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An **e**-journal of **T**eacher **E**ducation and **A**pplied **L**anguage **S**tudies

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e-TEALS

An e-journal of Teacher Education and Applied Language Studies

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An **e**-journal of **T**eacher **E**ducation and **A**pplied **L**anguage **S**tudies

The Development of Oral Skills in Foreign Language Learners through Information Gap Exercises

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| University of Porto

This action research project had its genesis in a common problematic situation observed in the Secondary School in Ermesinde and in the EB1 Santa Cruz, in two distinct classes, the 10th J and 3rd B. This problematic situation is reflected in the reluctance shown by some students to express themselves orally or to avoid spontaneous oral participation. Even if the environment created in the classroom was friendly and relaxed (even playful, in the 3rd year class), some students showed embarrassment when asked directly by the teacher. However, despite their resistance to oral participation, it was found during an initial observation phase that the students felt that talking was the most important skill in learning a foreign language. It was also found to be a convergent opinion in both groups that it was easier to talk to a colleague or within their peer group than with the teacher and that an oral presentation before the entire class was perceived as intimidating. Students surveyed about the strategies that have positive effects in developing their speaking skills said they liked to work with songs and communicative games.

The research results show that information gap exercises were an effective tool in the development of oral skills of students in 10th and 3rd year. The strategies used in both groups were similar, suggesting that these exercises cut across different age groups, becoming an advantageous working tool from which students benefit in foreign language classes.

The communicative approach in the classroom

The main aim of the communicative approach to teaching and learning is to achieve competence in communicating in a foreign language in all its components. Thus, to communicate is to use a whole range of knowledge, know-how and attitudes. The

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communicative competence of a speaker is constrained by a wide knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and several paralinguistic aspects of the target language.

Within the framework of communicative competence in a foreign language, the Common European Framework of Reference states that in order to accomplish their communicative intentions, learners mobilize overall skills and combine them with a communicative competence specifically related to language. In a narrower sense, the communicative competence comprises linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects. Communicative competence should include knowledge and performance because, in practice, these terms do not exist separately.

In an article on communicative tasks, Nunan pointed to key characteristics of the communicative approach, namely the emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the foreign language, the introduction of authentic materials in the context of learning, creating opportunities for students to focus not only on the language but also on the learning process itself, the use of student's personal experiences as important contributions in the classroom and the attempt to link language learning in the classroom with its activation beyond the classroom (Nunan 279).

Although these are guidelines for the communicative approach, when developing my project I wasn't trying to meet the potential or actual communicative needs of the students who are learning a foreign language. Quite the contrary, the tasks given to students were not chosen according to a real situation outside the context of the classroom. Following the curriculum of the 10th year (German) and the Guidelines for English in the Primary School (3rd year), I chose the grammatical and lexical items to work with and I selected the materials and activities that I considered to be more effective to achieve my goals.

Long defines information gap exercises as those tasks that require the exchange of information among participants (qtd. in Pica and Doughty 307); each one has information that is unknown to the other, but both need it to accomplish a given task. It emphasizes the mandatory nature of the information sharing that occurs in a reciprocal manner, thus creating conditions for students to adjust their speech and to maintain consistency of content.

So, what I intended with my research project was to develop students' awareness of what they already know about the linguistic system of a foreign language, demonstrating that it can

be applied in communicative contexts in real life. In possession of basic language skills, including some vocabulary and structures, I wanted students to feel confident and able to establish dialogues / conversations in the target language. To achieve this objective, I created activities to develop students' self-confidence in the context of the classroom, developing their comfort with the foreign language and the possibility to overcome difficulties of inhibition or shame.

The anxiety and reluctance in speaking

A study by MacIntyre & Gardner shows that anxiety negatively affects learning and performance, indicating a close relationship between anxiety levels and their students' proficiency in acquiring a foreign language. According to Tobias (1986), anxiety can work as a mental block to cognitive performance in its three phases: input, processing and output (qtd. by MacIntyre and Gardner 255). An increase in anxiety, which is typically associated with feelings of low self-esteem and fear of failure, can hinder the performance in the foreign language.

The anxiety in language, a kind of anxiety associated with specific contexts of language learning, can arise from several factors, according to the frames of reference specific to each learner. The context of the classroom itself may represent an environment likely to cause anxiety in some students, since it involves frequent assessments.

As pointed out by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, "performance in any foreign language can challenge the self-evaluation of the student as a competent communicator and can cause reticence, self-awareness, fear or even panic" (Horwitz *et al.* 128).

As far as performance anxiety is concerned, other authors offer a list of potential sources of language anxiety, which can be personal and interpersonal anxieties, the opinion of the learner about learning foreign languages, the teacher's opinion about the foreign language teaching; the actions of teacher and student, the procedures of the classroom, and the assessment in the foreign language.

The process of teaching and learning a new language often challenges the personal identity, the social and cultural development of the learner, in which cognitive and affective factors, directly linked to their personality, often play an important role. The tolerance of

differences, the willingness to take risks and to be exposed to the other, the anxiety, inhibition, motivation and self-esteem are some of the inherent factors of the learning process.

With no intention of disregarding the personal traits of each student, forcing those students who do not like to speak, even in their native language, to do so, I consider the strengthening of the oral fluency to be extremely important. By developing oral skills, even inhibited students observe and develop grammar, pronunciation, fluency, facial and body posture.

The relevance of the use of information gap exercises

Information gap exercises, developed predominantly in pairs, involve the exchange of information from one element to another, that is, each student will have information to share with a colleague, so that the task they have been proposed is successfully accomplished. This was the strategy I chose to develop the ease of students in the production of oral speech, for numerous reasons. Besides allowing a broad exchange of information, it makes students concentrate on the information they are encouraged to share, making them both producers and receivers of discourse.

It also encourages the development of socialization skills, which are very important in the 1st cycle of basic education, promoting a spirit of mutual help and solidarity. The motivation for carrying out this type of exercise is high, since the students have a reason to talk to each other, encouraging the use of structures and vocabulary they already know and offering the same speech opportunities to all students.

Another reason is that these exercises are conducted in pairs, which means they are less intimidating to shy or embarrassed students, who do not expose themselves to the whole class. It facilitates the creation of a comfortable and uninhibited classroom environment, thereby increasing the students' self-confidence and well-being towards the target language.

According to the Guidelines for English Teaching in the 1st cycle, the teaching and learning of foreign language aims at the progressive appropriation of language specific skills, respecting and promoting the development of generic and developmental skills and fostering the integration of language in other curriculum areas (*Orientações* 9-10). Again, information gap exercises

show their relevance, since they are easily adaptable to a variety of activities which include vocabulary, reading, drawing or maths.

As far as the role of the teacher is concerned, the idea is to become just a facilitator of communication, providing the necessary material for the activity to take place. After that, she is the organizer of the activity, giving instructions to students, correcting any errors and ensuring that the activity is progressing as planned. In terms of effective communication, it is the students who are conducting the activity and performing the main interaction; the teacher assumes the role of moderator for more insecure or less autonomous students.

Information gap exercises in the classroom context

Information gap exercises were introduced into the research framework of the acquisition of foreign languages by Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), in an attempt to clarify issues related to input and interaction. Since that date they have been reliable tools for gathering information. The origins of information gap exercises may be referred to by teaching, by taking root in the classroom, in activities that ask students, for example, to find differences in images, to order sentences or stories, to complete maps and tables (Brumfit and Johnson 1979; Ur 1981, 1988, qtd. in Pica, Kang, and Sauro 302). As performers of these activities, students engage in the foreign language in a functional manner, focusing on the meaning and use of the target language, cultivating an appetite for learning. In an approach that favors the use of form, the information gap exercises can be developed to encourage students to devote greater attention to specific linguistic structures.

Too often in the classroom, while performing certain tasks, students who are listening are not actually participating, sharing or exchanging information among themselves and practicing their language skills. Quite the contrary, they tend to disperse their attention, especially if the interaction that is taking place is beyond their ability to process language. However, if all students, without exception, feel a practical need to know information that others hold, their attention will not wander and their language practice time will be extended.

According to Nakahama, Tyler, and van Lier, a number of studies on interaction in foreign language teaching demands that, in the case of non-native speakers, unstructured interaction

provides few opportunities for language development when compared to a more controlled interaction, which converges to a specific and well defined target (Nakahama *et al*. 378). In fact, studies have found that controlled, task-based interactions, particularly those with a single result, promote more opportunities for language development than less structured activities, whose purpose is more open. In contrast, in poorly structured exercises students can experience difficulties in communication because they lack the lexical knowledge of form, which inhibits and restricts them, causing frustration and resistance to the use of the target language.

Verbal interaction is an important aspect in the process of acquiring a foreign language. For example Long (1985) and Ellis (1994), quoted by Nakahama, Tyler and van Lier, concluded that this interaction becomes relevant when the linguistic information becomes more obvious to the learner (Nakahama *et al*. 379). More recently, Izumi and Bigelow (2000), also quoted by the authors mentioned above, added two additional factors involved in verbal interaction and language acquisition, the student's attention and production (Nakahama *et al.* 379). Information gap exercises focus primarily on the informational level. There is information that will be exchanged through the use of primary aspects such as lexical items or a certain grammar structure. The end result of this type of exercise is unique, common and convergent, allowing less space for doubts and uncertainties.

The intention of this work, focused on information gap exercises with non-native speakers of English and German, was to move the students' attention to the form and meaning, with exercises that presupposed oral interaction and the development of five distinct aspects:

a) vocabulary: groups of words, vocabulary related to a defined topic.

b) form: framing questions and answers.

c) pronunciation

d) the overall competence, referring to a speech content and ability

e) reduction of anxiety and increase of self-confidence.

Since the purpose of the exercises I proposed was, in most cases, to complete charts, students concentrated on understanding the words spoken by their classmates and on producing their statements correctly, to make themselves understood. Since the interventions of each element of the pair are short and are characterized by the repetition of lexical items and

structures, both had the opportunity to interact several times during the performance of the activity.

The information gap exercises were developed in the classroom, in a controlled environment in which tasks were carefully explained and the expected results were uniform and easily verifiable.

The research process

After an initial phase of contact with both schools and classes, of informal and simple observation, and a second stage of drafting a plan for data collection, which used questionnaires and observation grids as research tools that allowed me to draw some conclusions, it became easier to define a theme to work and to choose a method to do it.

I had the opportunity to apply in one English class (3rd Year students at EB1 de Santa Cruz) and one German class (10th Year Students at ES de Ermesinde) information gap exercises, in an attempt to get answers to the research question I set out to investigate: *what is the contribution of the information gap exercises in the development of oral skills in students of foreign languages?*

The first cycle of my action research project started with the presentation of a theme, which included vocabulary and grammatical structures. I will begin by describing the activity implemented in the class of German.

The activity object of study, performed at the end of class, consisted of a communicative game, known for being one of the students' favorites to play in their leisure time outside school. It intended to activate the interest and motivation of students and simultaneously maximize the students' speaking time. To implement this activity in class, cards with different clothing items were used, coloured with four different colours. The aim of the game, played in pairs, was that each player got a set of the same garment in four colours. For this, each student had to ask his colleague, e.g. *Hast du einenroten Rock?* (Have you got a blue skirt?). If the player had the item of clothing requested, it would be delivered, otherwise it would give the deck to try their luck. Each student would form one question at a time.

The interventions of the students were noted down on an observation grid, in real time. The categories used for observation grid were chosen in order to record specific behaviors of students, relevant to the subject of study of this project, including their interest and ease when facing an eminently communicative activity, which sought to determine whether they could apply the vocabulary related to clothing and the structure presented in class.

After analyzing the observation grids related to the activity it was necessary to re-evaluate the strategy applied and the level of difficulty presented to the students. The class showed great interest in this activity, demonstrating understanding of the game's instructions and respecting the rules set in advance by the teacher. The students participated and were interventional, never trying to miss their turn to speak or delaying the normal flow of the game; they reacted positively, showing no inhibition. However, as far as grammatical accuracy is concerned, the results show that only one student managed to do it mostly correctly, while three students missed 4 out of 10 questions and two students missed 3 of the 10 questions they have asked. Analyzing the students' pronunciation during the game, four of them had 50% or more interventions with good pronunciation and made only two pronunciation errors in 6 out of 10 questions. It is also important to emphasize the use of mother tongue, which wasn't used by three students, which was little used by two students and used four times out of ten by another student.

Regarding the activity conducted by the English class students, it was an information gap exercise in which students, interacting in pairs, had to complete a table with the number of fruits that the colleague said / possessed. The aim of this task was to promote the practice of the structure "... How many have you got?" / "I've got ...", plurals and to consolidate vocabulary related to numbers and fruits. Based on data collected through observation grids at the beginning of the school year I concluded that only six students in this class felt inhibited and anxious when they needed to express themselves orally in English. Thus, although the whole class did the information gap activity, I was observing these six students in particular, because they needed a more focused intervention. From the six students who constituted the total sample, two showed some concern with the fact of asking the question and giving the answer in English, showing insecurity and reluctance in speaking. Interestingly, only one of these students

demonstrated not to recognize the name of the fruits listed in the table, which made it impossible to understand the question and, consequently, led to failure in working out the answer. To overcome this difficulty, he used his mother tongue.

In the second cycle of my action research project I worked with the class the topic *Wetter* (Weather), which represented a positive factor; the topic was easy for students to understand which increased their self-confidence. Insisting on a student – student interaction, I proposed two distinct activities. In the first one, students in possession of small cards with pictures depicting the weather, asked a classmate "*Wie ist das Wetter heute*?" (What's the weather like today?), hoping to find a card with a similar picture, to make a pair.

In the second activity, three students received grid A and the other three students received grid B, both incomplete, with the months of the year and three world cities, with different weather conditions in different seasons. The task was to ask their classmate "*Wie ist das Wetter im Januar in Berlin?*" (What's the weather like in January in Berlin?), drawing the symbol the classmate said, for example, "*Es regnet*" (It's raining). In this activity, students were expected to formulate the question correctly, distinguishing the preposition used with the months of the year and with the names of towns, recognizing weather vocabulary and drawing the symbol in order to complete the table. Again, the implementation of the activity was noted down in an observation grid. The class reacted favorably to the German communicative games, showing interest, at ease and participating in the activities with a posture that showed motivation. Five of the six students were secure in using the lexical items and structures involved, only one student showed some uncertainty in the identification of weather icons. The six students were able to formulate the question and give the answer without making grammatical errors, seeming fully aware of the difference in the preposition. Half the class performed the activities with proper pronunciation and none of the students used the mother tongue during the tasks, which shows some growth and maturity in terms of foreign language and perception of the communicative purpose of the activity.

