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Alongside regular articles, AJAL calls for articles which address the multiple Covid-19 teaching and learning scenarios. Do not hesitate to contact the editor at ajaleditor@faapi.org.ar
Editorial introduction

At the beginning of 2020 our world changed. First in the northern hemisphere and later in Latin America, the health emergency due to COVID-19 altered most scenarios: home schooling became a staple of every household, home offices mushroomed all across the world and economies suffered due to the pandemic or the ensuing lockdown and confinement. We have witnessed inequality rocket, companies collapse, salaries vanish and uncertainty grow. As we keep fearing what will happen next and wondering whether societies will manage to promote progress and equality in the near future, teachers and researchers continue doing their jobs under unpredictable and unprecedented circumstances. This issue celebrates their spirit.

Back in our May issue we made a call for articles dealing with the teaching of foreign languages in these new conditions. We are now proud to share with our readers “Comprehensive Sexuality Education Activities in the EFL Lesson through Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)”, by Silvana Accardo, and “Winning a cooperative online vocabulary learning tournament: Teamwork strategies applied by Ecuadorian teachers and students during the COVID-19 pandemic” by Sara Cherres Fajardo, Valeria Chumbi Landy and Carmen Morales Jácome. The former article is a classroom account of the technological resources and the remote teaching proposals that made it possible to teach contents of Comprehensive Sexuality Education in primary and secondary level EFL lessons in Argentina. The latter accounts for an innovative way of working with vocabulary in this new world: the spirits of cooperation and competitiveness worked hand in hand to reward the efforts of a group of teachers and students in Ecuador who teamed up to take part in an international online vocabulary tournament during lockdown. The authors analyze the data collected through reflective vocabulary journals and WhatsApp messages to explain how that team managed to succeed in their learning and in the competition.

Among our regular articles, we include “The cross-linguistic ability to classify content words in L1 Spanish and FL English of undergraduates at Universidad Católica Argentina”, by Florencia Beltramino, a research report which intends to determine the level of correlation in effectiveness in the classification of content words in L1 as well as FL. In “Extensive Listening-while-reading: A Case Study applying the Minimalist Approach”, Divya John studies the effects of the minimalist approach on the listening skills of five vernacular-medium students of EFL in India. Finally, in “Bringing pronunciation back into
The ESL/EFL classroom: Current research trends and recommendations for teachers and teacher trainers.” Germán Zárate-Sández reviews the latest literature on pronunciation research and instruction in order to come to conclusions about the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction, about what aspects of English pronunciation should be taught and how that instruction could be approached.

This new world we are inhabiting made it impossible for teachers and researchers to share their findings and concerns in face to face interaction. Our three academic event reports prove, however, that this did not deter them: virtual gatherings could equally promote creativity, critical thinking and inquiry. Griselda Beacon reports on “Conversaciones Sobre Lenguas Extranjeras: A Cycle of Interviews to Foreign Language Teaching Specialists in the Southern Cone”, Ana Cad and Yanina Caffaratti tell us about the ACPI Symposium “On Challenges and Opportunities: Emergency Remote Teaching” and Carolina Clerici and Cristian Dopazzo report on a series of Instagram livestream sessions with guest scholars in “Discussing ELT with... Instagram livestream sessions as an opportunity to reflect in times of coronavirus.” Thanks to these articles we learn about current preoccupations and proposals, about possible approaches to new problems and about how to keep the spirit high in times of trouble.

We wish to thank Muhammad Asif, Cristina Banfi, Richard Day, Yamina Gava, Soledad Loutayf, Aga Palalas and Paul Savigny for their generous reading and feedback, and our supporters for their confidence in our work. We also wish to invite prospective authors to submit their research articles, classroom reports and essays to our second Special Issue of May 2021.

María Susana Ibáñez
Flavia Silvina Bonadeo
Editors
Comprehensive Sexuality Education Activities in the EFL Lesson through Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)

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ABSTRACT
This article intends to show how contents of Comprehensive Sexuality Education can be included both in primary and secondary level EFL lessons through the use of different educational technological resources and remote teaching proposals. The passing of National Law 26,150 (2006) created a national program on Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) which enforces the inclusion of perspectives, contents and discursive practices around CSE in all areas of the curriculum —EFL included— and at all levels of the educational system. During these times of pandemic and emergency remote teaching, the inclusion of CSE in our lessons continues to be of paramount importance. This article describes some of the initiatives and practices implemented for the inclusion of CSE.

Keywords: Comprehensive Sexuality Education, EFL, social distancing

RESUMEN
La aprobación de la Ley Nacional 26.150 (2006) creó un programa nacional de Educación Sexual Integral (ESI) que impone la inclusión de perspectivas, contenidos y prácticas discursivas en torno a la ESI en toda la currícula —lenguas extranjeras incluidas— y en todos los niveles del sistema educativo. Este documento tiene la intención de describir algunas de las iniciativas y prácticas que, hasta ahora, se han implementado para la inclusión de la ESI y demostrar cómo algunos de sus contenidos pueden incluirse en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera, tanto en nivel primario como secundario, a través del uso de diferentes recursos de tecnología educativa y propuestas de enseñanza remota, aun en contexto de pandemia.

Palabras clave: Educación Sexual Integral, Inglés lengua extranjera, distanciamiento social

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Introduction

Since the passing of National Law 26,150 (year 2006), which created the National Programme of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in Argentina, CSE must be present in all educational proposals, EFL included, and at all levels of the educational system. That is, it is expected that CSE contents be worked transversally and throughout all school subjects by the development of initiatives that involve all participants in the same institution. These initiatives, in turn, should deal with the contents allocated to each level (preschool, primary and secondary school, teacher training college and tertiary level education) and be based on the CSE Curricular Guidelines elaborated by the Argentine Federal Board of Education in 2018.

Due to an unusual and unprecedented situation that the world is going through since the CoVid-19 outbreak, instruction of all school subjects at all levels has migrated to remote teaching/learning experiences. Therefore, CSE and its gender and human rights perspective should be included in all the educational proposals being taught online during this exceptional health emergency, not only to guarantee pedagogic continuity but also to guarantee our students’ basic right to quality education.

Although the CSE National Law was passed fourteen years ago, the inclusion of CSE seems to be still at “an embryonic stage” (Banegas, 2020:2) due to the lack of constant implementation or the fact that some teachers feel they do not have the right tools to apply CSE in their daily educational practices. This article, therefore, intends to show how despite the fact that lessons are being delivered remotely due to the CoVid-19 outbreak, this does not exempt EFL teachers from developing initiatives or working in articulation with other areas and teachers to include CSE. For that matter, this article describes some of the initiatives that have been implemented to include and teach CSE and to provide tools and help other EFL teachers carry out similar practices.

Theoretical Framework

What is Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)?

