, it was found that preparatory classes use *planning/organizing* strategies more frequently when compared to sophomore, junior, and senior students ($p = 0.017$; $p = 0.002$ and $p = 0.000$). As regards *affective strategy* use, when the preparatory class was compared to other classes, there was a significant difference only in the case of senior students ($p = 0.005$) since these students used *affective* strategies more frequently than preparatory class participants.

Table 3 The results of posthoc tests (LSD) used to examine the differences in the use of oral communication strategies between classes

Strategies	(I) Class	(J) Class	Mean difference	S	P
Message abandonment strategies	Preparatory class	Freshman	0.4103[a]	0.13037	0.002
		Sophomore	0.2066	0.13114	0.116
		Junior	0.2805	0.14285	0.050
		Senior	0.6073[a]	0.13114	0.000
Planning/ organizing strategies	Preparatory class	Freshman	0.1935	0.11418	0.091
		Sophomore	0.2769[a]	0.11486	0.017
		Junior	0.3916[a]	0.12511	0.002
		Senior	0.6207[a]	0.11486	0.000
Affective strategies	Preparatory class	Freshman	−0.2469	0.13046	0.059
		Sophomore	−0.0629	0.13123	0.632
		Junior	−0.0889	0.14294	0.535
		Senior	−0.3711[a]	0.13123	0.005

[a] statistical significance at the 0.001 and 0.005 level

These results imply that after completing the freshman year, students reach an advanced level and they do not need to plan their speech in advance or abandon their messages, which may testify to the fact that the students have expanded their communicative resources. Moreover, the finding that the senior students use *affective strategies* more frequently than preparatory class students may result from the fact that by the time the participants come to the 4th year, they will have had a lot of opportunities for language production and the classes they attend over this time may affect their attitudes towards speaking in English positively. In addition, it may be concluded that although students in preparatory classes may bring negative attitudes related to their previous experiences, they overcome these negative feelings and gain self-confidence in the process of their language education.

4.3 What Are the Differences in the Use of Oral Communication Strategies in Terms of Gender?

In order to explore the differences in oral communication strategy use between female and male students, the researchers used an independent samples *t*-test. The results included in Table 4 show that there is a significant difference between male and female students in the use of *message abandonment strategies* and *affective strategies*. Females use *message abandonment* strategies more frequently than males ($p = 0.023$), whereas males use *affective strategies* more frequently than females ($p = 0.029$).

Such findings stand in contrast to those of most of the studies undertaken to investigate differences in the use of language learning strategies between male and females students. For example, Tercanlioglu (2004) found male superiority for all strategies except for the affective domain in which case there is female superiority. Aslan (2009) also found that males resorted to *affective strategies* less than females,

Table 4 Results of independent samples *t*-tests used to examine the differences in the use of oral communication strategies between males and females

Strategy categories	Gender	N	M	S	t	p
C1. Negotiation for meaning	Female Male	217 77	4.0927 4.0427	0.51391 0.56173	0.716	0.475
C2. Message abandonment	Female Male	216 77	2.5192 2.2825	0.76026 0.84229	2.280	0.023[a]
C3. Planning/organizing	Female Male	216 77	3.5307 3.3695	0.66641 0.77307	1.745	0.082
C4. Affective	Female Male	216 77	3.7468 3.9481	0.80564 0.63996	−2.206	0.029[a]
C5. Compensatory	Female Male	216 77	4.0673 4.0649	0.54090 0.56108	0.032	0.974

[a] statistical significance at the 0.05 level

but the difference was not significant. Furthermore, while Aydın (2003) found no significant differences between males and females in terms of language learning strategy use, other studies showed significant female superiority in the use of all language learning strategies (Ehrman and Oxford 1989; Ellis 1994). The results indicate that even in the same culture there may be gender differences, which may result from the fact that one's social context and culture shape gender identity, a process that is accompanied by unique individual experiences (cf. Davis and Skilton-Sylvester 2004).

5 Conclusions

The results imply that *negotiation for meaning strategies*, *compensatory strategies* and *affective strategies* can be regarded as effective oral communication strategies which help students overcome communication problems, whereas *message abandonment strategies* and *planning/organizing strategies* can be considered as less useful in dealing with communication difficulties. Thus, in order for students to cope with communication breakdowns and achieve their communicative goals, they should be trained in the use of *negotiation for meaning strategies, compensatory strategies* and *affective strategies.*

The differences between intermediate and advanced level EFL students in the use of oral communication strategies indicate that proficiency level is important in the case of *message abandonment strategies* and *planning/organizing strategies,* but it is not so crucial when it comes to *compensatory strategies, negotiation for meaning strategies* and *affective strategies*. However, the results cannot be generalized to all EFL students because in the literature there are contradicting results regarding the use of *compensatory strategies, negotiation for meaning strategies and affective strategies.* The participants of the current study include ELT department students who are expected to have background knowledge and intrinsic motivation to speak. Thus, it can be assumed that this motivation may be related in intricate ways to the proficiency level.

The differences in the use of oral communication strategies by female and male students may indicate that gender is a determining factor in this respect. However, it should not be perceived on its own because there are divergences in the preferences for oral communication strategies by females and males even in the same cultures, which may result from individual differences or the social context. To sum up, the results of the study suggest that apart from proficiency level and gender differences, other variables such as culture, individual differences, background knowledge and motivation should be taken into account in the identification of oral communication strategies.

The study was conducted at the English Language Teaching Department of Mersin University. A follow-up study can be carried out with students who learn English in other settings for different purposes so that comparisons can be made with respect to their motivation. The factors investigated in this study should be

reinvestigated with participants from different settings, bearing in mind other possible factors, with different research methods, so as to be able to better understand the effect of gender and proficiency on the use of communication strategies. Cohen (1998) claims that each investigation method has a unique set of advantages and disadvantages. For example, the findings of the current study are restricted to the perceptions of the students, but strategy use can also change according to the speaking tasks in which students are engaged. For this reason, in future research, specific tasks could be assigned and students' speech could be recorded in order to identify oral communication strategies.

Appendix A

Strategy Inventory of Oral Communication (SIOC)

Items	Never true of me	Generally not true of me	Somewhat true of me	Generally true of me	Always true of me
1. I think of what I want to say in my native language and then construct the english sentence					
2. I leave a message unfinished because of some language difficulty					
3. When I don't know the english word for something, I say the Turkish equivalent of the word					
4. I plan how words will come together in advance					
5. When I can't think of a word that I want to say, I use an alternative word expressing the meaning as closely as possible					
6. I try to remember the words related to the speech topic and context in advance					
7. I pay attention to my rhythm and intonation					
8. I use gestures and facial expressions if I can't communicate how to express myself					

(continued)

(continued)

Items	Never true of me	Generally not true of me	Somewhat true of me	Generally true of me	Always true of me
9. I change the structure of Turkish word or expression in accordance with english structure					
10. I repeat what I want to say until the listener understands					
11. I try to relax when I feel anxious					
12. I try to speak clearly and loudly to make myself heard					
13. I give examples if the listener doesn't understand what I am saying					
14. I don't mind taking risks even though I might make mistakes					
15. I give up when I can't make myself understood					
16. I pay attention to the conversational flow					
17. I actively encourage myself to express what I want to say					
18. I notice myself using an expression which fits a rule that I have learned					
19. I think first of a sentence I already know in english and then try to change it to fit the situation					
20. When I feel incapable of executing my original intent, I try to express myself in a different way					
21. I ask other people to help when I can't communicate well					

(continued)

(continued)

Items	Never true of me	Generally not true of me	Somewhat true of me	Generally true of me	Always true of me
22. I reduce the message and use simple expressions if I feel incapable of expressing myself					
23. While speaking, I pay attention to the listener's reaction to my speech					

Appendix B

The Items of Strategy Categories in SIOC (the Inventory Developed)

C 1: Negotiation for Meaning Strategies

7. I pay attention to my rhythm and intonation.
10. I repeat what I want to say until the listener understands.
12. I try to speak clearly and loudly to make myself heard.
13. I give examples if the listener doesn't understand what I am saying.
16. I pay attention to the conversational flow.
18. I notice myself using an expression which fits a rule that I have learned.
23. While speaking, I pay attention to the listener's reaction to my speech.

C 2: Message Abandonment Strategies

2. I leave a message unfinished because of some language difficulty.
3. When I don't know the English word for something, I say the Turkish equivalent of the word.
15. I give up when I can't make myself understood.
21. I ask other people to help when I can't communicate well.

C 3: Planning/Organizing Strategies

1. I think of what I want to say in my native language and then construct the English sentence.
4. I plan how words will come together in advance.
6. I try to remember the words related to the speech topic and context in advance.
9. I change the structure of Turkish word or expression in accordance with English structure.
19. I think first of a sentence I already know in English and then try to change it to fit the situation.

C 4: Affective Strategies

11. I try to relax when I feel anxious.
14. I don't mind taking risks even though I might make mistakes.
17. I actively encourage myself to express what I want to say.

C 5: Compensatory Strategies

5. When I can't think of a word that I want to say, I use an alternative word which expresses the meaning as closely as possible.
8. I use gestures and facial expressions if I can't communicate how to express myself.
20. When I feel incapable of executing my original intent, I try to express myself in a different way.
22. I reduce the message and use simple expressions if I feel incapable of expressing myself.

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The Effect of Diacritics on Kinetic Tone Direction and Placement

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Abstract The study investigated the efficacy of tonal diacritical marking in facilitating learners' accurate choice of kinetic tone direction and placement. Two groups comprising a total of 52 Saudi university students read two different lists of sentences representing fall and rise tones in English. The lists included utterances that were marked with tone diacritics and others that were clarified with some contextual clues. The data was analyzed through pitch tracks and spectrograms and was compared to native speakers' output. The findings showed that the diacritics had no effect on the direction of the rise tokens since the participants had the same result, 79 %, for both types. However, the diacritics could have distracted them slightly as their marked fall instances were 6 % worse than their unmarked counterparts. Furthermore, only 52 % of the learners were able to choose the marked words to place kinetic tones, suggesting that zero marking accompanied with short contextual clues was actually better than using diacritics when learning tone direction and placement. The overall results led to the conclusion that diacritics had either a negative or neutral effect, lending support to previous research which proved that tone marking imposes a cognitive load on readers as they are forced to follow a slow and flawed procedure to process utterances. Therefore, exposure to extensive training on diacritical interpretation should be complemented with contextualized practice data.

1 Introduction

The shape of the fundamental frequency contour determines intonational variation in English communicating a wide variety of information. Speaker intention and listener perception are conveyed through the placement and choice of pitch accents and boundary tones. For this reason, intonation plays a significant role in conversational

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management as it highlights important information while backgrounding less essential information (Levis 1999).

Learning L2 intonation cannot be taken for granted but this aspect of pronunciation is of vital importance as it has been confirmed that it can have a major impact on learners' comprehensibility and reflects the extent to which an English learner sounds nativelike (Beach 1991; McNerney and Mendelsohn 1992; Cruz-Ferreira 2003). This elusive and inherently difficult nature of suprasegmentals as compared to segmental features creates what is considered to be the last hurdle that the majority of learners of English never manage to cross (Banjo 1979; Amayo 1981). It has been reported that native students described their foreign teacher assistants' pronunciation as disorganized and unfocused due to their excessive use of pauses and falling intonation contours (Tyler et al. 1988).

Suprasegmental features of speech have usually been avoided in the design of syllabuses for teaching English, partly due to the little importance attached to their teaching, and partly due to the unavailability of a practical framework through which intonation is made comprehensible (Underhill 1994). They have only recently begun to be "seriously and systematically taken into account both in the literature devoted to foreign language learning and in teaching itself" (Cruz Ferreira 1989, p. 24). By investigating the effectiveness of using tonal diacritical marking in coursebooks, our present study attempted to 'isolate' certain features that should contribute to the analysis of such a complex topic as suprasegmentals (Hahn 2004). It also aimed at evaluating the taken-for-granted features of teaching materials that would facilitate learners' accurate choice of kinetic tone direction and placement.

2 Previous Studies

To the best of our knowledge, no previous study has attempted this angle of investigation in relation to English and Arabic. The related studies found were on tone marking for tone languages which are obviously different from English and Arabic. Such studies, nonetheless, provided some evidence of learners' ability or inability to match the phonemic codes represented by the graphemes or diacritical tone markings with fluent production of utterances. Some of them actually experimented with different levels of tone diacritics in alphabetical languages to facilitate reading. This perspective can contribute some valuable insights to our present area of research.

Bird (1999) presented some objective evidence that marking tone with diacritics hindered fluent reading. He tested a large number of subjects who differed in age, educational background and level of exposure to tone orthography. He presented them with sentences that were marked or unmarked for tone, but they were not given time to go through the utterances. The results demonstrated that zero marking did not cause more comprehension errors. On the contrary, they indicated that tone marking made a negative contribution to fluency as the subjects were slow and had more hesitations and repetitions.

Bernard et al. (1997) taught a group of participants one tone marking system and then presented them with fifty sentences to read. Each sentence was marked and unmarked. The researchers concluded that marking tone hindered speakers in reading silently and loudly, as seen in the increased perception and vocalization time. The participants' comprehension was also affected as their errors increased when reading the unmarked sentences aloud. In the study undertaken by Essien (1977), three levels of tone marking were examined and the conclusion was that sentences with zero marking had many correct readings, as compared to only a few for the other two levels. The subjects with previous exposure to the marking system did not do better than the others.

In his investigation of the way intonation was taught in North American ESL textbooks, Levis (1999) stated that intonation functions in communication were not addressed effectively. He concluded that people listen for an overall pitch shape, a rise or a fall in pitch, rather than for the phonetic patterns of where the intonation contour begins. He noted that overall shapes of final rising or falling intonation seemed to be sufficient for learners, leading to a more straightforward representation of intonation than has usually been shown.

Therefore, in the present research, we followed the simple technique employed by Cruz-Ferreira (2003) in dividing tones into two major groups, that is *falling* and *rising*. Her division is based on form as she believes that all falling tones require a decrease in fundamental frequency and all rising tones an increase. She considers the final pitch movement to be the deciding factor, regardless of whether a tone is simple or complex. In other words, the tone that falls at the end is a falling tone and the one that rises at the end is a rising one, irrespective of those tones that involve a bi-directional movement where the pitch starts with a rise and ends in a fall, or starts with a fall and ends in a rise. According to Allan (1984) and Cooper and Sorensen (1981), the intonational cues that differentiate spoken questions from statements are a final rise in fundamental frequency for the former and a decline for the latter.

In addition, the 'nuclear' approach was adopted for the current analysis because the data the learners practiced was based mainly on O'Connor (1980). Utterances are divided into tone groups, and the stressed syllable of the last accented word in a tone group is considered the nucleus in unmarked utterances. The nucleus has the major pitch movement that denotes tone meaning (O'Connor and Arnold 1973). A tone unit is an intonation contour *terminal tone*, which is the final single pitch movement of the intonation phrase (falling, rising or level). So, in tone-unit theory, a 'nuclear tone' that is ultimately falling is called a *falling terminal tone* and the 'nuclear tone' that is ultimately rising is called a *rising terminal tone*. Accordingly, the marking system employed here is also based on O'Connor and Arnold (1973).

While falling intonation in English is used to indicate completeness, assertiveness, definiteness, real gratitude, strong command, certainty and finality, rising intonation is employed to express politeness, pleading, hesitation, suspicion, questioning, criticism, resentment, encouragement and non-finality (Cruttenden 1997; O'Connor 1980; Collins and Mees 2003). The same is true for Arabic. Yet, both languages do not employ diacritics to signal tone direction and placement.

3 Method

3.1 Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the effect of using tone diacritics on students' choice of kinetic tone direction?
2. What is the effect of using tone diacritics on students' choice of kinetic tone placement?

3.2 Subjects

The subjects were 52 second year university students. All were in the English Department in the College of Education, Princess Nora University. Their average age was 20. The subjects had taken four courses in phonetics covering segmentals and suprasegmentals. Each was a 3-h course per week that included intensive practice in the language lab, continuous feedback on students' errors, and pronunciation assignments that required home oral practice. The last course included intonation where the diacritical marks and contextual or syntactic clues used in O'Connor (1980) were utilized to learn tones. Two different groups of participants read two different lists of sentences: Group 1 (G1) read Set 1 and Group 2 (G2) read Set 2. The native speakers were four females; two British and two American.

3.3 Material

The data was originally part of the learners' practice material in which they were exposed to native speakers' production in class and at home. It was randomly chosen from a longer list the researcher had set up to assess the learners' production of suprasegmentals. It consisted of one set of sentences for each group of subjects that included both fall and rise tones. Some utterances were marked with tone diacritics and some were clarified with short contextual clues. They are as follows:

Set 1
He looked kind of young. (fall1) (unmarked)
What a lovely rose! (fall2) (marked)
Have you seen him yet? (rise1) (marked)
What's your name again? (rise2) (unmarked)

Set 2
I worked hard. (fall1) (unmarked)
Come over here! (fall2) (marked)
Will you? (rise1) (marked)
How was the weather? (rise2) (unmarked)

3.4 Procedure

The students' production was recorded in the language lab of the English Department in their college. They were given a few minutes to go through the materials and asked to read the utterances at a normal speed paying attention to the given contextual clues and the marked tone diacritics. The marks denoting high intonational patterns were placed against the top of the text and those representing low variants were placed at the bottom. The place and direction of the final contour was indicated by a slanting nucleus mark.

3.5 Data Analysis

The kinetic tone direction and location were acoustically traced through pitch tracks and spectrograms using SFS/WASP Version 103 (2004) by Mark Huckvale from the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics, the University College London. Auditory assessment was also employed. The same analysis was performed on the native speakers' data.

4 Results

4.1 Kinetic Tone Direction

The acoustic and auditory analysis addressing the first research question yielded different results for the students' pitch direction. The students in G1 read 81 % of the marked fall examples and 85 % of the unmarked ones accurately. The performance of G2 was superior as 89 % of the marked fall examples and 96 % of the unmarked ones had accurate pitch direction (Table 1). So, the overall result for both groups for the accurate unmarked fall cases was 91 %, which was better than for the marked ones (85 %). When we turn to the rise tone instances, we can observe that the pitch direction produced by G1 was correct for 77 % of the marked as well as the unmarked rise examples. But G2 performed better than G1 in both the marked and the unmarked rise occurrences (81 %) (Table 1). In sum, the end result for both groups for the marked as well as the unmarked rise tones was 79 %.

Table 1 Kinetic tone direction

	Marked (%)	Unmarked (%)
G1 Fall	81	85
G1 Rise	77	77
G2 Fall	89	96
G2 Rise	81	81

The overall results showed that the participants in G2 were more successful in choosing kinetic tone direction for the marked tokens (85 %) than G1 (79 %). They were also more successful in the unmarked tones (89 %) than G1 (81 %). So, the performance of the total number of students for both tones in the unmarked instances was better (85 %) than the marked ones (82 %).

4.2 Kinetic Tone Placement

The acoustic and auditory aspects of the students' kinetic tone placement were examined to answer the second research question. The outcome of tracing marked utterances produced distinct patterns. The placement of the fall kinetic tone was correct for only 14 % of G1, and for 44 % of G2. As for the rise tone cases, we observed that while G1 tone placement was 100 % accurate, G2 were only 67 % accurate (Table 2). So, the overall results for fall patterns were very low (29 %), but much higher for the rise examples (84 %). To look at these results from another angle, we noted that the participants in G1 were more successful in kinetic tone placement for the marked examples (100 %) than those in G2 (89 %).

When the students' acoustic results were examined with respect to kinetic tone placement for the unmarked instances in comparison to those of the native speakers', notable differences emerged. The students' placement of the fall kinetic tone was right for only 50 % of G1, and for 28 % of G2. When we assessed the rise tones, we noted that while the students' tone placements in G1 were 100 % correct, only 14 % were right in G2 (Table 2). So, the overall results for fall tones were very low (29 %), but somewhat higher for the rise ones (57 %). Viewing the results according to groups, it was clear that the students in G1 were more successful in kinetic tone placement for the marked examples (75 %) than those in G2 (21 %).

The obtained results of unmarked tokens showed that fall kinetic tone placement was correct for all the students in G1, and for 96 % of the participants in G2. Likewise, the rise tones were correct for all G1 students, but for 81 % of those in G2 (Table 2). On the whole, the result was 98 % for the fall tones, and 91 % for the rise tones. Yet still, the participants in G1 were more successful in kinetic tone

Table 2 Kinetic tone placement

	Marked (%)	Unmarked (%)	Unmarked tone placement as compared to native speakers (%)
G1 Fall	14	100	50
G1 Rise	100	100	100
G2 Fall	44	96	28
G2 Rise	67	81	14

placement when producing unmarked patterns (98 %) than those in G2 (91 %). It is worth pointing out, however, that all the students' kinetic tone placement for both tones in the unmarked instances was far better (94 %) than the marked ones (56 %).

5 Discussion

The data reported here supported the claim that diacritics had either a negative effect, as the students' unmarked fall cases were 6 % better than their marked ones, or a neutral effect, as the result was 79 % for the rise tone direction regardless of tone diacritics. Likewise, the learners' performance when choosing the right place of kinetic tones suggested that diacritics could have distracted the students as nearly half of them (48 %) were unable to choose the word signaled with tone diacritics for kinetic tone placement. That observation was confirmed by negative results in both groups, as 44 % of the students in G1 and 61 % of the participants in G2 were unable to choose the right word.

Therefore, the findings of the study were consistent with those of the previous research as they proved that, in general, tone marking imposed a cognitive load on readers forcing them to follow a slow and flawed procedure to process utterances. Failure to attend to the influence of diacritics when reading practice material led to peculiar production. Figure 1 confirms that conclusion as it shows a student's flawed reading of a question that was clearly marked with a rising tone diacritic signaling the right location of the kinetic tone. When her reading was compared to that of the native speaker's (Fig. 2), it was obvious that the student used a falling tone instead of a rising one. She also read most of the words in the question with as much power, time, and pitch as the word carrying the kinetic tone.

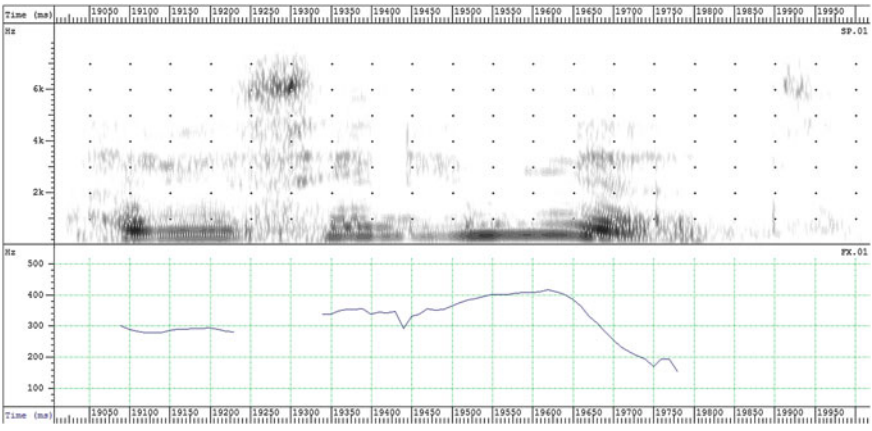

Fig. 1 A student's flawed production of "Have you seen him yet?", which was marked with rise tone diacritics

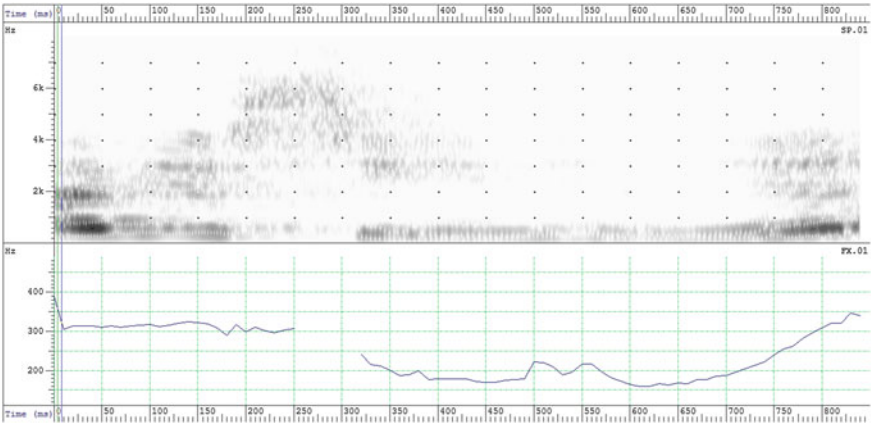

Fig. 2 A native speaker's normal production of "Have you seen him yet?"

6 Conclusion

The present analysis demonstrated that the difficulty did not lie in the students' inability to remember whether a certain utterance should be produced with rising or falling intonation, as the diacritics were provided in the sentence list. Rather, their dilemma was in manipulating their voice to produce such patterns because it had been confirmed that different orthographies impact phonological awareness differently, as they require creating graphic models of a phonological system and generating grapheme-to-phoneme mapping (Olson 1994). The findings also implied that zero marking complemented by short contextual clues was in fact better than using diacritics to teach tone direction and placement. In other words, contextualized practice data should accompany extensive training on diacritical interpretation. This confirms Wichmann's argument that in language teaching, "the preference for 'authentic' texts requires both learners and teachers to cope with language which the textbooks do not predict" (1997, p. xvi).