At the end of the second cycle of action research, students were asked to fill in a questionnaire in which they had the opportunity to express their opinions about the communicative activities that had been proposed, keeping the principle of confidentiality and

anonymity. Together with the observation grids, this questionnaire was an important assessment tool for understanding the effect of information gap exercises in the development of students' oral skills.

The activities performed by the 3rd Year English students in the second cycle of the action research project included handing out worksheets, with Grid A and B. I decided to keep the exercise typology because, especially with younger students, establishing routines and habits is extremely important. In this particular aspect, I do not mean social routines or socializing, but the routines with cognitive function, which according to Vygotsky work as organizers of cognition in the dual point of view of the representation of the task and its mode of resolution.

The activities were more ambitious in terms of language knowledge, as students were supposed to know vocabulary related to games, hobbies and sports, should recognize that through pictures, the days of the week and should be able to express preferences using the structure "Do you like ...?" Thus, taking turns, students asked their classmates, for example, "Do you like playing computer games on Monday?" and drew the correct symbol ("I love / I like / I don't like"). Keeping the methodological options selected at the beginning of this project, the implementation of the activity was noted down on an observation grid.

The data analysis demonstrated that activity maintained the students' interest and motivation. The two students who in the first cycle of this action research had shown disinterest and uncertainty showed as very receptive to the task. Only one student failed to use the structure accurately, the same student who could not verbalize the structure in the first cycle of this action research, asking the question incorrectly and keeping the error, despite hearing the partner using the correct structure. Only one student used the mother tongue, which represents a significant decrease compared to the first cycle of this action research, in which five students persistently used Portuguese during the activity.

The German class

The less encouraging results obtained in the first cycle of the action-research with the German class are explained by the fact that the activity was too ambitious for these students' level. In

fact, to ask the question correctly, students had to recognize the garment, the colour, they had to identify the gender of the word, which could be feminine, masculine or neutral, and finally had to form the question using the accusative case. There was actually too much to take into account for these students, who despite having already felt at this stage some peculiarities of the German language, still lack an opportunity for further practice.

As a global assessment of the activity, I consider that the grammatical and pronunciation errors made by students didn't hinder their communicative activity. All, without exception, were able to interact with the classmates in a motivated way. However, those students who didn't feel confident about the pronunciation or the grammatical structure revealed an evident unwillingness to ask the question, so I felt that this first cycle of action research had not fully accomplished the previously established objectives.

Thus, the option taken in the second cycle of action research was to simplify the information gap activity, based on two reasons. Firstly, the results obtained in the first cycle of action research, had not been entirely positive. Secondly, the decrease in students' motivation and the consequent need to prevent the spread of the belief that German is a "difficult" language.

The interpretation I make of the second cycle of this action - research allows me to make very satisfactory comment as it was possible to register an increase in security with the language and a very substantial reduction of the use of mother tongue as a strategy to support learning and performing tasks.

Also the results of the questionnaire corroborate the interpretation that was made from data collected by observation grids, confirming the positive results of activities with a gap of information as potential development tool of oral skills in foreign language students, particularly by increasing levels of confidence and ease, fluency and predisposition to oral communication.

The English class

The data obtained in the first cycle of the action-research allowed a positive assessment of the activity, which was warmly welcomed by the entire class and the majority of the six target students in this study, who achieved an uninhibited and conscious interaction with their peers.

The encouraging result obtained in the first cycle of this project led me to increase the degree of difficulty of the exercises offered in the second cycle of action research, both in terms of linguistic exponents and in the scope of the exercise.

The performance of students in this study during the second cycle of action research was even more positive than that recorded in the first cycle. The disinhibition with language that all students developed over the school year was evident in the implementation of the information gap exercises proposed, whose mode of operation was very well accepted and assimilated by the students. The natural willingness for oral communication expressed by students in this age group allied itself with the internalization of English as their own language of communication in the classroom.

The increased levels of trust in using the language, the attempt to improve the correct use of structures and the decrease in the use of L1 allow me to conclude that this second round of action research also constituted a positive contribution in developing the oral skills of this English class.

The initial fear that students might not interact was not confirmed. The information gap exercises proved to be an activity that reached all learners, helping them to develop their communication skills and thus making them more confident to assert their knowledge in foreign languages.

The initially set aims to develop vocabulary, structures, pronunciation, global competence, to decrease anxiety and to increase self-confidence were achieved in general. In further lessons, students repeated questions and answers worked previously, using a different interaction, usually led by the teacher, which resulted in a significant activation of their linguistic memory, inviting them to participate and interact orally. This procedure also confirmed the efficiency of the information gap activities in promoting the learners' oral fluency.

The relevance of using closed response exercises was also confirmed as a way to increase safety and awareness that the knowledge you have, even if it seems to be insufficient, is already enough to hold a conversation in a foreign language.

I have also confirmed the possibility of using information gap exercises in different lesson stages, either in the lead-in to review the previous class, in the phase of consolidation of

topics or in the final production stage. Its eclectic nature is also revealed in the ease with which it allows cross-curricular activities, allowing the exchange of different areas of learning and knowledge, an important characteristic when working with students in the 1st cycle of basic education.

Conclusion

Students were given the opportunity to develop their ability to communicate and interact in the target language, using their personal interests as a form of motivation, trying to link the language learning in the classroom with its activation beyond it. With the tasks I proposed, I did not bring real life into the classroom. However, a real complexity of vocabulary and structures was constructed that students will use in real communicative situations. Thus, provided that the interaction is not true, it seems to me that the pragmatic aspect cannot be measured in this action research project. However, little episodes occurring outside the context of the classroom demonstrate disinhibition with the target language and willingness to communicate.

I can refer a student of German, that said "*Es is kaltheute*" (It's cold today), demonstrating that she has learned to apply the knowledge acquired in the classroom to the real context as indeed it was a very cold day, and to have overcome the anxiety the oral statements caused her at the beginning of the school year. Also, the students of English showed, in real life settings such as study visits, motivation and willingness to display their knowledge of English, not hesitating to keep a dialogue with a couple of English native speakers, showing spontaneity and knowing how to use the foreign language in real life.

As teacher-researcher I felt encouraged by this action research project, which I think has been quite engaging. I found myself constantly reflecting on my practices, taking into account the difficulties the students felt and the specific contexts of each class and these thoughts have been reflected in the attempt to achieve a better practice. I believe that the type of activities proposed effectively contributed to the development of oral skills in students ■

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Meeting 10-12 Year Olds' English Language Learning Needs through a Theme-based Approach

Sheila BRANNIGAN
| The British Council Lisbon

Tomás: "How do you say 'pegada'?"
Teacher: "It's footprint"
Tomás: "In my book 'Fisicoquímica' I have this picture."
(He's talking about the moon landing footprint)
Rita: "Nikki, why they put the capsule in ocean?"
Teacher: "Yes. Why did they put the capsule in the ocean? Can anybody say?"

The above conversation observed during an elementary level English class at the British Council Lisbon highlights the kind of communication going on in classrooms in the school where a theme-based approach to learning and teaching English is being followed with 10-12 year old learners (5th, 6th and 7th year school pupils). The conversation shows learners sharing their knowledge about the theme of Space and the video clip they have just watched of the 1969 moon landing. Additionally, the learners are trying to understand and find out more about it, drawing on any linguistic resources they have. The teacher has provided material and activities linked to a theme which is motivating for her learners and she is supporting and scaffolding their English learning. This paper discusses what a theme-based approach to learning and teaching English is, how themes can be used to plan and organise language learning with 10-12 year olds, problems that may arise with a theme-based approach and how such an approach supports 10-12 year olds' language learning.

This discussion of a theme-based approach draws on classroom observation, teaching and syllabus and materials development which has taken place in the context of the British Council in Lisbon. At the school, learners have English classes for three hours per week, supplementing

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their statutory school English learning. The paper aims to show that a theme-based approach gets 10-12 year olds learning how to communicate in English in meaningful ways drawn from a variety of discourse areas and is adaptable to a statutory school English learning and teaching context. It is clearly important to clarify at this point what is meant by a theme-based approach to learning and teaching English and what the benefits of this approach are.

A theme-based approach has been described by Cameron as follows:

> In theme-based teaching and learning many different activities are linked together by their content; the theme or topic runs through everything that happens in the classroom and acts as a connecting thread for pupils and teacher. (Cameron 189)

Cameron highlights how this approach structures language learning around a theme which links together a number of activities and tasks as a 'connecting thread' (189). One way of organising this approach to learning and teaching a language is to develop the theme through school subject areas relevant to the age group of the learners, e.g. art, maths, citizenship and science for 10-12 year olds. In this way, a theme-based approach involves learners carrying out activities and tasks using content and language from subjects across the curriculum and all tied to a theme. As Moon has it, "In the process, children are using English in a purposeful way to find out things and do things which have meaning and interest for them and to communicate the results to others" (Moon 119). Moon identifies one of the key benefits of this approach with 10-12 year old learners of English, which is that learners' knowledge and interests in all areas are taken into account through giving them purposeful tasks to do which have meaning for them (119). The importance of understanding and meaningful and purposeful communication to these 10-12 year olds' language learning will be returned to below.

Language outcomes are of central importance in this approach, a factor paralleled by the emergence of what Langé posits is a distinct European model of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in which overt work on language is incorporated (Langé). Met, a coordinator of Foreign Languages for Maryland County, USA, places all content based teaching

on a continuum between courses and classes which are content driven and language driven – see table 1:

CONTENT-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING:
A CONTINUUM OF CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATION

Content-Driven				Language-Driven
Total and Partial Immersion	**Subject Courses Taught in L2**	**Subject Courses Plus Language Instruction**	**Language Classes Based on Themes**	**Language Classes with Frequent Use of Content for Practice**
	Sheltered classes (Brinton, Snow & Wesche)	Adjunct model (Brinton, Snow & Wesche)	Theme-based courses (Brinton, Snow & Wesche)	Multi-disciplinary activities used to improve language proficiency
	Foreign language-enriched university courses (Jurasek, et al.) LxC (Straight) Content-based FLES (Curtain Pesola)	English for Academic/Social Purposes, Business French Content-enriched FLES (Curtain & Pesola)	Thematic units Area studies (Leaver & Stryker)	Content-related FLES (Curtain & Pesola)

Table 1. A continuum of content driven and language driven courses (Met)

According to Met's classification, Language Classes Based on Themes are close to the language-driven end of the continuum. These are courses where the language teacher / level coordinator / school selects a theme from which language outcomes are derived. The theme-based approach currently being implemented with 10-12 year old learners in the British Council

in Lisbon (BC Lisbon) is included in this group, with courses which are theme-based and include language learning outcomes. For teachers working within a curriculum in which language items are fixed and pre-determined, one possibility would be experimenting by using a theme-based approach for one, two or three lessons, or for part of a lesson across a couple of weeks. This would come to the right of the table, as Language Classes with Frequent Use of Content for Practice (Met). The central importance of language outcomes in theme-based courses clearly puts them at the language-driven end of the continuum and is a key planning factor.

A theme-based approach can be used to plan and organise English language learning. Beginning with a theme which is developed through school subject areas to create tasks and activities and from which language learning outcomes are selected (Moon; Cameron). The following diagram shows a topic-web for the theme of Spies, a theme on our beginner level course for 10-12 year old learners at BC Lisbon.

Table 2. A topic web for the theme Spies at beginner level

The topic-web shows how the theme Spies is developed through school subject areas relevant to the age group of the learners (of course a theme may not cover all school subject areas). Next, tasks or activities that are devised in which, to return to Moon, "children are using English in a purposeful way to find out things and do things which have meaning and interest for them and to communicate the results" (Moon 19) – see Tables 3, 4 and 5:

Theme	Spies
School subject area	Maths
Task	Read and write messages using secret codes
Language outcomes	Reading and writing basic messages Consolidation of alphabet and numbers 1-30 Lexis related to codes

Theme	Spies
School subject area	Stories
Task	Read and view story Spycat (BC Learn English website) Write a story based on your own spy character
Language outcomes	Reading and writing a simple story Lexis related to spies Present simple and continuous tenses

Theme	Spies
School subject area	Citizenship
Task	Find out about the CIA K-9 Corps (spy dogs) Information swap
Language outcomes	Reading from a website Language of biographical information Lexis related to CIA dogs Process language

Tables 3, 4 and 5. Planning and organising language learning from themes

When planning a theme-based course or sequence of lessons, some language outcomes that the specific activities or tasks within a theme will lead to can be identified. At the syllabus or course planning stage, as Willis and Willis suggest in their model of a lexical syllabus, texts which have been selected need to be analysed for relevant language coverage and activities designed to focus on form (Willis and Willis 79). The target language selected must take learners' level, and the corresponding cognitive load that they can cope with, into account. However, as Met points out, "Some of the language that emerges from content learning will be high frequency, useful language outside the content classroom; some of it may not be" (Met). Language learning from themes and their development through school subjects relevant to 10-12 year olds demands the inclusion of content-specific language. Table 6 shows examples of language outcomes from theme-based courses for 10-12 year olds at BC Lisbon:

Theme and level	School subject through which it is developed	Task/activity	Language outcomes: lexis
Spies beginner	Citizenship	Read about CIA K-9 corps (from CIA website for kids)	a strong sense of smell, find explosives, trained to catch bad guys
Space elementary	Technology	Design an invention for an astronaut	an astronaut, the International Space Station, zero gravity, things float about
Up In The Sky Pre-intermediate	Science	Learn about wings, flying and birds	a bird's wing, an airplane's wing, flap its wings, airfoil, lift
Advertising intermediate	Technology/ Media Literacy	Design an advert for ice-cream	a catchy slogan, the advert is aimed at, to appeal to someone, hidden persuaders

Table 6. Language outcomes from themes

Certain themes clearly lend themselves to structural language outcomes, e.g. Adventures In The Past; the past simple tense or Space; zero conditionals. Themes selected are required to

both motivate the majority of 10-12 year olds in the learning context and further language learning goals.