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) defines comprehensive sexuality education as “Education about all matters relating to sexuality and its expression. Comprehensive sexuality education covers the same topics as sex education but also includes issues such as relationships, attitudes towards sexuality, sexual roles, gender relations and the social pressures to be sexually active, and it provides information about sexual and reproductive health services. It may also include training in communication and decision-making skills.” However, as complete this definition may seem, Comprehensive Sexuality Education involves critical thinking, citizenships, social and life skills, as well as a pedagogy of collective care.
As advocates for CSE, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and numerous researchers and practitioners have specified and clarified that CSE is constituted of (1) a basis in values and human rights of all individuals as a core component, not an add-on; (2) thorough and scientifically accurate information about human rights, gender norms, and power in relationships, (including consent and decision making, sexual coercion, intimate-partner and gender-based violence, and sexual diversity); the body, puberty, and reproduction; relationships, communication, and decision-making; and sexual health (including STIs/HIV and AIDS, unintended pregnancy, condoms and contraception, and how to access health and other support services); (3) a gender focus (gender norms and gender equality) as a stand-alone topic and also infused across other CSE topics; moreover, such gender content dovetails with efforts to keep girls in school and to promote an egalitarian learning environment; (4) a safe and healthy learning environment; (5) effective teaching approaches that are participatory, help learners personalize information, and strengthen their skills in communication and decision making and in critical thinking; (6) youth advocacy and civic engagement in program design but also in empowering learners beyond the curriculum, as agents in their own lives and leaders in their communities; (7) cultural appropriateness, tailored as needed for distinct subpopulations.

Going back to our country, Argentina, based on our National CSE plan, the teaching of CSE revolves around five main axes whose main objectives are to ensure a more holistic approach to its implementation. These are: (1) recognition and inclusion of gender perspective, (2) respect for diversity, (3) value of affectivity, (4) exercising sexual and reproductive rights, and (5) body and health care. And as Cahn et al. claim (2020, p.31), “CSE is a systematic and continuous space of teaching and learning that does not limit itself to one educational intervention, a talk or a movie screening. CSE considers sexuality as one of the dimensions of people that keeps developing since birth.”

Therefore, it could be said that CSE is a set of comprehensive and holistic life skills that includes all the possible aspects in the construction of one’s subjectivization as a human being and as a global, critical and sexual citizen. And as such, it should be present in all educational proposals and at all levels as a core of the curricula.

**Why Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) and not Online Teaching?**

During these times of emergency, uncertainty and social distancing, teachers around the world have been working on providing students with support and temporary access to instruction through technology as a solution to an immediate problem. In this article, I will be using the term Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) to describe this mode of work instead of the term Online Teaching.

As Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust & Bond explain in their article *The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning*, the main difference between
both approaches lies in the very founding moment of each approach. Online Learning has been around us for a long time and online teaching proposals have been born, planned and designed as such since their very beginning to create a systematic model of instruction. In fact, to design and develop a quality course takes time, effort and instruction. However, Emergency Remote Teaching encompasses “a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances” (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust & Bond, 2020). Furthermore, it is considered that instruction will return to its previous face-to-face format once the crisis has abated.

Hence, the term Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) will be used to describe the methodology of online teaching since it is considered more suitable and coincides with our local present situation in our educational system.

How? Through Task Based Learning (TBL)

As Haberland (2015:34) states in her paper *The Case for Addressing Gender and Power in Sexuality and HIV Education: A Comprehensive Review of Evaluation Studies*, “one program characteristic that has been fairly consistently correlated with effective programs is interactive, learner-centered and skills-based teaching approaches. (...) using interactive, participatory, learner-centered or critical thinking pedagogy.”

That is why, Task Based Learning (TBL) fits as a suitable teaching approach to include and implement CSE contents and projects in the EFL lesson. Furthermore, TBL promotes the development and integration of skills while engaging with different tasks along the course of the projects, which makes it not only a means but also a way to develop CSE contents in the lesson.

The initiatives described below try to follow a Task Based Learning scheme. As Willis (1996) explains in Díaz Maggioli & Painter-Farrell (2016, p.353), “there are four conditions for language learning: three obligatory and one desirable. The three obligatory conditions for language learning include (1) exposure to varied input of authentic language in use, (2) motivation to use that input in reading or writing and (3) opportunities to put the input in use.” These three conditions can be found in the initiatives described in this article. The students were exposed to a variety of input and authentic material such as videos, texts, images. Both initiatives started with a driving question that engaged students in real world problems. They were motivated to use that input in reading and writing. And students had opportunities to put the input in use through oral discussions and project work. Students inquired into a topic and created final products that were made public afterwards.

**Context**

The initiatives were carried out at a low-middle/middle class private Catholic school in Buenos Aires City (CABA).
Students in primary level have three periods of classes, each of forty minutes, whereas secondary level students have four periods of forty minutes each. During face-to-face instruction, students had lessons twice a week.

Another difference between both levels is that students in secondary school are divided into three levels: elementary, intermediate and advanced.

Most students have an internet connection available and an electronic device to connect to the synchronous instruction meetings, either a mobile phone, a tablet or a computer. However, not all of them count with working webcams.

**Initiatives**

**Initiative 1: Illustrated Biographies of Important Women in History in Primary Level**

The following initiative was carried out during the first term of 2020 with two joined courses of seventh graders of 34 students each. Students had instances of asynchronous teaching/learning with materials and videos created by the teacher and uploaded to the school platform, and synchronous teaching/learning with a 60-minute-online meeting through Zoom or Google Meet.

It was part of the school and teachers’ practices to have staff meetings to share plans and future projects in order to guarantee collaboration and articulation between areas and to generate cross-cutting spaces. This practice was usual not only before the pandemic, but it also continued to be implemented during lockdown. Video Conferences among schoolteachers from different levels and areas ensured the creation of cross-curricular projects. Therefore, seventh grade EFL teachers agreed to join homeroom teachers in a project related to women’s rights by creating a broadened initiative that encompassed Social Studies, Ethics & Citizenship in relation to EFL.

The main objective of this initiative and sequence of activities was to visibilize women’s role in history and their fight for equality. The activities were then complemented with the reading of illustrated biographies of famous women, such as *Fantastically Great Women that Changed the World*, by Kate Pankhurst (Bloomsbury: 2016), *She Persisted Around the World*, by Chelsea Clinton & Alexandra Boiger (Philomel Books - Penguin Random House: 2018) and *Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History*, by Vashti Harrison (Puffin Books - Penguin Random House: 2017). Through this initiative, students were able to know more about important women in history, from different fields and around the world, including Argentinian pioneers.