While it has been noted that learners with previous exposure to phonological rules are better equipped to evaluate their problems in speech production, the teaching of intonation rules which are too elaborate might be overwhelming and teaching materials that rely on decontextualized language might be artificial (cf. Kenworthy 1987; Jones et al. 1994). To provide a more efficient basis for the development of oral skills, language teaching and learning should make a conscious effort to attend to the meaningful correlates of segmentals and suprasegmentals in the immediate linguistic context, as well as the wider context of human communication. Therefore, language learners' goals of intelligibility, fluency and accuracy are too modest when compared to the ultimate target of mastering the oral aspects that define a speaker's attitude, mood, and social orientation (Thompson and Gaddes 2005; Pennington 2014).

This study sought to provide insights into the effect of tonal diacritical marking on learners' oral production. It attempted to shed some light on the influence of mental representations that have been shown to be valuable in learning and pedagogy research as they shape and constrain foreign language production (Myles 2005, p. 374). Moreover, the process of revising the function and format of diacritics and other phonetic symbols should provide "guided general principles such as accessibility, readability, and standardization" (Johnson 2000, p. 182) that contribute to discourse and conversational analysis research. The results of this investigation are limited to the effects of tone diacritics on tone direction and placement. It did not attempt to answer questions related to pitch range or pitch and conversation analysis. Thus, further research is needed to determine more precisely which conditions are the most beneficial in teaching tone direction and placement.

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Is There Any Place for Silence in the Communication-Oriented Process of Adult Language Learning?

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Abstract This article investigates the perception of the reverse of communication —silence—in instructed English language learning, as seen by adult language learners and teachers of adult learners. After a brief presentation of theoretical aspects referring to the notion of silence in the second language acquisition literature, a short survey study is described whose aim was to find out how adult language learners and language teachers of adults conceptualise silence. In particular, an attempt was made to determine if the respondents find silence in any way useful for the achievement of language learning success, or would rather resort to communication in the target language as soon as possible. The paper finishes with some recommendations regarding further investigations and implications for teaching adults.

1 Introduction

Silence as a construct in language acquisition studies is not a frequent object of investigation. Of the two concepts—silence and communication—research in language acquisition has tended to focus principally on the latter, and far less on the former. This may be due, in part, to the widespread opinion that communication leads to learning, whereas silence plays no essential role. Yet, there may be more room reserved for the importance of silence than it is usually believed, even in the communication-oriented classroom. The following two examples show how differently silence can be approached by adult language learners.

> *The story of Jolanta*
> Jolanta, 60, enrolled in an elementary English language course run at her place of work. In the past during her Polish philology university studies she learnt Russian, German and Latin, and in those times she was considered a good student. She visited the United

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Kingdom a few times because her niece married an Englishman, and Jolanta privately desired to learn English to be able to read, and even more, to be able to pronounce English written words without any problems. During her learning she thought she had more problems than her other colleagues and requested the teacher to treat her as though she were absent, that is, not being called on or expected to produce any responses. After the teacher agreed to this, Jolanta seemed to be very much involved in attentive listening to others, and generally trying to do all the written exercises, but not speaking. Had it not been for this silence, she would certainly have given up the course. What was interesting, though, was the fact that Jolanta was not totally consistent in her decision. Whenever she was sure that she knew the answer, she blurted it out, forgetting her previous request to be allowed to remain silent during the lesson.

The story of Bożena

Bożena, 50, enrolled in the same elementary English language course offered at her place of work. Like Jolanta, she had studied Polish philology and in the past had learnt Russian and German. Very confident in her Polish speaking skills and distinguished by a high level of self-esteem, she tried to transfer this feeling to some degree onto other languages by making use of whatever linguistic resources she had at her disposal. For example, she could ask a question in a semi-formal English-led meeting, however broken or incomprehensible her English was or, if her communication was totally obscure to those around her, she would ask someone in the group to translate her specific question and bring it to the floor. She always looked for the deeper sense in what was being said, and since she usually had something important to say on any topic, silence was rarely exercised by her.

These are true examples of the treatment of silence in one adult language learning classroom. In the first story, Jolanta voluntarily asks for silence but, somewhat unconsciously, can give it up when she considers it no longer necessary. In the second story, Bożena cannot allow herself to remain silent because, being excellent in communication skills in her native language, it is beyond her to accept her own silence in an interesting conversation only because it is held in a language in which she can barely communicate. How is silence conceptualised in the process of adult language learning? Is lapsing into non-speaking a sign of feeling inferior, the acknowledgement of one's desire to speak but at the same time one's inability to do so? Or maybe silence is not a valid issue, but rather something to be avoided as it highlights one's weakness or questions one's claim to the right to speak? The above examples of authentic stories inspired the author to attempt to investigate silence, and in particular to examine its role in learning to speak a foreign language from the perspective of adult learners and the teachers of adult learners.

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the treatment of silence in the literature, focusing on using silence in some language teaching methods, different language learning contexts, attitudes towards silence exhibited by language learners and teachers, as well as silence *vis a vis* critical pedagogies. The second part describes the survey study in which the conceptualisations of silence by adult language learners and teachers of adult language learners were investigated.

2 Theoretical Foundations

The issue of silence in the field of language learning has been subject to fluctuations in terms of its frequency of appearance and the kind of aspects raised. Its treatment in the literature seems mainly to focus on the following strands: using silence in language teaching methods, dealing with silence in ESL contexts, teachers' and learners' attitudes towards silence or the view of silence in critical pedagogies.

Silence is well acknowledged in language teaching methods based on comprehension approaches where "input is silently processed without the production of any utterances in the target language" (Marton 1988, p. 3). Asher (1969) Total Physical Response requires several hours of students' silence during which they have to carry out teacher instructions given in the target language, perform multiple-choice tests based on pictorial stimuli, or respond to commands in the native language. Although in favour of using teaching strategies totally based on communication, Krashen and Terrell (1983) in promoting the Natural Approach were in a way advocating students' right to silence. According to Krashen (1981), productive skills are not essential to acquire competence in a language, and the basic condition that has to be met is the idea of *comprehensible input*. This is to say that successful language learning can take place provided that the input to which learners are exposed is meaningful and the context of learning anxiety-free. In such a classroom, most of the time is spent on speaking activities, and if there is any silence-based receptive task, it usually serves "only as preparation for immediately introducing a speaking activity related to the text" (Marton 1988, p. 38). Yet, as Terrell claims, "a student is likely to try to speak in the new language whenever he or she makes a decision to do so" (1977, p. 333). The Natural Approach in a way foreshadows language teaching approaches which are premised on the belief that understanding is more important than production (Granger 2004, p. 110), for example the Communicational Approach (Prabhu 1987) or the Lexical Approach (Lewis 1994).[1]

Apart from language teaching methods, the issue of silence in the language acquisition literature accompanied the formation of a new identity for second language learning immigrants. The memoirs by Eva Hoffman (*Lost in translation*), Richard Rodriguez (*Hungry of memory*) and Alice Kaplan (*French lessons*) (see Granger 2004, p. 69–88) vividly show that lapsing into silence—metaphorically or literally—can be a way of surviving when the new world presents too big a challenge. Yet the external silence of those writers is only superficial. Deep down it signifies losing oneself in one's inner world, holding innumerable conversations with one's different subjectivities, creating dialogues in which a language learner is simultaneously speaker and listener. This echoes Vygotsky's (1978) inner speech and, even more, Bakchtin's (1981) dialogism and polyphony based on encounters inside packed with tension, anxiety and conflicts. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000,

[1] A list of factors determining the supremacy of comprehension over production in second language learning is provided by Prabhu (1987, pp. 78–80).

p. 165) maintain that there is a time when a person has no experiences because "it is through inner speech that we create our experiences". When Eva Hoffman's Polish has atrophied and somewhat prevented her from holding "night time talk with myself" (1989, p. 107) and her new language English has not yet emerged, silence again seems to provide the natural release. Although for a time less productive because it had less 'food' with which to make sense of a new immigrant's experiences lacking in words, silence busily prepared the ground for the imminent new language to penetrate "to those layers of (…) psyche from which a private connection could proceed" (1989, p. 107).

The issue of silence in language teaching literature has hardly omitted the language teacher. The teacher's silence was sought after in the Silent Way, according to which the teacher should talk only when it was absolutely necessary. Using colour charts and rods as aids, she was expected to encourage learners to express their opinions and feelings, herself lapsing into long pauses (Larsen-Freeman 2000; Richards and Rogers 2005; Kumaravadivelu 2006). Irrespective of the teacher's role advocated in the Silent Method, most publications discussing the silence of the language teacher emphasise teachers' intolerance of silence. Tsui (1996), for example, claims that many educators "feel very uneasy when they fail to get a response from students" (1996, p. 151), probably because the lesson flow is disturbed, their traditional image of teacher asking and learner responding somewhat blurred and, consequently, their power in the teacher-learner relationship questioned. Drawing on the research studies by Basso (1970) and Philips (1970) investigating American Indians' reluctance to speak in the classroom, Edwards (2010, p. 26) maintains that there are three negative consequences of teachers' perception of silence. Firstly, if they do not receive the feedback to which they are used, teachers can hardly obtain all information about learners' knowledge and abilities. Secondly, facing silence, teachers gradually adopt a style of teaching bent on decreasing their traditional role as a model of norms and practice, which may damage the reception of their work in the eyes of students. Thirdly, teachers may tend to formulate false and unfair conclusions about the cultures of their silent learners (see Saville-Troike 1997, pp. 138–139; Young 2011, pp. 426–428).

When it comes to the measurement of learners' beliefs about silence, a notable study is the attempt to elicit attitudes towards silence from teenage students in three schools in Wales, made by Jaworski and Sachdev (1998). The authors reported that silence marks power imbalance and ambiguity of interpersonal relations in interaction but also that "silence is (…) a positive communicative item, (…) a facilitative device enabling students to gain access, organise and absorb new material" (1998, p. 286). Likewise, in Morita's (2004) study, apparently passive and withdrawn students can actively develop "their multiple roles and identities in the classroom" (2004, p. 587). Yet, a learner's silence is very complex because, as Ehrman and Dőrnyei (1998, p. 104) remind us, a learner who is habitually silent and begins to talk in response to, for example, group pressure, may not be acknowledged for the change but interrupted, talked over or received as if he had not talked at all.

Recently, the issue of silence has started to appear in the literature based on critical pedagogies in language learning. In these approaches focused on transforming

present social relations for the benefit of social justice, silence can be made into a sign (Kramsch 2000), comfort zone (Stroud and Wee 2012, p. 132), the exhibition of one's right not to speak (Stein 2004, pp. 108–109) or even the demonstration that language progress is taking place—a learner understands "the meaning and its contingency" (Price 1996, p. 258) but prefers to remain silent in order to preserve his identity (Swain et al. 2011, p. 80).

All in all, there exist different tonalities or attitudes to silence. They can belong to language teaching methods, secure transitional protection for fledgling linguistic identity, disturb the process of language learning, result from tension and stress or symbolise communication that has all its material components but volume.

3 The Study

3.1 The Focus of the Study

Although strides of various dimensions into silence have been undertaken, there seems to be a paucity of research examining its value *vis a vis* adult language learning, in particular its relation to speaking. The present study aims at filling this gap, although it is hardly possible to focus on all the aspects of silence mentioned above. For example, the relationship between silence and identity has to be dismissed because, unlike the immigrants learning a language in second language contexts, the respondents in the study to be described are learning a language in a foreign language environment. Motivated though they can be, they seem to consider learning a language an obligation since it is a school subject studied far less intensively than in the case of the described immigrants, even boiling down to something that is to be passed. Therefore, it seemed more feasible to investigate the use of silence in language teaching practice and its general perception held by adult language learners and language teachers of adult learners. With regard to learners, it was of interest whether they view, in whatever way, silence as relevant to learning a language, particularly speaking, whereas, in the case of teachers, the intention was to find out to what extent teachers are ready to acknowledge or tolerate silence in their, in most likelihood, communication-dominated contemporary language classrooms. Altogether, two general research questions were formulated:

1. How is silence perceived by adult learners in the beginner language classroom?
2. How is silence perceived by contemporary language teachers of adult learners?

3.2 Respondents' Profiles

Before presenting the outcomes of the study, it is necessary to briefly describe the respondents. The adult learners participating in the survey (n = 31) were learning

English at elementary level in an extramural private higher school of management.[2] Most of them were in their mid to late 30 s and half of them had already obtained an MA in other higher studies. Their English language learning was taking place on a non-intensive basis, amounting to 30 h per semester, often squeezed into five blocks of six hours each. The course was aimed at general English with some elements of business or tourism terminology, depending on the learners' field of specialisation. At the moment of the study, the respondents had completed the first term of language learning. As for the teacher respondents (n = 23), extreme care was taken to make sure that they all had considerable experience in teaching adults, either currently teaching foreign language courses in private language schools or doing it in the not too remote past.

3.3 Methodology

The data was gathered by means of two surveys: one for adult language learners (Appendix A) and the other for language teachers of adults (Appendix B). The questions were intentionally open-ended because such an approach would force learners to provide their own opinions, not options suggested beforehand. The survey for the learners consisted of five questions, out of which four directly concerned communication and only the last was specifically connected with the issue of silence. It was constructed in this way in an attempt to obtain the information indirectly[3] and somewhat confirm learners' consistency in their replies to question 5. The surveys were completed in Polish, the learners' native language so that the answers would not be in any way affected by the respondents' lacking target language competence. The survey for the teachers comprised only three questions, and for the same reasons as the learners' survey, focused on examining teachers' views on silence in an indirect manner (question 1), treating questions 2 and 3 as the respondents' verification of their opinions provided earlier. The survey for teachers was also written in Polish, the respondents' native language. The procedures adopted in collecting the data were as follows:

1. Asking adult language learners and teachers to answer the questions in the surveys.
2. Reading the data the first time.
3. Numerical coding of the respondents in both groups (from 1 to 31 and from 1 to 23).

[2] This is not the same group of learners to which Jolanta and Bożena referred to at the beginning of the article belonged to. As mentioned above, they provided only some inspiration in bringing the present study to fruition.

[3] It was assumed that in the communication-focused contemporary classroom, silence in language learning would not be a topic which learners would openly discuss, even if it was applied by them. Lack of readiness to talk about silence made the author look for indirect ways of investigating it.

4. Reading all the data the second time and noting down the answers.
5. Grouping similar answers together for both groups.
6. Calculating the percentage of subjects.
7. Interviewing several respondents in order to clarify misunderstandings.

3.4 Results

The results obtained for both surveys are discussed below, starting with the data from the learners and then followed by the teachers' answers.

3.4.1 Learners' Perceptions

As far as the adult learners' responses to the questions are concerned, the most frequently provided answers can be subsumed under the headings included in Tables 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, presented in descending order.

It is interesting to note that all the respondents agreed with the statement of the necessity to speak a lot in learning a foreign language. The most common reasons provided are listed in Table 1. As can be seen, the most important reasons offered by the surveyed adult learners concern remembering and reinforcing new structures and vocabulary as well as practising pronunciation. Hence, speaking in the target language can be considered by most of the respondents as a kind of learning strategy, thanks to which language is longer retained and better memorised.

As far as the emotions experienced by the respondents when called on to speak in the target language are concerned, most of them seemed to be suffering from negative feelings, as presented in Table 2. More than half of the answers given in response to this question underscored anxiety and embarrassment and almost one third of the responses in the researched group gave "mixed feelings" made up of at least one negative emotion.

Table 1 The learners' reasons why speaking in the target language is important

Reasons	No. of answers
It helps to remember and reinforce the language better	13 (41 %)[a]
Pronunciation is practised and improved	10 (32 %)
Confidence in language is gained and barriers of anxiety can be overcome	6 (19.5 %)
Speaking is the basis of language knowledge	4 (12.9 %)
You can better benefit from another person's corrections	3 (6.4 %)
It is easier to catch the formation of a sentence when you have to say it	2 (6.4 %)
I learnt a completely foreign language by speaking it in a foreign country	1 (3.2 %)

[a] Many respondents expressed several opinions—this is why the percentage does not always equal 100

Table 2 The learners' emotions when called on to speak in the target language

Emotions	No. of answers
Anxiety and embarrassment	17 (54.8 %)
Mixed feelings: anxiety before and relief or satisfaction afterwards; pleasure and embarrassment—I can answer but I need more time to think,— anxiety and feeling of being distinguished that nobody can do it but me; pleasure and helplessness that I may not know it	8 (25.8 %) 3 3 1 1
Pleasure	6 (25.8 %)
Uncertainty	2 (6.45 %)
Helplessness	2 (6.45 %)
Shame in front of myself	1 (3.2 %)

When asked about the influence of external factors upon the emotions experienced during their speaking performance in the target language, 10 surveyed learners declared that the context and the people around in no way affected them. They declared that at their beginning level of language knowledge they were not afraid of making mistakes and treated them as something natural and that being corrected eliminated such mistakes. However, for the remaining 21 the obstacles enumerated in Table 3 seemed to be an issue. As can be seen from the data, two thirds of the respondents reported being affected by the context. For them, both their classmates and the teacher can stand for disabling factors evoking the experience of negative feelings. For some learners, having to speak and the resultant unsuccessful performance may even signify a great deal of shame before themselves.

When asked about the acceptance of learning the target language without the necessity of speaking it until they were willing or ready to do so, out of all the respondents only one person expressed her willingness to wait until she felt ready to start speaking with confidence. It can be added that that person emphasized getting a sound knowledge of grammar and vocabulary items first, after which she might consider her attempts with speaking. The remaining respondents strongly disagreed with such a suggestion, and the reasons they provided can be subsumed under the headings in Table 4. The answers offered by the learners were very positive about the rejection of prolonged silence in the language classroom. For most of the respondents, the proposed approach was almost incomprehensible, and almost one

Table 3 The factors influencing negative emotions

Factors	No. of answers
Classmates, fright of being laughed at by them	11 (35 %)
Teacher, being ashamed	7 (22 %)
Being considered a 'weak student'	4 (12 %)
Being ashamed in front of myself	2 (0.6 %)

Table 4 The reasons why the learners would not want to postpone their speaking

Reasons	No. of answers
I would never start speaking	9 (29 %)
It is strange, beyond acceptance, speaking is one of the skills which should be practised as early as possible	7 (22.5 %)
Thanks to speaking aloud I can get rid of speaking anxiety	4 (12.9 %)
Speaking aloud helps you practise pronunciation	4 (12.9 %)
Teacher can always correct and prompt me to say something	2 (6.4 %)
I would not know what I know and what I don't know	2 (6.4 %)
Speaking from the start is motivating	1 (3.2 %)

Table 5 The functions of silence

Functions	No. of answers
I correct and verify my mistakes	7 (22.58 %)
I reinforce and better remember	7 (22.58 %)
I silently repeat	3 (9.67 %)
I improve pronunciation	3 (9.67 %)
I catch other people's mistakes and learn from them	2 (6.45 %)
I learn better than being asked myself	2 (6.45 %)
I answer the question whispering, and if it correct, it is also my response; if it is not correct, there are no consequences for me	2 (6.45 %)
I catch language subtleties	1 (3.2 %)
I write down what was incomprehensible	1 (3.2 %)
I listen to others, plan my response and, if other people's response is wrong, I talk about my suggestion	1 (3.2 %)
I analyse other people's answers	1 (3.2 %)
Other people's responses motivate me to speaking	1 (3.3 %)
I am more confident about my own answers	1 (3.2 %)

third did not trust themselves in their ability to recognize and utilise the readiness to speak.

The last question addressed to the learners was directly focused on silence. Interestingly enough, in the face of what was said before, all the respondents, just like Jolanta in the first true story at the beginning of this article, agreed with the beneficial role of silently listening to others without having to respond. Table 5 lists the functions that learners' silence fulfils in this respect for the investigated learners. The results show that all of the students reported taking advantage of it through the direct use of non-response. Convinced about its positive role, they offered a number of reasons why they thought so and presented several concrete ways of capitalizing on not having to talk.

3.4.2 Teachers' Perception

The participants of the teacher survey seemed to have no doubts about their answers to the first question. All of them reported that speaking skills were promoted in their language classrooms; the techniques of how it was actually done are listed in Table 6.

Of the total number of the participating teachers, 16 wrote that silence was very difficult for them to tolerate, and 3 others that it could be accepted with reference to singular students. Some of those respondents made references to the quality of students' silence, which seems to be the most burdensome if the teacher knows that learners can cope with the assigned task. Other reasons provided by the teachers for their dislike of silence are listed in Table 7.

Some of the respondents stated that they were so much afraid of silence in the classroom that they suggested using special strategies to deal with the problem of students' non-responding. They mentioned the following strategies:

- I ask them to speak in a predictable order; they know who will be speaking next.
- I often remind them of the necessity of making mistakes. I even organise a competition for the most interesting spoken mistakes.

Table 6 Ways of promoting communication

Teacher techniques	No. of answers
I ask students about things in the target language	14 (56 %)
I reward those students who speak a lot (praising, grading)	6 (24 %)
I try to introduce interesting topics	5 (20 %)
I use active methods, i.e. role-play, drama techniques	5 (20 %)
I regularly use pair and group work	5 (20 %)
I try to create a nice and safe atmosphere	5 (20 %)
I assign oral presentations	4 (16 %)
I never interrupt students' utterances	4 (16 %)
I encourage them to share experience in overcoming speaking barriers	3 (12 %)
I start with the simplest things to encourage them to talk	3 (12 %)
I am very engaged in my teaching	2 (0.8 %)
I regularly remind them about the necessity of making errors in learning a language	2 (0.8 %)
I encourage them to use IT in developing speaking	2 (0.8 %)
I try to personalise language tasks	1 (0.4 %)
I always prompt target language words when they speak	1 (0.4 %)
I periodically lecture on the need for communication and the importance of spoken language	1 (0.4 %)
I inform students at the start of course that everyone will have to speak	1 (0.4 %)
I may exchange speaking for reading texts to accustom students to speaking	1 (0.4 %)
I select a course book rich in speaking tasks	1 (0.4 %)

Table 7 The reasons for teachers' dislike of silence in their language classrooms

Reasons
Teacher is then made to be more active
Speaking should be developed and communication is the most important—it is out of the question
Not productive in terms of language learning
If they are not to speak in the classroom, then where?
It would be unfair for them not to speak—everybody has some duties
It means lack of preparation on their part
It is unacceptable due to the pressure of formal requirements—how to give them a final grade?
Students' silence stands for their lack of knowledge and skills
Students' silence proves their lack of material coverage and hostility
It shows their lack of interest and lack of adjustment of the course level to students' abilities

- I emphasise that students' activity is the most important for me.
- If they don't want to speak I impose revisions.

It should be added though that four respondents were not so straightforward about this issue. Three participants pointed to students' shyness or speaking anxiety, which usually prevents them from asking students to contribute and makes them wait for their own decision to start speaking. One person, however, seemed to look at the problem with more consideration, offering the following comment:

> Everything depends on the situation, students, topic, even the time of the day. Students' silence, as long as it is not caused by their laziness, may signal a number of things, i.e. the topic or the task, are too difficult. To my mind, silence is also communication, and I as a teacher ought to interpret it, either by changing the topic or task or, vice versa, overcoming silence.

The answers to the question of teachers' tolerance of silence indicate that the overwhelming majority (19 teachers) do not accept it in their language classes, whereas the remaining 4 have more mixed feelings about it and even tend to look for the reasons behind it.

The question referring to Krashen's and Terrell's (1983) Natural Approach did not prove to be as straightforward as the previous one. The responses were more equally divided: 13 teachers rejected the suggestion of learners' remaining silent until they are willing to speak, whereas 10 were ready to accept it under certain circumstances. Those who were against the idea seemed to be concerned about the following aspects:

- Impossible in the Communicative Method which I use.
- Attempts to speak should be made from the very first lesson.
- I know my students, and I know that the topics are interesting enough for them to say something.
- If I didn't encourage them to speak, I would never develop this component of communicative competence.
- Speaking is part of a final grade, and I can hardly wait.
- Speaking is reinforcement, and the development of its automaticity requires calling on.

- I can't imagine such classes.
- Calling on is never a problem if the topic is meaningful for students.
- They would never start speaking.
- Calling on is a better and faster way to make them start speaking.
- Calling on is like survival in life. To make it easy I can give them preparation time or the order of their performance.

By contrast, the teachers who might be willing to consider the idea of allowing students more silence provided the following conditions:

- A beginning group.
- Students suffer from extreme stress and trauma.
- Small groups.
- Students of similar personalities.
- You have enough time to cover the things slowly.
- You work with other forms than speaking and from time to time check if they are ready to start to talk.
- You know that psychological aspects like shyness are involved.
- Such a system of teaching is externally imposed.

Having said so, most of the teachers in the second group still reported that despite their agreeing to the occurrence of silence, they would probably encourage learners to speak but would take care not to resort to pressure.

4 Discussion

This study aimed at identifying adult learners' and teachers' perceptions about the use of silence—the reverse of communication—in the language classroom. It is noticeable that in today's language classroom where the development of communication seems to be the norm, the very idea of silence, especially in popular understanding, seems marked. Although the present study focused on exploring the reception and conceptualisation of silence, *absolute silence* (Bilmes 1994, p. 79), in terms of the absence of noise, was not the principal object of interest. It was rather *notable silence* (Bilmes 1994, p. 79), understood as silence that can be relevant and in any way beneficial for language learning, that seemed to be primarily searched for.