As Met argues, in a theme-based approach "Language is used to explore content, and language growth emerges as students need to comprehend or produce language related to content" (Met). The following conversation between a teacher and learners observed in a BC Lisbon classroom provides examples of this emerging language growth. The theme is Adventures in the Past and the beginner level 10-12 year old learners are reading and looking at a page from a factual authentic book about how the first people spread from Africa to the rest of the world. The page is illustrated with a map of the world with the route marked in red, animals from the period and cavemen (Wow! People and Places). Language outcomes for the task were verb phrases: have got horns, teeth, fur; the first people invented clothing, weapons, tools and ways of making fire and passive recognition of the past simple tense.

Diogo: "How do you say 'extinto'?"

T: "It's 'extinct'."

Diogo: "The mamuth [sic] is extinct."

T: "Yes, that's right Diogo. Mammoths are extinct. Which other animals in the picture are extinct? ..." (No responses from students) "OK, are elephants extinct?"

Various learners: "No."

T: "What about tigers?"

Students: "No."

The teacher asks about all the animals on the illustration. "What about sabre toothed tigers?"

Gonçalo: "Extinto"

T: "Extinct"

Gonçalo: "They extinct."

(Three lessons later)

T: "Who are they?" (Showing a different image of prehistoric man)

Ana Rita: "The cavemen live in Africa and they "espalhar" for the rest of world."

T: "They *spread* to the rest of the world. That's great Ana Rita."

When the first part of the above conversation was observed, the learners were fully engaged although they did not produce a lot of language. The abovementioned language areas from the text, including the learner-initiated addition of which animals were / were not extinct, was consolidated and recycled in the next lessons. The learner input in a subsequent lesson highlights how learners pick up chunks of language which are meaningful and memorable for them and which are not necessarily the target language.

The rich linguistic input of a theme-based approach clearly gives learners exposure to generative language patterns and allows them to explore themes through which language growth can develop. McKay explains how young learners (up to 13/14 years old) learn language through Skehan's model of cognitive processes in language learning, in which learners use both a formulaic system to understand and get meaning across and a rule-based system to draw on underlying rules to construct discourse (McKay 36-38). While 10-12 year olds are able to draw on both systems, McKay argues:

> Since children have less developed metalinguistic ability the need to channel the bulk of children's attention towards meaning communication is vital if fluency is to be achieved. . . . Older learners in the later elementary school years develop greater metalinguistic awareness and become more able to gain knowledge of language rules from explicit language study. However, depending on the learning context, older elementary age learners still tend to rely strongly on a formulaic system. (38)

A theme-based approach gets learners learning how to communicate in English in meaningful ways, the rich linguistic input giving them exposure to generative language patterns. Furthermore, language work is included, only lessons and courses are not built on rule learning. As 10-12 year olds' language learning consists of both accumulating memory-based chunks of language and applying and noticing underlying language rules then a theme-based approach meets their language learning needs (Mckay 38).

A key further advantage is the fact that the language learned in English is from a variety of discourse areas, relevant to 10-12 year olds' global education and future learning. Met gives high value to this factor, citing Widdowson in her comment, "Indeed, initiating L2 learners into

the discourse community of a given academic discipline can be a significant objective of content-based instruction" (Widdowson, qtd. in Met). The findings of the report into the Bilingual Project in Spain give further backing to the value and importance of learners learning the discourse of e.g. English language, literacy and science, to their proficiency in English and their learning in these other subject areas (Johnstone).

The issue of how learners learn language includes consideration of the relation of input to intake in language classrooms. As Willis has it, "students learn a great deal directly from exposure to language through reading and listening, without the need for the teacher to impose a description on what is learnt" (Willis iv). Both predictable and unpredictable language outcomes are a clear feature of a theme-based approach. Unpredicted language that arises and that is useful for the learners' language wants and needs (as in the above conversation about animals that are extinct) can, of course, be returned to in follow-up language slots. Clearly, a theme-based approach demands a level of experience and flexibility on our part as teachers. One of the problems which may arise from using this approach is a feeling from teachers, and perhaps coordinators, that they are not in control of the language learning going on in the class, as they feel they are with an approach in which structural items are methodologically worked through. As we have seen, the language learning of 10-12 year olds is not primarily concerned with the accumulation of language rules, therefore developing knowledge of how they learn languages and how input does not equal intake would help teachers deal with this issue. A further area of concern which a theme-based approach raises is classroom management. Trying to get learners to draw on prior knowledge as a class or in pairs / groups, scaffolding their attempts to communicate their ideas and meanings and providing maximum communicative opportunities all require planning and skill in classroom management. It is also important to bear in mind that a theme-based approach does require time for individual learning and language work. However, teachers need to be prepared to engage with their learners and to give them a more active class role.

As we have seen, a theme-based approach requires knowledge of different activity types and resources for planning and, for this reason, it is a good idea to work on planning with other teachers. Time is clearly required for the adaptation or creation of materials – as commercially

produced EFL or ESL materials which prioritise content over a structural syllabus for 10-12 year olds are limited – with an exception being the Macmillan English series. A key area to consider is the amount of time learners are spending on making or designing without using any English (Moon; Cameron). Solutions to this include the regular input of process language for activities, learners asking teachers or other learners for materials in English and teachers monitoring closely and asking questions.

To sum up, this paper has identified a theme-based approach as a way of teaching and learning English with 10-12 year olds that draws on their prior knowledge and their desire to communicate what they know, using all the linguistics resources they have at their disposal. The importance of language outcomes in this approach has been discussed along with how to plan and organise language learning in this way. The fact that a theme-based approach supports 10-12 year olds' language learning has been identified as a key benefit. The advantage of learning the discourse of other key subject areas through English has also been highlighted, setting a theme-based approach within the wider CLIL context. Problems that commonly occur with such an approach have been identified and some solutions put forward. Experiences in syllabus writing, observing lessons and teaching following this approach, taking place in courses for 10-12 year olds at BC Lisbon, have informed this discussion. This experience has shown clear benefits of this approach in capturing the interest, curiosity and eagerness to share knowledge of 10-12 year old learners and channeling this into their English language learning. This is a process of experimentation and learning in order to better meet the English language learning needs of learners of this age group. To conclude, a theme-based approach involves our 10-12 year old learners learning how to communicate in English in meaningful ways drawn from a variety of discourse areas and is an effective approach to teaching and learning English with this age group.

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BIG BROTHER IS LISTENING TO YOU: The Space of Language in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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Spatiality Studies – A brief overview

It is my aim in this paper to view Orwell's novel through the lens of *Spatiality Studies*, an approach stemming primarily from the work of Michel Foucault in the 1960s and 70s, which sought to view spaces, both contemporary and in a historical context, in terms of their "simultaneity, juxtaposition and dispersion" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces"). Foucault's ideas were developed further by Henri Lefebvre and more recently by geographers, most notably Edward Soja and David Harvey. Foucault's theories have been extensively applied by those working in the field of human geography, to help understand the contemporary emergence of difference and identity (whether cultural, social, political or economic) as a central issue in larger multicultural cities. In particular, there has been interest in Foucault's notion of heterotopias, or spaces of otherness, which can function as a means of escape from authoritarianism and repression. More recently, Kevin Hetherington (1997) has extended the idea further and defined heterotopias as "spaces of alternate social ordering", within the confines of an external world where different rules apply. Another influential strand of Foucault's thinking has been his comparison of modern society with Jeremy Bentham's "Panopticon" design for prisons, whereby a single guard can watch over many prisoners while the guard remains unseen. Foucault's contention is that a "carceral continuum" runs through modern society, such that at every level humans are keeping each other under surveillance (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*).

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Introduction

The dystopian future envisaged by Orwell in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is particularly disturbing since it involves the complete destruction of those fundamental aspects that make an individual human. In the words of O'Brien:

> In our world there will be no emotions except fear, rage, triumph, and self-abasement. Everything else we shall destroy – everything. . . . There will be no loyalty, except loyalty towards the Party. There will be no love, except the love of Big Brother. There will be no laughter, except the laugh of triumph over a defeated enemy. There will be no art, no literature, no science. . . . There will be no distinction between beauty and ugliness. There will be no curiosity, no enjoyment of the process of life. All competing pleasures will be destroyed. . . . If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever. (NEF 306)[1]

Moreover, at the heart of this process of dehumanization is the systematic destruction of language so as to ensure Party orthodoxy by reducing the capacity to think.

In this paper I intend to analyse the reduction of the space of language in Orwell's novel, both as a system operating within the mental space of the individual, and as a socio-geographical space wherein discourse may, or indeed may not, take place.

Crang and Thrift, in their introduction to the book *Thinking Space*, make the following assertion:

> Just as there is no pristine 'thought' about the world that does not require the mediation of language, and conversely no world that is not already spoken or written, . . . so we also need to consider the relationship of space and language. (Crang and Thrift 4; original highlighting)

Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of Orwell's dystopia is the notion that an artificially created language, *Newspeak*, could be adopted so as to "*diminish* the range of thought" (NEF 343) and make rational conversation an impossibility. The book's protagonist, Winston Smith, is told by Syme, a "specialist in Newspeak" that "by the year 2050, at the very latest, not a single

human being will be alive who could understand such a conversation as we are having now" (NEF 61). In such a world, individuals would not have the linguistic capacity to fully fathom the spaces in which they found themselves, thus easily accepting the geographical and social constraints on their lives, which, indeed, are already in evidence in the Oceania of 1984, where Winston lives and works in cramped conditions, socially restricted in his movements.

According to Lefebvre,

> [e]very language is located in a space. Every discourse says something about a space (places or sets of places); and every discourse is emitted from a space. Distinctions must be drawn between discourse *in* space, discourse *about* space and the discourse *of* space. (Lefebvre 132)

The present essay will focus mainly on the first of these distinctions, that of "discourse in space", and the way in which space can impose quantitative and qualitative limits on the discourse emitted within it.

To Lefebvre's list could be added *the space of discourse*; specifically, the way in which the shape and size of a language may influence the thought processes of its speakers. I intend to look especially at the way in which Newspeak seeks to dehumanize the individual and reduce identity.

In his discussion of the relationship between space and language, Lefebvre quotes Nietzsche, who likens language to

> [a] mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people. (Nietzsche 46-7)

Lefebvre adds that "Language in action and the spoken word are inventive; they restore life to signs and concepts that are worn down like old coins" (Lefebvre 138).

Nineteen Eighty-Four, on the other hand, portrays a world where Nietzsche's "mobile army" is being systematically decimated to the point where the language is so altered that it can no

longer provide any meaningful link with the past and cultural identity is therefore destroyed. Orwell turns Lefebvre's notion around such that words themselves are "worn down like old coins" and the newly minted Newspeak prevents signs and concepts from being restored to life, as the philologist Syme explains to Winston: "Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly *one* word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten" (NEF 60).

Crang and Thrift suggest that language should be seen as "an evolving or emergent system" (5), in line with a modern view of "*space as process* and *in process*" (3).

Particularly influential in this contemporary perspective on the space of language has been the work of the Russian philosopher Bakhtin, whose theories of language see it as a dynamic, socio-historical act of communication between Self and Other. Holloway and Kneale describe this *dialogical theory of space* as a "philosophy of open-endedness and becoming" (71) wherein the Self completes the Other. According to Bakhtin:

> I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another . . . *To be* means *to communicate* . . . To be means to be for another, and through the other for oneself . . . I cannot become myself without another. (Bakhtin, *Problems* 287)

Holloway and Kneale assert that "To reach a point where the opportunity for continuing dialogue is denied is a position that doesn't exist in Bakhtin's thought" (71).

However, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it is precisely the denial of such dialogue that is fundamental to the Party's control. Later in this essay, I wish to further examine Bakhtin's dialogics of space and see how in Orwell's novel, individuals are denied the freedom to create a sense of Self through communication with the Other, which is one of the most unsettling aspects of the dystopia.

Using "conceptual tools" borrowed from Geography Studies, Fátima Vieira (2005) applies a systematic spatial approach to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In a synchronous study of the novel, she analyses the protagonist, Winston Smith, considering three spaces of simultaneity: *physical space* (involving description of the space of the body), *geographical and social space* (analysing

the space occupied by the individual's body and how it connects with other physical spaces) and *psychological space* (the mental space of the subject, seen in his dynamic relationship with physical places and other individuals).

I wish to extend this analysis to include the *space of language*, which is indeed connected to each of the spatial distinctions examined by Vieira. I aim to show how the reduction of the space of language is at the heart of Orwell's dystopia and that when and where it is not delimited, spaces of resistance can exist, albeit temporarily.

The socio-geographical space of language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

I here intend to explore the space of language as a space wherein people engage in communication with each other, looking at how their possibility to do so freely has been severely curtailed in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and at how Winston and Julia's affair is a conquest of this space. I wish to end this section by looking briefly at the socio-geographical space of language through the lens of Bakhtin's dialogical theory of language.

One of the principle means by which the Party is able to exert power over each individual is the *telescreen*, "an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror" (NEF 4), located within every space occupied by Party members and providing an ever present instrument of surveillance.

This is very reminiscent of the 'all-seeing' eye of the "Panoptican", which Spatialty theorists have used as a symbol of surveillance in a social context. I wish to compare a famous quotation from Foucault with an extract from Orwell's novel to show that there is a clear parallel:

> Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so. (Foucault, *Discipline* 201)

> There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was

> even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. (NEF 5)

The Orwellian surveillance is then, like the Panoptican, both visible (the telescreen is ever present within the spaces occupied by Party members) and unverifiable. The 'tall-central tower' of the Panoptican is replaced by the "oblong metal plaque" of the telescreen, whose one-way transparency is emphasised by its being described as "a dulled mirror" (NEF 4).