EFL teachers decided to begin their lesson by carrying out a brainstorming activity that allowed them to check students' ideas and assumptions about women using an app called Mentimeter. Students shared their knowledge and views by expressing the first word - adjectives, mostly- that came to their minds (See Pictures 1.a and 1.b). Then, they shared what famous women in history they knew or remembered. (See Picture 2).
Some students expressed a more traditional view by saying that women were beautiful, sweet, lovely, thin or blond, whereas others stated that women were strong, powerful, kind and important. As regards famous women in history, some students could name women from different fields while others just a name, e.g. Frida Kahlo and Marie
Curie. In another class, students had to choose an important, pioneer and groundbreaking woman in history to represent. To do so, students had to bring an object, an item of clothing (or wear a costume) and three clues so as to play a guessing game. They also had to tell why they had chosen those exponents. As homework, students had to recreate photos of famous women doing the types of work that were traditionally thought for men.

In the video conference before meeting the deadline of their final task, one of the teachers modelled this task by dressing up as the iconic figure of Rosie the Riveter, Dr. Jane Goodall or scientist Marie Curie, among other famous and important women in history during their zoom classes. She showed some elements and gave some clues before revealing the complete outfit and students could guess who she was.

Throughout the online meeting and by sharing the screen, students were also presented with other salient women in history through PowerPoint presentations and videos. Students played games in teams such as Jeopardy or Baamboozle where they had to answer trivia questions about important women in history. Another useful tool was Jamboard. This app allowed students to write sticky notes under each column and move any they considered not properly placed. Afterwards, they had to justify their decisions. The columns had the following titles above: “In the past, women could…”, “In the past, women couldn’t…”, “Long ago, women used to…” and “Long ago, women didn’t use to…”.

As a final activity, students were asked to write about three important women in their lives and choose an outstanding woman from history to write a short biography. Students created presentations and videos and shared their work through online lessons. Students and teachers repeated the first activity. The objective here was to check students’ progress, see if there was a change in their notions and opinions, and if they could include more women referents in history to their lists. (See Picture 3 and 4)
Teachers showed students all the slides to compare them and to self-evaluate their process. They all concluded that they had been able to learn more about women and to appreciate their role in history. Students also reflected upon their notions and preconceptions about women and were able to learn of different women from different fields such as sports or science. It opened a new world of possibilities and goals.

**Initiative 2: How are you feeling in Lockdown? An Experience in Secondary Level**

The following initiative was carried out on June 24, which was the first of three days throughout the year included on the Buenos Aires City Education calendar to deal with CSE contents in all educational institutions, both state-run and private, and at all levels. The initiative involved a group of 24 students from first year intermediate level. Again, students had instances of asynchronous teaching/learning, with materials and videos created by the teacher which were uploaded to the school’s platform, and synchronous teaching/learning with a 60-minute-online meeting through Zoom or Google Meet.

Each secondary level course has a special video meeting with their tutors every week. Students, tutors and teachers from all areas get together to play games and talk about how they are all doing in lockdown. It must be remembered that these first-year students had just started secondary school and had shared the classroom only for a week, both new students and students that came from the primary level. They had little time to adapt and socialize as adolescents beginning a new stage in their lives. Therefore, these meetings try to help them socialize and get to know each other better. However, that week their meeting had a focus on CSE. All meetings were organised by their tutors and based on the documents sent by the City of Buenos Aires Ministry of Education.

Although gender perspective and CSE are included transversally in projects and lesson plans throughout the year, this time a special CSE day was also carried out during our weekly meeting. The first step was reading the documents and guidelines sent by the Ministry of Education and the booklets created by the National Ministry of Education called “We Continue Teaching”, which have a special section for CSE for each level and group.
The focus in the guidelines was on health, healthy habits and being at home due to the pandemic. Therefore, our CSE meeting continued along that same common thread. First, students were presented with a Mentimeter presentation where they had to answer two main questions:

1. **WORD CLOUD:** How do you take care of yourself and your health? What do you do?
2. **WORD CLOUD:** What are your feelings in lockdown/quarantine? How are you feeling?

After students completed each slide, we all stopped to talk about the answers that were coming out in each word cloud or chart.

In the first slide, students shared some of the things they do to take care of themselves such as drinking a lot of water, washing their hands, using a sanitizer, wearing a facemask, sleeping eight hours, walking or doing exercise. Others expressed that they were eating a big amount of unhealthy food because it was easy to cook, it was just there or because they were experiencing cravings for sweets and floury food.

Some of the answers that came up in the second word cloud were tired, stressed, bored, sad, worried, tired, “saturated by homework”, confused or “I can spend more time with my family”. These answers needed a deeper involvement since some students could open up and express how they were experiencing this unprecedented moment in history. To do so, students used their L1 when needed or they felt more comfortable.

This activity led to talking about their routines, their spaces around the house and about how some of them felt they had lost their privacy.

Afterwards, it was Think-Pair-Share time. We carried out a task called “1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1” (Picture 5). This activity was carried out through breakout rooms where they got together randomly in groups of three. Smaller groups showed they felt more comfortable to speak and share their opinions and experiences.
All groups had five minutes to pair and share. Then, they all got together and said what they had shared in the breakout rooms and agreed or disagreed on their classmates’ answers (Picture 6).

As a final individual task, each student had to create a TikTok video, a poster, a PowerPoint presentation or a Word document where they would share their pieces of advice to other teenagers on how to survive quarantine and social distancing. They could choose the format they felt more comfortable with, include photos or themselves in the video or not. Students who wanted to share their productions did so by sharing their screen and talking about their work. This also encouraged others to do the same.

According to Krashen (1981:31) “The Affective Filter hypothesis implies that our pedagogical goals should not only include supplying comprehensible input, but also creating a situation that encourages a low filter.” It could be said that by lowering the affective filter and anxiety levels some students could open up and share about their daily lives at home, their fights with members of their family, missing grandparents, not having a good hygiene routine or having video calls with their former classmates instead of making new friends at a new school. Last but not least, students mentioned two things that I considered as clues that lead the way: “the only subject I really want to attend on Zoom is English” and “Can we still meet during the winter holidays?” Therefore, it could also be concluded that students need spaces where they feel safe, heard and taken into account. By including CSE and generating projects with the students, all five axes of Comprehensive Sexuality Education were present throughout the didactic sequences: recognise gender
perspective, value affectivity, respect diversity, take care of our bodies and exercise our rights. However, we could highlight the importance of valuing affectivity and consider it as a tool to build rapport and connect through meaningful content and activities during the pandemic.

**Conclusion**

The objective of this article was to describe some of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) initiatives carried out in the EFL lessons, both at primary and secondary level, in a private school in Buenos Aires City in times of pandemic and lockdown. The aim was to describe some practices that would serve as models on how to include and teach CSE contents through Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). The descriptions of such initiatives also show that teachers cannot dismiss CSE contents, no matter if the students are attending even online lessons, both synchronous and asynchronous. Despite social distancing, teachers can open the door to self-expression and creativity, gender equality and gender perspective, critical thinking and articulation with other areas and teachers. As educators, we are agents of change and advocates of our students’ rights. There is no doubt that we have the duty to secure and guarantee those rights. And by doing so, we will be creating safer, fairer and more inclusive spaces where our students can feel they can express themselves, feeling close even though we are just one screen away from each other.