Several implications can be drawn from the two surveys discussed. First, this work, although tentative, corroborates the findings of other research which has suggested that silence which stands for the opposite of willingness to communicate is viewed at first blush as rather negative and undesirable. Having said so, it is notable that there exist some differences between its perception by teachers and adult learners. The overwhelming majority of teachers discourage silence in their language classes, and some answers even suggest their finding the author's survey questions strange as, to their minds, communication and the development of speaking skills should be of paramount importance. Responses to question 2 about the teacher's tolerance of silence like "There is no such option as silence" and "It is

out of the question—communication is the most important" are good cases in point. It seems therefore that silence is marked for teachers. The cause of this is probably the ubiquitous focus on communication—visible in both school programs and pragmatic aspects of learning a language, such as travelling—which in common parlance equals speaking. Besides, teachers probably abhor the idea of their lessons not being planned with the goal of preparing students for communication. Having silent learners and still striving for the development of communication would mean greater involvement on the part of the teachers. Since in popular jargon communication is a two-way interaction, an active teacher and passive students hardly produce the idea of a communicative classroom. Moreover, silence on the part of teachers may also indicate power imbalance. If students remain silent, especially if the teacher knows this results from their unwillingness to talk, the traditional balance of power may be, in her view, shaken. It can be interpreted as meaning that students refuse to do what the teacher tells them to do, do not learn what they are expected to learn and, what is feared most of all by the teacher, join together in some kind of resistance which comprises silence. Therefore, it can be inferred that silence is understood by the majority of the surveyed teachers at the most superficial level—the opposite of loud rehearsing the language, however unattractive or repetitive this rehearsing can be. This understanding may resemble Bilmes's *absolute silence* since it seems not to be important what learners say and how they sound as long as they speak or, rather, are voluble. This also echoes Benson and Lor's (1999) distinction between *quantitative learning*, in which learning is perceived "as being on the receiving end of knowledge" and *qualitative learning*, in which "learning is seen as an active process involving a sense of responsibility" (Martinez 2008, p. 109).

When asked about the quantity of speaking deemed necessary for language learning or the possibility of learning a language without having to speak as long as one desires, adult learners were also rather critical about silence, and in this sense their attitudes overlapped those of the teachers. Their attitude favoured acceptance of communication and, even more, speaking, by all means, even at the expense of learners' comfort during the lessons. Yet, when questioned about the feelings they experienced when being pressed to speak, which served as an indirect way of learning about their perceptions, the learners described a whole gamut of emotions, among which negative feelings largely surpassed the positive ones. This can suggest that what learners say is not necessarily what they experience in actual fact. Nevertheless, this contradiction does not result from their ill will—learners may be convinced that speaking is the most important, and at the same time may not realise that they themselves are making the use of silence. Hence, silence is not as obvious for learners as it is for teachers, and although it is relatively marked for teachers, it may not be equally marked for learners.

Second, silent listening to others and using other people's spoken answers as one's learning points to the use of silence as a learning strategy. Protected by the feeling of not having to talk and yet granted a possibility of listening to others, an individual, as is the case with eavesdropping, is provided with knowledge without being pressed to demonstrate it on the spot. Such understanding of silence makes it

resemble the concept of *mediation* (here, silent listening to others) and then *internalisation* (here, the acquisition of readiness to speak)—both featuring highly in Vygotsky's (1978) theory of development. Negative emotions indicated by the respondents as resulting from the presence of the others are then not invoked, because the anxiety-free environment ("it is other people who are talking, not me" phenomenon) allows language to incubate silently before its full emergence. Probably somewhat related to this concept is the apparent facilitative function played by *wait-time* (Chaudron 1988, pp. 128–129). Teachers' waiting before answering an unanswered question or asking someone else to answer it increases the amount of silence for an individual and, as Clarke (2005, p. 50) claims, leads to longer answers, more confident responses, less abandonment of responses, a supply of more alternative explanations or more eager improvement of other students' answers. Given that the most effective language teaching and learning are the basic objectives in the classroom, it seems worthwhile for teachers to pause more than usual if it is to improve students' target language performance.

Third, another important revelation arising from the study of the learners is their most frequent response that they would never like to decide about their readiness to speak in another language due to the fact that they would never know when to break the barrier of silence and start being voluble. Such responses testify not only to learners' willingness to communicate but even more to their helplessness and lack of autonomy and responsibility for their own learning. The respondents tended to reflect a general sense of not learning or making progress without having the teacher tell them what to do. The students' answers clearly indicate that making decisions about the learning objectives or curriculum procedures is alien to them, and the traditional role of teacher—someone who is not adviser, facilitator or counsellor—is reflected in their process of language learning. Yet, as Granger (2004, p. 114) maintains, if the concept of learner autonomy is to be treated seriously, "learners should determine the pace and the content of their own learning, it must also tolerate the possibility of moments, of whatever duration, in which that determination is, or seems to be, away from learning". The respondents in the survey are probably hardly aware that they could have a greater say in their language learning, or they would not to like to have it because, coupled with the consequent responsibility on their part, their personal constructs about the roles of teachers and students may be very traditional.

5 Conclusion

Although the problem of silence in language learning and the issues that affect it are beginning to be addressed, much needs to be done in this respect. Having no unanimous responses from language teachers or learners about the detrimental or facilitative role that silence holds, it seems warranted to research this aspect more deeply. This study has only signalled the problem from the perspective of adult learners and teachers, pointing to the fact that pressure to speak may cause a number

of unpleasant emotions, whereas silence may be constructively used as a learning strategy. In addition, there is much scope for further investigation of the issue of 'notable silence' and its influence on the development of learners' speaking skills. If silence and pressure to speak are used judiciously, students like Jolanta and Bożena can be perhaps provided with teaching that accommodates their own idiosyncrasies and is more in line with their own styles of learning from the start of the language course. Therefore, it is perhaps time silence were considered as an important language learning category in a number of dimensions in which it can be investigated.

Appendix A: Survey for an Adult Language Learner

Answer the following questions and give a short explanation.

1. Do you think that in order to learn a target language you must speak a lot in it? Why?
2. What emotions do you experience when you are called on to speak in a target language? Please explain your answer.
3. Are the emotions enumerated in question 2 affected by other factors, i.e. other people (teacher, classmates), anxiety about making a mistake, etc.? Please explain your answer.
4. 4.Would you be able to accept learning a target language without the necessity of speaking it aloud until you yourself felt willingness or readiness to speak? Please explain your answer.
5. Do you talk to yourself silently or silently answer other people's questions in the language classroom? Are there any benefits for you from listening to other people's answers? Please list these benefits and/or give some information about this.

Appendix B: Survey for a Language Teacher of Adults

Answer the following questions and give a short explanation.

1. Do you promote learners' speaking in your language lessons? If so, how do you do it?
2. Do you find learners' silence easy to tolerate? Why (not)?
3. Would you be able to accept the view that a learner starts talking in a target language when he or she is ready, and a teacher should not call him or her on to give an answer? Please justify your response and, if possible, list the circumstances that would make such an approach possible.

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Part III
Teaching and Assessing Speaking Skills

Videoconferencing as a Tool for Developing Speaking Skills

Barbara Loranc-Paszylk

Abstract This paper aims to explore the possibilities offered by innovative language learning, in particular such that is aided by dynamically changing technology, and focuses on videoconferencing, a mode of communication that can foster the development of speaking skills in English. Since videoconferencing allows geographical distances to be bridged, it can be used by foreign language teachers who want to overcome the problem of limited opportunities for speaking practice in the classroom by exposing students to genuine interaction in which communicative experiences can be extended. We will discuss a project that involved several experimental sessions of videoconferencing, organized as a result of international collaboration between a Polish and a Spanish university. The project primarily aimed to develop students' communicative language skills through audio and visual interaction in real time and to create a collaborative learning environment where the participants—in both cases studying for a B.A. in English—had to construct and negotiate meaning using task-based activities. Using the results of this project, as illustrated by the students' evaluation questionnaires and the teacher's observations, we aim to identify the potential benefits for language learning that might be offered by new technologies.

1 Introduction

The rapid expansion of technological tools in recent years has been transferring foreign language teaching onto a completely new level. Considering the limited opportunities both for interaction outside the classroom and for the development of learners' communicative competence, new technologies, especially new capabilities for audio and video communication that have emerged lately in educational contexts are particularly useful for successful achievement of language learning objectives.

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The present paper discusses a project that involved several experimental sessions of videoconferencing, organized as a result of international collaboration, and focuses upon the ways in which the application of new technologies can benefit the development of speaking skills among learners of English as a foreign/second language.

2 Communication and Interaction in Language Learning

It has been widely agreed that pursuing authentic communicative goals allows learners to develop communicative competence. The concept of communicative competence has itself been long discussed in literature. The prevailing model (cf. Bagarić and Djigunović 2007), first proposed by Canale and Swain (1980, 1981), was based on three main areas of knowledge and skills: *grammatical*, *sociolinguistic* and *strategic competence*, with a fourth component, *discourse competence*, added by Canale (1983, 1984) some time later. While grammatical competence is mainly concerned with mastery of the linguistic code needed for understanding and expressing the literal meanings of utterances, sociolinguistic competence involves appropriateness of language use in different sociolinguistic and sociocultural contexts. Strategic competence, on the other hand, is connected with the use of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that help learners deal successfully with any gaps in communicative competence. Finally, discourse competence, as described by Canale (1983, 1984), involves the mastery of rules that determine cohesion and coherence of both spoken and written texts. Thus, well-designed tasks need to focus on communication that provides an opportunity to use linguistic elements correctly, but also to express oneself appropriately within social contexts (Swain 2000).

Oral interaction has long been considered an important element in the field of second language acquisition, and it has been widely agreed that speaking skills develop best in an authentic situation that involves negotiation of meaning (Long 1996). However, interactional modifications that contribute to making input more comprehensible alone do not appear sufficient to focus learners on the differences between their interlanguage and target language forms and still need to be accompanied by two additional factors involved in interaction and acquisition: the learner's attention and output (Swain 1985; Schmidt 1990). The emphasis on the three elements of input, attention, and output, as expressed in Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis, means that negotiated interaction, in which corrective adjustments are made by native speakers or experts who are more competent than learners, reveals gaps in learners' interlanguage. Furthermore, it leads to the modification of their output in the L2, and thus its adaptation to the negotiated form, which facilitates acquisition.

Yet the benefits of interacting in the L2 mentioned above have mainly been shown for the traditional NS–NNS configuration (Long 1996). The way learners interact among themselves is different from the way learners and native speakers interact, which is why the model for negotiation of meaning among L2 learners described by Varonis and Gass (1985) may be perhaps more suitable for identifying and analyzing the negotiation routines in the case of the videoconferenced oral interviews

between foreign language learners. In their model for negotiation of meaning, Varonis and Gass (1985) claim that the horizontal flow of conversation is interrupted when an acknowledgement of the communication problem (the indicator) occurs following the source of non-understanding (the trigger), and it is continued until the negotiation for meaning ends, either with a positive or negative outcome. Then, the conversation is resumed and the main line of discourse is continued.

3 Videoconferencing and the Development of Speaking Skills

The term *videoconferencing* is used to describe a system where two or more participants in different locations can interact while both seeing and hearing each other in real time with the help of specialized equipment and a high-speed Internet connection (Smith 2003). As the quality of online transmission has been continually improving and the cost of computer equipment falling, videoconferencing is becoming more and more accessible nowadays, especially in the field of distance learning. There are a growing number of studies that have discussed the practices and obstacles to effective teaching and learning focusing on the educational uses of videoconferencing, both in schools and in higher education (Coventry 1998; Martin 2000; Newman et al. 2008; Lawson et al. 2010).

It is important to mention that while being situated within the e-learning context, videoconferencing significantly differs from text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC), as it allows for audiovisual channels in the interaction. As a result, videoconferencing retains key elements of the communication process, such as the reception of non-verbal signals that support the interaction, and, most importantly, the immediacy and spontaneity of response, creating time pressure on the participants to process input and provide output in real time (Lee 2007).

The audiovisual channel of communication and time pressure which entail the need for an immediate response definitely put the videoconferencing context very close to a real-life authentic situation. Such a claim seems to be supported by a recent study by Kim and Craig (2012) in which experimental tests were carried out with test-takers using face-to-face and videoconferenced oral interviews. The findings indicated no significant differences in performance between the two test modes and also provided evidence for the comparability of the videoconferenced and face-to-face interviews in terms of comfort, computer familiarity, environment, non-verbal linguistic cues, interests, speaking opportunity, and topic effects. In another study, Yanguas (2010), while examining task-based, synchronous oral computer-mediated communication (CMC) among intermediate-level learners of Spanish, found no significant differences in the way video and traditional face-to-face communication groups carried out these negotiations.

In the light of such considerations, it is hardly surprising that videoconferencing has been making an important contribution to the language learning field, especially as a means of communicating orally with expert/native speakers and as a means of

enhancing the development of learners' oral skills (McAndrew et al. 1996; O'Dowd 2000; Chapelle 2001; Wang 2006; Lee 2007; Katz 2001; Kinginger and Belz 2005; Ware and Kramsch 2005; Wiedemann 2006; Guichon, 2010; Bower and Kawaguchi 2011; Kim and Craig 2012).

There are a number of scholars linking videoconferenced interactions that aim at fostering foreign language speaking skills with issues of self-confidence, anxiety and communication apprehension. For example, Kinginger (1998) analyzed classroom interactions taking place between language learners in the US and France via international videoconferencing. The research project aimed at identifying the morphosyntactic and discourse difficulties experienced by American second language learners interacting with native speakers of French. She found that much of the language use that took place during the conference was beyond these learners' capabilities, due in part to heightened language classroom anxiety, and in part to differences between the variety of French learned in American schools and the French spoken by educated native speakers. In a particularly useful study, Phillips (2010) investigated the development of L2 oral production among young learners and her findings suggest that pupils of both lower and higher abilities tended to see videoconferencing as helpful in learning to speak French; good students were highly motivated by their videoconferencing participation and lower ability students benefitted with increased confidence in speaking.

Unlike most of the studies on videoconferencing and language learning (including those mentioned above) that focused on interactive contexts with native speakers or expert speakers, this article aims to discuss the role of videoconferencing in fostering the development of oral production in English among native speakers of Polish and Spanish, in both cases learners of English as a foreign language.

4 Description of the Research Project

This small scale study attempts to contribute to our understanding of how videoconferencing can be used as a tool for teaching speaking in a foreign language. Yet, from the very outset, we need to be aware of its limitations, as the sessions were not recorded, and thus measuring such components of successful language performance as complexity, fluency and accuracy (Skehan 2009) was not possible. The results of the study will be discussed on the basis of the questionnaires completed by the Polish participants at the end of the project.

4.1 The Context and Objectives of the Project

The project took place from May to June 2011 at University of Bielsko-Biała in Poland. At this point, it is important to mention that it was designed and organized in collaboration with Professor Veronica Colwell from the University of León, and formed part of a series of similar projects carried out between the two institutions

since March 2011 (cf. Loranc-Paszylk 2011). All the participants were students reading for a B.A. in English.

The main aim of this project was to allow the students the opportunity to develop their speaking skills in English by preparing for and participating in a series of interactions in the form of job interviews via videoconferencing. As a result, we decided to work within the framework of task-based instruction, as it involves learners' active participation in sharing and exchanging information through problem-solving situations and triggers meaningful use of the target language (Willis 1996). Consequently also the use of new technologies (e.g. videoconferencing) was meant to expand students' communicative experience, as they do not live in a cosmopolitan area or one particularly frequented by tourists and thus have few opportunities to interact in English with foreigners, let alone native speakers of English.

It is also important to mention that our project was based on a genre of a job interview. Genre was defined as a macro level concept, a communicative act within a discursive network; it deals with repertoires of typified social responses in recurrent situations (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995). For the task-based activity of focusing on a job interview it involves a set interactional pattern with typical questions and predictable stages to be expected by the interlocutors.

Being placed within the context of the videoconferencing project, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent will the videoconferencing task contribute to the learners' self-confidence as regards speaking skills relevant to the job interview genre?
2. To what extent will the videoconferencing experience enhance the participants' awareness of gaps in their interlanguage during negotiations of meaning?

4.2 The Participants

The group of 24 Polish students from University of Bielsko-Biała took part in the project. They were all completing their second semester of a BA English degree, all between 19 and 20 years old, and residing in the Bielsko-Biała region. Their English language competence could be described as ranging between B1 and B2, according to the *Common European framework of reference for languages*. Based on a pretreatment background questionnaire, we found that 3 participants admitted that they had not yet had any opportunity to communicate with a foreigner in English, and another 7 students described their real-life interaction with foreigners as very occasional and involving an exchange of basic information. The selection of the Polish participants was not random since they were asked to join the project as a part of their course requirement.

The group of 9 B.A. students from the University of León in Spain was comparable with respect to the profile of their studies and average age, although their language level was perhaps more differentiated: generally between B1 and C1.

They were all 2nd year students in their 4th semester of a B.A. English degree, 20–21 years old. There was 1 Erasmus student from France and 8 Spanish students who were all the residents of the local area. Two of the participants from the University of León voluntarily took part in the project for the second time, having worked in its first edition.

4.3 The Procedure

In this section, we present a short description of the project with particular attention paid to the description of stages that make up the task-based activity.

As part of the project requirement, the students completed two desktop videoconferencing assignments in the language lab, where one room was equipped with desktop videoconferencing capabilities. The videoconferencing sessions were conducted in a language lab equipped with the Polycom® HDX 7000™ videoconferencing system. The equipment allowed for image transmission at a resolution of 1,280 × 720 and a speed of 30 frames/s, (720 p). The quality of the transmission was superb: HD voice, HD video and HD content. The device established the Internet connection directly, by dialing to other endpoints (IP address).

Like in the first edition of the project (Loranc-Paszylk 2011), the students had to perform the tasks both as members of a recruiting team and as individual candidates for particular jobs. This way of organizing the assignments aimed to exploit the full potential of the videoconferencing sessions and to maximize the learning experience. The project consisted of a number of steps described below.

Step 1: Preparing job advertisements Students from both universities were organized into small teams consisting of 4 or 5 participants and each group was responsible for designing one job advertisement for the local job market that would be suitable for a student applicant from Spain or Poland respectively. The 5 job advertisements were subsequently sent via e-mail to the other station, and job advertisements were received in turn from Spain or Poland.

Step 2: Preparing for the job interviews This stage involved both written and oral tasks, as well as individual and group work. First, we will discuss the individual assignments linked with the students' roles as applicants and then we will describe the group work tasks based on the students' roles as members of the recruiting teams.

- The Polish students as individual applicants had to apply for two job offers selected freely from the ones sent from Spain. A session devoted to an analysis of CVs and covering letters was carried out in class and, after training, the students were instructed to write and send via e-mail their application packs including both documents. Further to this, the students took part in a few sessions based on listening to several podcasts and recordings of authentic job interviews carried out in English. The recordings were also available for extensive listening out of class on the Moodle platform. The listening sessions were followed up by a

discussion aimed at identifying the typical stages of a job interview, and also enumerating typical questions asked and appropriate answers. As a final task at this stage of the project, the students were asked to prepare individually a written scenario for their own job interviews in the roles of candidates.

- The teams—authors of a given job offer—collected the applications sent by the Spanish students and selected suitable candidates whom they would invite for an interview based on the applications received. Further to this, they had to prepare questions for the candidates and establish assessment criteria for speaking in English. All groups had to prepare their own criteria which were later presented in class, discussed and revised, until one final version of the assessment criteria framework was agreed upon by all the teams.

Step 3: The job interviews At the most important stage of the project, the students were again working both in groups and individually. As individual candidates, they had to participate in at least one job interview led by the team from the partner university via videoconferencing. The time allowed for each interview was 10–13 min. As members of the recruiting team, the students had to conduct a few job interviews via videoconferencing, then evaluate and conduct an internal review of the candidates, select the most successful ones and, finally, notify the candidates about the outcomes of the recruiting process via e-mail.

Finally, at the last stage of the project, we asked the Polish participants to fill in an anonymous evaluation questionnaire that consisted of eight 4-point scale close-ended questions and two open-ended questions. The analysis of these responses provide insights into the participants' experience from a first-person, retrospective point of view, and most of all, allows us to answer the research questions posed in the previous section.

5 Results of the Research Project

Tables 1, 2 and 3 provide a summary of the responses to the close-ended questions (Q1–Q8) with the mean, standard deviation and the mode for each question, and the participants' responses to the open-ended questions (Q9 and Q10).

Table 1 presents a summary of responses to the close-ended questions (Q1–Q4), with the participants responding on scale of 1–4 (1—"strongly disagree" and 4—"strongly agree"). The results obtained suggest that the videoconferencing sessions contributed to building up the participants' self-confidence with regard to the pragmatic competence in English. Most of them admitted that after the videoconferencing experience they would describe their communication skills in English as sufficient to take part in a job interview in this language (Q1, with the mean of 2.92 and the mode of 3).

Furthermore, the videoconferencing sessions with the Spanish students apparently acted as a strong stimulus for speaking, as the majority of the students agreed that they were more motivated to speak in this new context than during a standard

Table 1 Results for close-ended questionnaire items (Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4)

N (24)	Mean	Standard deviation	Mode
Q1. Thanks to the videoconferencing project my communication skills in English are sufficient to take part in a job interview	2.92	0.84	3
Q2. Students are more motivated to speak during videoconferencing than during standard classes	3.42	0.76	3
Q3. The videoconferencing session made me realize that I should improve my speaking skills	3.86	0.43	4
Q4. The videoconferencing session made me realize that I should improve my vocabulary and grammar	3.61	0.52	4

Table 2 Results for close-ended questionnaire items (Q5, Q2, Q3 and Q4) rating the VC experience in terms of learning gains

N (24)	Mean	Standard deviation	Mode
Q5. Evaluating somebody's speaking performance in English	3.23	0.47	3
Q6. Anticipating and answering questions asked by job interviewers	2.96	0.84	3
Q7. Self-presenting—talking about my strengths and weaknesses	3.17	0.71	3
Q8. Interaction/conversation management: sustaining conversation, asking questions as interviewers	2.65	0.87	3

conversation class (Q2, with the mean of 3.42 and the mode of 3). The answers to the next questions strongly suggest that interaction with the Spanish learners enabled the Polish students to notice the gaps in their interlanguage. The participants almost unanimously admitted that the sessions made them realize that both their speaking skills as well as vocabulary and grammar were not on the satisfactory level and needed to be improved. The results also show that there was little individual variation in the responses to Q1, Q2, Q3, or Q4 as the SD value is low and never exceeds 1.

Table 2 shows the responses to further close-ended questions (Q5–Q8); at this point, the participants were asked to rate the videoconferencing experience in terms of learning gains on a scale of 1–4 with (1—"very little" and 4—"definitely a lot"). The findings demonstrate that in the participants' opinion the videoconferencing sessions were quite effective with respect to several learning gains, such as, most of all, applying some assessment criteria to speaking performance (the mean of 3.23), anticipating the recruiter's questions, self-presenting and conversation management.

Finally, some dominating tendencies in answers provided to the open-ended questions (Q9 and Q10) are summarized in Table 3, selected responses have been included as examples. Those answers seem to confirm the overall positive findings

Table 3 Summary of the responses to the open-ended questions (Q9 and Q10)

N (24)	Dominating tendencies	Other interesting comments
Q9. Please enumerate two the most valuable aspects of the videoconferencing project	1. Practicing speaking English with foreigners or foreign language learners with different accent 20 answers (83 %)	"I had a chance to see how it is when you have a job interview"
	2. Developing communication skills and preparation for a real job interview)—16 answers (67 %)	"It was valuable to listen to Spanish people's accent and get to know how they speak English"
	3. Critical reflection concerning language level; noticing gaps in one's interlanguage—8 answers (33 %)	"Face-to-face contacts which allowed training English on the new level. I makes our self-confidence grow"
		"I know what I should improve now"
Q10. Please enumerate two the most difficult aspects of the videoconferencing project	1. Stress largely limiting the performance—24 answers (100 %)	"One of the most difficult aspects was stress because of which I couldn't present myself in a calm way—too many people were watching me!"
	2. Understanding different accent of interlocutors—16 answers (67 %)	
	3. Time pressure in providing response to questions—8 answers (33 %)	"Once or twice I didn't understand what the Spanish people were saying to me, so I think that I should practice more and improve my listening and speaking skills"
		"It was difficult to speak face to face"

obtained in the previous sections of the questionnaire. The responses to Q9 show that the vast majority of the participants (83 %) valued the most the opportunity to interact in real time with foreigners in English. The development of pragmatic competence with respect to the job interview context was also frequently mentioned (67 % of the participants indicated such an advantage). The number of participants reflecting critically on their own individual language level is definitely worth signaling, and although we did not investigate individual learner differences, the fact that 33 % of the participants admitted that they had noticed gaps in their interlanguage might be quite significant.

In their responses to Q10, all the students mentioned stress as a factor that largely limited their performance; some of them even described such stress as resulting from the act of 'speaking face-to-face'. Difficulty in understanding a different accent of the interlocutors came as a second most difficult aspect of the interviews. Fewer answers (33 %) indicated the time pressure involved in answering the interlocutors' questions as another significant difficulty.