Thus, the key to the success of the telescreen is the very fact that the individual can never be sure that he is being observed, an uncertainty forcing him to constantly monitor his own movements and even facial expressions. However, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the idea is extended further such that the telescreen is also the all-seeing ear:

> The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it . . . You had to live – did live, from habit that became instinct – in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard. (NEF 5)

It is thus clear that Big Brother is not only watching you at all times but listening to you, as well. This, of course, has major repercussions on the space of language, as freely flowing, unguarded conversation is no longer possible. Right from the beginning of the novel, we get an impression of individuals living and working in isolation, their opportunities to speak with each other strictly regulated. We see this readily in the description of Mrs Parsons, who knocks on Winston's door to ask him to help fix her blocked sink. Even in the apparently innocuous small talk between neighbours, there is a sense of constant unease and Mrs Parsons has "a habit of breaking off her sentences in the middle" (NEF 25). She is wary even of how she speaks to her own children and, of course, later in the novel we discover that she indeed has every reason to be nervous of them, since her husband is reported to the *thought police* by his very daughter who, with an ear-trumpet to the bedroom door, catches him saying "down with Big Brother" in his sleep. The comic satire is tempered by the fact that Parsons is the last person that we, and indeed Winston, expect to be guilty of *thoughtcrime*, since at every appearance he constantly

speaks only about his apparently limitless enthusiasm for the Party and his boundless energy to serve it and praise it. The words uttered in his sleep reveal that at a subliminal level he is aware of the awful reality of life, but that he has developed a style of speaking during his waking life as a means of blocking out this reality. His endless descriptions of his involvement in official functions and events constitutes a very narrow kind of conversational speech that does not permit any exchange of ideas other than those in support of party orthodoxy. Elsewhere the narrator describes these kind of exchanges with Party members as "creaking camaraderie oiled by gin" (NEF 95).

The example of Mr and Mrs Parsons shows, then, how the perpetual fear and paranoia induced by the presence of the telescreen delimits the space of language. Anyone who lets their guard slip is liable to be arrested, even those who apparently speak in full support of the system. Another case in point is Winston's colleague Syme, whose conversation in the work canteen at the Ministry of Truth is full of praise for the Party but reveals that he knows too much about its motivations, leading Winston to suppose that one day his friend 'will be vaporised' (NEF 70), which is, of course, what does eventually transpire.

The opportunity for conversations of any depth or meaningfulness, beyond the mundane is thus virtually impossible. The snippets of conversation we hear are often about the lack of basic amenities, the shortage of razor-blades, problems with the plumbing, and so on. It is apparently the Party's wish that by perpetuating these shortcomings which affect people's daily lives, so individuals will be more engaged in dealing with ways to overcome them than in discussion about the true source of the problem.

Opportunities for potential conversation with other Party members are also restricted by the nature of the socio-geographical spaces in which people operate. In Winston's workplace at the Ministry of Truth, within a large hall each person sits within in a separate cubicle without having any verbal contact with one another or any firm idea of what particular job each is involved in. The only kind of communication that takes place is in the form of the abbreviated and emotionless instructions which land on the desktop from the pneumatic tube. We are given a description of a fellow worker across the hall:

> a small, precise-looking, dark-chinned man named Tillotson was working steadily away, with a folded newspaper on his knee and his mouth very close to the mouthpiece of the speakwrite. He had the air of trying to keep what he was saying a secret between himself and the telescreen. He looked up, and his spectacles darted a hostile flash in Winston's direction. (NEF 48)

There are several references in the novel to such bespectacled Party operatives whose eyes are not actually visible, further evidence that the window to natural conversation is closed.

The opportunity to talk freely or at any length is also denied the workers during their meal breaks. The work canteen is described as a "low-ceilinged" space "deep under ground" and "deafeningly noisy" (NEF 56), a hellish sort of place indeed, accentuated further by the "sour metallic smell" and disgusting food. It is almost as though it is deliberately kept unpleasant so as to deter anyone from lingering there and potentially talking to anyone for any length. Furthermore, the telescreen emits frequent announcements which interrupt any conversation and lets out "a piercing whistle" when it is time to return to work.

There is, therefore, a prevailing sense that freedom to converse with fellow 'comrades' has been severely limited. Yet, it is not altogether impossible to find spaces wherein the natural flow of language can flourish, as is demonstrated by Winston and Julia's rebellious act of carrying on a love affair in the midst of such repression, albeit an act which they both know is punishable by death.

Vieira has described Winston's rebellion as a "spatial conquest" (95), since he and Julia occupy socio-geographic spaces which are strictly off limits to Party members. The clearing in the wood outside the city, the belfry of the ruined church out in the deserted countryside and the room above Mr Charrington's shop in the prole quarter; all these offer the possibility of an albeit temporary utopian life within the dystopian world that surrounds them, or spaces of heterotopia as Foucault would call them ("Of Other Spaces" 22-27) – spaces within which there is an "alternate social ordering", as Hetherington defines them (Hetherington 9), and which, according to Vilas-Boas, "question the present and aspire to transgress its limits" (Vilas-Boas 104)[2]. Vieira considers an appreciation of these heterotopian spaces to be crucial for any spatial approach to Orwell's novel.

I wish to add that these spaces of resistance also constitute heterotopian spaces of language, within which Winston and Julia are free from the limitations that ordinarily prevent natural discourse from taking place. Their love making is "a political act" and "a blow struck against the Party" (NEF 145), but so too is their freedom to speak. Julia's first declaration of her feelings for Winston is the "I love you" written on the piece of paper that she hands to him in the corridor at work. It is in itself a conquest of space, since the words stun Winston so completely, invading the closed space of his cubicle where no communication between individuals is permitted. The scrap of paper reflects the fragmentary, temporary nature of their relationship, stunning Winston completely during its brief existence before entering the memory hole and burning in the furnaces beyond. The image of this piece of paper "folded into a square" and soon to become ash is echoed later in the "small square of dust" (NEF 157) which Julia scrapes together on the floor of their "hiding place" in the church tower, wherein she draws a map indicating how Winston should arrive at their next rendezvous. Once again we see their space of communication literally as a tiny physical area, here delimited by the dust which they are destined to become.

Until they can be together more regularly in the "sanctuary" of the room above the junk-shop, communication between them is similarly sporadic and made up of fragments of conversation.

> In the street it was usually possible to talk, after a fashion. As they drifted down the crowded pavements, not quite abreast and never looking at one another, they carried on a curious, intermittent conversation which flicked on and off like the beams of a lighthouse. . . . Julia appeared to be quite used to this kind of conversation, which she called 'talking by instalments'. (NEF 147)

It is telling that their space of language is likened to a lighthouse, since it represents a beacon of light and hope amid the surrounding darkness, each snatch of conversation a victory against the Party. It is a space which is then fully occupied when they are together in the church tower and "the gaps in their fragmentary conversation" are "filled up" (NEF 149). The lovers physically fill the space of their resistance, most notably the room above Charrington's

shop, with their presence and with objects that Party members are ordinarily deprived of, such as proper tea and coffee, scent, and the glass paperweight, an object of beauty from a forgotten past. Similarly, their space of language is filled to the brim as they are able to talk freely for hours. The ultimate fragility of this space for free and unguarded dialogue is brutally enforced when it later becomes clear that all the while their conversations have been monitored by the telescreen hidden behind the steel engraving of St Clement's church. Their entrapment is further hinted at in the rhyme begun by Charrington, and eventually completed by O'Brien, "'Oranges and Lemons' say the bells of St Clement's", whose last line becomes a metaphor for their eventual capture; "Here comes a candle to light you to bed, Here comes a chopper to chop off your head". It is a cruel irony that the apparently innocent language of a children's rhyme from a bygone age is in fact evidence that the brutality and destructive power of the Party is present in the room from the very first moment.

We have seen how the reduction in the socio-geographical space of language has a great dehumanizing effect on people. This concurs with Bakhtin's assertion that "*to be* means *to communicate*" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 287; emphasis in original); that "if we cease being addressed by the environment and the others around us, we simply cease to be" (Holloway and Kneale 75). According to Bakhtian thought, language is made up of individual "utterances", ranging in length from single words to the longest of written texts. What gives meaning to an utterance is its relation through dialogue with other utterances, such that each is delimited by "a change of speakers" (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 71). Holloway and Kneale illustrate this idea further:

> . . . the dialogical utterance can be exemplified through the communicative act between Self and Other as two situated interlocutors. The articulated utterance of the Self from its inception is always placed in relation to that of the Other via the referencing, understanding and awareness of the Other's past, present and potential future utterances. (Holloway and Kneale 76)

It is the very absence of this dialogical flow that makes the world of Airstrip One seem so grim and soulless. We see this in Winston's solitude at the beginning of the novel and the way he begins his diary:

> He was a lonely ghost uttering a truth that nobody would ever hear. But so long as he uttered it, in some obscure way the continuity was not broken. It was not by making yourself heard but by staying sane that you carried on the human heritage. He went back to the table, dipped his pen, and wrote:
>
> "To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone – to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone: From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink – greetings!" (NEF 32)

Winston senses that overwhelming instinctive desire to reach out to the Other and by so doing make sense of his own Self.

Ultimately, of course, it is the constraining power of *doublethink* that has the upper hand, and following O'Brien's methods of persuasion, Winston is forced to concede the truth in the Party slogan "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past". Any understanding of what the Other may have said in the past, may be saying at the present moment or may say in the future is impossible when *doublethink* renders meaningful dialogue impossible. In his conversations with O'Brien at the Ministry of Love, Winston's attempts to conduct a rational dialogue with his tormentor are futile, as "whatever he said, the swift answer crushed him like a bludgeon" (NEF 305). The Party's control of the space of language is absolute, such that Winston eventually comes to believe that two and two can be five.

There is a further way in which Bakhtian ideas about the space of language are negated in the world of Nineteen Eighty-Four. The utterances deployed by a speaker are the embodiment of a certain world-view or *positionality*. As Holloway and Kneale explain, "The diversity and manifold variety of these different points of view or ideologies, in competition and conflict, is termed heteroglossia (many-languagedness)" (77).

In practice, when an individual Self engages in discourse, his position is made clear by his "speech genre", that is, by his way of talking, which is in turn recognised and evaluated by the

Other. Each of these speech genres constitutes one of the many languages of heteroglossia creating "the *polyphony*, or many voices, of the social world" (Holloway and Kneale 78).

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the future world envisaged by the Party is one which could be described as *monoglossia* in that only one type of speech genre will be allowed to prevail, namely that which, spoken in pure Newspeak, will represent utterly Party orthodoxy and "make all other modes of thought impossible" (NEF 343).

Even in the world portrayed in the novel we see evidence of a narrowing of the ability to recognise and evaluate different "speech genres". This is revealed when Winston speaks to the old man in the prole quarter. Their conversation takes place in a pub, a place which ordinarily in our world would be filled with a rich and diverse polyphony of voices. Winston wants to question the man about his memories of the past to see if they square with those he has gleaned from a children's history textbook borrowed from Mrs Parsons. Though it may indeed be true that the old man's memory is so fragmented that it is "nothing but a rubbish-heap of details" (NEF 105), which causes Winston to feel that they are "talking at cross-purposes" (NEF 104), it is also true that Winston is unable to evaluate properly the man's speech genre, since his solitary experience of the world is so far removed from that of the proles that he is unable to recognise the natural humanity emanating from the man's utterances. He even toasts Winston with the words "'Ere's wishing you the very best of 'ealth!" He mentions his sister-in-law's funeral as an occasion when he wore a top hat, but Winston seems unable to empathise with the old man. Reeling off a long description of what he has learned from the history books, Winston is literally unable to 'make' conversation and by so doing, cannot enter into the old man's world-view and appreciate his 'position', to use Bakhtin's term.

The mental space of language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Until now I have focused on the space of language in terms of the socio-geographic spaces where it can or, indeed, cannot take place – in other words, the space for language. I now wish to look at the mental space of language, that is the albeit abstract space within the human mind, which over the course of a lifetime is ordinarily filled with the language the individual acquires in order to express his needs, desires and thoughts. In Orwell's novel we see the

systematic reduction of this mental space of language through the adoption of Newspeak, an artificially created language whose aim was to limit the individual's ability to think and thus provide the ultimate means of mind control and conditioning.

As its name suggests, Newspeak is a new language, albeit developed from English, which was thereafter rendered Oldspeak in the new parlance. Through the ingenious reduction of the lexicon, such that the same word would serve as verb, noun, adverb or adjective, and could be further modified using a comprehensive system of affixation. Newspeak was thus deliberately designed to contain as few words as possible and thus "its vocabulary grew smaller . . . every year" (NEF 352).

We are introduced to Newspeak right at the beginning of the novel in a footnote (NEF 6) which explains that it "was the official language of Oceania" and directs the reader to the book's Appendix "for an account of its structure and etymology". Thus, it is very clear that Orwell wants the reader to be aware from the start of the Party's desire to control thought through the reduction of language.

We are told, in the Appendix, that Newspeak "had been devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc" (NEF 343). During one of their sessions at the Ministry of Love, O'Brien explains to Winston that these 'ideological needs' were essentially the seeking of power entirely for its own sake" (NEF 301) and that such power "is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together in new shapes of your choosing" (NEF 306). Though referring to the inevitable destruction of Winston's self, O'Brien's words can apply also to the wholesale destruction of language envisaged by the adoption of Newspeak.

The very first word of Newspeak that we come across is *Ingsoc*, which the Appendix indicates is an adaptation from the Oldspeak *English Socialism*, only that it is much more than just a political system and, in fact, encapsulates in its two syllables all potential routes to truth and reality, be they religion, science or any other form of knowledge or belief. The *Principles of Newspeak* reveal that "there was, indeed, no word for 'Science', any meaning that it could possibly bear being already sufficiently covered by the word *Ingsoc"* (NEF 353). Newspeak was, thus, specifically designed so that single words could cover whole areas of thought, such that it would reduce "the temptation to take thought" (NEF 352). Indeed, such is the extent of this

reductionism that Winston's colleague at the Ministry of Truth, Syme, who is working on further ways to reduce the language, asserts that "Newspeak is Ingsoc and Ingsoc is Newspeak" (NEF 61).