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Winning a cooperative online vocabulary learning tournament: Teamwork strategies applied by Ecuadorian teachers and students during the COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT
In foreign language learning contexts, vocabulary acquisition is sometimes perceived as a solitary activity with word lists and flash cards for memorization. However, it is possible to create vocabulary learning tasks that take into account both individual and cooperative efforts in a competitive environment that promotes engagement and motivation. The paper provides an account of the vocabulary learning and teamwork strategies employed by a group of Ecuadorian teachers and students who took part in an international online vocabulary tournament under the unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. The data analyzed include reflective vocabulary journals and the WhatsApp messages exchanged. The authors conclude that in addition to the discovery and consolidation strategies for vocabulary learning, the team’s cooperative interactions combined with a high level of social motivation have significantly contributed to their success.

Keywords: vocabulary acquisition, cooperative learning, teamwork strategies, social motivation, online vocabulary applications.

RESUMEN
Dentro de los contextos del aprendizaje de un idioma extranjero, la adquisición de vocabulario a veces se concibe como una actividad aislada con listas de palabras y tarjetas para memorizar. No obstante, es posible crear tareas que tomen en cuenta el aprendizaje léxico, considerando tanto el esfuerzo personal como la cooperación, en un ambiente competitivo que promueva compromiso y motivación. Este estudio provee un recorrido por las estrategias de aprendizaje y de trabajo en equipo enfocadas a la adquisición de vocabulario aplicadas por docentes y estudiantes ecuatorianos, quienes participaron de un torneo internacional en línea de aprendizaje de vocabulario bajo las circunstancias singulares de cuarentena debido al COVID-19 en el 2020. Los datos analizados incluyen diarios reflexivos de su aprendizaje de vocabulario y los intercambios de mensajes vía WhatsApp. Las autoras concluyen sosteniendo que, a más del descubrimiento y consolidación de estrategias para el aprendizaje de vocabulario, las interacciones cooperativas del equipo con un alto nivel de motivación social, contribuyeron significativamente a su éxito.

Palabras clave: Adquisición de vocabulario, aprendizaje cooperativo, estrategias de trabajo en equipo, motivación social, aplicaciones en línea de vocabulario.

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Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition activities in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context are not usually set up to exploit the full benefits of cooperative learning. Essential as it may be for communication, studying vocabulary is often perceived as an activity during which the individual language learner first encounters and then consolidates the knowledge of words or multi-word units (Nation, 2013; Barclay & Schmitt, 2019). However, learning goals may be set in such a manner that they combine cooperative, competitive and individualistic efforts (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). In the account that follows, we describe how an international vocabulary learning tournament provided a unique opportunity to bring these three types of endeavors together under the unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research project itself followed the main stages of Exploratory Action Research: exploring a success story in order to find out why it proved to be successful (Mercer, 2020), asking pertinent questions, gathering and analyzing the data and reflecting on the results (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018). Taking part in the tournament was the logical outcome of an exploratory phase when we had been looking for effective ways to help millennial ‘digital natives’, who are familiar with digital technology from an early age, to discover and consolidate vocabulary (Schmitt, 1997; Nation, 2020). Furthermore, the competitive element introduced by the international tournament also offered an opportunity to explore how teamwork can enhance the learning process since the extrinsic motivation of a substantial prize (the free use of the vocabulary learning web application for a year for all members of the University community) prompted contestants to work harder than they would have done with individually set goals. This type of motivation is better described as ‘social motivation’ (Pittman & Heller, 2003) and is also related to belongingness, which can be defined as “an innate need to belong to a group” (St-Amand, Girard, & Smith, 2017, p. 107). In our case, the newly-established, ad hoc group satisfied our need to belong, while our social motivation urged us to exert a substantial effort for others who belonged to a larger community at a time when solidarity and empathy were needed even more than under normal circumstances.

In the account below, we describe how a group of eight Ecuadorian university teachers and students worked together as a team to learn English vocabulary over a four-week period during the coronavirus lockdown (April-May 2020), namely, how they were able to combine newly acquired e-learning skills with teamwork. The extraordinary outcomes seem to prove that it is possible to create new ways of learning cooperatively despite the material limitations and the restricting conditions in education which were brought about by the economic and health crisis that evolved in Ecuador during the pandemic in 2020.

Background and context

The present Action Research study evolved from a mentoring scheme that was set up at the University in December 2019 with the purpose of supporting classroom research. After an exploratory phase of investigating students’ vocabulary size, the project on vocabulary
acquisition was supposed to start at the beginning of April 2020 with the new cohort of students. But a month after the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in the country (León & Kurmanaev, 2020; Long, 2020), Ecuador went into lockdown, and conducting any Action Research activity became unfeasible.

It was against this backdrop that a team of five teachers and three students signed up for the vocabulary learning tournament. Under the circumstances of the global pandemic the team members decided that they could use the enforced isolation to examine their own ways of dealing with vocabulary learning.

Entering the tournament offered several advantages: the team’s way of competing could throw light on vocabulary acquisition strategies applied by both teachers and mature English major students. During the process, the participants wanted to find out more about their own – often unexplored or non-verbalized – vocabulary learning strategies so that they could apply that knowledge in learning and teaching vocabulary more effectively. They also wanted to explore working in a non-hierarchical, collaborative arrangement.

A wealth of data was generated during and after the vocabulary competition: each team member wrote a reflective vocabulary learning journal and summed up their experience in the form of an evaluative, final reflection as well. The contestants were in touch by WhatsApp messages which, retrospectively, provided an insight into the way the team communicated in order to coordinate their activities as well as monitor and track performance.

The online application and the tournament
WordEngine is a gamified digital flashcard application that can be used both on smartphones and computers. After taking a short vocabulary test (the so-called V-Check), which is a diagnostic tool to assess lexical competence, learners can start studying new vocabulary based on the specific high-frequency words which, according to the V-Check, they do or do not know (Browne, 2008; Cihi, 2018).

WordEngine had been conducting individual study tournaments, but in 2019 they organized their first cooperative-learning-based series of matches in line with Slavin’s (1995) theory, which claims that groups of students can study independently, at their individual levels, and still compete together as a team. Announcing the 2020 tournament, WordEngine’s Support Team Leader, Guy Cihi (EFLtalks Italy, 2020) stressed that in such a set-up, students do not only motivate each other, but they also “develop more interpersonal communication skills, which are lifelong social values that go way beyond just the high-frequency vocabulary”. Clearly, the need for communication during the coronavirus crisis was even more pivotal than usual: our team leader could not meet us face-to-face, but we needed to communicate about team performance and the standing of the competitors. Under the circumstances, the WhatsApp messages, which constitute one of the data sets analyzed below, became not only a lifeline, but the means of tactical and strategic cooperation.
In the next section, we summarize the main themes and findings related to vocabulary acquisition and cooperative learning and present a few recent studies where there is a reference to the merging of the two.