The findings suggest that the answer to the first research question—"To what extent will the videoconferencing task contribute to learners' self-confidence as

regards speaking skills relevant to the job interview genre?"—seems to be affirmative. The results reported in Tables 1 and 3 suggest that the videoconferencing sessions contributed to building up the participants' self-confidence with regard to their pragmatic competence in English. The most frequent response to the statement: "Thanks to the videoconferencing project my communication skills in English are sufficient to take part in a job interview" was "I agree" (the mode of 3). The development of such subskills as anticipating and answering questions asked by job interviewers, self-presenting—talking about one's strengths and weaknesses, interaction/conversation management—sustaining conversation, or asking questions as interviewers was also reported by the participants (see Table 2). Moreover, 67 % of the Polish students indicated the development of communication skills and preparation for a real job interview as one of the two most valuable aspects of the project. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the marked tendency present in a considerable number of answers to the open-ended Q10 (see Table 3). It should be emphasized that all of the participants pointed to speaking anxiety and signaled the role of stress as the most difficult aspect of the videoconferencing project. While it seems rather clear that the videoconferencing task contributed to boosting the learners' self-confidence as regards the speaking skills relevant to genre of job interviews, we may assume that stress, as a major obstacle in the videoconferenced interactions, possibly resulted in lowering their individual performances.

The second research question—"To what extent will the videoconferencing experience enhance participants' awareness of gaps in their interlanguage during negotiations of meaning"—can also be answered in the affirmative. The participants most frequently marked the answer "I strongly agree" when responding to the following statement: "The videoconferencing session made me realize that I should improve my speaking skills/vocabulary and grammar" (see Table 1). It is also worth noting that 33 % of the Polish students considered the enhanced awareness of gaps in their interlanguage as a valuable aspect of the videoconferencing project (see Table 3, Q9).

The results obtained by means of the questionnaire also suggest that the participants seemed to consider the whole activity as highly authentic and close to a real-life situation. They generally agreed with the statement that students are more motivated to speak during videoconferencing than during standard classes (see Table 1). As a matter of fact, the visual contact allowed by the videoconferencing mode added a lot of authenticity to the whole recruitment process—the Polish participants often referred to the interactions with the Spanish interlocutors as 'face-to-face' (see Table 3), the students interviewed as candidates were stressed out because of being watched and evaluated by the whole recruiting team, and the students performing as recruiters could also assess the candidate's body language. This might confirm the findings of Kim and Craig (2012) or Yanguas (2010) that suggested no significant differences between face-to-face and videoconferenced performances.

On the other hand, in the light of findings reported by Fuller et al. (2006), it appears that a particular set of individual characteristics, such as anxiety associated with computers and apprehension of oral and written communication, can influence learning in a technology-mediated environment and they are influential factors in an

individual's e-learning experience. Such claims may shed some interesting light on the results of the questionnaires completed by the participants who pointed to stress as the most difficult aspect of the videoconferencing experience.

The project might also be summed up by applying the evaluation criteria for videoconferencing-based tasks, as suggested by Wang (2007, p. 593) who modified the measures for *CALL task appropriateness*, formulated earlier by Chapelle (2001). On the basis of the data collected by means of the evaluation questionnaire completed by the participants, the teacher's personal observations and the post-session informal interviews we might suggest that the results of our project have met Wang's evaluation criteria to a large extent.

First, the *practicality* of the videoconferencing tools to support task completion was achieved. Both the video and audio quality during the sessions were excellent and allowed task completion without any breakdowns in communication. All the participants were very positive about the technological capabilities of the videoconferencing system.

The second criterion, *language-learning potential*, was met successfully, especially from the perspective of the development of communicative competence. The tasks involved in preparing for the interview which were based on text-analysis and subsequently evaluating speaking performance made the participants focus on several linguistic forms, whereas performing such oral activities as self-presentation, answering questions asked by job interviewers, and overall conversation management were more focused on meaning and contributed to the development of strategic and discourse competence. As indicated in the answers to the open-ended questions, the participants highly valued the project for allowing them the opportunity to develop communication skills relevant to the context of a job interview, to experience being a candidate/recruiter in a job interview, and to interact with foreigners in English, which might have a positive effect on the level of their sociolinguistic or pragmatic competence.

The tasks were of moderate difficulty, thus fulfilling the *learner fit* criterion. We noted correspondence between the level of the difficulty of the tasks and the level of proficiency of the learners from both Polish and Spanish groups. Moreover, as mentioned above, the participants from both groups had a comparable level of proficiency in English.

As for the fourth criterion, *authenticity*, described as correspondence between the videoconferencing activities and target language activities of interest to learners outside the classroom, the results were also positive. Practicing job interviews was an advantage of the project, as it focused on developing skills useful in the real world. Another important aspect constituting the authenticity of the project was interaction with foreigners in English. The combination of interlocutors involved in the project will surely have given the participants the opportunity to become exposed to and familiarize themselves with English spoken with a foreign accent. Greater sensitivity to diversified accents in English seems to be a must in today's world of differing *Englishes*.

Finally, the fulfillment of the last criterion, *the positive effects of the videoconferencing tasks on the participants*, can be well illustrated by the participants'

comments concerning enhanced self-confidence and increased motivation in learning English thanks to direct contact with foreign students. As we can see from the participants' rating of their learning gains, they commented almost unanimously that the project was a positive learning experience. They also valued the fact that it was a peer-to-peer international project that had provided them with a unique opportunity to interact with peers from a different country who had chosen the same program of study.

It should be noted at this point that the results reported above correlate with the findings of the study which focused on the Spanish participants, undertaken by Colwell O'Callaghan (2012). They suggest that an approach that employs videoconferencing, involves spoken interaction, and at the same time addresses learners' perceptions of their own and others' strengths, weaknesses and coping strategies is highly valued and genuinely motivating for learners.

6 Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that videoconferencing can offer a great potential for learning. The following discussion highlights the aspects that may have affected the participants' performance, as well as tendencies that were reflected in the evaluation questionnaire.

The interactions conducted via videoconferencing were based on a series of job interviews. In Bygate's (1987) functional analysis of speaking, the genre of job interview could be classified as an example of an *interaction routine*, or a predictable pattern of interaction. Therefore, explicit instructions as well as focus on spoken samples of job interviews were an essential element of pre-task training (Bygate and Samuda 2005). We may also assume that predictability of the interactions may have affected the level of participants' self-confidence.

Furthermore, we believe that another possible reason for the effectiveness of this project would be appropriate task design that allowed learners to pay more attention to the selection and monitoring of appropriate language. As Takimoto (2007) claims, the development of L2 pragmatic proficiency can be influenced by manipulating input. In our project, the students had many opportunities to manipulate source materials (via comparing, contrasting, evaluating, creating, see Bloom 1977), which might have contributed to noticing gaps in their interlanguage as well as better retention of the material.

An important principle taken into consideration when designing the task was adopting a register-sensitive approach advocated by Rühlemann (2008). In his view, when teaching the spoken language educators should aim at bringing classroom English into closer correspondence with the language actually spoken. That is why, we decided to provide the participants with a wide choice of listening exercises for self study to expose them to *spoken,* rather than written samples of language typical for the context of a job interview (mainly podcasts of different job interviews).

Finally, it has been reported that when students prepare their projects for videoconferencing, close collaboration among participants, interactivity and a brisk pace of delivery strategies all increase their motivation to learn and to perform well (Martin 2005; Lee 2007). The analysis of the questionnaire responses clearly confirm the occurrence of these benefits.

7 Conclusions and Implications

While considering careful task design to be an essential element of a videoconferencing project (Lee 2007), we might expand the language learning potential into further specification with the following recommendations for videoconferencing sessions focused on developing speaking skills among L2 learners:

- applying strategies that would aim at lowering anxiety and communication apprehension among the participants, for example: exposing the students to a different accent of the interlocutors prior to the actual videoconferencing might have an advantageous influence on speaking performance;
- providing a model of spoken language for the participants of the videoconference; such exposure might be of vital importance, especially when we lack the immediate feedback of expert speakers or native speakers in the interaction (i.e. the interlocutors are not expert speakers of the target language); furthermore, applying a register approach might be an advantage;
- creating a stimulating context for videoconferences—the profile of interlocutors might perhaps be a factor contributing to the effectiveness of the videoconferenced interaction; as was mentioned before, the Polish participants highly valued the fact that they had a unique chance to interact with their peers from Spain who were also studying English, which might have significantly enhanced the participants' level of motivation.

As a matter of fact, videoconferencing offers many of the advantages of the traditional face-to-face mode plus the advantages derived from the use of technological applications, allowing large distances to be bridged. It would thus seem logical that videoconferencing should be implemented successfully in language education, as it creates opportunities for foreign language teachers to gain access to new arrangements allowing for more authentic communication than is available in the traditional classroom interaction.

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Using Storybooks as a Catalyst for Negotiating Meaning and Enhancing Speaking Among Very Young Learners of L2: Evidence from a Case Study

Joanna Rokita-Jaśkow

Abstract It is a well known fact that oral production of very young learners of L2 in an instructed setting is very limited, and that most of the L2 teaching tends to favor comprehension over production. Unlike naturalistic learners, instructed ones lack an authentic need to communicate, which would motivate them to use L2 and stimulate their speaking skills. On the other hand, as proponents of the Output Hypothesis claim (e.g. Swain 1985, 2000), we cannot let very young instructed learners, who often start learning L2 early (ca. 3 years of age), remain silent endlessly as it is only from oral production that we can see how much language they have actually acquired. There are, of course, additional benefits of oral production, such as mastering L2 pronunciation and better retention of words. The article argues that very young learners' oral skills can be enhanced if authenticity of meaning is provided. This can be generated by reading meaningful stories to children and letting them identify with storybook characters. With this idea in mind, the author conducted a case study in which two very young learners (aged 2;5 and 4;10) were taught L2 English by means of authentic children's storybooks which constituted a catalyst for further language activities and the enhancement of speaking. The results of the study show that authentic storybook reading leads to successful vocabulary acquisition, as well as spontaneous oral performance, albeit limited to single words and formulaic chunks. Thus it is argued that story-based syllabuses should be introduced in teaching L2 to very young learners as they provide meaningful and memorable input for acquisition.

1 Introduction

The expectation that very young instructed learners (i.e. pre-school children, younger than 6 years of age) will start to speak in L2 may, at first glance, seem to be unrealistic and unjustified. Indeed, such young children are capable of saying very

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few things as their production is limited to single words and simple sentences. This is partly due to the limitations of their memory, which is mechanical, and does not enable children to internalize new rules consciously, which would otherwise lead to creative language use (Moon 2000; Cameron 2001). Also, the very capacity of short-term memory is limited (a 3-year-old child has a capacity of 3, a 5-year-old child has a capacity of 5), which does not allow children to repeat more than 3–5 words at a time (Jagodzińska 2003, p. 70). Indeed, as it was found in the author's previous research project (cf. Rokita 2007), a very young learner's communicative language use is limited to object labeling, recreating class activities or games, formulaic expressions, or incorporating L2 items (sometimes with grammatical/phonological adjustment) into L1 utterances. Creative language use, which would indicate the assimilation of language rules, is extremely rare.

It must be remembered that such young children (especially below the age of 4) may still be acquiring their mother tongue (Gleason and Ratner 1998). Yet, the prospective goal of reaching communicative competence in L2 seems to be one of the major arguments for enrolling very young children in L2 instruction. Early L2 instruction should be a pathway to reaching successful mastery of L2 speaking skills. It is therefore argued that even such young L2 learners should be encouraged to engage in oral production, which will constitute a stepping stone to future fluent command of the target language.

2 Storybooks in Children's Lives: Is Transfer of Training from L1 to L2 Possible?

There are countless benefits of storybook reading for children's linguistic, cognitive and emotional development. In the case of pre-school children, it is first and foremost the child's home environment that plays a role in the development of the child's emergent literacy skills, as well as general interest and motivation to read in the future. The home literacy environment has been described as having a multi-faceted character, and thus comprising such elements as frequency of joint parent-child reading experiences, parental reading and television viewing habits, library use, magazine subscription, as well as parental literacy beliefs (Weigel et al. 2006, p. 358).

Parental beliefs about literacy, in turn, impact the quantity and quality of reading experiences they offer to the child. (i.e. types of books chosen, the style of reading, etc.). While reading a story from a storybook, a parent has an opportunity to teach some language forms to his child by actually pointing to selected items and labeling them. Indeed, the very activity of joint parent–child book reading lends itself to an effective scaffolding of meaning. The term *scaffolding* was introduced by Bruner (1983) and refers to the supportive talk offered to the child that helps him to carry out the activity. In the task of book comprehension, for example, parental scaffolding would denote techniques which illustrate word meaning as pointing to

pictures, paraphrasing, giving examples, imitating character/object sounds, as well as asking questions aimed at checking comprehension.

The benefits of home literacy experiences, especially of pre-kindergarten children, find their manifestation in children's further verbal and literacy achievement in kindergarten and school. Those children who are read to seem to surpass other children in letter recognition speed, vocabulary recognition, and even mathematic skills (Griffin and Morrison 1997, cited in Weigel et al. 2006, p. 358). A strong correlation has been found between the amount of parental literacy teaching (such as naming letters and name writing) and children's subsequent abilities in letter-word identification, single-word reading and spelling rates, phonological awareness, such as rhyme detection and phonological deletion (Hood et al. 2008, p. 265). A similar relationship was found between parent-child reading and wide vocabulary knowledge. Yet, in order to contribute to successful vocabulary acquisition, parent-child book reading should be accompanied by careful scaffolding of book meaning. Blewitt et al. (2009, p. 294) argue that asking questions about target words improves children's comprehension of those words, as an instance of a scaffolding strategy. Additionally, they suggested that it is an effective strategy when parents vary their questions according to the difficulty of a memorization task, i.e. they should ask low demanding questions in reference to words appearing first, and high demanding questions later (such as call for translation), and finally even asking children to retell the story.

Most of the studies on the benefits of reading relate to the process in the mother tongue. However, their findings have been found equally relevant to second language acquisition, thus suggesting that it is possible to transfer skills and strategies acquired in L1 to L2 acquisition. For example, Huennekens and Xu (2010) present a case study of two preschool children (below 5 years of age) of Spanish origin whose verbal ability in L2 English increased considerably as a result of the suggested intervention, i.e. reading assigned books by parents in their mother tongue (Spanish) along with the introduction of the same books in English instruction in kindergarten. It was argued that home reading can give children more confidence in participating in class-based literacy activities, as they know what the text is about. These are usually educational activities that nonnative children are unwilling to take part in, possibly due to their lack of comprehension. Parents involved in the study were asked to read a Spanish version of the books assigned to their children every day for 20 min, 5 times a week. Additionally, they received training in dialogic reading, so as to enhance their story reading abilities (the questioning techniques, pace, fluency, etc.), and subsequently arouse children's curiosity, as it was recognized that the way parents read the text and scaffold meaning has an enormous impact on the child's text comprehension.

Word comprehension strategies acquired early in life seem to be operating and transferrable even many years later, when a child starts to learn a second language. An interesting instance of such a behavior was found in a study by Sparks et al. (2008), who investigated early foreign language skills among adolescents. The researchers observed that adolescent learners used the same skills in learning their second language as they used many years earlier when they learnt to read and spell

in L1. The subjects were first tested on their first language skills in grade 1, and 10 years later on their L2 skills. The authors claim that L1 skills are the best and relevant predictors for L2 skills. Therefore, the best predictor of L2 reading (word decoding and comprehension) were measures of L1 reading comprehension (including word decoding). A similar connection was found between L2 spelling and L1 spelling and phonological ability, as well as L2 word decoding and L1 word decoding measures. The results of this study may be yet another important argument for the early exposure of children to reading texts since its benefits extend not only to later academic achievement of the child, but also to later second/foreign language learning.

All the aforementioned studies emphasize the important role of reading in, among other benefits, enriching the child's lexicon. It is vocabulary knowledge that a child builds on in subsequent language acquisition. It may be argued that words, phrases or even whole sentences acquired in the meaningful context of stories are much more memorable and can lead to long-standing acquisition, possibly even leading to creative language use.

The results of the study also show that a cross-linguistic transfer is possible even after many years of L1 literacy development. Therefore, it seems to be even more likely that a similar transfer of training should take place in early L2 acquisition. It can be assumed that once very young children have developed interest in books, actively listen to stories they are read and seem to acquire some words/phrases from the stories (evident in children's pretend play), then authentic book reading can be an effective method of teaching a second language to them.

When it comes to using storybooks in reference to second language learning, Lugossy (2007) reports on a Hungarian reading project conducted among children aged between 7 and 10, in which storybooks were used as a supplementary material both during class time and at home. The results of this research project showed that the introduction of authentic storybooks had a positive impact on motivation and attitudes towards learning L2, which revealed itself in children's willingness to take borrowed books home as well as to look forward to the following classes. What is more, storybook use had a positive influence on children's siblings through increased home reading as well as on other subject teachers, who were also willing to implement storybook reading in their classes. Such a response apparently was caused by the fact that the experience of reading books other than coursebooks seemed to be more real and authentic.

As for linguistic outcomes, Lugossy (2007) found that children acquire a lot of new words and structures from the text, even after a while, thanks to the memorable linguistic and visual contexts the words appeared in. The author also pointed to a few other noteworthy observations, namely that the activities of in-class reading and sharing books had a positive influence on classroom dynamics (mutual book sharing and conversations) and arousing the interest of boys, normally not so engaged in linguistic activities. It is also argued that reading stories in class provides equal opportunities in further academic achievement—because books are not read in every home, this early instructed experience aids the development of literacy skills.

3 Using Authentic L2 Storybooks for Scaffolding of Meaning and Oral Development

Numerous early foreign language programs seem to focus, first and foremost, on the comprehension of a new language. Language teaching appeals to children's mechanical memory, and thus instruction relies on the repetition of single words and chunks. Language practice is conducted through choral repetition, singing songs and TPR games (Cameron 2001). As a result, teaching young learners seems to resemble PP(P) format: first some new words/simple structures are presented (with flashcards, objects, etc.), which are later reinforced by means of drills and imitation of actions. In classroom interactions, children are usually recipients of information and hardly ever have a chance to voice their own interests or initiate interaction. Such instruction clearly lacks authenticity and it is an authentic desire to communicate with other members of the speech community that motivates learners to speak in a second language in naturalistic situations by activating cognitive abilities in order to do so (Wong-Fillmore 1979).

Language which is acquired in such a way, i.e. via rote learning, does not lead to long-standing acquisition. Back in 1978, Krashen and Scarcella (1978, p. 284) indicated the superiority of meaningfully acquired language over language memorized mechanically. More recently, Niżegorodcew (2009, p. 127) pointed to the fact that children seem to bring out hardly any knowledge from language classes. This lack of apparent production might denote two phenomena: first, either class instruction is ineffective, as indeed it varies considerably from teacher to teacher and from institution to institution, and uniform standards of teaching very young learners are still lacking, or, secondly, as Gibbons (1985) pointed out in his article, a persisting 'silent period' may denote lack of comprehension. If this is so, some intervention should be undertaken, such as, for example, translating into the child's mother tongue. In addition, a child should be inclined to produce any L2 forms as it is only from a learner's production that one can see how much language has been acquired.

A similar assumption has been made with reference to the Output Hypothesis (Swain 1985), which, although formulated firstly for older adolescent learners, could apply to child learners as well. The most important tenet of the hypothesis is that learners should be forced by the teacher to produce language that may be even beyond the current linguistic level of a learner as it is only then that the learner can find out what he already knows and what capacities are still lacking. Therefore the output, i.e. the language produced by the learner, may play a more significant role than just the input, i.e. the language received by the learner. According to Swain (2000, p. 99), "the output pushes learners to process language more deeply—with more mental effort—than does the input". It stimulates learners from the semantic, open-ended production of language to more complete grammatically accurate production. The teacher's role is to stimulate the learner, by appropriately asking challenging questions, to move beyond the current linguistic level. Learners, while trying to produce the target language, should exercise their creativity in producing

new language forms and phrases to meet the communicative demands of the task. Producing the output promotes *noticing*, and it is clear that a language form has to be first noticed in order to be acquired (Ellis 1994). By the same token, L2 teaching to very young learners should not be limited to mere comprehension and performance of the teacher's orders. The child should be encouraged to produce some L2 forms. However, mere repetition does not seem to be most meaningful and memorable. In addition, while producing L2, children enhance active memory of new words and reinforce their pronunciation, which is yet another argument for encouraging children to speak in L2.

It is evident from the above discussion that in order to encourage learners to speak in L2, a communicative goal and authenticity of meaning should be provided. Yet, this goal seems to be unattainable in an instructional setting, particularly in the case of very young learners who have infrequent contact with L2 and do not realize the usefulness of knowing a foreign language. In such a case, one should ponder what constitutes an authentic experience for the child. From the psychological and pedagogical literature on child development (e.g. Schaffer 2004) it is known that children love pretend play, acting out cartoon or storybook characters. They like putting on costumes and masks, which allows them to assume a different identity. Thus, it can be argued that a fantasy world constitutes an authentic reality for the child. This capacity can be explored in second language learning as the desire to communicate with other pretend characters can stimulate the child to produce L2 utterances. While speaking a foreign language to another Polish child or a teacher does not seem to be authentic, speaking to a disguised character in a new linguistic code may turn out to be so.

Stories have the capacity to provoke such pretend play as children react to their content with liveliness. They seem to experience the same emotions as story characters. They impatiently wait for the continuation of the story and they interrupt the reader with instant questions. Subsequently, in free play, they initiate acting out story parts themselves. In early foreign language pedagogy, storybooks are used; however they are usually applied in order to reinforce the language previously presented (Cameron 2001, p. 159). By the same token, the activity of acting out story characters is known as *drama*; yet it consists in rote memorization of text lines. In this paper, it is intended to argue that storybooks can be used for successful, although limited, L2 acquisition in which it is the child who decides which language is relevant to his or her needs and experience, and which s/he wants to use. Therefore, such self-initiated production can be assumed to mark true and long-standing L2 acquisition.

Storybooks can have various formats. They range from those for the youngest infants, in which just a few words or sentences are accompanied by colorful illustrations to elaborate, to lengthy fairy tales written in prose. Storybooks can also contain poems written specifically for children. This type of storybook is appreciated by children the most as the language is often rhythmical, rhyming, repetitive, and contains onomatopoeic expressions and alliteration. The vocabulary is concrete, easy to understand from the accompanying pictures, and the topics of the books usually appeal to the interests of children, i.e. animals (wild and domestic),

vehicles (trains), food, other animate creatures (dinosaurs, monsters, etc.), daily activities (sleeping, eating), and adventure (going on a trip or a picnic, being a detective). Additionally, authentic English books usually have an attractive layout and contain elements that allow children to get hands-on experience of the book, such as flaps to lift, pieces of material to touch, etc. (Cameron 2001).

When aiming to develop a child's L2 oral skills, two important criteria proposed by Cameron (2001, p. 36) must be taken into account: "meaning must come first" and "children must both observe and participate in the discourse". These principles can find practical realization in storybook reading, because, in order to acquire any language from a story, children must understand its content. Therefore, careful explanation of key words and even translation/summarizing the content in the mother tongue should be allowed. In addition, children should not only hear the text but also have a chance to try out the newly acquired language, for which pretend play seems to be the best solution.

Despite hopes for promoting in very young learners more creative and communicative language use, it should be acknowledged that a lot of learning, including language learning, takes place by observation and imitation of others, as was proposed in Social Learning Theory, put forward by Bandura (1977). Imitation is the simplest form of learning any skill, as often there can be no meaning attached to it. This also means that in language learning children can imitate words of an interlocutor without fully understanding their meaning, which may result in production without comprehension. Very young learners can particularly find it easy to recall words if the testing situation resembles the one in which the new words were encoded. This phenomenon, referred to as *transfer-appropriate processing*, was described by Morris et al. (1977). In an experimental study in which they asked participants to identify rhyming words, they observed that they found it easier to perform this task if the words were rhyming with those presented in the encoding task, thus similar processing between the two activities took place. In other words, similarity of the encoding and recall processing tasks facilitates performance in the latter. The authors argued that this type of memorization task may be equivalent to rehearsal and does not stand for deep and long-term memorization.

4 The Case Study

4.1 The Aims

The goal of the study was to investigate to what extent the experience of reading L2 authentic storybooks can lead to the acquisition of L2 by two very young learners, in the absence of any other form of instruction. More precisely the research questions were as follows:

1. How many lexical items can children produce in elicited L2 production tasks (upon a picture-cue, a phrase-cue and a call for translation)?

2. What sort of linguistic items are the children able to use spontaneously? In what situations do they use them?
3. What are the differences in word production between the older and the younger child?

4.2 The Subjects

The subjects of the present study were two siblings, very young learners of English as a second language, who were 2;6 and 4;10, respectively, at the beginning of the study. Both of them had a fluent command of their mother tongue, yet when it comes to the knowledge of English, the younger brother had no prior experience of the English language. The older had had course instruction twice a week at kindergarten for 4 months before the study. The mother of the children, and at the same time the author of the paper, is an English teacher, and has sufficient knowledge and experience in dialogic book reading, which probably affected the children's interest, participation and level of comprehension.

4.3 The Study Method and the Procedure

A case study is an approved method of investigating early child language development, both in first and bilingual language acquisition, particularly in the case of longitudinal observation. It must be pointed out that although the results often cannot be generalized, they do give insight into common processes that take place in many other subjects in similar situations, apparent through close scrutiny of the individuals. Secondly, it is difficult to obtain large amounts of quantitative data from children due to the small number of such young learners participating in very early L2 learning, the large differentiation in second language programs, and problems involved in eliciting the data. A longitudinal case study, particularly if it is conducted by a person familiar to the children, has the additional advantage of maintaining regular contact with the subjects, thus enabling obtaining more data from frequent observation, which is nevertheless scarce in comparison to naturalistic bilinguals. Moreover, the close bond between the subjects and the researcher allows the researcher to elicit more answers in any quantitative measurement.