It is curious how the word *Ingsoc* is first revealed, with a description of a poster which "torn at one corner, flapped fitfully in the wind, alternately covering and uncovering the single word INGSOC" (NEF 4). There is something in this image of the dual existence of two realities in Oceania; one on the surface which is literally a tattered and war-torn reality of people subjected to deprivation and the crushing power of the state, and the other a deeper reality felt in the mind by those party members who have learned not only to accept this hardship but to cherish it, through a process of *doublethink*, as part of their love for Big Brother and party orthodoxy, indeed their love of *ingsoc*. This ability not only to comprehend but unconsciously accept both realities is fundamental to the Party's continuing hold over the minds of its members, and such "reality control", as Winston refers to it, is encapsulated in the single Newspeak word *doublethink*. Winston resists by holding onto the reality that he experiences with his senses and which exists in his memory. His first act of rebellion is to begin writing his diary with the words "from the age of doublethink – greetings!" (NEF 32).

The first time in the novel when we get to see a stretch of Newspeak is in the fourth chapter of Part I, which describes Winston's workplace in the Records Department of the Ministry of Truth where he is engaged in editing and indeed rewriting news reports, as part of the Party's continual effort to erase events as it saw fit, in tune with its slogan "who controls the past controls the present" (NEF 284). One of Winston's tasks is to rectify Big Brother's Order for the Day in an issue of the *Times* from the previous year. The message he receives is partially written in Newspeak and instructs him to rewrite the report *fullwise*, or in full, since it contains references to *unpersons*. This latter word is one of the most chilling in the Newspeak lexicon in that it refers to 'non-existent persons', that is, those who have disappeared following arrest and detention, or have been 'vaporized'. Not only do these individuals no longer exist in the present, following their death at the hands of the Party, but they are soon also to become erased from the past so as never to have existed. They might still exist as a memory, but for those like O'Brien who are adept in the art of *doublethink* even this memory can be erased. Throughout

the novel, the word *unperson* hangs over Winston, as both he and the reader know that he will eventually become an *unperson* himself.

Winston actually engages in the task of erasing Comrade Withers from the report with a certain relish, not because he agrees with the policy, but since such "delicate pieces of forgery" released him from the tedium of his routine, like a "mathematical problem" solved through "knowledge of the principles of Ingsoc and your estimate of what the Party wanted you to say" (NEF 51). We learn that Winston is indeed so good at this type of work that "he had even been entrusted with the rectification of the *Times* leading articles, which were written entirely in Newspeak" (NEF 51). The Appendix begins by explaining that these articles were a "*tour de force* which could only be carried out by a specialist" (NEF 343). On the one hand, that he is entrusted with such "an intricate and responsible job" reveals Winston to be a skilled manipulator of both Old and Newspeak, and as such useful to the Party. Yet, it also demonstrates that he is ultimately, too clever and simultaneously poses a threat to the regime. In their conversation in the subterranean depths of the miserable staff canteen, Syme indeed detects that Winston does not have "a real appreciation of Newspeak" and calls his pieces for the *Times* "translations" since they betray that in his heart he would "prefer to stick to Oldspeak with all its vagueness and its useless shades of meaning" (NEF 60). Syme accuses his 'friend' of not grasping "the beauty of the destruction of words". In a sense he is advocating the "beauty" of the destruction of beauty, in this case the beauty inherent in natural language, and this is underlined in the Appendix which mentions that the "process" of making "a political or ethical judgement" was "assisted" by "the texture of the (Newspeak) words, with their harsh sound and a certain wilful ugliness which was in accord with the spirit of Ingsoc" (NEF 352). As we see elsewhere, it is indeed Winston's awareness of beauty in nature and art that also makes him an enemy of the Party. The fanatical zeal with which specialist philologists like Syme destroy words, with all their inherent beauty and links to a distant past is echoed in the smashing of the glass paperweight in the room above Charrington's shop when Winston and Julia are arrested.

One of the messages delivered to Winston through the pneumatic tube in his work cubicle contains another word which perfectly exemplifies the reduced nature of Newspeak. The slip of

paper informs Winston that the reporting of Big Brother's speech in the news bulletin he is to rewrite is *doubleplusungood*. We are told that this would be rendered as "extremely unsatisfactory" (NEF 51) in Standard English. When Syme enthuses to Winston about "the destruction of words", calling it "a beautiful thing" (NEF 59), he explains that "a word contains its opposite within itself" and uses the word *good* to exemplify his meaning. He calls on Winston to admire the "beauty" in reducing "the whole notion of goodness and badness" to "only six words", namely, the root word *good*, its antonym *ungood* and the use of the affixes *plus* or *doubleplus* to replace "vague useless words" like "excellent" "splendid" (NEF 60).

Orwell, clearly wants the reader to appreciate the nature of this new language, for not only are we directed early on to the Appendix for a full account of the *Principles of Newspeak*, but much of its essence is outlined by Syme in his zealous appraisal of the Eleventh Edition of the Newspeak Dictionary. Thus, it is Syme who first reveals that "the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought" (NEF 60). The irony is that Syme himself exhibits anything but a narrowing of his range of thought. As a compiler of the new dictionary he understands the "how" but is also all too familiar with the "why". His enthusiasm for, as he sees it, perfecting the language – "the Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect" (NEF 61) – is no doubt driven by his own personal hand in the "process" of "cutting the language down to the bone" (NEF 59), like a butcher taking pride in wielding the knife. Yet it is this arch sense of knowingness that will ultimately lead to Syme's downfall. Such is his appreciation of the concept of language reduction that he is forced to add "as an afterthought" that "it was B.B's idea originally, of course" (NEF 60). He further gives himself away by enthusing that in the future Newspeak will alter the "whole climate of thought" such that "there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now" and that "orthodoxy is unconsciousness" (NEF 61). So fully conscious is he of the Party's intentions that Syme's unorthodox behaviour is tantamount to an act of *thoughtcrime* and Winston knows that for seeing "too clearly" and speaking "too plainly" Syme will one day be "vaporized" (NEF 62), which is of course what does eventually come to pass.

It is ironic, therefore, that the very people who are capable of designing the new language are, despite their zealous efforts, themselves a threat to the Party for they comprehend too well its motives. We get the impression that it suits the Party to have Newspeak designed only to

then promptly do away with its creators, since the language will become so prevalent that knowledge of its origins and etymology will be unnecessary and it will have become merely a tool to control Party members.

O'Brien would, thus, no doubt believe that Newspeak is the linguistic "boot" stamping down on and shrinking the mental space of language – "for ever". He affirms that "we (the Party) control life, at all its levels" (NEF 308), and thus the vitality of human thought freely expressed through language is the level of life that Newspeak seeks to decimate.

And yet this is not what happens. The Appendix is written from some unspecified future perspective, at a time when Standard English is clearly flourishing once more. It looks back on the world of 1984, explaining that Newspeak was envisaged to have "finally superseded Oldspeak by about the year 2050" (NEF 343). The clear failure for this to happen is emphasised by the fluid clarity of the writing itself and by the sentence "relative to our own, the Newspeak vocabulary was tiny". The fact that we are directed to the Appendix as early as the fourth page of the book, shows that Orwell is keen for the reader to be aware that the brutal future foreseen by O'Brien will not come to pass.

Syme tells Winston that before long all the great literary works of the past will have been destroyed – "Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron – they'll exist only in Newspeak versions, not merely changed into something different, but actually changed into something contradictory of what they used to be" (NEF 61). The Appendix ends by referring to this same transformation of works of literature, adding that "these translations were a slow and difficult business" and the main reason for "so late a date as 2050" being chosen for the "final adoption of Newspeak" (NEF 355).

We are given an indication of the difficulty in achieving this endeavour when we learn that the poet Ampleforth has, like Winston, been caught by the thought police. His work at the Ministry of Truth involves the production of certain of the so-called "definitive texts" which Syme alludes to, in reality "garbled versions" of those "poems which had become ideologically offensive but . . . were to be retained in the anthologies". With his "talent for juggling with rhymes and meters", Ampleforth, like Syme, has the necessary linguistic skill to produce what the Party requires, but his knowledge of what is being suppressed and indeed replaced is what

leads to his arrest. He complains to Winston that he had to include the word "God" (NEF 265) in a reworking of a poem by Kipling in order to fit the rhyme scheme, clearly unacceptable to a party who denied the existence of a higher being.

After Winston's dream of the Golden Country with its beautiful natural landscape, he wakes up "with the word 'Shakespeare' on his lips" (NEF 36), a further hint that somehow the literature of the past cannot be destroyed.

The Appendix explains that following the eventual adoption of Newspeak any unorthodox thought "should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words" (NEF 343). Orwell does not give any explanation as to why the regime of 1984 ultimately fails, but there are suggestions that this notion of human thought being more than words alone may have something to do with it. Reflecting, in the canteen, on the overwhelming sense of the dreariness and discomfort inherent in "the physical texture of life", Winston considers that "always in your stomach and in your skin there was a sort of protest, a feeling that you had been cheated of something you had the right to" (NEF 68). There is a sense that perhaps there is something indomitable about the human spirit that will always prevail.

The physical space of language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Finally, I will look at how the physical space of language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and how the adoption of Newspeak would even impact on the biological mechanisms involved in the act of speaking.

We learn in the Appendix that the Party only expected Newspeak to have fully replaced Oldspeak "by about the year 2050" (NEF 343). However, even in the world of 1984, we see evidence of individuals who are already speaking in fluent Newspeak in order to communicate their assimilation of Ingsoc, if not also their assimilation by Ingsoc, as their speech appears to be an almost unconscious stream which sounds like the "quacking of a duck" (NEF 63), referred to in Newspeak as *duckspeak*. In the canteen, a young man on a neighbouring table is "talking remorselessly away" (NEF 62) in this way and spouting forth a torrent of pure orthodoxy. It seems to Winston that the man is more like a dummy talking than a real human being and "it was his larynx" that was speaking rather than his brain. The Appendix indeed reveals that this

was precisely the Party's intention and that "ultimately it was hoped to make articulate speech issue from the larynx without involving the higher brain centres at all" (NEF 352). It further explains that the short compound words making up Newspeak were themselves designed such that the equal stress given to the first and last syllables would produce a "gabbling style of speech" that was virtually "independent of consciousness". The satire is at its harshest when we then learn that the intention was that equipped with the tools of Newspeak, "a party member called upon to make a political or ethical judgement should be able to spray forth the correct opinions as automatically as a machine-gun spraying forth bullets" (NEF 352).

The intention indeed seems to be to create a new race of beings who are not truly human beings at all. The original name of the book is *The Last Man in Europe* and O'Brien addresses Winston as the "last man" and "guardian of the human spirit".

The *duckspeaker* in the canteen is described as "an eyeless creature with a quacking voice" and certainly comes across as one of this new breed of aliens. Similarly, Winston describes how a certain "beetle-like type proliferated in the Ministries", men with "short legs" and "very small eyes" that "seemed to flourish best under the Dominion of the Party" (NEF 69) Newspeak is central to this horrific notion of the dehumanising of the Party members.

Conclusion

Nineteen Eighty-Four is essentially a dystopian warning as to the dehumanising effect of totalitarian power. The reduction of the space of language is part of the way in which personal and cultural identity are systematically reduced. Orwell is clearly seeking to satirise the linguistic manipulation of regimes such as Stalin's Russia, with its party slogans and state propaganda. However, his invention of Newspeak is just as much a satirical attack on the way language was being used much closer to home in 1940's Britain.

In his "Politics and the English Language"[3] Orwell champions the cause of plain English and condemns the 'slovenliness' of modern English, which has become full of 'bad habits'. He is particularly scathing of political writing, stating that "orthodoxy, of whatever colour, seems to demand a lifeless, imitative style" (Orwell, *Essays* 355). His description of a politician standing

on a platform giving a speech is precisely that of the duckspeaker in the canteen in *Nineteen Eighty-Four.*

> . . . one often has a curious feeling that one is not watching a live human being but some kind of dummy: a feeling which suddenly becomes stronger at moments when the light catches the speaker's spectacles and turns them into blank discs which seem to have no eyes behind them. And this is not altogether fanciful. A speaker who uses that kind of phraseology has gone some distance toward turning himself into a machine. The appropriate noises are coming out of his larynx, but his brain is not involved as it would be if he were choosing his words for himself. If the speech he is making is one that he is accustomed to make over and over again, he may be almost unconscious of what he is saying, as one is when one utters the responses in church. And this reduced state of consciousness, if not indispensable, is at any rate favourable to political conformity. (Orwell, *Essays* 356)

We see here the template for the ideas that would result in the notion of *duckspeak*, meaning to speak without thinking. The *Appendix* explains that the Party upheld all those who spoke in this way:

> Provided that the opinions which were quacked out were orthodox ones, it implied nothing but praise, and when 'The Times' referred to one of the orators of the Party as a *doubleplusgood duckspeaker* it was paying a warm and valued compliment. (NEF 352)

The Principles of Newspeak envisage a world where the link between language and thought is severed completely. This final stage of the reduction of language, which Steven Blakemore suggests 'can be called "nospeak"' (349), is predicted to be in force by the year 2050, a time when 'the death of language would make the possibility of rebellion impossible: for rebellion has first to be realized linguistically (355).

Jean-Jacques Courtine asserts that "language is the living memory of man and offers him space for inner resistance" (70). Winston's rebellion begins inside his head, where he thinks he is safe from the Party's ever watching gaze. "Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull" (NEF 32). Such is the pressure he feels with so many

ungoodthinkful ideas crowding his head, that he is compelled to physically manifest the rebellious words in his head on the paper of his diary, filling half a page by repeatedly writing the line "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER" (NEF 21). Courtine likens language to a body whose words, or signs, are like "social parasites" which the Party seeks to eradicate. Language is a threat to the totalitarian state and just as individuals are purged of their unorthodox thoughts, so "signs must be purged and purified of their meaning" (Courtine 70). Explaining to Winston how the Party had previously dealt with *thought criminals* like himself, O'Brien says that "by the time we had finished with them, they were only the shells of men" (NEF 292). He promises that eventually Winston himself 'will be hollow', proffering that 'we shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves' (NEF 293). We can see, therefore, how the Party seeks to remove the space of language completely, like a surgeon wielding his knife, as if lancing a boil and squeezing the imperfection from the body. Just as Winston is given injections that aid him into actually believing for a moment that he can see five fingers instead of four, so the Party will ultimately inject the hollow space of language with Newspeak, a form of language purged of all impurities so that there is no room for ambiguity or shades of meaning, such that it can only produce pure *goodthink*, for which perhaps we should read 'nothink', and the speaker will be able to freely perceive that two and two make five.