**Literature Review**

**Vocabulary acquisition**
For several decades, the study of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) did not specifically focus on vocabulary learning and instruction as these aspects “were seen as somehow isolated and separate from the mainstream theories of SLA” (Browne, 2008, p. 4). However, with the introduction of the lexical perspective (Lewis, 1993), learners’ needs for acquiring vocabulary effectively have become a focus of intense scholarly study. Simultaneously, advances in technology have also changed the approaches to vocabulary acquisition, one aspect being the introduction and widespread use of accessible gamified software for mobiles and PCs. This technological development is now allowing learners to acquire language by receiving rich input even when they are isolated at home (Krashen, 2020). Learners need both, vocabulary input and meaningful language interaction (Berns, 2016) and language games can function as motivators (Silsüpür, 2017) helping to maximize vocabulary acquisition while developing cooperative learning skills (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998).

**Flashcards and digital games**
Currently, the wide access to electronic devices facilitates learner exposure to online language games, which create interest in and support for vocabulary acquisition (Silsüpür, 2017). Browne (2008) mentions that “interactive vocabulary learning games induce automaticity” (p. 10) and can help maintain students’ motivation.

Sheridan and Markslag (2017) point out that digital games containing flashcards resemble physical vocabulary cards and emphasize that they can function as powerful tools of lexicon growth. While mobile devices maximize learners’ time on task (Steel, 2012), accessible game applications help learners to encounter high-frequency vocabulary enough times for them to acquire it successfully (Sheridan & Markslag, 2017).

**Cooperative learning**
Using the strengths of cooperative learning to acquire vocabulary brings to light visible behaviors in group performance. Online classes, technology-based lessons and tournament participation through language games allow for the synergy of vocabulary acquisition and cooperative, including competitive, elements. Johnson et al. (1998) stress that positive interdependence, for instance, energizes team members by making them understand that the group will not be able to succeed unless everyone walks in the same direction. Individual and group accountability make each member of the team work as hard as possible to
contribute to the group since the joint effort of all participants, especially in online gaming platforms, count as one.

*Promotive interaction* encourages face-to-face contact, but it is also present in the form of social network exchanges, for example, WhatsApp messages, students’ Facebook posts and online video conferences. *Interpersonal and social skills* in the team can be perceived as an innate characteristic of the group, and finally, the *group processing* element examined by Bertucci, Conte, Johnson, and Johnson (2012) makes the team reflect on their advances and the strategies that help to achieve the group’s goal (in our case, acquire vocabulary quickly and effectively).

**Gaming and motivation**

Perhaps one of the most powerful aspects of vocabulary language games is the element of enjoyment while practicing incidentally (Huyen & Nga, 2003). In their research involving Vietnamese students, Huyen and Nga (2003) found that games create a relaxing atmosphere, which enhances vocabulary retention in the learners’ brain, while they also promote friendly competition and help meet the students’ expectations of the class.

When cooperation and competition trigger motivation, the latter is capable of driving human behavior (Dörnyei, 1998) including the manifestation of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. For years, researchers have debated whether intrinsic motivation can overlap with extrinsic motivation. As one of the leading academics on the topic of motivation, Dörnyei (1998) claims that “under certain circumstances - if they are sufficiently self-determined and internalized - extrinsic rewards can be combined with, or can even lead to, intrinsic motivation” (p. 121).

**Social motivation**

Beyond the binary categories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, *social motivation* can also play a role in how groups act not just for the sake of the individuals involved or the ‘team’ but for an even bigger social group. Pittman and Heller (1987) provide a comprehensive overview of social motivation that often guides social behavior (p. 480). After her interview related to the unprecedented circumstances under which teachers and students were forced to start functioning at the time of COVID-19, Sarah Mercer (2020) stressed the role of this type of motivation:

*We are often motivated by such lovely human characteristics as not wanting to let others down, a sense of belonging to a team/group, and our drive to help others beyond ourselves. … Goes to show humans are driven most effectively by our humanness - this kind of social motivation and group identities. (Personal communication, June 20, 2020)*

Korpershoek, Canrinus, Fokkens-Bruisma, and de Boer (2019) investigated the relationship between school belonging and students’ social-emotional conduct. The results of
their meta-analytic review revealed that school belonging showed a positive association with social-emotional outcomes such as self-concept and self-efficacy (p. 25). One can only assume that these results would be valid for students and teachers at a flagship Ecuadorian state university whose mission is to train a new generation of teachers through, among others, systematic inquiry, reflective practice and Action Research.

**Combining vocabulary acquisition and cooperative learning**
An overview of the relevant literature shows that there has been ample research on vocabulary acquisition using games and online applications. The advantages of cooperative learning and interaction in the language classroom have also been explored extensively. In our study we combine these elements and include the aspect of social motivation as a strong motivator for a team in which teachers and students collaborated to achieve a common goal.

In the next section, a range of strategies will be analyzed to demonstrate how vocabulary acquisition and cooperative learning merged and became a powerful motivator for individual and team learning while competing for the benefit of a much larger social group – the community of the University.

**Methodology**

**The Action Research design**
According to Smith and Rebolledo (2018, p. 29), one of the motivations for doing teacher research is to explore why something has worked well. In our case, the proof of success was that we had won the first prize so, as the next step, we wanted to understand better how and why we succeeded (Mercer, 2020) because we believed that once we were able to disentangle the threads, there would be lessons to take back into our classrooms. After gathering and analyzing the relevant data on vocabulary acquisition and cooperative learning, we also intended to reflect on the experience so that the elements of success could be employed repeatedly.

**Research questions**

What were the most important vocabulary learning strategies employed by the group that resulted in success?

How far did the *cooperative* and *collaborative* teamwork strategies applied during the vocabulary tournament contribute to winning WordEngine’s Team Challenge?

**Data gathering**
The data for the Action Research project was collected during and after the vocabulary tournament. Quantitative data were provided by Lexxica, the company behind the WordEngine application, while qualitative data were gathered from reflective journals, the team members’ final reflections and the WhatsApp messages exchanged.
The tournament started on 6th April and ended on 3rd May 2020 with 38 teams from seven different countries participating (Appendix A). The teaching/learning profile of the 8-member team shows the wide range of language skills and experience (Appendix B). The only reason why its members could compete as one team is that, following an initial vocabulary assessment by WordEngine (V-Check), the contestants competed at their own level of lexical competence, and their correct responses (CRs) were averaged.

During the four weeks of the tournament, the team, which chose a name that combined the acronym of the University and Ecuador’s international calling code, won in each round.