It was decided to venture into the study upon observing how the two children in question willingly listened to storybook reading in their mother tongue, and how it inspired them to initiate their own games in which they acted out story characters, using the character words as their own. Additionally, it was observed how storybook language fostered the development of L1 of the younger child. By listening to books dedicated to the older brother, in which the language was much beyond the younger child's comprehension ability, he managed to acquire some context-embedded

expressions. Indeed, one of his first sentences in L1 at 2;0 was "Idziemy moczyć len" (English: "We are going to soak flax".).

The study lasted from January till May 2011, i.e. 4 months. During each period the children were regularly (every day, or at times, every other day) read books in English. A new book was introduced every 2/3 weeks (cf. Appendix). The books which were introduced earlier continued to be read along with the subsequently introduced ones, usually on the children's request. The first time a book was read, its content was explained by means of translation/switching to L1 as well as pointing to pictures and using gesture to make sure the children understand the content. Referring to the mother tongue was necessary to grab the children's attention and to ensure comprehension of the text. In the following reading sessions, no text translation was necessary; however, the meaning of new words and expressions was further scaffolded by gesture, picture labeling, varied intonation, etc. Also the children were invited to fill in the pauses made by the reader and finish off the lines of the text. Additionally, the children volunteered to show their comprehension and engagement in the story by lively reactions to the text and asking questions related to the text content in Polish. Although no intentional teaching of the target language took place, occasional follow up games/drama activities were organized, often on request, so that the children could act out some characters in their own pretend play.

4.4 Data Collection

In order to answer the first research question, i.e. how many lexical items the children managed to acquire actively, firstly a list of all content words (and a few function ones) was compiled, which later served as a checklist for testing children. Altogether the children were tested on 40 words that appeared in the stories (ca. 60 new words were introduced in total in all the storybooks, including function words, cf. Appendix 1). Vocabulary production was tested at three intervals, each time by means of a different technique: by asking a child to name an object in the picture (i.e. picture cue test), usually a content noun or an action verb, e.g. 'a train', by asking the child to finish off the lines of the sentence (i.e. verbal cue test), e.g. "I'm ... *lost*" or "I'm a very hungry… *caterpillar*", and by asking the child to give an L1 equivalent, e.g. "How will you say 'Chodź za mną'" (English: "Follow me")? Using these aimed to show whether there are any differences in recall depending on the way of cuing. The answers to the third research question were collected mainly through observation.

4.5 The Results

The results of vocabulary tests are presented in Table 1. The results clearly show that word recall is the best in the case of phrase cues, i.e. when the child is asked to finish off the lines of the text. Quite satisfying results were also obtained upon a

Table 1 Word production scores in a vocabulary elicitation test

Word production scores	Subject 1 (2;10)	Subject 2 (5;2)
Picture cues	23 (out of 40)—57.5 %	32 (out of 40)—80 %
Phrase cues	36 (out of 40)—90 %	34 (out of 40)—85 %
Call for translation	11 (out of 40 words and phrases) —27.5 %	26 (out of 40 words and phrases) —65 %

picture cue. This might indicate that the recall of words, and possibly storage of these words, takes place through the same channel as encoding (i.e. via a picture or a verbal phrase). This finding would confirm that in very early instructed L2 learning, transfer-appropriate processing (Morris et al. 1977) takes place. The children seemed to recall best the words which were tested in a similar context as they were encoded. Since translation from L1 to L2 is the poorest capacity, this might indicate that the children had not acquired the meanings of the words fully and deeply, and henceforth their memorization was not long-term.

Memorized chunks are among the most easily acquired categories; their recall resembles a behaviorist stimulus-response relationship. Their instant production does not indicate that children understand the meaning of its constituents. It may be concluded that vocabulary acquired from stories, although presented in a meaningful context, is still to a large extent acquired through the participation of the mechanical memory and, as Krashen and Scarcella (1978, p. 284) claimed, such language does not lend itself to true acquisition.

With respect to the second research question, observation of the children's production indicated some spontaneous fluent use of selected phrases and words. For example, the children themselves pretended to travel by train in the playground and virtually recited the whole poem ("Off we go, through the woods, over the bridge, etc."). They spontaneously started to use words and phrases which seemed to be particularly relevant and meaningful to them, e.g. 'my mummy'. They also had no problem with naming favorite characters or toys outside the content of the book, often with exaggerated intonation, e.g. Subject 1 (2;7) says; 'EEElephant'. It is noteworthy that they also used two-word collocational phrases, irrespective of the relative difficulty and infrequent real life usage of the words, e.g. 'fierce lion', 'scary monkey', 'hungry caterpillar', or 'scratchy starfish'. These examples indicate that word retention is facilitated more by its meaningfulness/interest for the child, rather than its conceptual ease.

Children could virtually finish off all lines of the text, though their pronunciation may be distorted; still the younger subject preferred utterances of MLU (Mean Length of Utterance, the term introduced by Brown (1973) to measure the length of child language production) = 3, (e.g. "I am going to … 'catch that fly'"). On the whole, the length of spontaneously used phrases did not exceed MLU = 3 Spontaneous use of the following phrases could be noted: "Off we go', 'I know', 'Follow me', 'I'm hungry', 'Not me', and 'Move over'. Longer phrases also appeared, e.g. the younger brother produced a largely repetitive chunk: "Fly, fly,

little fly", as well as "We've arrived at the seaside"; however, the latter phrase was misarticulated due to its length. The limited length of a phrase (to ca. 3 morphemes) also indicates the limitations of short-term memory.

All those words and expressions were produced during either a storybook reading activity or during drama games, initiated by the researcher. Storybook scenes were set with the available toys and materials, and, as the storybook text was being read, the children were encouraged to take roles of individual characters and butt in with appropriate words. For example, the story *Sitting in my box* was acted out with toy animals knocking at the box and saying "Let me in". Subsequently, on the request to get out as there were too many in the box, each of them said: "Not me", etc.

When it comes to the differences in L2 production between the two children, which is the scope of the third research question, the older one (aged 5) generally surpassed the younger one in word production tests. It seems that particularly object labeling and translation tasks were more cognitively demanding and required the child to approach the learning/testing task more consciously; hence the advantage of the more mature child, whose memory capacity and cognitive abilities were also better developed.

However, in free play situations, it was the younger child who was more willing to adopt L2 words for spontaneous use. He inserted L2 items into his L1 utterances, often with a Polish inflectional suffix, as in e.g. "Daj mi mojego *lion*—a" (English: "Give me my lion"). Such adaptations of English words into the Polish morpho-syntactic system indicate the productive use of the rules, which is a good indicator of the acquisition process taking place. However, the rules in question are those of the Polish language and not those of English and thus they can be regarded as a proof of the acquisition of Polish, and not English.

The older brother (5;2) code-switched much more rarely. However, when he asked to provide L2 equivalents, he remembered a lot of them. It may be hypothesized that in the case of the older child his mother tongue system had been firmly established and, therefore, he felt lesser need to insert L2 items into his utterances.

One final note must be made about the affective dimension of learning L2 by such young learners. Affectivity played a very important role in the willingness to speak L2: desire to please the mother and get praise from her probably motivated the younger child to insert English words into his L1 talk. It may also be the aspect of the novelty of English words and their attractive sound that motivated the child to use them. It must also be mentioned that the child often expressed willingness to listen to stories in L2, at times even in preference to L1 books, and asked for drama-like games in L2. It seems that the child valued and desired those activities which enabled him to spend time with his mother, even if they were in a new linguistic code. Thus, it can be additionally argued that the affective bond plays a prominent role in encouraging a child to produce L2 words/phrases. By contrast, the older child often rebelled when time to listen to stories in L2 came, as he preferred the usual L1 games, and only on seeing how many praises his younger brother received, did he sometimes compete for attention by giving prompt answers to the questions, finishing text lines or acting out story characters in drama activities. Thus, it may be argued that a parent can be the best teacher of a foreign language

for his or her child, as a close affective bond and a desire to please the teacher are among the strongest motivators in child L2 production. If this is not a parent, but an instruction teacher, he should exert a similar influence by, for example, praising the child, offering supportive touch and ensuring frequent contact.

5 Conclusions

In this paper, I aimed to suggest that authentic storybooks can be used as an alternative successful tool in enhancing very young learners' L2 speaking skills. They should be used as a springboard for explanation of new meaning, which is thus presented in a memorable context. The meaning itself can be negotiated in joint adult-child reading activities. Book reading is an authentic experience in the lives of many children, which boosts their vocabulary development and hence language acquisition. In addition, children, when engrossed in the content of the story, identify themselves with its characters and are willing to act them out voluntarily, putting into their mouths the words of the story characters. Such performance can constitute an authentic reality for them in a situation when other authentic needs to communicate in L2 are lacking. Reading L2 storybooks does enhance children's knowledge of L2 words and formulaic chunks. They, in turn, treat them as part of their linguistic repertoire (i.e. they are willing to show them off or associate their usage with linguistic play). Additional help from the parent/teacher, for example, in the form of appropriate scaffolding or encouraging pretend play, helps to reinforce the acquired language even more. To conclude, authentic storybook reading should constitute the basis of syllabus planning for second language courses for very young learners, as it lends itself to successful vocabulary acquisition and oral production, limited as it may be. In addition, story content appeals to children's imagination and enhances their emotional development.

Appendix

Storybooks used (in the order of introduction):

Horacek, P. 2009. *Choo Choo train.* Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.
Campbell, R. 1982 (2007). *Dear zoo.* London: Macmillan Children's Books.
Campbell, R. 2003. *I'm hungry*. London: Macmillan Children's Books.
Rosen. M. and K. Waldron. 2010. *Tiny little fly*. London: Walker Books
Haughton, C. 2011. *A bit lost*. London: Walker Books.
Saunders, K. 2010. *Little fish*. London: Caterpillar Books.
Lillegard, D. 1991. *In a box*. London: Faber and Faber.
Carle, E. 2008. *A very hungry caterpillar*. London: Penguin Books.
Martin, B. 2010. *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?* New York: Henry Holt
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Business Meetings as a Genre—Pedagogical Implications for Teaching Business English

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Abstract Business people spend a considerable amount of their working lives participating in different types of meetings, talking and listening. What makes business meetings difficult to grasp for both researchers and learners is the vast number of factors contributing to them, such as the size of a company, the purpose of the meeting and the relationships among the people involved. This article will try to examine how people in business communicate in meetings to get their work done and will also analyze some of the most recurrent features of the business meeting genre. I will draw on a particular corpus (CANBEC)—a unique resource which brings together descriptions of meetings of different types, both within and among companies, involving speakers, whose roles and responsibilities vary, and who represent a range of nationalities and differing first languages—and on the research carried out by Handford (2010). The analysis of keywords, concordance lines, and discourse provided him with thorough insights into certain aspects of business meetings, such as the structural stages of meetings, participants' discursive practices useful in meetings, interpersonal language, creativity, power and constraint, and many other factors. In conclusion, I will make practical suggestions for implementing the knowledge of the business meeting, as a genre into the Business English classroom, as well as for the design of educational materials, which will help prepare students to participate efficiently in business meetings of various kinds.

1 Introduction

Life in corporations revolves around meetings—business people spend a considerable amount of their working lives participating in different types of meetings, talking and listening. Managers regularly meet their subordinates to delegate and plan tasks and duties or to review/check them. Similarly, colleagues have meetings

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on a daily basis to solve or postpone various problems. What makes this type of business communication difficult to grasp for both researchers and Business English (BE) learners is the vast number of factors contributing to it, such as the size of a company, the purpose of the meeting and the relationships among the people involved. This article will examine how people in business communicate in meetings to get their work done and will also analyze some of the most recurrent features of the business meeting genre. The role of language in the arrangement of meetings and the specific linguistic conventions employed will be discussed. Finally, pedagogical implications will be made as to how these findings can be applied in the BE classroom and the design of teaching materials. The question as to whether the selected BE textbooks do prepare students to participate successfully in meetings will be answered, namely: is the language taught there of any particular use for would-be business people?

The study of the genre in question will draw on a particular corpus of a spoken language, the Cambridge and Nottingham Business English Corpus (CANBEC)—a unique resource of one million words from a variety of business contexts, which brings together meetings of different types, both within and among companies, involving speakers, whose roles and responsibilities vary, and who represent a range of nationalities and first languages.[1] This article will refer to the research done by Handford (2010). The analysis of keywords, concordance lines, and discourse provided him with profound insight into certain aspects of business communication, such as the structural stages of meetings, participants' discursive practices useful in meetings, interpersonal language, the power the participants have within the organization, and potential constraints at meetings. Some of these will be discussed below.

2 Business Meetings as a Genre

If we want to make any generalizations about naturally occurring speech and also understand how meetings are constructed, we have to clarify first what is meant by context. With respect to the context of business meetings, despite regular, stable factors, such as setting, roles and agenda, it seems to vary from one meeting to another (Charles 1996; Rogerson-Revell 2008). We should try to recognize what is

[1] CANBEC is undoubtedly a specialized corpus of a genre. The corpus was compiled from authentic internal and external meeting data, taken from 64 meetings recorded in 26 companies located mostly in the UK; although data were also collected in Japan, Ireland and continental Europe. Company sizes involved in the project varied, ranging from multinationals with over 50,000 employees to small businesses with a few employees. Data were provided by both the manufacturing and service industry. The companies represented the following sectors: manufacturing, pharmaceutical, IT, leisure, finance and consultancy. The majority of speakers were British L1-English speakers, but 20 % were non-native English speaking employees. Most of the recordease were male (79 %), and a majority of these were either upper- or middle-managers (Handford 2010).

recurrent and constant, simultaneously paying attention to what is dynamic and changeable. As Handford claims (2010, p. 26), "while attending to the specific, in the background there is constantly the acknowledgement of the conventional forms, goals, situations, relationships and practices that enable us to recognize a particular genre". Thus, a strictly top–down, externally imposed, static understanding of context would not allow analysis to account effectively for the dynamism typical of meetings.

Scollon and Scollon (2001, p. 32) argue that from the point of view of the participants, it is "the shared knowledge of context which is required for successful professional communication". Therefore, if such knowledge is necessary from the participants' perspective, learners of BE have to be provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of the text in question and to account for the reciprocal relationship of context and talk, in which each dynamically shapes the other. They also have to be made aware of the potentially infinite nature of context, as well as the possibility of changing our interpretations, as a result of considering more aspects of the context, and the idea that interpretation often depends on the applied criteria of relevance, which differ socially and culturally and can be signaled differently.

The participants of a meeting and the institutions they represent undeniably have definable multi-level goals, but communicating about these goals, they automatically employ relatively well-ingrained professional and discursive practices to achieve them[2] (Fairclough 1995). Spoken business discourse is described as goal-driven (Koester 2006), which is best illustrated by the agenda, whose function is to provide an outline of the explicit goals of the meeting; however, the speakers' goals can be elusive to the observer for a number of reasons. Participants in a meeting may have multiple goals, some of which may be conflicting (Tracy and Coupland 1990). Additionally, goals may be personal or corporate (Charles 1996); they do not necessarily exist prior to the meeting, but may emerge in the course of the communication (Hopper and Drummond 1990). For example, during the meeting, somebody introduces a problem not listed on the agenda, but again these emerging goals will tend to result in the utilization of particular, conventionalized practices. The goals illuminate participants' objectives (e.g. solving the problem), and the practices concerned aid in demonstrating how these goals can be achieved. Goal-driven models of business meetings suggest that participants are in conscious control of the discourse to a far greater degree than some may envision as probable; although the extent to which naturally occurring speech is consciously produced is a highly complex issue, as much as the question whether learners should, or even can, develop a conscious, critical understanding of the communication.

[2] In literature the term *strategy* is also used, and there is a potential overlap between the two. Yet, the term *strategy* implies an intentional choice of how to proceed, whereas practices tend to remain at a more automatic level. Practices defined as shared or sanctioned communicative conventions explain how much an individual's spoken workplace communication can occur spontaneously or automatically, as a result of that person having been apprenticed in a particular professional community. Strategies, on the other hand, belong to the realm of conscious intent (Handford 2010, p. 30–31).

In terms of the meeting purpose, Handford (2010, p. 12) identifies six categories, which apply to both internal and external meetings: *reviewing*, *planning*, *negotiating*, *task-/problem-oriented*, *buying/selling/promoting a product*, and *giving and receiving information/advice*. Purposes can obviously overlap; for example, buying a product and giving and receiving information/advice can both occur during negotiations. In fact, many meetings have more than one purpose. In the corpus analyzed by Handford (2010), the six categories are spread across external meetings more evenly than in internal ones.

A useful distinction in discussions of workplace discourse is that of *transactional* and *interpersonal* (or *relational*) language and goals (Koester 2006). Although the business meeting seems to be the most transactional of professional events, it features relational talk to a surprisingly high degree—speakers in business meetings appear to be deliberately using what is, on one level, an interpersonal language, with transactional goals in mind. While analyzing one of the meetings in CANBEC, Handford (2010, p. 28) claims that the sales director, who starts talking about football with his client towards the end of an important sales negotiation, does not do so randomly and without purpose. By resorting to this off-topic relational move, he is addressing the transactional goal of making sure his institution makes money, and he achieves this goal, in part, by reminding the client of their companies' mutual relationship, illustrated by football matches played together.

Speakers also have goals when engaging in casual conversation, but often these goals are largely relational, and not transactional (Koester 2006). Within the context of business meetings, however, the correlation between casual conversation and relational goals does not always hold, and care needs to be taken to combine, appropriately, language and goals. Relational language, for example, talking about football, can be used to achieve transactional goals, such as encouraging the client to remain loyal and to buy more from the company.

To be able to read contextual information of a business meeting, we have to analyze the relationship between the speakers, which is often the most relevant factor in understanding unfolding business meeting discourse, since "it is essentially a heuristic device that imposes a structure on a dynamic, changing reality" (Handford 2010, p. 10). Only when we interpret the business meeting discourse from the relationship perspective will we be able to see obvious differences between the actions business people take and the language they employ to perform them. In internal meetings, categorized as either manager-subordinate or peer meetings, the relationship can be determined by considering the goal of the meeting and the institutionally sanctioned power relationships among the speakers. Thus, the status of the speakers helps categorize meetings, but equally important is the social action being carried out. For example, a meeting in which the owner of the company is having a discussion with a technical manager can be categorized as a peer meeting if the former is asking advice from the technical expert about cost of services. Their official positions within the company are not as relevant as might be initially expected (Handford 2010).

For relationships in external meetings, the contractual status of the two companies seems to be the key distinguishing factor, which divides the data into either

contractually bound or *non-contractually bound* relationships. The former involve two organizations, which have a formal, legally binding agreement; the latter have no legally binding contract, and their business may be on a one-off or ad hoc basis, or the meeting may by exploratory, with one or both companies attempting to check the viability of starting a formal, contractually bound relationship (Handford 2010).

The analysis of CANBEC data helped Handford (2010, p. 15) list nine topics around which meetings revolve, namely: *sales* (buying and selling products), *procedure* (the way things are done), *technical* (communication about some technical aspect of business, e.g. IT), *logistics* (management of the physical distribution side of the business, which controls the goods flow), *production* (production process which involves a service, and/or a manufactured object), *other* (a miscellaneous variety of topics, such as AGMs, expenditure, accounts, and discussions relating to clients), *strategy* (the long-term goals or objectives of the company), *marketing* (some aspect of product or service promotion, placement, or pricing) and *HRM* (effective management of human resources).

According to Scollon and Scollon (2001), over time, a community of practice develops a mutually understandable set of practices, which exists because of some common purpose or goal. For example, a company, or one of its components (e.g. the marketing department), groups, goal-oriented, regularly interacting people, who share routines and practices, can be interpreted as a community of practice capable of developing genres suitable for the discursive activities, in which they are involved, e.g. business meetings. Meetings embody and provide a platform for various practices that take place in business, especially management practices. In other words, contexts, such as meetings, are the participatory frameworks through which the community can address its goals and develop the enterprise (Handford 2010).

Another aspect of business meetings central to understanding such practices and their communities is the notion of constraint, in terms of topic, agenda, the chair, time, and the relationship between or among the participants. The constraint ensures that the meeting proceeds according to the plan and expectations of its participants. Chairs and other powerful speakers can, for example, keep meetings on track or finish them when they deem this appropriate (Scollon and Scollon 2001).

Human interaction in the workplace has the potential to develop into conflict and confrontation. Business people often criticize each other's suggestions, which might involve potential loss of face. Hence, another important issue is crucial for successful participation in business meetings—politeness, a system of interpersonal strategies or practices supposed to minimize any threats meeting participants may encounter (Lakoff 1990). When it is necessary to perform an act which may cause offense people may attempt to mitigate it by employing various politeness techniques, such as being positive and polite to the interlocutor, by complimenting them, or allowing them plenty of room to reject an imposition, or wording a matter in such a way as to appear non-confrontational (Handford 2010).

3 Stages and Practices of Meetings

Meetings have typical structural features repeated in different contexts and companies. Even if the unfolding discourse may appear problematic or disorganized, and the participants may discuss topics not included in the agenda, they know what is appropriate and acceptable. Yet, we have to realize that not all types of workplace encounters can be considered business meetings. They fall into this category only if they have a clear work-related purpose and topic, which can include relational issues if they are seen as impacting work, e.g. reporting to a superior that the employee's relationship with the line manager is affecting the latter's performance. Characteristically, meetings are also specific, entailing constrained, turn-taking modes, which depend on the level of formality and the power differences among the speakers, as well as a high degree of inter-texting—such as references to previous and future meetings, or to other meetings, emails, faxes, calls, and contracts.

Holmes and Stubbe (2003) proposed a three-stage meeting structure (opening, discussion, closing), which Handford (2010) developed into a meeting matrix, depicted in Fig. 1. The three stages in bold are interpreted as obligatory elements of a business meeting, but are subsumed within a broader framework that accounts for their intertextual and dynamic nature. Three transition moves are functional elements, which can occur within one speaker's turn, or after someone else's turn, and which signal that a particular stage begins; for example, the meeting may be opened by someone saying: "We may as well start". Meeting preparation involves any preceding work done directly relevant to the meeting in question, e.g. sending out the agenda. Sometimes some of the participants discuss an agenda topic or some aspects related to the meeting just before the meeting, or engage in ice-breaking "small talk".

Points of the agenda can be discussed in a linear pattern, which will be reflected in the clearly organized turn-taking, often involving question-and-answer patterns; the points of the agenda can also be discussed in a more spiral, or cyclical way, with frequent topic shifts, and with topics and issues being set aside temporarily and then resumed later. The post-meeting stage concerns the effects and repercussions of the meeting, such as discussion of another meeting for a later date, a change to be implemented following the meeting, or the termination of the relationship between

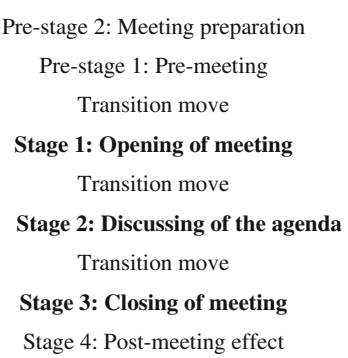

Fig. 1 Structural aspects of business meetings (Handford 2010, p. 69)

the two companies. Not all meetings follow all six stages of this paradigm, and they often have unclear boundaries—for example, the development of "small talk" can be very fluid throughout the meeting, and may also not be confined to the pre-meeting stage. Beginnings and endings involve highly conventionalized practices and are characterized by the use of formulaic language (Handford 2010).

In a meeting, the participants—who want to achieve their personal and corporate goals—employ various discursive practices, in order to achieve these goals. These practices, and the language that constitutes them, can actualize the specific structural elements of the genre (the stages outlined previously), such as the instantiation of the closing of a meeting, but at the same time, they can blur such boundaries. For example, the discussion of a football game, initiated by a sales manager during the closing stage of a meeting with a client, does not fit into the typical meeting structure. Participants in meetings do far more than merely perform the structural stages listed in Fig. 1. To account for the unusual in business meetings, some notion of dynamism needs to be included in the meeting matrix. McCarthy (2000, p. 33) proposes incorporating the four strands of linguistic behavior found in the spontaneous spoken genres: *expectations*, *formulations*, *recollections*, and *instantiations*. Although they are not specific to business discourse, they provide a scaffolding for meeting-specific discursive practices and illustrate the ways in which interaction in meetings is managed. *Expectations* (e.g. setting the agenda, opening the meeting) signal the kind of activity the speakers are involved in and their use of resources of the genre in question. *Formulations* (e.g. summarizing progress or information, seeking clarification, checking or emphasizing shared understanding) mark the point which the present, ongoing activity has reached. *Recollections* (e.g. orientations toward the past, related, or recurrent events) mark the present context as a past, related, or recurrent one. *Instantiations* (introduction of topic shift, bringing discussion on/off track, cutting speaker off, making an aside, reaching/blocking/postponing a decision, requesting a future meeting, bringing topic/meeting to a close) enable the speaker to alter or manage the direction of the discourse within the genre, while it is in progress. The genres may be transactionally- or relationally-oriented, or both, and they account for the fluidity that is a defining feature of a genre.

4 The Language of Business Meetings

The language used in meetings differs from that of ordinary conversations. Drew and Heritage (1992, p. 25) claim that talk at work is characterized by three related factors: *orientations to tasks and functions*, *restrictions on kinds of contributions* that can be made, and *distinctive features of inferences* made by participants about how the interaction should progress (e.g. a lawyer will not express shock or sympathy upon hearing what the client has done). There are also many lexico-grammatical expressions that are either far more or far less frequent in business meetings than will be found in everyday English.