The eventual dehumanising effect of Newspeak is to be enhanced by radical social changes planned for the future. O'Brien tells Winston that "we have cut the links between child and parent; between man and man, and between man and woman" (NEF 306). Thus is envisaged a world where children are ultimately not brought up by their parents and would not learn language conventionally but presumably directly from the state power.

We see this idea paralleled in Bentham's social theories, of which Orwell may not have been aware, but which curiously echo his satirical vision of a world where thought control through language and education is a possibility. Foucault elaborates on Bentham's 'panopticism' in his *Discipline and Punish* (1977):

> The Panopticon was also a laboratory; it could be used as a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals. To experiment with medicines and monitor their effects. . . . To

> try out pedagogical experiments – and in particular to take up once again the well-debated problem of secluded education, by using orphans. One would see what would happen when, in their sixteenth or eighteenth year, they were presented with other boys or girls; one could verify whether, as Helvetius thought, anyone could learn anything; one would follow 'the genealogy of every observable idea'; one could bring up different children according to different systems of thought, making certain children believe that two and two do not make four or that the moon is a cheese, then put them together when they are twenty or twenty-five years old; one would then have discussions that would be worth a great deal more than the sermons or lectures on which so much money is spent; . . . (203)

Reconstruction or, rather, purification of the space of language can thus be seen as the means by which a vast project of social engineering is to be carried out. The individual of this future society will have every link cut between himself and those things which we consider vital in shaping his very humanity; parents, history, cultural identity and natural language.

As Courtine points out, Orwell's invention of Newspeak was a parody of *Basic English*, an international language experiment devised by C. K. Ogden, which was essentially a "syntactically simplified English of 850 words" (Courtine 71). Syme's comment that "we are destroying words – scores of them, hundreds of them" (NEF 59) echoes Ogden's assertion that "the primary principle of *Basic*, which made the reduced vocabulary possible, is the elimination of the verb" (Ogden 5). Orwell, though initially interested in the experiment, had grown disillusioned with it. Interestingly, Courtine (73) reveals that Ogden was concerned that the whole vocabulary of *Basic English* should "be visible at a single glance" (Ogden 18) and, influenced by Bentham's notion of an all-seeing eye of surveillance, he had already conceived of an even more abbreviated language consisting of no more than 500 words which he appropriately named *Panoptic English.*

It must not be forgotten, of course, that Orwell was quite definitely not predicting the actual future 1984 but satirising his own present. It is a point made succinctly by Bernard Crick who draws out attention to the last sentence of the Appendix: "It was chiefly in order to allow time for the preliminary work of translation that the final adoption of Newspeak had been fixed for so late a date as 2050" (NEF 355).

Crick notes that "the satirist implies that demotic language and literature cannot be controlled" (Crick 147). It is perhaps, ultimately, then Orwell's view that a future of the sort he describes could never in fact take place, on account of the indomitable spirit of the proles, who are the one group whose space of language has not been reduced. Winston's belief that "if there is hope, it lies in the proles" (NEF 80) is, therefore, just as central to the novel as the image of the boot perpetually stamping on a face. When walking in the prole quarters and observing the evident humanity of the people he saw there, speaking freely and unfettered by the Party's restraints on movement, he ponders:

> What mattered were individual relationships, and a completely helpless gesture, an embrace, a tear, a word spoken to a dying man, could have value in itself. The proles, it suddenly occurred to him, had remained in this condition. They were not loyal to a party or a country or an idea, they were loyal to one another. For the first time in his life he did not despise the proles or think of them merely as an inert force which would one day spring to life and regenerate the world. The proles had stayed human. They had not become hardened inside. They had held on to the primitive emotions which he himself had to re-learn by conscious effort. (NEF 191)

Certainly, in terms of the language that we see used by the proles, it is apparent that their humanity is very much in evidence. Winston describes having gone to the cinema and seen a war film featuring the bombing of a refugee ship and a shot of a child's arm being blown off. A prole woman has to be forcibly removed by police for protesting and Winston records in his diary that "nobody cares what the proles say" (NEF 11), but, nevertheless, he transcribes the essence of what she had said: "they didnt oughter of showed it not in front of the kids they didnt it aint right not in front of the kids it aint" (NEF 11).

These words are reminiscent also of those that Winston remembers were spoken in an air-raid shelter by a grieiving old man who kept repeating, "we didn't ought to 'ave trusted 'em. I said so, Ma, didn't I? That's what come of trusting 'em. I said so all along. We didn't ought to have trusted the buggers" (NEF 39).

Through plain language transcribed in its colloquial originality, these excerpts illustrate the core human values of dignity, respect and trust, which Winston comes to realise have remained alive in the proles, and which O'Brien coldly explains have been eradicated amongst the Party. It is, of course, ironic that according to O'Brien "humanity is the Party" and the proles are "helpless" and "irrelevant" "like the animals" (NEF 309). Instead, it is the members who have become dehumanised.

The washer woman in the yard also seems to show the sheer power of the human spirit. She sings a song produced as *prolefeed* for the masses, but is able to inject it with a passion and beauty that touches Winston profoundly. The Oldspeak words produced randomly by a *versificator* are allowed to shine forth through her voice.

We have seen how Bakhtin sees language as a discourse between Self and Other, and that our identity is dependent on where we have come from and where we are going, in constant dialogue with those around us as well as those who have come before us and will come after us. Our humanity stems from the resulting "heteroglossia" of speech genres and our awareness of each other's differences. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* we see a disturbing world of "monoglossia", with no shades or variation. It is a world where the space of language has been so reduced that it threatens to turn people into creatures not unlike ants or beetles in a vast colony, loyal only to the Party and loving only Big Brother.

Ultimately, Orwell's novel is a warning about what could happen if we were to allow the reductionist principles of Ogden's *Basic English* to be used by a power-mad dictator, such as the world has indeed seen in the form, for example, of Josef Stalin. It reminds us of the need to preserve our freedom of speech and ensure that the space of language can remain as wide open and unconstrained as possible.

I have found that applying a spatial approach to the novel allows us to appreciate it from a new perspective. By viewing the tyranny of Big Brother's regime as a reduction of the geographical space in which individuals are free to speak, as well as a reduction in their very ability to speak through systematic destruction of language, we are able, more clearly, to consider the space occupied by the proles as a heterotopia, operating within the prevailing

dystopia, and thus recognise that Orwell ultimately believed that such a nightmare vision could never in fact come to pass.

Notes

[1] NEF hereafter is used to indicate references to the 2000 Penguin edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

[2] Translated from the original Portuguese, "As heterotopias (...) questionem o presente e aspirem a transgredir os seus limites".

[3] Originally published in Horizon, London, 1946.

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Representing Disability in the English Classroom

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Introducing the topic of disability in the English classroom

A basic claim of all intercultural education is that classrooms should welcome diversity and address equity issues in terms of gender, class, ethnicity and/or disability. This paper addresses the topic of presenting disability in the English classroom through children's books. To render disability visible and to discuss it in the English classroom may promote a transformative perception of reality (inclusive of disability and diversity). Only by including diversity of personal and cultural situations will materials in the English classroom address the social and personal realities of children and young people in all their diversity. This means that the author subscribes to the idea that transformation of societies can come about through change of ideological assumptions, and that this change can be read off books and promoted through guided responses to books. So, on the one hand, the article addresses which books on disability to choose, and how; while, on the other hand, it addresses how to approach the reading of particular books. Such a project must be situated within the social model of disability (as against the medical definition of disability that looks up to medical intervention to resolve problems), which describes the social barriers that work against equal opportunities and requires social change (Saunders). The idea of exclusion and inclusion, and of disability, that will emerge from the selected materials and reading approaches, presented in this article, is not connected to special education, instruction, or school organization. It goes beyond the focus on disabled children to reading materials in the classroom for *all* children. It explores feelings of exclusion from familiar backgrounds or from social opportunities. It highlights how difficult it is, sometimes, to integrate in society, to have similar rights and learn in alternative ways. It looks at

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the wider social contexts of contemporary societies and challenges discrimination based on disability.

The article also claims that introducing materials, such as books and pictures in books, that represent disability is no easy task and requires, on the one hand, willingness to see disability as part of contemporary societies and as a curricular topic; and, on the other hand, it requires criteria for choosing books and reading guidelines that will ensure a bias-free discussion of disability and promote change of perception in pupils. Rather than putting forward a list of titles of children's fiction that might be included in the English classroom as positive representations of disability, the article offers teachers and teacher trainers scope for reflection on how to choose the appropriate reading materials for their own classrooms and specific educational contexts. Ideas to generate thought and reflection around children's books on disability will be drawn from research and from one particular *Booktrust* initiative called the *Booktouch* project and its report *Making Exclusion a Thing of the Past: Children's Views on Disability in Book*. Thus, our broad aim is to show elementary teachers, teacher trainers, librarians and parents how it is possible to promote intercultural education and explore disability issues in the English classroom through pedagogical resources that facilitate choice of quality children's books and an interpretive reading framework that might facilitate change of perception in pupils. This framework is developed from within a critical non-discriminatory pedagogy that identifies causes of disability; feelings and reactions to it; self-images and hetero-images of disabled characters; critical incidents and resolutions. It also throws light on power relations and values the transformation of discriminatory realities.

Children's books as inclusive practice

The article works from the assumption that 'mainstream school and society often know little about disability and, despite some valuable instances of inclusion, continue to exclude disabled people from experiences available to other citizens' (Ballard 174) or to exclude the topic from the classroom. In fact, most teachers will not have consciously perceived the importance of looking at representations of disability in children's books in the English classroom, since it is not a topic that deserves consistent representation in most manuals or in children's fiction. As

highlighted by Brenna, the fact that books centering on characters with special needs miss the awards lists serves to continue the marginalization of people with disabilities (Brenna 100).

However, in increasingly more multicultural and inclusive societies it is important to lead children to think about issues of disability in the wider context of representation of difference and diversity and to include the topic in systematic ways. By 'systematic' we do not mean that the topic should be dealt explicitly with in the English classroom, but rather that it is desirable that the many issues surrounding the representation of disability are truthfully and adequately treated and that its representation should be transversal to most learning materials. The early years seem to be critical for understanding disability and generating positive attitudes and perceptions towards it (Innes and Diamond, qtd. by Matthew and Clow 68), though this is a topic that might be addressed at any age and educational level.

In education, researchers have shown that using quality children's books which portray dynamic characters with disabilities may be an effective teaching tool for the inclusive classroom because books can provide positive role models and promote understanding as well change realities into more inclusive places (Sotto and Ball 40). It has also been shown that through books children may be more willing to talk about their feelings about disability (Inquinta and Hipsky).

Research in the area of children's books and intercultural education has pointed to several ways through which societal pressures for exclusion may be removed. Children's books and fictional materials are particularly useful to confront children, through personal and emotional engagement, with unfamiliar situations and ideas, good and bad solutions, and to challenge readers to make connections between what they read about and their living contexts, especially when there are unexpected events and interpretations that differ from theirs. 'Books send very strong signals to children about themselves – who they are, what they can do, who they can be, and who is different from them' (Lewis). Books are believed to address hearts rather than facts and to define – for children – what is 'normal', 'acceptable', 'worthwhile' as well as what is invisible and devalued (Cole and Valentine). Rosenblatt (1991) stresses literature's role to develop a sense of empathy for people who face discrimination. Several other authors, among which many bibliotherapists, will highlight the need and the right of all children to see

themselves represented, in their diversity, in children's books. Others, such as Matthew and Clow, will defend that inclusion of reading materials about disability and 'special people' should not be viewed as a separate activity, but be included in a casual way as part of the everyday contact of children with fiction. Matthew and Clow conclude through focus group discussions with youth librarians that 'casual inclusion of images of disabled people in everyday children's books would be a better solution' to the lack of good examples of inclusive books (67). This way books would be 'images that reflect the real world' (67).

Reading will not change realities, but it may well constitute 'a first step toward changing attitudes and building relationships' (Smith-D'Arezzo 92). Smith-D'Arezzo also claims that characters in literature may be used as a strategy to introduce children in classrooms to peers who have disabilities and to teach children about diversity. Teaching about diversity, social justice and social issues should be the main focus to reduce prejudice. However, she also makes it very clear that defining appropriate criteria for selecting books is as important as it is to guide children's reading and inviting connections of what they read with their own experience as part of a well designed study. 'To be inclusive', writes Ballard, 'requires that we strive to identify and remove all barriers for learning for all children. This means that we must attend to increasing participation not just for disabled students but for all those experiencing disadvantage, whether this results from poverty, sexuality, minority ethnic status, or other characteristics assigned significance by the dominant culture in society' (Ballard 2).

However, there are common pitfalls to the use of children's books for this end. Not all books about disability are acceptable. Beckett, Ellison, Barrett, Shah and Bryne (2010), while claiming that books will influence child readers' perceptions of social life, call attention to the need to evaluate the standpoint of representing disability. They argue that there are many examples in 'good' children's books that use discriminatory language and negative stereotyping or fail to represent disability in a non-marked or biased way. Jackson (2009) reports about his difficulty in finding disability-positive books. He characterises these as being able to dispel stereotypes, support those labeled 'disabled' and start discussions about 'difference' and 'feeling different' among students, besides empowering children with disabilities, offering genuine insights into a person's life and feelings, and portray socially inclusive contexts. Brenna argues

for characters with disability that are described in 'their unique patterns of individuality and human growth' (101). Several claims have been made that there aren't enough good books in the English language (where the market is huge) and that characters with disabilities are almost invisible, or play secondary roles. Research in the area of representation of disability in children's fiction is very limited, on a par with the few titles published that portray main characters with disabilities in a positive non-biased way. Furthermore, it has also been claimed that representation of disability in children's books hardly meets the disabled children's lives and experiences (Matthew and Clow 67). Besides, there is, among writers, illustrators, critics and educators the fear of not using children's books about disability 'in the right way' (Matthew and Clow 72).