Table 1. Correct Responses (CRs) of the University team and their competitors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The University</td>
<td>2 860</td>
<td>3 602</td>
<td>2 244</td>
<td>4 353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The team in second place</td>
<td>2 029</td>
<td>2 909</td>
<td>1 449</td>
<td>1 480</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: WordEngine (Lexxica) data

The team members practiced intensely and this was reflected in the high number of hours that they spent online:

Table. 2 Number of hours that team members spent practicing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Total number of hours</th>
<th>Correct Responses (CRs)</th>
<th>Rank on last day (3rd May 2020)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>04:36:56</td>
<td>05:39:28</td>
<td>03:48:59</td>
<td>02:33:42</td>
<td>16:39:05</td>
<td>10 010</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy</td>
<td>06:19:10</td>
<td>09:08:59</td>
<td>05:52:08</td>
<td>10:43:08</td>
<td>32:03:25</td>
<td>16 865</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>07:19:05</td>
<td>07:35:18</td>
<td>00:32:43</td>
<td>07:40:10</td>
<td>23:07:16</td>
<td>9 841</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: VAdmin data (WordEngine)

In the end, the University won the series of matches by gaining altogether 6637 points more than the Romanian team in the second place. As can be seen in Table 2, on the last day...
of the tournament all team members were among the first 13 in the ranking (out of about 4000 players). We were declared the winners and this meant that the university community stood to receive almost 3000 free WordEngine licenses for 360 days.

Results and discussion

Members of the team expanded their vocabulary size considerably. Table 3 presents the data that show that most contestants managed to improve their reading comprehension skills by one level in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and one of the teachers, Catalina, moved up by two levels.

Table 3. Team members’ vocabulary gains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vocab size at start</th>
<th>CEFR</th>
<th>IELTS</th>
<th>Vocab size at end</th>
<th>CEFR</th>
<th>IELTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalina</td>
<td>8,615</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>13,073</td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>11,379</td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>14,208</td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy</td>
<td>6,453</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>11,061</td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maribel</td>
<td>8,548</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>12,274</td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathew</td>
<td>4,216</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>7,955</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiden</td>
<td>1,094</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4,101</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>5,509</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>9,950</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>7,065</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>9,675</td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: VAdmin data (WordEngine)
Note: All participants’ names are anonymized

It needs to be pointed out that these results reflect a certain point in time, after weeks of intense practice and they represent improvement in word recognition based on multiple choice questions with three options to choose from.

The five teachers and three students employed a number of vocabulary learning strategies. They utilized 33 out of the 59 strategies listed down in Schmitt’s (1997) taxonomy. Teachers often used determination strategies, such as analyzing parts of speech, examining the roots of a word as well as the affixes and they often related the words on the digital flashcards to cognates in their first language (L1). Both students and teachers employed the strategy of guessing from context, but students were more inclined to relate the meaning of a new word to their life experiences. The most frequently utilized memory strategies included studying the spelling and sound of words and saying them aloud while practicing.

The reflective vocabulary journals provide an insight into how team members went about organizing the task, which had both logistical and meta-cognitive elements that sustained the vocabulary learning effort.

Some of these include:
• signing up with WordEngine as individual users (free trial before the tournament began);
• familiarizing themselves with the application and taking a V-Check test;
• joining the group as team members and taking the V-Check test again to establish a benchmark;
• setting daily and weekly goals and monitoring one’s own performance as well as that of others during the competition.

The specific vocabulary acquisition strategies included creating wordlists and studying the words before sessions like Aiden did: “I was literally speaking in front of my mirror and practicing the words”. Isabel used a specific strategy, which implied relating the unknown English words to cognates that she knew from her additional languages (Modern Greek and Latin): “I was often just listening out for the root of the word or thought about the Greek I know, especially when it came to scientific expressions and numbers”. Some team members started using the words that they had learnt actively as shown by Aiden’s journal entry in Week 2: “I started to work on my laptop in the yard of my house because … I felt that my living room or bedroom [look] like a cell (cell is a word I learnt on WordEngine)”. Catalina went back to the words that she missed in the 15-item rounds and checked their meaning as well as examined how they were used in a sentence. Maribel created a word list and made an attempt to memorize the words she had written down as there was not enough time to look at the list while she was playing.

As for some of the final reflections, Alexander, ranking No 2 for a number of days, was able to see the results he achieved clearly:

I noticed that thinking and reading a definition of a word in a short period of time was not as challenging as when I started the tournament. At the very beginning, I struggled with remembering some words, but at the end I could develop the skill to think more carefully and critically to choose the correct word.

The team leader was equally satisfied with her results and the strategies she applied: “I associated the English word to a similar word in Spanish, I made a vocabulary list, I used mnemonics … When we took the V-check, I went from an advanced level to an expert level”.

Beyond the conscious use of vocabulary acquisition strategies, the group used a range of teamwork strategies. In the next section we present the most important elements of working in a non-hierarchical unit during an online cooperative learning experience.

**Cooperative and collaborative teamwork strategies**

The framework for the analysis of the data pertaining to this aspect of our study comes from Ruiz-de-Azcárate, Hernández-García, Iglesias-Pradas, and Acquila-Natale’s article (2017), which specifies a system of indicators that can be used for the assessment of teamwork by looking at the quantity and quality of interactions in online collaborative contexts.
Ruiz-de-Azcárate et al. (2017) provide the following definition for teamwork as a collaborative process:

Teamwork refers to a behavioral pattern between two or more individuals who interact dynamically, establish a regular and constant negotiation to reach agreements through knowledge exchanges and problem solving, while keeping a steady pace and coordinating efforts in order to achieve their shared goals. (p. 2)

The authors go on to say that in group teamwork, interdependence and interrelatedness translate into interactions between the members:

“Member interactions are an essential element of teamwork and lead to observable behaviors because, in order to achieve the shared goals, the team has to show cooperation and social skills that are not necessary to perform an individual task” (p. 3).

In sum, group teamwork is understood as a collaborative process. Ruiz-de-Azcárate et al. (2017, p. 1) assert that, in the foreseeable future, networked organizations with teams at their heart will replace “traditional hierarchical structures”. In our own context this meant that we were mindful that the three student-contestants were treated as equal members of the team, and we found that the absence of a hierarchy had a beneficial effect on team spirit.

One of the crucial factors that led to the team’s success was effective communication before, during, and after the tournament. According to Ruiz-de-Azcárate et al. (2017), constant interaction among members of the group reveals reciprocity and positive communication and this is one of the factors that determine outcomes. The chat interactions among team members included the use of positive and constructive language to encourage and motivate each other.

Example 1

1. **Ivy:** We won 🎉🎊🎉🎊🎉

2. **Alexander:** Congratulation team 😊ése

3. **Ivy:** Congrats team!!! Teamwork 😊ése

4. **Mathew:** 🎉🎊🎊🎊🎊

There were a total of 574 WhatsApp messages exchanged during the 4-week tournament. From among these, 261 were messages of interaction among members, 223 came from the team leader, and 90 expressed cheering, celebration, and team support.
Table 4. Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction among members of the team</td>
<td>Organization and logistics (coming from team leader)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of WhatsApp messages</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data gathered by the co-authors

Similarly, the entries in the journals and the final reflections show how effectively team members communicated. Members of the team were in constant interaction motivating, cheering and celebrating each other's achievements. As Ivy said, “We supported each other from the beginning and we cheered each other on”.