Word frequency counts of the CANBEC corpus, and of the sub-corporal the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse English (CANCODE), and comprising the language typical of socializing and intimate encounters (SOCINT) when compared, have revealed a surprising similarity, which illustrates that significant lexico-grammatical differences between everyday English and BE may not be decipherable.[3] What is more, everyday English is the 'mother" of BE—but the collocations and functions of many of the words are constrained in contextually recognizable ways, and the practices they constitute are often specific to or are highly typical of business. In both everyday English and spoken BE, interlocutors pay close attention to needs related to self-esteem and to relationship-building. Yet, since BE is a form of institutional discourse, with transactional goals, speakers often differ in administrative seniority, or in their ranks, within their respective companies, and a higher level of formality can therefore be expected. Spoken BE, due to its higher lexical density and greater prevalence of nouns and noun phrases, is also more similar to written language (Handford 2010).

BE is distinct from everyday English in that it comprises a limited set of semantic fields, which reflects the institutional nature of the business world, in terms of activities and relationships. It is well exemplified by the word 'partner'—while in everyday English, it has a wide range of meanings (e.g. lover, team member, fellow criminal), in the business context, it has a limited, specific meaning: a person or company, with whom another person or company is involved in an organizational relationship (Handford 2010).

Keyword searches (both negative and positive), which allow for a statistically more sensitive understanding of the language in the meeting genre, have helped researchers show the least and the most typical words to be found in the business context. Among the least common words in business are: 'home', 'family', 'school', 'garden' and 'music'. The CANBEC positive-keyword list includes many types of business-specific nouns (e.g., 'customer', 'meeting', 'sales', 'business'), nouns with constrained business meaning (e.g. 'service', 'support', 'team', 'stock'), nouns with industry- or departmental-specific constrained meaning (e.g. 'web', 'install'), time nouns (e.g. 'January', 'month', 'moment') and functional business nouns (e.g. 'problem', 'solution', 'issue', 'process', 'point'). Apart from nouns, there are several modal verbs, such as 'need' and 'can', pronouns, like 'we', and the words 'if' and 'so'. Moreover, the past tense is much more common than the present tense in SOCINT, as compared to CANBEC, which suggests that in business, people talk about the future and the present more than they do in everyday life (to illustrate, the word 'will' is ranked 20 in the positive-keyword list) (Handford 2010, p. 106–108).

Much of the business language, like everyday, naturally occurring speech, is made up of prefabricated clusters—groups of two or more words, fixed or semi-fixed phrases, that regularly reoccur (e.g. 'I don't know if', 'we should start', 'we need to',

[3] The table listing word frequencies in meetings and everyday conversation can be found in Handford (2010, p. 99–100).

'if you don't mind'). These clusters fulfill specialized discursive roles repeated in various meetings involving different employees and companies, and, thus, are important in understanding business discourse and thereby form a central component of fluency. The use of those formulaic sequences proves that the participants know that they are in a meeting and that they are in the process of creating that meeting through speech. In meetings people are doing business, and the language they use varies because their goals and related practices are different, namely they do such things as trying to solve problems, make decisions, convey information, or negotiate a deal.

O'Keeffe et al. (2007) managed to identify the following functions in spoken BE: speculating, hedging, being vague, specifying, describing change and flux, referring to collective goals, protecting face, and giving directions. These functions can be used as a platform for categorization and analysis of clusters found in a business meeting discourse. Such analysis involves interpreting certain functional categories as instances of discursive practices, which allows us to move beyond a description of the texts and their immediate context towards an interpretation of the wider social context (Handford 2010).

5 Teaching and Learning Implications

Although applying findings from the corpus research to the development of teaching and learning materials is not straightforward, it is extremely informative and should help teachers better equip their learners for succeeding in the workplace. Rather than teaching language as a model of prescriptive idiomatic usage, which in international or intercultural business communicative situations is not valid anymore, authentic workplace corpora should be treated and taught as a collection of expert performances instructive for learners, teachers, and educational material writers. Furthermore, such a premise gives BE learners, who are apprentices in business contexts, access to authentic language and efficient language tools, i.e. skills and strategies, which have been tried and tested in authentic communication, and will help them dynamically to maneuver in the business world. A working knowledge of specific clusters, typical of business meetings, may allow the business person, who lacks an extensive grammatical preparation in English, or many years of experience in business, to short-wire the system and be a more effective communicator.

BE learners obviously have a great need to learn business terminology; however, just as important is having knowledge of various clusters and keywords, which business people use when they are actually doing business. For example, hedging and indirect language make up a considerable amount of CANBEC ('I don't know', 'I think', 'I mean', 'I guess'). They occur in all types of meetings and tend to have a clear face-protecting role. They are also useful during disagreements, when making suggestions, and when offering any kind of criticism. Vague language is also very common and allows the speaker to show shared understanding ('and things like

that', 'and everything else'). Modality is another area that deserves considerable attention in the classroom—for example, 'need to' and 'have to' are extremely frequent in CANBEC; whereas 'must' is rarely used. Pronouns and backchannels deserve attention, too, as do discourse markers, such as 'so' and 'the next point is'. 'We' is the top keyword in both internal and external meetings, and its associated pronominal references 'us' and 'our' also rank as top keywords. 'We' used instead of 'you' acts as a softening device, and when used instead of 'I', emphasizes collaboration. It also involves the speaker in foregrounding the identity of the company (Handford 2010). Handford (2010, p. 257) warns us against a purely semantic approach to teaching BE, because "it will put the learner at a pragmatic disadvantage when it comes to dealing with real business people in real situations and to using language that is in harmony with the community of practice".

Unfortunately, many textbooks often teach grammar points with no consideration of the characteristic lexis, which leads to students producing awkward linguistic output. Similarly, textbooks tend to ignore the fact that one feature of BE is that it has constrained collocations, which means that certain language may be highly unlikely in real business contexts, for instance, the use of certain modal forms of obligation, such as 'must' or the expression 'I disagree with you'. Presenting such language as unmarked, textbooks run the risk of allowing such speech to be perceived as effective and appropriate examples of communication for business situations; learners, therefore, are in danger of acquiring artificial language of limited use and value in the business world.

Williams (1988) argued that the language taught by BE textbooks for use in meetings is often limited to exponents of functions, and these often differ from those actually used in the meetings. They tend to teach isolated functions, such as suggesting or agreeing with various possible linguistic realizations, which are one sentence long, and are often not sequenced or considered in combination with other types of utterances. They take no account of the reality that each utterance is part of the ongoing discourse, thus ignoring context completely, and also ignoring the fact that language is used for a particular purpose and as a conduit of a strategy. Furthermore, the language of real meetings contains a large number of unfinished sentences, false starts, overlapping utterances, interruptions, redundancies, and fillers, such as 'um, 'er', or 'you know'. There are also comments, jokes, repetitions, and asides. Some of the sentences used by the participants are not grammatically correct. The speakers do not generally speak in one-sentence utterances. They often have difficulty persuading the other speakers about a point and have to resort to lengthy supporting explanations and repetition. Overtly polite forms are used rarely. The language presented in textbooks, Williams (1988) concluded, does not reflect the language commonly used in meetings. Although the specimen language is comprehensible, consists of whole, correct sentences, without the same degree of false starts, interruptions, or repetitions, there is little evidence of difficulty in arguing a point; extremely polite forms are often used, and, thus, such an inadequate exemplar is of no particular use for students when they participate in meetings.

Although Williams (1988) based her conclusions on the analysis of textbooks published 30 years ago, some business textbooks still demonstrate this "disconnect" with the real language of business meetings, which has been changing over time, or they do not teach skills necessary for participating in meetings. For example, MacKenzie (2002), teaches about business only through the use of authentic written texts and anecdotal accounts of experts talking about different aspects of business; his textbook contains no lessons based on business people actually doing spoken business: lessons based around real meetings, telephone calls, or presentations. The book does not teach learners how to do business.

BE, as it also involves the interpersonal discourse, is much more than the special nomenclature reflecting content knowledge. Research shows that the interpersonal dimension of business language has been largely neglected (Koester 2006). Yet, it is important because it enables the speaker to communicate the message clearly, achieve communicative goals of the discussion, and deal with the relationship appropriately. Even when relational communication is taught in business courses, it is only in the form of "small talk" and socializing. What people in the workplace really need, however, is interpersonal and interactional skills, which would enable them to clarify meanings, block interruptions, politely contain a garrulous interlocutor, or direct the other company to follow a desired procedure. Such skills, and the language that helps achieve them, should be taught with reference to encounters occurring in actual businesses, such as the ones compiled in the CANBEC corpus, rather than being based primarily on the impressions of the textbook author/s. The intertextual nature of naturally occurring discourse cannot be ignored either. It is vital to teach how encounters are built on and draw from previous meetings, how participants discuss and relate preceding and anticipated communication to the ongoing encounter, and how spoken BE often references written texts, such as emails, reports, and agendas. Making learners aware of this intertextuality should be an essential pedagogical objective (Handford 2010).

CANBEC can also shed light on turn-taking practices, which would be useful for learners. The preferred turn-taking structure, utilized to attain agreement in convergent communication, is for short, unhedged, positive responses; whereas, in conflicted, divergent communication, disagreements tend to be hedged and abrupt. Disagreement during cooperative business communication is far more usual than outright conflict and tends to feature silences, hedging, and accounts; learners need to be made aware of this. In addition, the importance of status, power, and social distance within the meetings—and how they allow or restrict opportunities for speakers to take the floor, or to open or close topics, should also be taught (Handford 2010, p. 256–257).

Transcripts of recordings gathered in CANBEC can be used for listening exercises, both without alteration for higher-level learners, and in simplified form for other learners. Even if the latter transcripts would not qualify as strictly authentic texts, they are still preferable to purely artificial dialogues. Tacit, discursive practices identified as useful can then be categorized as skills for the learners to study, internalize, and practice, with the intention of speeding up the learning/apprenticeship process.

The language in CANBEC meetings can be grouped into four purposes or functions: *procedure-focusing*, *information-focusing*, *decision-focusing*, and *negotiation-focusing*. Learners of BE should receive encouragement to develop competencies in performing all four key skills, which are applicable in face-to-face meetings, and other work genres, such as telephone calls, interviews, and training sessions. These skills, therefore, seem to be essential for students to participate successfully in meetings. They can be categorized as: clarifying what you have said, clarifying what your interlocutor has said, clarifying your general position, asking for clarification. Similarly, learners need to be able to summarize effectively. Decision-making and problem-solving involve raising an issue, discussing the issue, discussing solutions, reaching consensus, postponing or evading decisions. Other skills include planning and making arrangements, exchanging information, evaluating, dealing with conflict, and hypothesizing. The interpersonal aspects of communication show that building, maintaining, and occasionally ending a business relationship, or giving appropriate attention to face-saving concerns, as well as to positive or defensive politeness strategies (showing appreciation or hedging impositions) all deserve close analysis and examination in the classroom (Handford 2010, p. 255).

There are quite a lot of BE textbooks available on the market, which incorporate many of the findings mentioned above, such as *Market leader* and the *Intelligent business* series. Although they do not explicitly teach the structure of business meetings discussed here, they have a separate section in each unit (*Skills* and *Career skills,* respectively), wherein they present students with the language, functions and skills useful in meetings. Moreover, each book has a separate sub-unit devoted to learning-by-doing (*Case study* and *Dilemma & Decision*), in which students are presented with business problems and are supposed to solve them, while role-playing a meeting. Whenever students are asked to participate in a meeting, they have specific roles to play. Each meeting has a purpose imposed by instruction. Both the meeting topics and the purposes of the speaking exercises included in the BE textbooks analyzed for this article coincide with the ones identified in CANBEC corpus.

Four BE textbooks have been analyzed (intermediate and upper-intermediate level works of *Market leader*, *Intelligent business upper-intermediate*, and *Intelligent business upper-intermediate skills book*). The results are presented below in Tables 1 and 2 (each tick, ☑, signifying that one speaking exercise dealt with a particular topic or had a specified purpose):

Intelligent business is accompanied by a separate book (*Skills book*), where students learn, among other things, important elements of BE discourse, namely: how to ask questions, bid and bargain, present a proposal, negotiate with powerful people, chair a meeting, attain goals, summarize or take minutes. The fictional drama recorded on a video, which can be used alongside *Intelligent business*, or as free-standing material, demonstrates many of the features of the modern business meeting, such as chairing meetings, giving presentations, running brainstorming sessions, etc. It has the advantage of being a significant source of knowledge of authentic business meeting interactions, and, as such, it enables learners to analyze the non-verbal cues and gestures used by participants in business communication, as well as enabling them to recognize non-verbal substitutes for functions indispensible for

Table 1 Meeting topics in the analyzed BE textbooks

Meeting topic	*Market leader intermediate*	*Market leader upper-intermediate*	*Intelligent business. Coursebook*	*Intelligent business. Skills book*
Sales	☑☑☑	☑☑	☑☑	☑☑
Procedure	☑☑	☑☑		☑☑
Technical				
Logistics				
Production	☑☑☑	☑	☑☑☑	☑☑
Strategy	☑☑☑☑	☑☑☑	☑☑☑☑☑	☑☑☑
Marketing	☑☑	☑	☑☑	☑
HRM	☑☑☑☑☑	☑☑☑	☑☑	☑☑☑
Others	☑	☑☑	☑☑☑☑	☑☑

Table 2 Meeting purpose in the analyzed BE textbooks

Meeting purpose	*Market leader intermediate*	*Market leader upper-intermediate*	*Intelligent business upper-intermediate*	*Intelligent business. Skills book*
Reviewing	☑☑	☑☑☑☑	☑	
Planning		☑☑☑	☑☑	
Giving/ Receiving info	☑☑☑	☑☑☑☑☑☑	☑☑☑☑☑☑	☑☑☑
Task/problem-solving	☑☑☑☑☑☑☑	☑☑☑☑☑☑☑☑	☑☑☑☑☑☑☑	☑☑☑☑
Buying/selling/promoting a product	☑	☑☑	☑☑	☑☑
Negotiating	☑☑☑	☑☑	☑☑	☑☑

good performance in a meeting. A lot of the exercises included in the accompanying *Video resource book* go beyond the basic level of a sentence and thus contribute to raising learners' awareness of the complexity of the business meeting genre.

6 Concluding Remarks

Specialized corpora, such as CANBEC, give BE educational materials writers access to authentic language, content and practices in context from various perspectives, and help to demonstrate the practices that construct the genre, and to describe the roles and functions of speakers and their business communities. They are cumulatively a record of what actually happens in and among companies, thus providing insight into what business people really do in business meetings. Possessing linguistic competence and knowledge about business is not enough to ensure that a meeting participant will perform well at a meeting. If students are to be prepared to participate actively and effectively in business meetings, the findings discussed here should become part of a BE syllabus. BE educational materials writers should also

try to utilize and otherwise make reference to corpora, such as CANBEC, in order to provide learners with authentic business meeting structure and dialog, thereby making them familiar with the language typical of meetings, and helping them to develop optimal practices for successfully interacting in business meetings. Only then will learners have opportunities to develop meeting skills in the BE classroom, which will prepare them to perform effectively in business meetings.

Appendix—Sampled BE Textbooks

Cotton, D., Falvey, D., Kent, S. 2010. *Market Leader. Intermediate*. London: Longman.

Cotton, D., Falvey, D., Kent, S. 2006. *Market Leader. Upper-Intermediate*. London: Longman.

Gomm, H. 2005. *Intelligent Business. Video Resource Book.* London: Longman.

Johnson, C. and Barrall, I. 2006. *Intelligent Business. Upper-intermediate. Skills Book*. London: Longman.

Trappe, T., Tullis, G. 2006. *Intelligent Business. Upper-intermediate.* London: Longman.

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Charles, M. 1996. Business negotiations: Interdependence between discourse and the business relationship. *English for Specific Purposes* 15: 19–36.

Drew, P. and J. Heritage. 1992. Analyzing talk at work: An introduction. In *Talk at Work*, eds. P. Drew and J. Heritage, 3–65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fairclough, N. 1995. *Critical discourse analysis*. London: Longman.

Handford, M. 2010. *The language of business meetings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holmes, J. and M. Stubbe. 2003. *Power and politeness in the workplace*: a sociolinguistic analysis of talk at work.London: Longman.

Hopper, P. and K. Drummond. 1990. Emergent goals at a relational turning point: The case of Gordon and Denise. In *Multiple goals in discourse*, eds. K. Tracy and N. Coupland, 39-65. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Koester, A. 2006. *Investigating workplace discourse*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lakoff, R. 1990. *Talking power*. Chicago: Cambridge University Press.

MacKenzie, I. 2002. *English for Business Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McCarthy, M. 2000. Captive audience: small talk and close contact service encounters. In *Small talk*, ed. J. Coupland, 84–109. Harlow: Pearson Education.

O'Keeffe, A., M. McCarthy and R. Carter. 2007. *From corpus to classroom: Language use and language teaching.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rogerson-Revell, P. 2008. Participation and performance in international business meetings. *English for Specific Purposes* 27: 338–360.

Scollon, R. and S. Scollon. 2001. *Intercultural communication: A discourse approach*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Tracy, K. and N. Coupland. 1990. *Multiple goals in discourse*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Williams, M. 1988. Language taught for meetings and language used in meetings: is there anything in common? *Applied Linguistics* 9: 45–58.

Developing and Testing Speaking Skills in Academic Discourse

Elżbieta Szymańska-Czaplak

Abstract Teaching speaking is an essential aspect of developing students' sociolinguistic competence in a foreign language at any level. *English studies* at the tertiary level offer a variety of courses for practicing speaking and helping students reach the C1 and C2 level in BA and MA studies, respectively. However, it is not only the level that differentiates between BA and MA studies, but also aspects of register and style. Beginning with the subjects generally called *Conversation*, *Speaking*, *Oral reproduction*, *Argumentation skills*, *Debating* or *Public speaking* (BA studies), students gradually advance to *Conversation based on academic texts* (MA studies). This transition requires students to raise their level of general English competence as well as learning the elements characteristic of academic discourse. This paper presents the MA program developed by the Institute of English at Opole University. The advantages as well as problems faced when introducing the program are described, including a discussion of the methods used in developing students' English competence (C2 level) and, furthermore, testing their performance in academic discourse. The first implementation of the program has been completed and the results have been analyzed. As a result, adaptations have been made that have perfected a model which can naturally serve in creating similar MA programs at other institutes of modern languages.

1 Introduction

This paper is a report on a new model for teaching and testing speaking skills at the MA level at Opole University, Poland. The ideas behind it are inspired by the Ministry of Higher Education recommendations on teaching academic subjects at the MA level, which require the development of new competencies, not stressed at the BA level. For *English Studies*, developing these new competencies means

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working out new ways of both teaching and testing practical English at the C2 level, according to the *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, and assessment* (CEFR).

There were two main reasons for introducing this new model, the first being the new Ministry regulations that follow a 3 + 2 model of higher education. Secondly, the change was spurred by increasingly frequent problems that students encountered when taking their oral MA defenses. The decision was therefore taken to introduce elements of academic discourse into compulsory speaking classes included in the curriculum, rather than merely providing instruction on how to write an MA thesis, in order to help students further prepare for the defense. Consequently, practical English classes have been integrated with MA seminar majors (linguistics, literature and culture), fulfilling Ministry requirements to develop new competences at the MA level.

The paper first presents the concept of academic discourse (i.e. the new element introduced into practical English classes and exams) and then the nature of the problems students faced during oral MA defenses before the new system was implemented. Finally, the system is described, including the aspects of both developing and testing student competence in the spoken mode of academic discourse.

2 Academic Discourse

Since most of the problems described above concern students' lack of ability to appropriately utilize academic discourse in spoken English, the concept of academic discourse itself must be discussed before presenting the new model. *Academic discourse* can be understood as a style of presentation influenced by reading academic textbooks and journal articles, as well as listening to lectures. It assumes that writers/readers and speakers/listeners form a part of community and can discuss concepts and theories that can be explained, examined, and, if necessary, contested within mutually understood boundaries of communication. Students, being part of an academic community, are exposed to academic discourse and learn how to produce it, both in written and spoken form, working within a construct used to denote a set of norms, conventions and habits of writing/speaking that make the student's work intelligible and interesting to follow for the reader/listener. Since academic culture is predominantly written, most of the descriptions of rules refer to written discourse, aiding students in the writing of their Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral theses. However, the increasing role of the Internet in disseminating the results of academic research makes the conventions less restricted. Similarly, conference presentations, academic debates and MA oral defenses must respect the bounds of spoken academic discourse.

Discussing spoken discourse, Hrehovčik and Uberman (2003) indicate that there are certain *routines* that are "conventional ways of presenting information which can either focus on information or interaction" (Nunan 1991, p. 40). Both types are

present in academic debates. *Information routines* refer to descriptions, facts and information content, whereas *interaction routines* help maintain the relationship between interlocutors. Nunan (1991) classifies the former type as either *expository* (e.g. description or comparison) or *evaluative* (e.g. explanation or justification). Hrehovčik and Uberman (2003) also point out that it is easier to teach information routines since they are more structured, while most spoken discourse is interactive and aimed at maintaining relationships with others. Thus, both have their place in classes devoted to the development of speaking skills.

Discussing discourse, Johnson and Johnson (1998) refer to *genre*, which is a type of discourse recognized by a given community (e.g. lectures, conversations, or speeches), each of which has its characteristic linguistic, paralinguistic, pragmatic and contextual features. Different genres have different vocabularies and certain types of grammar, so the kind of language employed depends on the field in which it is used. Yule (1996) classifies similar concepts (e.g. debate, interview, and various types of discussion) as *speech events*, whereas Thornbury (2005) refers to them as *speaking events*. Hrehovčik and Uberman (2003, p. 171) state that by genre, linguists refer to "a communicative event which has certain features common for that particular event, has a purpose/some set of communicative purposes and is 'socially-constructed'". In contrast, Harmer (2007, p. 31) claims that genre is a type of written organization and layout "which will be instantly recognized for what it is by members of a *discourse community*—that is any group of people who share the same language customs and norms". Nevertheless, Harmer's (2007, pp. 31–32) assertion that "the fact remains that textual success often depends on the familiarity of text forms for writers and readers of the discourse community, however small or large that community might be" may refer to speakers/listeners as well.

Comparing the concepts of routines and genres, Hrehovčik and Uberman (2003) maintain that they are similar in following certain patterns, but genres are longer than routines. Moreover, they point out that to see how conversations or monologues follow a given pattern, one must look at the whole text, which is in opposition to the view that learners move from discrete grammatical and lexical items to whole discourses. Students develop their competence by observing the whole (a model) rather than by composing it from elements without any model. An MA thesis, a final product of written discourse, is the result of the MA student's thorough study in the seminar field and knowledge of how to construct it, frequently gained by observing other ready-made models. Likewise, observing the debates of their colleagues, students learn how to construct their own debate when the time comes.

Defining the concept of *text* as a piece of oral or written communication produced by learners, Nunan (1991, p. 45) describes its context in terms of *field* (what the text is about), *tenor* (the relationship between text receiver and text producer, who is actually taking part in the exchange) and *mode* (either written or spoken). Thus, in an academic debate (see Appendix 4 and 5 for sociolinguistics and SLA topics), a group of students who share the same interests, have the same basic knowledge (based on Holmes 2008 or Wood 1998, respectively), and contribute knowledge gained by individually reading other related texts, discuss a given issue

(*field*—sociolinguistics or SLA, *tenor*—students of sociolinguistics and SLA seminars, *mode*—spoken).

Hrehovčik and Uberman (2003) cite *negotiation skills* as being indispensable in reaching consensus in a debate. They are employed by language users to ensure better or proper understanding of their utterances and intended meanings. Since negotiation of meaning takes place to reduce uncertainty, it is more likely needed during less predictable routines. However, in academic discourse it can be used to clarify less clear concepts or remedy inappropriate language usage on the part of students who are still developing their foreign language skills while actually using them.

When developing communicative competence, students use *communication strategies* to help them overcome language problems connected with imperfect vocabulary and structures. At elementary and intermediate levels, they make use of *achievement strategies*, mainly based on their mother tongue (foreignizing, code-switching, literal translation) or interlanguage (word-coinage, paraphrasing). Frequently, they apply cooperative strategies that can take the form of either interactional or non-linguistic strategies (Hrechovčik and Uberman 2003). However, advanced students tend to use *reduction strategies*, e.g. *avoidance*, ranging from message reduction to abandonment, or *meaning replacement*, which may cause imprecision or vagueness; both of these types of reduction strategies are highly inadvisable in academic discourse, where clarity of concepts and ideas counts.

Discussing language as text and discourse, Harmer (2007, p. 29) points out that "in order for collections of sentences or utterances to succeed effectively, the discourse has to be organized or conducted in such a way that it will be successful. In written English this calls for both *coherence* and *cohesion*". Although he adds that "for a text to be coherent, it needs to be in the right order—or at least make sense", academic discourse needs to do more than merely 'make sense'.

Describing *coherence*, Yule (1996, p. 141) writes that it is "not something which exists in the language, but something which exists in people". Academic debate makes sense and moves smoothly only if all the interlocutors share the basic ideas about the common field of interest (e.g. sociolinguistics or second language acquisitions) and have knowledge of the topic discussed (see Appendix 4 and 5). Even if a text produced by a given student is coherent, it needs internal *cohesion* to be easily followed by other students, who are participants in the debate. The elements in a text that guarantee cohesion—termed *cohesive devices*—include anaphoric pronouns, lexical and grammatical elements, and connectors.