Notwithstanding, from the children's book world perspective, there has recently been a surge of interest on the issues of diasbility that focus on: bringing together the children with special needs and the books; finding books suitable for disabled children in order to help them enjoy books, better integrate in the society, develop their abilities, and live a happy life. Online bookshops offer selections of books for children with special needs, research on recommending how to present books to children with special needs is growing. More important, or as important, may be all the initiatives that have strived to put 'disability' in the picture of children's books[1], or bring it into the standard classroom, and have addressed disability as one, among many, representations of diverse ways of living.

Selecting appropriate books and activities

From the perspective of multicultural or intercultural education, inclusion of books with characters with disabilities may not be enough to change perceptions. Books have to be carefully chosen as positive portrayals and strategies for guiding the reading have to be developed in order to effectively change children's perceptions through reading. It is generally assumed, among children's literature experts, that reading about children with disabilities will promote acceptance of them in reality, but as Smith-D'Arezzo and Moore-Thomas (2010) show this may not always be the case. Sometimes previous exposure to disabilities had more to do with change of perceptions. Previous preconceptions and prior knowledge may inhibit attitude

change through reading, write Smith-D'Arezzo and Moore-Thomas. This implies that attention should be given to guiding readings and promote debate about reading. Matthew and Clow write that there is evidence that children's books 'are only really helpful in promoting inclusive education when the disabled and non-disabled children (are) together' (77, quoting Pirofsky) .

Choosing books on disability that are disability-sensitive may seem a tricky business and leaves many a teacher with the fear that by choosing a politically correct book its interest and pedagogical relevance as authentic material will be lower. There are certainly some pitfalls to be avoided, which may be classified as situations that create and sustain social and cultural division.

Situations that create and sustain social and cultural division

Some of these situations concern the voice of disabled characters (or other excluded characters). For Sotto and Ball, in order to be positive role models, children's books should portray characters with disabilities as dynamic, i.e. able to participate in an adventure, interact with others and show growth (42). They should be problem solvers. Smith-D'Arezzo, a former special education teacher, selects realistic[2] images of characters with disabilities from quality literature, highlighting that they should be 'cast in a positive light' and be presented 'with all their flaws' (76). She further points to the need for books about characters with disabilities to 'present special education issues accurately' (77) and to address cognitive (mental and learning disabilities), physical or emotional disability. Children's books and materials may give voice to the excluded character, simulating experiences of exclusion, struggles and possibilities. Norms and limits imposed on them.

'Fear, ignorance, prejudice and resentment of disabled people are embedded in society's consciousness' (Brown 36). Though literature they may be examined and challenged as they often are not in classrooms and in society. The exclusion of persons based on disability is a form of oppression that denies access and opportunity and which views someone as worthless in society. Thus, among degrading and devaluing practices to be avoided we might include the following: main characters with communication problems (such as dys-fluency, mutism, articulation disorder, hearing loss, dyslexia, or language disorder) are often depicted as 'weak,

timid, withdrawn and spineless', conclude Sotto and Ball after reviewing 30 children's books (Sotto and Ball 42).

Another devaluing practice concerns the visibility of disabled characters. Brenna notes that among the American Newbery and Canadian Governor General's Award winners for English text over the last twenty years, there are no books centering on characters with special needs and when there are they are in secondary positions.[3] 'Common stereotypes include the idea that people with exceptionalities are generally not capable, persistent or independent, have communication difficulties, lack a sense of humour, and that a single disability is somehow all encompassing' (Brenna 100).

Further degrading representation practices may refer to over-simplification. Matthew and Clow claim that children's books in Britain often represent limited views of disabled people in a flat way, as tragic victims, saintlike, possessing superhuman strength and resilience, 'needy recipients of charity', or 'wholly defined by their impairments or differences' (67).

In general, as a result of this kind of representations, children's perceptions of disability tend to be negative. Smith-D'Arezzo and Moore-Thomas explored fifth-graders perceptions of a learning disability and concluded that they saw it 'as a large negative construct involving chararcter deficit, student and parent culpability, limited mental capacity, and character traits' (12).

Practical suggestions for the classroom

Taking into consideration the research that has been described allows the teacher to reflect on which books *not* to select. One argument of this article is that provided features as the above-mentioned are given dully consideration, any book on disability may be used if there is an appropriate frame of mind, i.e. clear about the power relations between disabled and non-disabled or attentive to the many social uses of power relations that will allow for transformative perceptions of disability as a social use of power relations. Including disabled characters in books and discussing them in the English classroom is a strategy that promotes equal dignity of all persons despite their perceived disadvantages. Openness, curiosity and commitment to

understanding the issue of disability are required on the part of students and teacher in order for difference to be respected. Awareness of who is being talked down to is also crucial.

Some very broad criteria may be useful to guide teachers' searches for the right books for his/her classroom. Here are some suggestions from the BARFIE (Books and Reading for Intercultural Education) project and catalogue which includes 138 books from 18 European countries, selected by professionals in the field of literature for children:

1. Books should be about disadvantaged young people; disadvantages of different kind should be taken into consideration, i.e. disadvantages due to ethnicity, religion, colour, disability, social status, etc.
2. The plot of the stories should be interesting and stimulating for an audience of varied age groups.
3. The book's literary values should generally be acknowledged by teachers, critics, scholars, librarians or other experts.

Further recommendations for the English classroom are a series of websites where the teacher may track down reading lists of books on children with disabilities, such as: the International Children's Digital Library at http://www.icdlbooks.org; http://www.letterboxlibrary.com/acatalog/index.html; Book Trust at http://www.booktrust.org.uk; Bookhead at http://www.bookheads.org.uk; Cool-Reads at http://www.cool-reads.co.uk; Booktrusted at http://www.booktrusted.co.uk. Contemporary writers of fiction seem to be sensitive to the topic, with a major impulse given, for instance, in the UK, through the Quentin Blake Award and the Bookmark report *Making Exclusion a Thing of the Past* (Bookmark), which presents some important guidelines to approach the issue of disability. The Booktrust report includes answers of students on how they felt about disability in books and how they reacted in a series of workshops led by children's authors and illustrators. Some of the very good ideas used in that project may be found at http://www.childreninthepicture.org.uk/documents/quentin_blake_award_project_report_001.pdf. Here are some examples, adapted from the Quentin Blake Award Project Report that a teacher may use in the English classroom before, during or after the reading of a book:

- Brainstorm the term 'disability'.
- Discuss the extent to which disability is a 'black and white' issue, or whether it is more of a spectrum or continuum.
- Develop own writing ideas on the subject or plotlines (collective) after which students are split into smaller groups to explore different ways of writing the story (play script, comic strip, graphic novel, newspaper article).
- Discuss published books about or which include portrayals of disability.
- Prepare questions to interview the author/illustrator of a particular book (on physical disability, on dyslexia or on any other diversity issue).
- Remember fictional disabled characters students read about it in their childhood: what do students remember? How positive is it? What is there in common among those characters?
- Look at particular fairy tales and how they portray physical disability: what kind of characters are the disabled characters? What happens to them? What may students conclude?
- Consider contemporary films and television programmes. What messages do they generally convey about disability? Consider *Shrek* and *Tracy Beaker* as examples.
- Brainstorm on how to raise awareness and improve visibility of disabled people without making it 'an issue' or exacerbating stereotypes.
- Discuss different types of books – horror, thriller, fairy stories, fantasy, and adventure – which students like best and why. What makes a good story? Generate ideas for a book.
- Use own ideas to develop characters: one of them has to be a wheelchair user. There may be other disabled characters. Discuss how many there should be and why. Which characters will be female and male? Which will be heroes and villains?
- Illustrate own characters. Practical considerations to be discussed: how are they dressed, whether/when the characters ask people for assistance, does the character propel herself or needs to be pushed?

- Interview authors (imaginatively or in person) about certain characters they have created.
- Brainstorm about what might the difficulties of drawing deafness.
- Draw a deaf character and present it to the rest of the group explaining own interpretation.
- Create a potential character in a book by drawing it with eyes closed and using the non-writing hand.
- Write the beginning of a fairy/magic story.
- Take a group of mainstream children to a special school to develop a workshop there on books about disability.
- Suggest that a particular central character in a story might be disabled. How might this knowledge have affected the plot or the students' interpretation of the story?
- Make a list of books students have read that feature disabled characters.
- Have groups of students develop 'story maps' that feature a disabled and a non-disabled character. The story map is a giant treasure island and the children have to illustrate the characters' journey across the island to reach the hidden treasure.
- Have students go through blurbs, covers, author biographies and titles. How do they influence choices to pick up a book?
- Consider the following statements for a class debate:
    - Readers will not accept disabled heroes or heroines;
    - People are more likely to accept a disabled villain;
    - A book featuring a wheelchair user (for example) will be seen as trying to 'make a point' or be 'too politically correct'.
- How do books feature disability? Have students choose favourite illustrators and create artwork in their style featuring disabled characters (eg. In the style of, for example, Lauren Child, if students are familiar her work).

Further useful resources, such as visual prompts may be found at http://www.childreninthepicture.org/uk/inspiration.htm.

Conclusion

The article started by highlighting some experts' voices that overlap and compete on the perceptions and needs of people with disabilities and the role of children's books to stand up against the absences, limitations and misrepresentations of disability not only in children's books, but also in classrooms and in society at large.

The article also highlighted that there seems to be constant apprehension that while addressing such a topic – representation of disability in children's books – teachers, teacher trainers, artists, parents and librarians will be subscribing to the deep culture of exclusion that pervades contemporary societies. Focusing on disability and on special people might set them further apart and underlies divisions between those that are 'special' and 'non-special'.

The article has tried to contradict this by offering suggestions on how to select and use reading materials in the English classroom that may simultaneously put disability in the picture and represent it in all fairness. It was suggested that teachers may use several websites and make use of research in the area to select books that are suitable to their classrooms. It was also suggested that some forms of thinking about disability are forms of oppression and that therefore when choosing books teachers may wish to focus on some features of the books, such as: whether they include characters with disabilities in culturally valued activities and quotidian settings; whether they center on characters and their intrinsic value despite being perceived as 'others'; and whether they invite the reader to read about unfamiliar situations as a way into critical reflection.

Finally, it was further highlighted that besides selecting 'good' books teachers and teacher trainers may wish to consider specific approaches to the reading materials which aim at transforming biased and discriminatory views on disability.

Notes

[1] One such event is a collection of books for children with special needs and a travelling exhibition organized in the last 20 years in Norway with the support of IBBY.

[2] Smith-D'Arezzo uses Huck's definition of realistic fiction as 'imaginative writing that accurately reflect(s) life as it was lived in the past or could be lived today' (Smith-D'Arezzo 78; Huck 454).

[3] Matthew and Clow quote ten guiding principles to put children with disabilities 'in the picture' and will defend that the point is not that they should be main characters, but that they should be there as a 'natural feature of every child's landscape' (principle 2) (Matthew and Clow 71).

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Public Speaking for Intercultural Education and Metalinguistic Development in ESP

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As higher education in Portugal becomes more active in the ERASMUS program, an increasing number of foreign students have enrolled in previously homogenous L1 classes in English for Specific Purposes, altering the dynamics of the classroom significantly. My discussion of this reality in a small inland polytechnic institute in the context of English for Specific Purposes in the areas of Marketing, Management, and Accounting will include the results of a four-year study on the effect of these new enrollment characteristics on metalinguistic development and issues of interculturality.

ERASMUS for European Union students

The European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students, known by its backronym ERASMUS, is the flagship education and training program of the EU. According to the European Commission, in addition to funding cooperation among European institutes of higher education, ERASMUS has enabled 200,000 students to study and work abroad each year. The objective has been to help create a European Higher Education Area, foster innovation throughout Europe, and, by 2012, have promoted mobility for 3 million ERASMUS students. In November 2010, the statistics from the European Commission were already at 2.2 million so, with increasing interest and financial support, this goal does seem realistic.

A cursory review of the ERASMUS website reveals a selection of quotes from participants remarking on their experience:

- "I realised that the experience made a whole new person of me and that I would never look at the world and Europe, my home, as I did before."

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- "ERASMUS life for me is about opportunities. Every opportunity I had, I took it and I thank ERASMUS for it."
- "It is true – when you're in ERASMUS, you find out a lot about yourself."
- "ERASMUS is a lot more than a studying experience. For me it is a way to look at the world with new eyes, to feel and discover new emotions and learn what is not written in the textbooks."
- "If I look at my experience from a distance, I can say that I would definitely do it again, and that apart from (or maybe because of) minor problems along the way, this semester has made me a stronger and more enthusiastic person!"

These words mirror my own experience as an American from UC Berkeley during my junior year in the Education Abroad Program in France in 1986-87 (Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour and the Paris UC Study Center in collaboration with the Sorbonne). Because of my own enriching experience as a university student and the additional characteristic I share with ERASMUS students of being a guest in a foreign country, I identify with ERASMUS students here in Portugal and am committed to contributing to the academic end of their adventure.

ERASMUS at the IPG

The School of Management and Technology (Escola Superior de Tecnologia e Gestão – ESTG) is one of the four schools of the Polytechnic Institute of Guarda (Instituto Politécnico da Guarda – IPG). In general, the IPG is a small and essentially monoethnic Portuguese institute of higher education, with a reduced number of French and Swiss family connections via emigration and less than 50 students from African countries that were former colonies of Portugal. Overall, in the city of Guarda, in 2010, there were only one thousand immigrants registered with the local Immigration Services (Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras).

In terms of local ERASMUS student reception, several observations apply. First, IPG students are not prepared to receive students from different cultures. The reserved nature of the students from the Guarda region makes integration difficult for the less extroverted ERASMUS students. Furthermore, as most teachers are ill-prepared to lecture content-classes in English,

the integration of the students in the classroom is complicated by all communication taking place in Portuguese, a language which they do not understand. Nevertheless, for the academic year 2008-09, a full-time translator was hired to deal with assessment in English.

ERASMUS students in the English classroom

The local experience has been that ERASMUS students enroll in English for several reasons. First, they are usually able to find a legitimate way to transfer the ECTS credits since their universities also offer courses in English for Specific Purposes. Second, as the language of science and management, the international status of the language holds relevance for most study areas. Finally, the relief of understanding course material is a high point in the day for the students who do not speak Portuguese.