In a somewhat unusual set-up, the team involved both students and teachers, but all members treated each other as equals. Alexander, a student member who was leading the ranking, was praised and cheered for maintaining his position until the end of the tournament (WordEngine continuously provides the ranking details for individuals and during those weeks, there were about 4000 players globally). Isabel was particularly appreciative when she messaged: “I am delighted by the fact that Alexander is now in second place”.

As the tournament advanced, classes at the University started, and some contestants felt frustrated for not being able to contribute to the team goal. The team leader displayed a high degree of organizational and leadership skills when dealing with problems. Aiden was actually on the verge of leaving the tournament: “I saw that all my teammates’ scores were very far from mine. I asked teacher Ivy if she wanted to put another person instead of me but she encouraged me to continue”.

In essence, the team’s constant communication and mutual support were crucial factors that were reflected in online interactions and played a considerable role in achieving outstanding results.

Cooperation

From the beginning of the tournament, team members had one common goal, namely, to win the competition and obtain thousands of free web application licenses for the University community. At the time, the University was under considerable financial pressure, and winning the licenses potentially meant less pressure on the teachers because of the newly introduced and large online classes. The messages in WhatsApp show that members were constantly discussing their achievements (group processing), following each other's progress (positive interdependence), and encouraging each other (promoting interaction). These concepts are in line with the main elements of cooperation as described by Johnson et al. (1998), so we have included them here to extend the framework provided by Ruiz-de-Azcárate et al. (2017).
The participants emphasized that group support was essential and that the encouraging and inspiring messages incentivized them to continue focusing on the task. Maribel, who usually played/practiced at night, felt the positive vibes coming from the other contestants: “I felt motivated because of team support and their willingness to succeed”.

An exceptional example of cooperative work was evidenced when Joe, a student, could not accomplish the daily number of words due to internet connection problems. He wrote in his reflections: “My internet was slow! The program freezes… I got as close as possible of the router”. Hearing this, the team decided to reach their weekly goal by distributing Joe’s potentially missed word quota among the rest.

Another incident that revealed the exemplary unity and cooperative spirit among team members was when Isabel, one of the contestants, who has native-like English proficiency, started running out of words in the second week of the tournament because WordEngine does not cater for highly proficient, plurilingual users. She wanted to step aside since she felt that she was jeopardizing the team’s performance and their chance of winning. However, all the participants agreed on not leaving her behind, since she supported and nurtured the team from the very beginning, as one of the journal entries demonstrate. “All team members have agreed to put in extra work as long as we can keep Isabel as part of the team. I am so proud of us! We are very strong!” [Ivy]

This inspired Aiden to create the team motto “TOGETHER EVERYONE ACHIEVES MORE”, whose initials form the word TEAM. Later on, group members also recalled that they made this exceptional effort for something bigger than the team. “I am extremely pleased and thankful for the achievements of our group. We worked hard to honor our team but we also fought for our university”. [Catalina]

The competition, therefore, created a strong sense of collaboration combined with further elements of positive interdependence, effective communication, and effective interpersonal skills, which all play a part in a group’s accomplishments.

### Coordination
The analysis of the chat exchanges indicates that the team members coordinated their work effectively. This was reflected in unceasing task execution, task completion progress, and reaching common decisions as shown in Table 6. Ruiz-de-Azcárate et al. (2017) emphasize that these factors are also linked to cooperation and communication.
Effective coordination was noticeable from the very start when the team decided on the weekly workload and distribution. Since the team keenly wanted to win the competition, Mathew suggested that they should work on 5000 words per week and the team accepted this exceptionally high target. Here is how Maribel reflected on this aspect: “We started and finished this competition as winners. We always had big goals as a group”. In actual fact, the possible top score per week assigned by WordEngine was 3,010 and the team agreed to maintain this figure as its weekly target.

Coordination along with communication and cooperation is considered to be one of the essential components of teamwork that leads to successfully achieving a goal (Rico, Sanchez, Gil, & Taberno, 2011) and the team was successful in this regard as well.

Monitoring and tracking
During the weeks of online teamwork, monitoring and tracking implied each member’s reflection over the tasks performed and the time spent on task (see Table 2). There is ample evidence of time tracking and task performance reports on weekly advances in the chat messages, which was crucial for the winning of the tournament.

The analysis of the data shows that when a member of the team informed the others about the amount of time they spent on reaching the goal, other members of the team became even more motivated and they practiced for longer as well.

Example:
1. **Isabel:** I’ll check if I can get some more points for the team tomorrow morning.
2. **Maribel:** I’ll do more words until the last minute.
3. **Joe:** I’ve been working since yesterday. I won’t stop until the morning.

Additionally, due to the frequent reporting on positive performance, a healthy competition began among members of the group. The weekly results report shown in the
group chat was a point of reference for every member to try harder. This led participants to regularly compare their scores.

Example:
1. **Ivy:** I’m trying to catch up with Alexander but every time I do 10 Alexander does 50.
2. **Isabel:** Hi everyone, Alexander is now No 12 and I’m No 11....Alexander is our star, with Ivy and Catalina not much behind.

Team members tended to track the time they spent on reaching the objective, which helped them to stay aligned with the weekly goal. Aiden was ready to work hard until 10 am on Sundays (the cut-off point for the week): “I’ve been working on the platform since 7:00 am. I’ll work on it [till] the last minute”.

The team leader discreetly and tactfully tracked each member’s performance. Every time she shared the weekly results, the team evaluated their own results and efforts without any need for nudging. Thus, when some participants realized they needed to contribute more to reach the common goal, they pledged to try harder.

Example:
1. **Ivy:** Despite our best efforts, we’re not in the first place anymore, I think we’re 200 hundred points behind. I think if we do the daily conversation [a special section of the vocabulary challenge] as Isabel suggested we can get back on track...
2. **Alexander:** I haven’t been doing my best, but it’s because I have started classes… I’ll be up-to-date with my points.
3. **Joe:** Sorry for the delay in my participation.
4. **Mathew:** I’m a little behind, my internet is not working but I’m doing my best to accomplish the goal.

The way the team leader and the members reflected on their activities and achievements was undoubtedly one of the factors that led them to become the champions.