Learning how to write academic papers is a developmental process. Students receive explicit instruction on how to do it, follow models to see how texts are constructed, and produce several shorter pieces before they commence their MA theses—and even then they are not fully ready to write without the assistance of their supervisor. Instead, they produce several versions before the product is ready for acceptance as a necessary requirement for taking the oral MA defense. Often, during the exam even the best students have problems discussing the issues covered in their theses, which is not surprising given that speaking in academic discourse is rarely practiced during classes.

Developing speaking skills in academic discourse should follow a similar path to developing academic writing skills during MA studies. BA students learn to control content, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation at the C1 level. MA students practice all the above at the C2 level, and additionally practice how to express ideas in academic discourse. Academic register covers the conventions regarding how to present research (paraphrasing, defining, comparing, contrasting, and concluding, etc.) and it requires a certain formality that places the writer/speaker in the background (as students are quoting other researchers). Presenting the data means not only quoting, but persuading the reader/listener that you understand the data by presenting it in a clear and intelligible manner, comparing and contrasting, and showing tendencies and correlations.

The new system for MA students of *English studies* at Opole University has been created and implemented in accordance with the above ideas. What follows is a description of the nature of the problems students have encountered taking their oral MA defenses, and an outline of the new system as it concerns both classes (developing the competence) and the practical English exam (testing students' competence). Appendices 1-5 include course syllabi and the examiner's sets in the fields of sociolinguistics and second language acquisition (both courses are run by the author of the paper).

3 The Diagnosis of the Problem Before the Introduction of the New System

An analysis of the situation concerning oral MA exams at the Institute of English distinguished problems and offered possible solutions. Previously, students followed two independent paths to completing their studies, one of them being their seminar major, and the other, practical English classes. In order to graduate, students had to write an MA thesis and pass a practical English exam. Finally, they had to pass an oral MA defense to receive a degree.

The practical English exam consisted of a standardized CPE test divided into reading, listening, use of English, speaking, and writing sections, with no connection to any of the academic topics covered during the MA seminars in linguistics, literature or culture. In the speaking section, students discussed such general issues as the dangers of smoking, the advantages and disadvantages of living in the city and pollution. The range of topics was similar to the exam at the BA level; however, the students were expected to use more advanced vocabulary and grammatical structures. During the exam students proved to be proficient enough, but later on ran into problems during the oral MA defense.

Students' oral presentations during MA exams were frequently very poor, as the examinees often mixed styles and used improper register, or, alternatively, recited 'written language' learned by heart. Since the exam could be regarded as a considerable intellectual exercise that follows certain conventions, just as the writing of

the MA thesis, the decision was taken to prepare students for it systematically during practical English classes. Towards the end of the study program, seminar classes are usually devoted to writing the MA thesis and supervisors reported that no additional time is left to practice speaking—meaning that any shifts within seminar subjects would be made at the expense of the quality of MA theses.

With the above ideas in mind, a new model of developing and testing speaking skills in academic discourse was created. The assumed effectiveness of the implementation of the system was pre-checked with a pilot program realized 2 months before graduation with students still following the old path of the standardized CPE test. The first step of the piloting phase commenced in March 2010, when two groups of students took part in several academic debates within their seminar groups (around 15 students in each group, 60 min per session, and 30 min for session feedback, topics in Second Language Acquisition). The teachers involved in the pilot program were asked to compile lists of the students' utterances that were inappropriate in the context of academic debate, and later reflect upon the nature of the problems. There was no intervention concerning the students' performance at this stage. The next step involved the teachers reporting on their observations in order to work out the details of the new model. The final stage consisted of preparing syllabi for a new subject in the MA study program (*Conversation based on academic texts*), exam guidelines for both examiners and examinees, as well as directions for teachers on how to prepare the students for the oral exam's new procedures.

The pilot program revealed that many of the problems anticipated occurred, and ones that were not predicted did as well. Generally, students used inappropriate register. In particular, some of them produced concise sentences that were to the point, while others produced lengthy utterances that were difficult for the teacher and the other participants in the discussion to follow. A possible solution to overcoming such problems would be instructing students in an explicit way about the proper register for this particular situation (academic debate) or working it out in an implicit way during successive debates. Encouraging reluctant students to speak and helping talkative students organize their utterances would also be a beneficial approach. Further problems included lack of connection between ideas ("I would like to say something else" instead of "Additionally" or "On the other hand"), simplistic, repetitive vocabulary and structures (often weak competence, below the C2 level), or a showy display of jargon used to hide a lack of knowledge (nice phrases about nothing).

The need for a change was evident and such students had to be guided towards speaking in academic discourse. Some of the students also needed help in reaching the C2 level, namely in developing the foreign language while using it. Although the idea of introducing academic discourse into practical English classes proved to be the right one, the model required a few adaptations. For instance, the debates worked best when the seminar group was divided into two groups of 6–8 participants. Under this arrangement, every student had a chance to speak several times during one debate and the other students could observe their classmates without participating in the debate, thus learning from the experience.

4 Presentation of the New System of Developing and Testing Speaking Skills

Ideally, speaking in academic discourse, as a supplementary competence, should be introduced when students are ready. However, in reality, this often means simultaneous development of language skills and subject knowledge, in addition to gaining confidence in critical thinking. Therefore, well-planned preparation before testing is extremely important. Students prepare during classes called *Conversation based on academic texts* (a course run in all four semesters) and are tested during the *Self-study exam* (applied once, at the end of the third semester).

Under the new model, the speaking exam format has been altered. Instead of the 'examiner questioning the student' model, an academic debate has been introduced. What motivated this change was the belief that the new format should reflect what the students had practiced during classes. Also, the new format would assess the students' social competences (e.g. exchanging ideas and cooperating). Needless to say, a real-life discussion is a more common type of speech event than a sequence of examiner's questions followed by a student's answers.

4.1 Preparation

Students work differently in the first and the second semester. Initially, the teacher prepares a text for students to read at home (see Appendix 1 and 2 for the ideas in sociolinguistics and SLA). Students underline the key concepts, take notes and bring the text with notes to the next class. The teacher, meanwhile, becomes the moderator of the debate, asks questions and redirects the discussion when needed, and the students feel free to look for the answers in the text. Later, the teacher's role changes, frequently he/she becomes an observer, providing feedback when the session is over. Moreover, a shift can be observed from text-centered to topic-centered discussions. Looking for ideas in the text impedes fluency and 'speaking' often becomes 'reading the answers aloud'. When several texts are already covered, students stop bringing materials to the classroom and start looking for the answers in their heads.

Since all writing/speaking is tailored to an audience, the audience for the academic debate can be described as follows: the teacher, who initially acts as a partner in the discussion, or moderator, though later on he/she becomes an observer who provides feedback, or even an evaluator during the exam session; the other students, who do not participate in the discussion but learn from observation and also provide feedback to the participants; and, during the exam sessions, the examiners, who grade the students.

Apart from providing the material for discussion, the teacher raises students' awareness of appropriate register. He/she helps them to organize the discussion, encourages both short and long turn-taking, and presents the necessary language

forms. Harmer (2007) advises that if the teacher wants to try to get students to use typical discourse markers and phrases, he/she can write them on strips of paper. Each student has to pick one of the strips and use the phrase on it in conversation. Apart from showing how to work on structuring and reformulating the language students use, Harmer provides invaluable advice on how to work with reluctant students or students with low competence. He also discusses the role of the teacher and provides numerous classroom speaking activities, some of which can be used for academic discourse, e.g. discussion, formal debate, prepared talk, or reaching a consensus.

Harmer (2007) points out that much of speaking and writing in academic discourse is made up of *fixed phrases* (or *lexical chunks*). The teacher may draw on any number of textbooks that revise academic vocabulary in use, such as McCarthy's (2008), which consists of 50 units, many of them helpful in presenting language, literature and culture research. McCarthy can be used to practice both written and spoken academic discourse, as it provides words and phrases of various levels of formality. It can also be used both in the classroom and for self-study.

McCarthy and O'Dell (2008) present ways of working with academic vocabulary (e.g. key nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) and word combinations (nouns and verbs, adjectives and nouns, verb combinations, prepositional phrases, verbs and prepositions, nouns and prepositions), as well as providing exercises for words with several meanings and common errors. The authors show how to avoid repetitions, make connections, and compare and contrast. Other units include ways of talking about facts, presenting evidence and data, numbers, statistics, graphs and diagrams, as well as cause-and-effect. McCarthy and O'Dell also deal with such functions as speaking about ideas, expressing opinions, reporting what others say, analyzing results, presenting research and study aims, talking about points of view, expressing degrees of certainty, presenting an argument and organizing ideas, and, finally, describing research methods, processes and procedures.

4.2 Testing

Practical English exam administration procedures follow the Ministry requirements for MA language studies concerning the C2 graduation level. The *Self-study exam* consists of two parts: a *written component*—a standardized CPE proficiency test—and a *speaking session* (for details see Appendix 3). The oral exam is organized in the form of an academic debate and students randomly choose the topic for discussion (see Appendix 4 and 5 for examples of the examiner's sets). Three aspects are taken into consideration while assessing students' participation: *practical English* (vocabulary, grammar, fluency, etc.), *social English* (turn taking, asking others for opinion, etc.) and *academic register* (paraphrasing quotations, providing researchers' names and dates or fields of research, using academic vocabulary, etc.).

5 Conclusions

Introducing the new model of developing and testing students' speaking skills in academic discourse has proven beneficial for Opole University MA students of *English studies*. Apart from the fact that it develops new competences (i.e. speaking in academic discourse), the model prepares students for their future MA defense. Moreover, it is helpful in writing the MA thesis, since debates are based on intensive and extensive reading of academic texts related to each student's major, be it linguistics, literature or culture studies. From a technical point of view, the timing of the exam is examiner-friendly since 6–8 students are tested during one 45-min session. Students appreciate the fact that they can speak when they are ready, without getting stressed out about providing an answer immediately. They also receive group support during the stressful situation that every exam is. Since both the pilot program (2010) and two sessions of the oral exam in the new format (2011 and 2012) brought promising results and improved the students' performance during their MA defenses, the author hopes that the ideas presented above may be successfully implemented in other institutes of modern languages.

Appendix 1

A syllabus for the subject *Conversation based on academic texts* for the seminar on *Second Language Acquisition.*

Course: Conversation based on academic texts
Course code: 1.2.5-MD-KTA 1–4
Year: 1–2, MA level
Term: 1–4, winter and summer terms
Hours: 30 per term
Course type: classes
ECTS: 2 per term
Prerequisites: none
Course description:

Practical classes during which the students learn how to organize and participate in discussions on various topics presented in selected academic texts. Moreover, they extend their knowledge of second language acquisition theories and enrich their vocabulary at the academic level.

Course aims:

The aim of the course is to practice oral communication skills with reference to topics connected to second language acquisition, as well as to practice short and long persuasive and informative speech in the context of a given academic field; moreover to develop students' proficiency at C2 level with reference to summarizing information from spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments in a

coherent presentation, and expressing her-/himself spontaneously with fluency and precision.

Intended learning outcomes:

Knowledge:

Upon completing the course, the student will possess the knowledge of how to characterize the phenomena examined during classes; he/she will understand and will be able to properly use terms and concepts essential to a given academic field (Second language Acquisition), as well as the style characteristic of academic discourse.

Skills:

The student will be able to organize and take part in an academic discussion together with several other participants; he/she will be able to cooperate with other members of the group. Moreover, the student will gain the ability to freely take part in debates referring to formal topics, with other people knowledgeable in the field of second language acquisition. He/she will express himself/herself in an effortless way without obviously selecting precise vocabulary or structures; he/she will be consistent in maintaining grammatical control of complex language production even if his/her attention is engaged in the topic of the conversation.

Additional competencies (attitudes):

Additionally, the student will be able to analyze a given question in a creative and open way, formulate his/her own critical texts on different types of writing pertaining to his/her field specialisation, apply different stylistic means characteristic of academic discourse, apply his/her ability to reformulate and restructure even large pieces of text.

Evaluation procedures:

Active participation in discussions, oral test

Course content:

The topics examined during classes are devoted to various aspects and theories of second language acquisition. The students participate in discussions on such issues as: how children think and learn; working with gifted children; helping children with learning problems; the role of the teacher in foreign language teaching/learning process; reflexive teachers. It is also possible to change the topics and select different ones according to the students' suggestions.

Recommended readings:

Wood, D. 1998. *How children think and learn*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Texts prepared by the teacher, and later on, the students.

A detailed reading list will be provided at the beginning of the course.

Appendix 2

A syllabus for the subject *Conversation based on academic texts* for the seminar on *Sociolinguistics.*

Course: Conversation based on academic texts
Course code: 1.2.5-MD-KTA 1–4
Year: 1–2, MA level
Term: 1–4, winter and summer terms
Hours: 30 per term
Course type: classes
ECTS: 2 per term
Prerequisites: none
Course description:

Conversational classes; students work in groups of 7–8; discussions on topics suggested by the teacher a week before the meeting; students discuss the issues covered by the heading 'sociolinguistics' and enrich vocabulary at the academic level.

Course aims:

Students develop debating skills in the context of academic discussion; they exercise the ability to provide substantial arguments as regards theoretical issues, included in the course content. The aim of the course is to practice oral communication skills with reference to topics connected with language and society, as well as to practice short and long persuasive and informative speech in the context of a given academic field; moreover the course develops students' proficiency at C2 level with reference to summarizing information from spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments in a coherent presentation, expressing her-/himself spontaneously, with fluency and precision.

Intended learning outcomes:

Knowledge:

Upon completing the course, the student will possess the knowledge of how to characterize the phenomena examined during classes; he/she will understand and will be able to properly use terms and concepts essential to a given academic field (Sociolinguistics), as well as the style characteristic of academic discourse.

Skills:

Speaking skills, argumentative skills, debating and persuasive skills—both small group and public speaking. The student will be able to organize and take part in an academic discussion together with several other participants; he/she will be able to cooperate with other members of the group. Moreover, the student will gain the abilities to freely take part in debates referring to formal topics, with other people knowledgeable in the field of second language acquisition. He/she will express himself/herself in an effortless way without obviously selecting precise vocabulary or structures; he/she will be consistent in maintaining grammatical control of complex language production even if his/her attention is engaged in the topic of the conversation.

Additional competencies (attitudes):

Reducing public speaking apprehension through developing self-awareness in the academic context. Developing academic skills in reading specialized texts; deducing connections between theoretical issues and their practical applications in different contexts; building skills in successful academic spoken interaction. Additionally, the student will be able to analyze a given question in a creative and open way,

formulate his/her own critical texts on different types of writing pertaining to his/her field specialization, apply different stylistic means characteristic of academic discourse, apply his/her ability to reformulate and restructure even large pieces of text.

Evaluation procedures:

Students are graded for attendance, contribution and cooperation.

Course content:

The topics examined during classes are devoted to various aspects and theories of sociolinguistics. The students participate in discussions on such issues as: regional and social dialects, variation according to speakers (age, education, gender, ethnicity, social class); variation according to situation (style, jargon, register), language maintenance and shift, language policies and language planning, cross-cultural communication, English as a global language, English-based pidgins and creoles. It is also possible to change the topics and select different ones according to the students' suggestions.

Recommended readings:

Holmes, J. 2008. *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Texts prepared by the teacher, and later on, the students.

A detailed reading list will be provided at the beginning of the course.

Appendix 3

A syllabus for the subject *Self-study C*2 for all the MA seminars.

Course: Self-study C2
Course code: 1.2.5-MD-PW
Year: 2, MA level
Term: 1, winter term
Hours: 0
Course type: Compulsory examination
ECTS: 6
Prerequisites: Credits in:
Conversations on academic texts 3,
Academic writing 3.

Course description:

The *Self-study C2-level* examination is a competence exam serving the purpose of controlling the students' general language competence, without concentrating on the knowledge of the material analyzed within any particular course. However, since the examination has a strictly practical character, the student must first achieve passing marks in the *Practical English*-block subjects to be admitted. The evaluation guidelines for the exam follow those issued by the Council of Europe in *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (*CEFR*). While evaluating the student's accomplishment in exam tasks, special attention is paid to the way of handling academic features of discourse,

such as: the use of impersonal forms, formal field terminology, the lack of emotional load and the presence of objective distance, an appropriate handling of formal information in arguments, and—finally—the student's social participation in a discussion (i.e. turn-taking, respecting other conversers' views, dealing with communication problems, and the use of extra-linguistic communication).

Course aims:

The aim of the examination is to test whether the student's language proficiency satisfies the C2-Level requirements with reference to:

- understanding heard and read texts,
- summarizing information from spoken and written sources,
- reconstructing arguments in a coherent presentation,
- expressing her-/himself spontaneously, with fluency and precision,
- differentiating between subtle shades of meanings in elaborate situations.

Intended learning outcomes:

Knowledge:

A student attempting the exam should know:

- the role of subtle plays of words and that of inexplicit ways of expressing meaning,
- the ways of oral and written summarizing of information,
- how to introduce emphasis in text production in order to avoid or eliminate ambiguity,
- idiomatic and colloquial language,
- the means to formulate summaries of and reports on research carried out by her-/himself or other people,
- the style characteristic of both narrative and research texts.

Skills:

A student attempting the exam should be able to:

- freely understand any kind of spoken language, live or recorded,
- understand texts written in both colloquial and formal style,
- understand and respond to regulations and commands even if they refer to an unfamiliar field,
- read and understand texts expressing indirect or ambiguous information and containing hidden judgements,
- freely take part in all conversations, also referring to formal topics, with native speakers of English,
- express her-/himself in an effortless way without obviously selecting precise vocabulary or structures,
- be consistent in maintaining grammatical control of complex language production even if her/his attention is engaged in the topic of the conversation,
- compose well-structured summaries of and reports on complex articles and other literary pieces,
- write a critical review of cultural, literary, or linguistic texts.

Additional competencies (attitudes):
After the exam a successful student is supposed to:

- formulate her/his own critical texts on different types of writing pertaining to her/his field specialization,
- apply different stylistic means (for instance, metaphors, irony, ambiguity or puns) in her/his texts,
- apply her/his ability to reformulate and restructure even large pieces of text,
- participate in the kinds of discourse that require a large scope of language accuracy to convey such subtleties as fine shades of meaning,
- author or co-author formally structured documents such as reviews, reports or projects.

Evaluation procedures:
The accomplishment of all exam tasks is represented by a sum of percentage points scored in individual tasks. Final marks are granted according to the following framework:
total score: 0–59 %—mark: 2.0
total score: 60–68 %—mark: 3.0
total score: 69–76 %—mark: 3.5
total score: 77–84 %—mark: 4.0
total score: 85–92 %—mark: 4.5
total score: 93–100 %—mark: 5.0
Course content:
The exam consists of three parts:

(a) An integrated test to control the student's language proficiency in:

  (a1) listening comprehension (maximum score = 20 % of the test score),
  (a2) reading comprehension (maximum score = 20 % of the test score), and
  (a3) use of English (maximum score = 20 % of the test score),

(b) Writing—a short essay (approximately two pages of A4 format) focusing on a discussion of a chosen research problem emerging from such subjects as: the *MA Seminar*, *Academic writing*, and *English for Specialist Purposes*. The student's task is to justify why a chosen problem seems to be important and interesting. This part of the exam serves the purpose of checking the student's ability to apply the appropriate academic style in a written text (maximum score = 20 % of the test score).

(c) Oral exam—this part aims at checking the student's knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, academic discourse markers, and the ability to conduct interactive communication within the fields analyzed in *Conversation on academic texts*. The questions are related to the student's MA major (maximum score = 20 % of the test score).

Recommended reading:

Brown, K. 2007. *Academic encounters: Life in society: Reading, study skills, writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cumming, A. (Ed.). 2006. *Goals for academic writing.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Espeseth, M. 2006. *Academic listening encounters: Listening, note taking, discussion: Human behavior.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Flowerdew, J. (Ed.). 2002. *Academic discourse*. Harlow: Longman.

MacPherson, R. 2006. *English for academic purposes.* Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN [PWN Press].

McCarthy, M. 2009. *Academic vocabulary in use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Osuchowska, D. 2009. *The rudiments of academic writing*. Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego [Rzeszów University Press].

Sanabira, K. 2007. *Academic listening encounters: Life in society: Listening, note taking, discussion.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix 4

Examiner's set: Oral Practical English Exam (C2 level)—*Sociolinguistics*

Sources:

1. Holmes, J. 2008. *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
2. A selection of academic texts (articles from scientific journals, chapters from the books), student's individual choices depending on their field of interest

Students randomly choose one of the topics:

1. Language variation: focus on users
2. Language variation: focus on uses
3. Social variation of language
4. Regional variation of language
5. Cross-cultural communication
6. Multilingual speech communities

Examiner's clues:

1.

a. Regional and social dialects
b. Gender and age
c. Social class

d. Ade-graded features of speech
e. Ethnicity and social networks
f. Variation and change

2.

a. Style, context and register
b. Politeness and address forms
c. Speech functions, linguistic politeness and cross-cultural communication
d. Gender, politeness and stereotypes
e. Language, cognition and culture
f. Ways of analyzing spoken and written discourse

3.

a. Social parameters: age, gender, social class, education
b. Social networks: jargon, register, network density
c. Social identity: standard versus non-standard variety
d. Vernaculars
e. Code-switching

4.

a. Standard language, standard language formation process
b. RP as an example of standard pronunciation
c. Vernacular language: example of Black English
d. Vernacular and social parameters
e. Ethnicity, pidgins and creoles

5.

a. Language, cognition and culture
b. Language and perception
c. Linguistic categories and culture
d. Discourse patterns and culture
e. Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, linguistic determinism, linguistic relativism

6.

a. Language choice in multilingual communities
b. Language maintenance and shift
c. Language policies and language planning
d. Linguistic varieties and multilingual nations
e. National, official and standard languages

Appendix 5

Examiner's set: Oral Practical English Exam (C2 level)—*Second Language Acquisition.*

Sources:

1. Wood, D. 1998. *How children think and learn*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
2. A selection of academic texts (articles from scientific journals, chapters from the books), student's individual choices depending on their field of interest

Students blind-choose one of the topics:

1. Images of childhood and their reflection in teaching
2. Maturation and learning
3. Learning how to think and learn
4. Language and learning
5. Making sense
6. The literate mind

Examiner's clues:

1.

a. Learning and schooling
b. Thought as internalized action
c. Piaget's approach to language and cognition
d. Vygotsky: instruction and intelligence
e. Talking, thinking and processing information
f. Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner—a comparison

2.

a. Piagetian stages of development and the critique of the theory
b. The impact of Vygotskian thinking
c. Neo-Piagetian theory
d. Mental modules and maturation

3.

a. Attending, concentrating and remembering
b. Memory and schooling, paying attention
c. Wholes and parts; theories of perception and understanding
d. Effective instruction

4.

a. Bernstein's theory of restricted and elaborated codes
b. Chomskian Language Acquisition Device (LAD)
c. Meaning and 'structure dependency"
d. Language learning and acquisition

5.

a. Verbal and non-verbal communication
b. Telling stories
c. Language and cognition
d. Information-giving

6.

a. Logic, literacy and reasoning
b. Language in talk and text
c. The written and the spoken word: learning to read
d. Writing, planning and self-regulation
e. Becoming literate
f. Reading comprehension

References

Harmer, J. 2007. *The practice of English language teaching*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
Holmes, J. 2008. *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
Hrehovčik, T. and A. Uberman. 2003. *English language teaching methodology*. Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego[Rzeszów University Press].
Johnson, K. and H. Johnson. 1998. *Encyclopedic dictionary of applied linguistics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
McCarthy, M. and F. O'Dell. 2008. *Academic vocabulary in use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Nunan, D. 1991. *Language teaching methodology: A textbook for teachers*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
Thornbury, S. 2005. *How to teach speaking*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
Wood, D. 1998. *How children think and learn*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
Yule, G. 1996. *The study of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Designing a Self-Assessment Instrument for Developing the Speaking Skill at the Advanced Level

Aleksandra Jankowska and Urszula Zielińska

Abstract The present paper describes an attempt at developing in college students the ability to self-evaluate their own recordings of short speeches on topics of their choice, made as a credit requirement for speaking classes. The students were asked to record short speeches (3–5 min) and hand them in. Initially, no self-assessment was required and then students were asked to evaluate their recordings, but no guidelines were provided. Despite the fact that all the students took a semester course in learner-training and that techniques for implementing elements of self-assessment in their own teaching were discussed during methodology classes, very few students manifested the ability (or willingness) to evaluate their speeches, limiting the evaluation to general remarks such as "I made some grammar mistakes" or "I need to work on my pronunciation". As a result of this experience, a short self-assessment instrument based on the *Common European framework of reference* (CEFR) descriptors for the speaking ability (spoken production) at the C1 level was developed and the students were asked to use it to evaluate their speeches. Selected students were then interviewed in order to find out their opinions on the usefulness of the instrument in helping them to identify their strengths and weaknesses in speaking. Both the students' and the teachers' opinions were later analyzed and the results of this analysis will serve as a basis for developing an improved version of the self-assessment sheet.