English class is, thus, a potential haven for these foreign students. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, created by the communication scholar Milton J. Bennet (1993), can be applied for greater understanding of the experience of difference for these students. According to this model, difference is experienced in predictable stages ranging from ethnocentric (**denial** of difference) to ethnorelative (**integration** with that which is different). Between these extremes, the experiencer will likely work through stages of **defense** against the identified difference, through **minimization** of the difference, leading to initial **acceptance** of and then **adaptation** to the difference before reaching the extreme of integration.

Language teachers also know that motivation for participating in that which is different must also be factored in for the experience. And while all of this is important to understand just how the ERASMUS student might be feeling, it is my contention that the local students must also be considered seriously. The appearance of a speaker of another language in their English classroom alters their own haven considerably, as the benefits of using the L1 in the L2 classroom (cf. Frankenberg-Garcia) may, at least in part, have to be foregone to focus on teaching ESP in a heterogeneous L1 language environment.

As a result, the language teacher must consider the experience of difference for both the newcomers and the home students. My Portuguese students visibly and verbally go through Bennet's proposed stages of denial and defense in the first days of contact, lasting up to three

classes over a two-week period, expressing their frustration at having the new students in "their" class. It is in these initial classes that integrative activities which require pair work, joint reading aloud, and interviewing are particularly useful to oblige students to work through these ethnocentric sensations. As this article goes to press, I have come across Tarun Patel's TALK blog at the British Council / BBC Teaching English site, at which he advocates five successful activities for heterogeneous language classes – adding new vocabulary and short presentations to my proposed triumvirate for actively integrating that which is different.

I have found Beth Fisher-Yoshida's (2005) approach especially helpful in these initial weeks of contact in the English classroom. Her stated objective is to reframe conflict as a constructive opportunity to engage with people we find different from ourselves. Her work is associated with the indispensable research carried out in association with the organization for Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies: Breaking the Cycle of Humiliation, a site that should be considered required reading for any educator concerned about enhancing the quality of intercultural activity.

In addition to actively reframing cultural conflict in the classroom as opportunities for all those involved, exercising an approach outlined by Adair Linn Nagata (2005), described as Self-Reflectivity, has also proven extremely valuable in promoting a positive intercultural learning environment. Self-reflectivity is described as an iterative approach to increase self-awareness in the home students and in the "other", develop self-management skills, and increase the students' overall will to communicate, all the while making language learning enjoyable. As a general practice, I have integrated her feedforward approach to written and oral activities throughout my English classes, with and without the participation of ERASMUS students because it simply makes sense for future professionals to be guided as apprentices.

Standing the practice of feedback on its head, these feedforward commentaries, also both written and oral on the part of the teacher, involve creating constructive suggestions for the next and following future student activities to exercise the competences being developed. For example, a student who is having difficulty accurately presenting numeral-based information about a company will need to know not only where to get linguistically-relevant guidance from the course manual or a favorite reference grammar but also in what context to best put it into practice, such as preparing a presentation based on the overall financials page of a company

listed at Hoover's, Inc. Clearly, the content of feedforward is contextualized by any feedback you would naturally provide; nevertheless, active application of this methodology opens the students' horizons even more, focusing particularly on each student's needs and specific competences. Language teachers working with portfolios will recognize the urgency of this type of guidance and readily understand the application for student autonomy and creativity.

The nature of feedforward is particularly effective with shorter, frequent activities, such as the short analyses, presentation, debate, and small group discussion of the students' activities and experiences, involving individual and group response in all three modalities (T-T; S-T; S-S, where T is teacher and S is student).

The Study

With these teaching considerations in mind for promoting interculturality and an enhancing learning experience in the English classroom, let's take a look at the study at hand. The driving question was to determine whether any particular language learning activities were favored by these mixed L1 classes.

This study covered four years of classes of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for Management, Marketing, and Accounting students at the ESTG-IPG between 2006 and 2010. During this time, a total of eleven ERASMUS students – 6 men and 5 women – participated in these classes, as illustrated in the table below.

Table 1. Enrollment of ERASMUS students in ESP classes at the ESTG-IPG (including nationality and gender)

year	Erasmus students	nationality	M	F
2009-10	5	Polish, Spanish	2	3
2008-09	1	Lithuanian	0	1
2007-08	3	Turkish	1	2
2006-07	2	Spanish	2	0
TOTAL	**11**		**6**	**5**

The limited number of ERASMUS students should not pose any threats to the reliability of this study. The presence of just one foreign student in an English class, as in 2008-09, is just as valid for Portuguese L1 students of higher education since her mere presence constitutes a difference, just as my presence, as an English teacher from California, is a clear constitution of difference.

Including these ERASMUS students, a total of 148 students enrolled in the second semester ESP class for Management, Marketing, and Accounting students were tested. Each year, between 2006-07 and 2009-10, in the first and last weeks of the semester, students responded to a simple multiple-choice question:

Choose your favorite English language learning activity:

- speaking in groups
- public speaking
- group writing
- individual writing

The results of the pre- and post-tests are documented in table 2 below, where the grey shading indicates the pre-test results.

Table 2. Pre- and post-test learning activity preferences

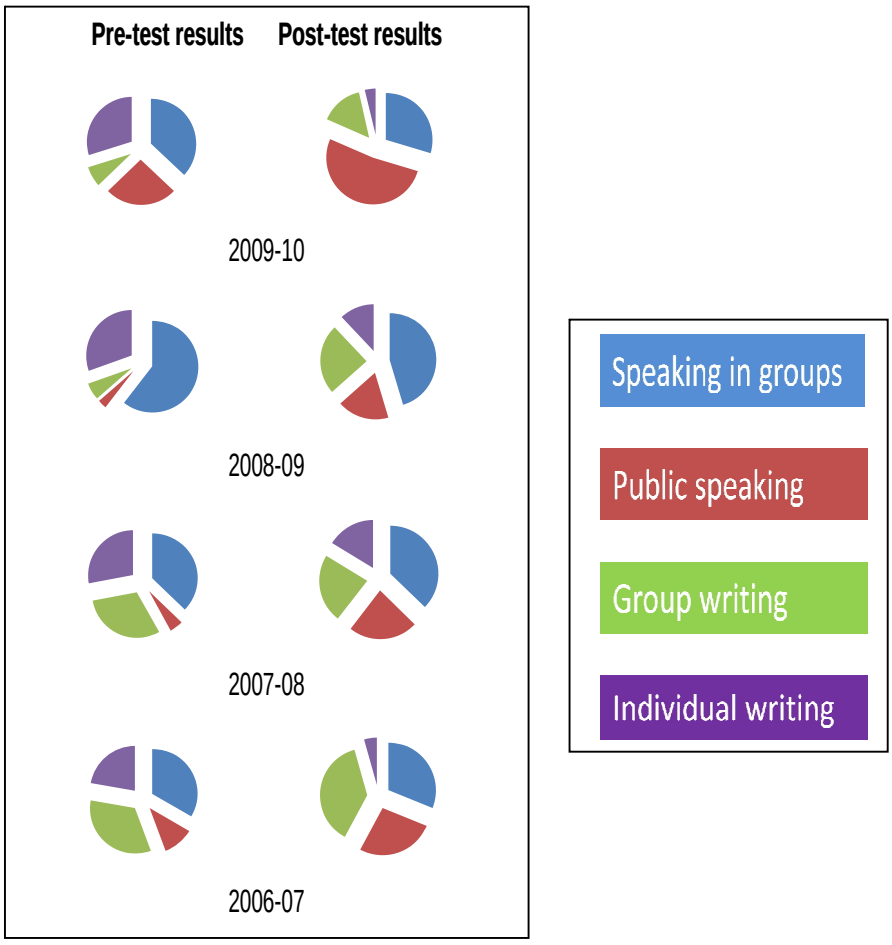
(1)	(2)	year	**Speaking in groups**		**Public speaking**		**Group writing**		**Individual writing**	
5	27	09-10	10 37%	8 30%	7 26%	14 52%	2 7%	4 15%	8 30%	1 4%
1	33	08-09	20 61%	15 46%	1 3%	6 18%	2 6%	8 24%	10 30%	4 12%
3	43	07-08	16 37%	16 37%	2 5%	10 23%	13 30%	10 23%	12 28%	7 16%
2	45	06-07	15 33%	14 31%	5 11%	12 27%	15 33%	17 38%	10 22%	2 4%
11	**148**	**TOTAL**	**61**	**53**	**15**	**42**	**32**	**39**	**40**	**14**

(1) Number of ERASMUS students
(2) Total number of students enrolled

The average rate of change from pre- to post-test preference for each of the activities over all four years was greatest for public speaking (180%), followed by group writing (22%). In the cases of speaking in groups and individual writing, both activities were selected less frequently in the post-test, with average rates of negative change of 13% and 65% respectively.

These results are more readily visible in the pie charts of figure 1, where the students' pre- and post-preferences are illustrated from left to right with a noticeable growth in preference for public speaking (red) in all four years. Selection of group writing (green) grew in all but the year 2007-08, a year in which public speaking (red) made a great leap en post-test preference. Individual writing (purple) and speaking in groups (blue) were both selected by fewer students, notably in the last two years of the study.

Figure 1. Graphic illustration of pre- and post-test learning activity preferences



Reserving comments and further analysis of the study results on the other activities for another article, the focus here, as promised by the title, is on public speaking as it was, in fact, the language learning activity in each yearly post-test that consistently attracted more learners than in the pre-test.

As an activity, public speaking differs from speaking in groups in that, in groups, the students are informally gathered in groups of 2 to 5, talking among themselves in a group activity. The activity of public speaking necessarily involves standing in front of the class, although it may take place either in a group gathered at the front of the class for this purpose or individually.

On a daily basis, public speaking took place in these English classrooms: sometimes as impromptu activities when I would call a work group or individual to the front of the class, requiring improvised speech, other times as specific planned activities. The students' public speaking activity covered the rhetorical forms of analysis, description, narration, exposition, evaluation, and argument and included visual rhetoric, an aspect that was readily embraced by students interested in marketing.

To strengthen the relevance of this activity, which in the first three years was consistently the least favored language learning activity in the pre-test results, each public speaking activity was followed by immediate attention to a checklist, what I called a Quick Response, based on 19 of the communication strategies tested by Wendy Lam (2007).

As such, the students became familiar with a strip of paper that simply listed these strategies, as in the list below. After speaking, they would pull out a copy of the list, cross off the strategies that they had not used, and add their name and date to the end.

Quick response on strategies:

1) Paraphrasing
2) Simplification
3) Activating background knowledge
4) Asking for help

5) Taking risks
6) Using gestures
7) Resourcing
8) Enhancing task knowledge
9) Facilitating progress
10) Seeking clarification
11) Using fillers
12) Monitoring contribution
13) Abandoning message
14) Monitoring turn-taking
15) Elaborating
16) Facilitating atmosphere
17) Focusing on task
18) Planning ideas in advance
19) Seeking views

The version used by the students did not follow any particular order, even listing the strategies in a different order each year so as not to favor any of them, for example, for being in first or last position. Four years of collecting data led to a very clear selection of learner communication strategies in public speaking: my students overwhelmingly used all of strategies listed here as 1 to 11, identifying strategies 12 to 19 in less than 50% of the Quick Responses.

This extra tie-in to public speaking as a language learning activity could be a factor contributing to greater appreciation of public speaking as demonstrated in the post-tests. Students were actively encouraged to reflect on their communication strategies; the action of recording their self-assessment on the Quick Response strips cemented the experience. Talking about communication strategies became commonplace in the classroom and the written analysis, simply by crossing out what did not apply, gave students a metalanguage to do so, empowering them to understand their own oral activity, to question it, and to improve.

I have no doubt that a positive constructive attitude from their teacher helped build a learning environment that was self-reinforcing and contributed to their self-reliance for, if students cannot make mistakes in the classroom, where can they err? In preparing as students in the classroom for their professional activity in the boardroom, they reach for greater challenges, striving to find in themselves the ability to face the greatest confrontations. Students thus entrusted to participate so actively in the classroom create more opportunities for their own learning.

This is the great reason for not using a course manual in these classes. The ESP content necessary for business and marketing, in general, includes obligatorily activities based on case studies, research, a historical perspective, and simulations, in tandem with business communication skills such as informing, entertaining, and especially persuading and expressing prediction for the future. All of these areas can be bolstered on material relevant to their business content courses rather than on predetermined material selected by the teacher. Also essential was the use of feedforward, which structured the autonomous student thrust by creating a roadmap for each individual student who rose to the occasion of the challenges proposed.

Conclusion

The study at hand set out to determine language learning activities that were impacted most by a growing intercultural environment, as reflected by the participation of ERASMUS students in ESP classes that had been previously attended by only Portuguese learners at a small inland polytechnic institute.

Learning interculturally clearly alters the dynamics of the classroom. Sometimes, the difference represented by ERASMUS students in the classroom is not readily accepted by the home students. When this happens, reframing this conflict as an opportunity to become more self-aware can also contribute to an enhanced intercultural education. Materials need to be adjusted to the new reality to correspond with the diversity of input of experience revealed by ERASMUS student participation. The enriched environment contributes to the development of

learning strategies and, hence, of language competence. Everyone involved can benefit from the situation.

In preparing for this study, and throughout its execution, the following resources (see Works Cited for links) proved to be rather useful, inspiring activities and providing both a practical and a theoretical basis:

- International Association for Intercultural Education
- Paul C. Gorski's Critical Multicultural Pavillion Awareness Activities
- Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies: Breaking the Cycle of Humiliation

The group for Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies is a jewel. Many researchers and practitioners will feel motivated, as I have, by the work developed by these scholars whose stated definition and goal transcribed here are the words on which I will end this article:

> We are a global transdisciplinary network and fellowship of concerned academics and practitioners. We wish to stimulate systemic change, globally and locally, to open space for equality in dignity and mutual respect and esteem to take root and grow, thus ending humiliating practices and breaking cycles of humiliation throughout the world. We suggest that a frame of cooperation and shared humility is necessary – not a mindset of humiliation – if we wish to build a better world, a world of equal dignity for all.

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