1 Introduction

Contemporary approaches to language teaching, such as the communicative approach or task-based teaching, see the development of effective oral communication as one of their main goals. There is no agreement, however, as to how this

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goal is to be achieved and we are far from fully understanding the processes underlying speaking. According to Levelt (1989), speech production consists of four main stages: *conceptualizatio*n, *formulation*, *articulation* and *self-monitoring*. During the conceptualization stage the content of the message is planned. This content is then matched to appropriate words and phrases which are connected following the rules of grammar and encoded phonologically. This pre-planned utterance is then physically produced during the stage of articulation. The whole process is controlled by a monitor, which is a part of the conceptualizer and is active both during and after articulation. For the process of speech production to be fluent, a degree of automaticity is necessary. The analysis of speech in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity (Skehan 1998) shows that learners find if difficult to concentrate on all of these factors simultaneously during speech production and, depending on the nature of the task, focus on one of them at the expense of the other two. Additionally, the quality of students' output has been found to be positively influenced by such factors as planning time and opportunities for task rehearsal and repetition (cf. Bygate 1996, 1999). In view of the above, it seems reasonable to suggest that planning, recording and then analyzing one's speech may be beneficial to foreign language learners wishing to improve their oral skills.

2 Testing and Assessing Speaking

In the literature on language learning and teaching the terms *testing* and *assessment* are used when talking about measuring learners' progress and proficiency. Testing usually refers to the more formal ways of checking students' knowledge and is a subset of assessment, which is an ongoing process of providing students with feedback on their performance. Most of the techniques used for assessment can also be used in testing and that is why in the remainder of the paper these two terms will be used interchangeably. Another important distinction is that between *formative* and *summative assessment*, where formative assessment refers to "evaluating students in the process of "forming" their competencies and skills with the goal of helping them to continue the growth process" (Brown 2004, p. 6), while summative assessment "aims to measure, or summarize what a student has grasped" (2004, p. 6).

Assessing and testing speaking is difficult and time-consuming. The difficulty is mainly due to the fact that speech is temporary and a teacher/assessor needs to conduct assessment immediately at the time the student is talking and very often rely on his/her memory to provide an accurate evaluation and feedback. Nowadays, the use of technology can help solve this problem with recordings of students' oral performance constituting a viable, although still rarely used, option. Assessment of speaking skills is also an extremely subjective process with many factors influencing the teacher's judgment. This problem can be minimized by developing and following clear scales. Many such scales are already available and their strengths and weaknesses are discussed in the literature on the subject (e.g. Luoma 2004; Hughes 2011). The major problems connected with assessing speaking are best

summarized by Alderson and Bachman in their preface to Luoma (2004, pp. iv–v) volume on the subject:

> Speaking is (…) the most difficult language skill to assess reliably. A person's speaking ability is usually judged during a face-to-face interaction in real time, between an interlocutor and a candidate. The assessor has to make instantaneous judgment about a range of aspects of what is being said, as it is being said. This means that assessment might depend not only upon which particular features of speech (e.g. pronunciation, accuracy, fluency) the interlocutor pays attention to at any point in time, but upon a host of other factors such as the language level, gender, and status of the interlocutor, his or her familiarity to the candidate and the personal characteristics of the interlocutor and candidate.

Speaking is a complex skill and its assessment includes the assessment of such areas as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehensibility, coherence and cohesion, as well as the ability to interact and adjust one's speech to a particular social context. These areas are reflected in most rating scales used to assess oral proficiency. Brown's (2001, pp. 406–407) oral proficiency scoring categories include grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, pronunciation and task, TOEFL speaking rubrics are divided into delivery (fluency, intonation, rhythm, pronunciation), language use, divided into vocabulary (which is evaluated with reference to diversity, sophistication and precision) and grammar, evaluated on the basis of range, complexity and accuracy, and topic development, assessed taking into account coherence, idea progression and content relevance (Hughes 2011, p. 99), while the criteria for the IELTS speaking test include fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation (Hughes 2011, p. 104), to give just a few examples.

In designing assessment tasks, we should also take into account the various types of talk we engage in. Brown and Yule (1983) distinguish four different types of information talk: *description*, *instruction*, *storytelling* and *expressing and justifying opinions*. Bygate (1987) differentiates between *factually-oriented talk* including description, narration, instruction and comparison, and *evaluative talk* comprising explanation, justification, prediction and decision. It is important that all the above types of talk are included in assessment procedures.

Tasks used for the purposes of assessing speaking can be grouped into several categories, one of which was put forward by Brown (2004, pp. 141–142), who lists the following types of speaking performance that can be the focus of assessment:

(1) *imitative*, in which students are asked to repeat short words or phrases and whose aim is to focus on pronunciation;
(2) *intensive*, which include reading aloud or sentence or dialogue completion;
(3) *responsive*, which take the form of very short interactions;
(4) *interactive*, which are extended versions of responsive tasks;
(5) *extensive*, which "include speeches, oral presentations, and story-telling, during which the opportunity for oral interaction from listeners is either highly limited (perhaps to non-verbal responses) or ruled out altogether. Language style is frequently more deliberate (planning is involved) and formal for extensive tasks" (Brown 2004, p. 142).

Specific examples of tasks used for the purpose of assessment include, among many others, imitation, interviews, picture descriptions, role plays and simulations, collaborative tasks, discussions, and live and recorded monologues (Thornbury 2005, pp. 125–126; Johnson 2008, p. 319).

Students can be asked to perform the tasks individually with the teacher/assessor acting as an interlocutor, in pairs or in groups, depending on the type of task and the aim of the test. Individual testing is time-consuming and stressful due to the unequal balance of power between the tester and the examinee, but it allows for flexibility in approaching each candidate. Another weakness of this type of arrangement is a limited number of types of tasks which can be employed. Both pair and group work allow for more variety in this respect, although they are also not without weaknesses, the major one being the influence of each candidate's proficiency level and personality on the performance of the other members of the group (Luoma 2004, pp. 35–41).

Taking into account the fact that most speaking is interactive in nature, it is not surprising that the most common assessment/testing techniques try to emulate that feature. There is still, however, room for monologic tasks during which students are given an opportunity to practice longer stretches of discourse (Luoma 2004, p. 44; Thornbury 2005, p. 126). Monologic tasks are used in the speaking part of the "iBT/New generation TOEFL" test as well as in the IELTS speaking test (Hughes 2011, pp. 99–103).

Typically, assessment is conducted by the teacher, but this is not the only option and both peer- and self-assessment should be considered. Peer-assessment is closely related to principles of cooperative learning and "is simply one arm of a plethora of tasks and procedures within the domain of learner-centered and collaborative education" (Brown 2004, p. 270). Self-assessment will be discussed in more detail in the following section of the paper.

3 Self-Assessment

Self-assessment might be considered by some researchers and practitioners as an "absurd reversal of politically correct power relationships" (Brown 2004, p. 270). However, to those who adhere to less conventional ways of teaching, this notion is extremely valuable, because it is so closely connected with the concept of developing autonomy and self-regulation. It would be very difficult to imagine independent, successful learners without the skill and the willingness to reflect on their performance and introduce adjustments into their own ways of learning a foreign language. If self-regulation is expected to be developed and improved, then the three subprocesses, namely forethought, performance or volitional control, and, most importantly, self-reflection (Zimmerman 2000) would be incomplete without self-judgment and self-evaluation. Once observed, analyzed and evaluated, different aspects of one's own performance, whether oral or written, become the foundation for a change, through which specific goals of an individual are attained. In other

words, by looking back and assessing performance, a person judges the effectiveness of techniques employed in learning the language and can thus adjust and modify their actions. Furthermore, "our regulatory skill, or lack thereof, is the source of our perception of personal agency that lies at the core of our sense of self" (Zimmerman 2000, p. 13). It would be impossible, then, to achieve this state of personal agency without the ability to self-regulate, self-reflect and self-assess.

Brown lists self- and peer-assessment among the "best possible formative types of assessment and possibly the most rewarding". The five categories he distinguishes include (2004, p. 270):

(1) assessment of (a specific) performance;
(2) indirect assessment of (general) competence;
(3) metacognitive assessment (for setting goals);
(4) socioaffective assessment;
(5) student-generated tests.

The first type of assessment requires an immediate (or at least not delayed) evaluation of the performance and is usually based on a checklist or some other defined scale. Journals and video-recordings are also used for that purpose. It was this type of self-assessment that had become the focus of our interest.

4 The Study

The present paper reports the results of an action research project in progress. Action research is operationalized here as "a form-of self reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which these practices are carries out" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, pp. 220–221, as quoted in Nunan 1989, p. 12).

In designing the study, the authors followed the procedure put forward by Kemmis and McTaggart (1989), cited in Nunan (1989, p. 12) in which the following stages of action research are identified:

- *Phase I*: Develop a plan of action to improve what has already been happening.
- *Phase II*: Act to implement the plan.
- *Phase III*: Observe the effects of action in the context in which it occurs.
- *Phase IV*: Reflect on these effects.

The aim of this research project was to develop a self-assessment checklist to help students evaluate their speaking skills, to evaluate it and, if necessary, suggest changes in the design of the instrument to be implemented during a follow-up stage.

4.1 Participants

Forty-six students who were involved in the initial stages of the study were 3rd year students of English of a teacher training college. Their course in English as a foreign language included classes in grammar, writing, speaking integrated with reading, and speaking integrated with listening. During the first two years of study they also had separate classes devoted to pronunciation practice. As part of the teacher training component of their study program (year 1 and 2), the students had classes in methodology devoted to ways of teaching all the aspects and skills of the target language as well as assessment and testing. Additionally, during the first year, they underwent a semester course in learning strategies aiming at improving their own ways of working on language development. The course also included elements of self-assessment.

The students were accustomed to recording their oral performances as they were asked to do it for their first year listening/speaking course. The speeches were to be recorded once a month and be 3–5 minutes long. The students were allowed to choose their own topics but they were encouraged to talk about the issues discussed during classes. In the second year, the students were not asked to submit recorded speeches and their speaking ability was assessed on the basis of their in-class performance including presentations, and a mock exam conducted at the end of the year.

4.2 Stage One: Preliminary Assessment

In the first semester of the academic year 2010/2011, the students were required to record 3 speeches *per* semester, each 3–5 minutes long. The students were able to select topics they wanted to address but were encouraged to talk about topics discussed in class. The students recorded their speeches using a variety of devices and software, and then submitted them on a CD or by e-mail. One student recorded her speeches on an audio cassette. The teacher then listened to the recordings, made notes on them and provided oral feedback on the students' performances during classes. The students were asked to present the main points of their speeches to their classmates. Once during the semester the teacher held individual conferences with the students in order to discuss their speeches in private in more detail. Providing feedback turned out to be quite difficult mainly because of the time required to do so effectively. This and the fact that the students were going to end their formal education soon constituted an incentive for the teacher to introduce elements of self-assessment into the project.

4.3 Stage Two: Preliminary Self-assessment

During the second semester, the students were asked to record the same number of speeches of the same length; this time, however, they were to attach a transcript of their speech together with phonetic transcription of its fragment and a short written

evaluation of their performance. In order to help them with the task, the teacher conducted a discussion session in which basic principles and advantages of self-assessment were discussed on the basis of students' knowledge from the methodology classes and their experience as learners. The students were then asked to design in groups a self-assessment form that could be used to evaluate their speeches. Most students agreed that such a form should include the following elements: topic, organization, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and general impression. The students were not provided with strict instructions as to what form their evaluation should take, other than a very general guideline: "Evaluate the speech, mention some strengths and weaknesses, comment on pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, contents and organization". Most students found the tasks quite difficult despite the training in self-assessment they underwent in their first year. Most of them were not able or willing to identify their strengths and weaknesses and limited their evaluations to very general statements as in the examples below:

Student 1:

- the whole text is rather chaotically organized; I should focus on coherence more;
- the vocab is not sufficiently advanced;
- sometimes I tend to mispronounce the sounds in the end of the words;
- I have some problems with diphthongs e.g. like in 'follows'.

Student 2:
I believe that both the topic and the word choice are adequate, I did my best to be as fluent and understandable as possible.

Student 3:
I think that there is more advanced vocabulary in my speech. However, I still have to practice on my fluency during speaking. I don't see any major grammatical mistakes. In my opinion, the speech is very logical and interesting.

Student 4:
I might have made grammatical mistakes, some problems with pronunciation, I used vocabulary which I have learnt recently.

As was already said above, the students rarely mentioned their strengths and weaknesses; instead they often limited their evaluation to listing examples of mistakes they made and providing the correct versions, as in the examples below:

Others instead of 'other'.
Worries instead of 'worrying'.
Similar to instead of 'equally similar to'.
Not 'prohibit but pro'hibit.
Should be fight 'off' not fight 'down'.
Problems with pronouncing the word 'vulnerability'.

Some students provided very detailed assessments closely following the format discussed in class, as in the following example:

> *Topic*: As I said in my speech, the subject of abortion will always be a popular and controversial topic for discussion. Since there are many various aspects mentioned by both the opponents and the supporters of abortion, I found the topic interesting to be discussed.
> *Organization*: I think that my speech is clear and well organized. There was the introduction, the main body, in which I mentioned what others claim and my own opinion, and the conclusion.
> *Pronunciation*: I have noticed some mistakes, for example in *religious*.
> *Vocabulary*: I believe that the vocabulary and the expressions that I have used this time are more advanced than those that I used for my previous speech.
> *Grammar*: I have not noticed any mistakes.
> *Impression*: Generally, I am satisfied with both the fluency and accuracy. I find this recording better that the last one.

Finally, out of the thirty students who turned in their written evaluations, four designed their own forms in which they included sections such as: *What I like in my performance* or *What I don't like in my performance*, which could be considered to be variations of the strength/weaknesses categories, or lists of the new vocabulary items that the students deliberately tried to include in their recordings. They also used colors and plus and minus signs to indicate different aspects of their speech performance.

On the whole, the results of the first attempt at introducing self-assessment into the course were rather disappointing as most students were not able to evaluate their speeches effectively, despite the previous training they received. This observation led the authors to the conclusion that a simple self-assessment tool may provide a way of helping students focus on specific features of their speeches. The development and implementation of the checklist will be described in the next section.

4.4 Implementing a Self-Assessment Checklist

In creating the self-assessment checklist, we were inspired by several sources, namely: the *Common European framework of reference* (CEFR), the guidelines for the practical English oral exam at the Teacher Training College in Poznań, as well as the authors' teaching experience and observations. The descriptors used in the *European language portfolio*, specifying the language level of learners, formed a basis for a detailed approach to the criteria incorporated in the preparation of the list. Since the graduates of the Teacher Training College are expected to reach the level specified as C1, the relevant description from the CEFR was taken into account, thus setting the frame within which the authors intended to operate. The guidelines for the final practical English exam, containing specific suggestions as to the assessment of pronunciation and the use of English, provided a substantial inspiration for the authors at the initial stage of the process. Some of the CEFR level

C1 descriptors, which guided the authors in their work, included the following (CEFR 2001, pp. 74–78):

(a) "Can express himself/herself fluently or spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions. There is little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies; only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural smooth flow of language".
(b) "Can use language flexibly and effectively for social purposes, including emotional, allusive and joking language".
(c) "Can argue a formal position convincingly".
(d) "Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organizational patterns and a wide range of cohesive devices".

The guidelines for assessing students at the final practical English oral exam, focusing on the language and communication skills, were also taken into consideration, including the following (Regional practical English test specifications 2005):

(a) the use of English: structure of sentences, the use of tenses, verb forms, the use of articles, collocations, advanced vocabulary;
(b) pronunciation: the quality of vowels and consonants, intonation patterns, word stress, fluency;
(c) communication skills: expressing personal opinions, asking and answering direct questions, interacting constructively.

The role of the last aspect listed in the guidelines, namely interacting constructively, was considered to be of marginal importance only, as students recorded their monologues rather than conversations (with two exceptions). The contribution or expressing opinions were crucial in the presentations, but not, for obvious reasons, 'responding' to each other's comments.

4.4.1 The Checklist

As a result, the following list of criteria was created and sent out to the students once they finished their independent, unguided evaluation. There were three categories in the checklist, the first being the *evaluation of the content* (points one to six), the second dealing with *pronunciation* (points seven to twelve), and the third covering *vocabulary* (points thirteen to seventeen). Twenty-five students completed and submitted the self-assessment checklist (Table 1).

The list was preceded by the title, the assessment scale and the name slot. At the bottom of the table, space was provided for students where they could reflect on their strongest and weakest points, or add other comments they might have been willing to share with the authors. Below that section, the evaluation-scale of the checklist itself was added, so that students could circle the phrase they agreed with, choosing one of the following answers: "very useful", "useful", "not useful", "not useful at all" and "cannot say", or write about their reactions to the checklist in their own words.

Table 1 Self-assessment checklist

	In my speech I managed to…	5	4	3	2	1	Comments/ examples
1.	Clearly present complex ideas						
2.	Adequately describe experience						
3.	Follow a logical order of events						
4.	Emphasize important arguments						
5.	Give appropriate examples						
6.	Draw conclusions						
7.	Speak fluently						
8.	Use appropriate intonation						
9.	Pronounce "th" correctly						
10.	Pronounce final voiced consonants correctly						
11.	Pronounce vowels correctly						
12.	Use correct stress in words						
13.	Use advanced vocabulary						
14.	Vary sentence structures						
15.	Form grammatically correct sentences						
16.	Use correct verb forms						
17.	Use correct articles						

4.4.2 Students' Responses in the Checklist

When completing the checklist, the students used the grading scale from 1 to 5, 5 being the highest. Fifty percent of those who handed in their checklists seemed to be satisfied with their own performance, as they marked the first three columns, assessing different aspects of the presentation as "very good", "good" or "quite good". There were ten students who ticked the column with grade 2 when assessing some aspects of the speech, and three students who marked the last column (grade 1) when assessing their pronunciation and intonation. As many as fifteen students wrote additional comments in the column designed for that purpose. The extent to which they elaborated on a given aspect of their speech varied from just one simple sentence or phrase to a few sentences. The following remarks were included in the checklist:

- There were moments where I could have spoken clearer.
- I mispronounced some words.
- I sound more accurate than fluent.
- Unfortunately, this time it seems there are no conclusions at the end of my speech.
- My speech was quite fluent.

- I still have problems with my intonation.
- I haven't noticed incorrect verb forms.

Quite frequently, the students wrote the word where they noticed a mistake or a phrase which they seemed to be proud of:

- Recurring, to outline, to plunge into.
- I made a mistake in phenomena, where I should say phenomenon.

All the students used the space provided below the table and listed their strongest and weakest points, although there was one person who did not provide any example of a strong point and wrote "lack" in that line. However, in most cases, not only good but also poor aspects of the students' speeches were enumerated, with the focus on grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary:

- Poor grammar and vocabulary variety.
- I knew what I wanted to say but somehow I couldn't put my thoughts into words.
- Final devoicing was my major problem, and vowels were sometimes carelessly pronounced.
- I think the organization, argumentation and the presentation of the topic itself is my strong point.
- The last point below the checklist, namely the evaluation of the criteria, was completed by all students and, subsequently, discussed in the interview.

4.5 The Interview

The next stage of the action research included meeting with the students and talking about the self-assessment checklist, as well as reflecting on the process of self-assessment itself. In the time available, 15 students were interviewed and recorded. The questions asked during the interview focused primarily on the evaluation of the checklist, on its wording or structure specifically, but they were also concerned with the strategies students use to learn the language, and their previous experience in self-assessment. They were as follows:

(1) How would you evaluate the checklist?
(2) Which of the statements were unclear or difficult to understand?
(3) Which of them would you change?
(4) How do you intend to improve the aspects of speaking which you evaluated as poor?
(5) What do you usually do in order to improve your language?
(6) Do you use any of the strategies acquired in your first year learner training?
(7) Did you assess yourself or record your speeches before you started studying at the College?

(8) Do you think you might be willing to introduce self-assessment in schools when you become a teacher?

On average, the interview lasted 10–20 min and was arranged with each student on an individual basis.

4.5.1 Students' Responses to Interview Questions

With reference to the first question, the majority of students interviewed stated that the list of criteria was useful. One student considered it very useful, three stated that it was not useful and one was skeptical about the whole idea of self-assessment and marked the answer "cannot say" in the checklist. Among the reasons justifying the usefulness of the list was the fact that it was easier for students to assess their own speeches with the help of the checklist, while without it the task seemed much more difficult: "I like it when all the points are listed, because when we had to assess the speech I had problems what to write; we didn't have such a pattern, didn't know what to pay attention to". Thus, some respondents stated that it would be ideal to have access to the list even before the recording, so that they could be aware what to focus on. Three students who stated that the list was not useful were actually expressing doubts about the "whole idea of self-assessment". They questioned the process of having to record themselves, of listening again to their own speeches and then evaluating the presentation. Moreover, having to transcribe their presentations seemed to be too troublesome for them: "writing the transcript takes at least 2 h and it's horrible". Although the whole idea of self-assessment was "useless", as the three students frequently repeated in the interview, the checklist itself was evaluated more positively: "we know what to pay attention to; it's better than transcribing the whole speech". The student who circled "cannot say" in the evaluation thought it would have been better to have been provided with the checklist at the beginning of the course, because "everyone had worked out the system" by the time the second recording was prepared.

On the other hand, however, there was a more positive response coming from a student who expressed a very enthusiastic view on the process of self-assessment: "I would convince my friends to listen to the recording at least four times, devote half an hour instead of 5 min—during my third listening I heard a lot more than during the first. It's simply impossible to focus on all aspects in one go: you need to listen again and again because each time you focus on a new aspect". Another student admitted that although she understood why some people might dislike evaluating their speeches and the very process of recording, for her it was extremely useful, because when she heard herself, she could notice her mistakes: "it helped me a lot, because I paid attention to what I wanted to improve, for instance, I wanted to change intonation". She also added: "many people are not aware of some aspects; such a checklist can help you focus on your weak points". Additionally, the student emphasized that for her it was an exceptionally good idea to transcribe the speeches: "although I know it might be difficult, I think that only when I transcribed

whatever I said, was I able to notice details, and details are important because we are going to become teachers, so we should be aiming at perfection; I noticed some vowels then, or some devoicing, and I think it would be best to do both, transcription and the checklist, because we don't always hear the mistakes we make". It may be interesting to note here that both students prepared a detailed analysis of their speeches, with the checklist criteria discussed and fully described in the comments.

As far as the second question is concerned, six respondents considered the second and the sixth criterion to be difficult to understand, as "adequately describing experience" and "drawing conclusions" seemed to have been too vague for them. One student had problems with evaluating fluency ("how do I do that?"). There were also a few students who expressed doubts about the meaning of the criterion: "I managed to follow a logical order of events" or "I managed to emphasize important arguments". They all agreed, however, that those criteria would probably depend on the type of speech prepared, so they would not be relevant in all presentations. As far as the third question is concerned, there were suggestions from two students that perhaps more specific descriptions should be added, as, for instance, "th should be characterized more fully", or more attention should be paid to the pronunciation of those segments which are "difficult for Poles, some diphthongs, for example".

Answers to questions seven and eight show that none of the students interviewed had any practice in self-assessment before entering university. Most students agreed, however, that it might be a good idea to introduce self-assessment in their classroom once they become teachers: "I think everyone should evaluate themselves; everyone should be able to say what their weak aspect is; we often think that teachers and friends exaggerate when they say that something is wrong, but when you listen to yourself, you will hear they are right". The three students who disapproved of self-assessment in general expressed a negative attitude towards using this strategy in their future teaching practice, arguing that it would be too difficult for their pupils: "why should a student in high school know how to assess himself? They don't learn pronunciation at school, or transcription".

The questions which referred to the students' ways of learning and improving the language, namely numbers four, five and six, triggered a variety of responses. Among the strategies used by the students the following were quoted: learning useful words, using word cards, drawing trees, mnemonic techniques, as well as listening to songs and watching films. It is interesting to note here that those ways of learning had been developed before their first year at the college and the course in study skills helped them become more aware of their activities ("I appreciate that more now, use it more consciously; before I came here I didn't know it was a technique; I thought everybody had to cope somehow; I didn't know others had the same problem and that there was a theory about it"). When inquired further about the source of help in acquiring new strategies, most students admitted: "Nobody helped me, I found them on my own". One student found inspiration in the preparation for the final exam in senior high school, and was directed and guided by a teacher.

When asked for a comment on the ways of learning, the three students who disapproved of self-assessment stated: "we all have our own ways of learning, difficult to change" and, in response to the fourth question ("How do you want to improve the aspects of language which you evaluated as poor?"), a surprising reply was given: "I think we should have pronunciation in the third year". Moreover, the question "What can you yourself do?" triggered a reply in the past tense: "I was listening to longer speeches after the first year exam", signaling to the interviewer that, in fact, the ways of learning the language have not changed or improved since then.

5 Conclusions

Undoubtedly, there are many aspects of the interviews and the checklist which could be further analyzed and studied, but the most crucial goal was attained: we now have learnt that the majority of students interviewed found the checklist useful and would consider using self-assessment in the classroom once they become qualified teachers. They would also prefer to have been given the checklist earlier, rather than later in the academic year, as evaluating themselves on their own turned out to be very difficult for many. A few points in the list of criteria should be improved, or made more precise, such as fluency, describing experience, or using advanced vocabulary. The study revealed that it is necessary to raise students' awareness about the importance of self-assessment in language learning as well as to provide them with systematic training in this skill. Self-assessment is a difficult process and it is influenced both by the ability of the students as well as their attitude to it. Some, more autonomous and independent students, will be eager to experiment with it and will be able to design their own techniques of conducting it. More teacher dependent students will need more time to be convinced about the usefulness of self-assessment and will need more guidance before they are willing to experiment with it. It seems that active involvement of the students in the process of designing the instrument is crucial if students are to accept it as their own. The students should also be allowed to experiment with different assessment instruments and choose aspects of the target language performance they want to focus on at any given time. Finally, the issue of the accuracy of students' self-assessment and the correlation between students' and teachers' assessment should be addressed.

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