After having considered the vocabulary learning strategies and the collaboration among the members of the team, let us now return to the initial research questions:

1) **What were the most important vocabulary learning strategies employed by the group that resulted in success?**

As demonstrated in the data analysis section, the team, which included both teachers (advanced learners) and students (beginning or intermediate students), employed a range of vocabulary learning strategies that contributed to their success. The strategies are familiar from Schmitt’s taxonomy (1997) and prove that repetition and the recycling of words are techniques that have resulted in successfully memorizing and retrieving vocabulary, in our case, too. Identifying cognates, resorting to the knowledge of additional languages, saying the words aloud, listening to its sound and paying attention to how it was written were some of the most often utilized strategies. Beyond these familiar strategies, there are two elements...
that cannot be disregarded: one is the extraordinary amount of time contestants spent online and offline and the other is the time-constrained nature of the tournament that supported automaticity (Browne, 2008).

2) How far did the cooperative and collaborative teamwork strategies applied during the vocabulary tournament contribute to winning WordEngine’s Team Challenge?

Evidence from the reflective journals and WhatsApp interactions suggests that the participants used cooperative and collaborative teamwork strategies extensively during the four-week tournament. There was constant interaction guided by the team leader, who continually organized, informed, and reported results to keep team members focused on reaching the weekly goal. Similarly, cheering and motivation, reflects how the exchange of positive and encouraging messages was decisive in motivating the team to continue working.

Weekly workload agreements and a fair distribution of responsibilities can be clearly seen in the way common goals and equal contributions were set by the group as a unit. Moreover, constant monitoring and tracking effectively informed the group about the status quo, which led to solving problems on the spot. Finally, immediate action and group decisions were taken when problems arose (members had poor internet connection or ran out of words to practice). The answer was the reallocation of the workload and covering for members who could not perform well through no fault of their own.

The fact that cooperation and collaboration are key in group teamwork was confirmed when, after the tournament was over, we learned that the Romanian participant, who was ranked first for much of the tournament, was not able to push her team to victory because there were two inactive members in her group and this brought down the group average considerably (Cihi, personal communication, June 9, 2020).

All in all, this shows that not even an exceptionally hard-working and disciplined participant can win in isolation. Beyond acquiring new skills for vocabulary acquisition, our team members also learnt first-hand about the effectiveness of cooperative, collaborative and teamwork strategies, which ultimately led the group to finish at the top.

Reflection and concluding remarks

Our reflections are multi-layered, because one of us was a contestant, but was not a member of the original Action Research team exploring vocabulary acquisition, while two of us had been in the Action Research group but were not WordEngine team members. However, this fact gave us a unique perspective and helped us share and explore the vocabulary learning experience as well as understand more about the dynamics of group teamwork.

As for vocabulary acquisition strategies, we learnt that there are a number of ways one can expand the size of their vocabulary. Contestants employed a range of individual strategies, but it became clear to all that without investing a lot of time and mental effort, vocabulary learning cannot be effective. We also learnt that a specific language learning
activity, which is sometimes carried out as a solitary task (memorizing word lists and flipping over flash cards), can be turned into a cooperative and, at the same time, competitive activity. It became clear that digital applications lend themselves to group competition that can engage participants deeply. We are intending to utilize this learning and create similar set-ups in our future language classes, whether they are given online or face-to-face.

Based on our data, we were also able to confirm that gamified EFL environments are powerful learner motivators (Silsüpür, 2017). Combining authenticity (live tournaments and online contests) with the playfulness of gaming can create the conditions for a long-lasting learning experience.

Over four weeks from early April to early May 2020, the team went on to spend more than two hundred hours of practicing vocabulary and, finally, came first in the competition. As the winners, they were awarded almost 3000 free licenses of the vocabulary learning application for the University’s teachers and students.

Under the unprecedented circumstances that the global pandemic brought with it, learning has become exceptionally challenging both for teachers and students, and it was exactly this situation that made us realize that cooperation can be a decisive factor and lead a team to success. Group members often explicitly applied the four basic elements of teamwork: communicating effectively despite the physical distance, collaborating ceaselessly, coordinating their activities and tracking their performance while pacing themselves carefully. These are all skills that we can foster in our multi-level language classrooms in order to promote equity and to appreciate that “We’re all in this together” (Mercer, 2020) and nobody is going to be left behind.

As a matter of fact, teachers and students working together as a team created a non-hierarchical system of learning, which is seen to be at the heart of organizations in the future (Ruiz-de-Azcárate et al., 2017). In such an equitable situation, learners feel respected and supported, and this motivates them to participate actively. This kind of motivation should be reproduced and maintained in face-to-face as well in virtual classrooms.

As mentioned by Dörnyei (1998, p. 121), intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are factors that can overlap. In our case, there was a further element of social motivation, and a strong sense of belonging to a greater social unit, namely, the University, which was going through a hard time.

When reflecting on the experience of vocabulary learning using an online application in a cooperative manner, we came to understand that online events, tournaments and other virtual modes of learning and teaching will probably become even more widespread. In our new reality, these virtual spaces might become the venues of deep and effective learning as well as offer opportunities for the acquisition of the skills of cooperative behavior whose importance we are only beginning to grasp.
Endnotes
1) The country has been one of the worst hit by COVID-19 in the Latin American region (Stott & Long, 2020). The health crisis struck in the wake of years of low growth and a foreign debt amounting to $36bn.
2) From among the authors of the present article, two were members of the original vocabulary research team with one more teacher joining them to participate in the WordEngine competition.
3) The distribution of the 2743 free WordEngine licenses started at the beginning of June 2020. By courtesy of Lexxica, the 254 incoming first-year students were also given WordEngine licenses.

Acknowledgements
We would like to acknowledge the help we received from the vocabulary tournament organizers, especially WordEngine Support Team Leader, Guy Cihi, who provided all the necessary backing, be it logistical or otherwise, during and after the event. We would also like to thank our student-researchers, Stthefany Anguisaca, Axel Calle, José Fajardo, Cristian Ruilova and Kevin Suntaxi, who were either among the contestants or helped in various stages of the write-up as well as assisted in the distribution of the free accounts that we won. Our gratitude goes to our lead mentor, Kenan Dikilitaş, for his insightful comments on a previous version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest
Winning the first prize of the WordEngine Team Challenge Vocabulary Tournament meant that all students and teachers at the University were given free WordEngine accounts for 360 days. Moreover, we were awarded a trophy cup, eight badges and two certificates. We requested the organizers that the countervalue of the eight Starbucks gift cards, which were part of the first prize, be donated to a local charity in Cuenca (Hogar de Esperanza), which was providing support to vulnerable people during the pandemic. In compliance with our wishes, $80.00 was transferred to the said foundation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Countries and number of teams participating in WordEngine Team Challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Week One</th>
<th>Week Two</th>
<th>Week Three</th>
<th>Final Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3rd Pl. Winner: Melbourne Storm
1st Pl. Winner: the University
2nd Pl. Winner: Balcescu Eagles

Source: WordEngine data (Lexxica)

Appendix B: Contestants’ language learning and teaching profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>No of years learning of English</th>
<th>No of years learning of teaching English</th>
<th>First language</th>
<th>Additional languages</th>
<th>No of years spent in an English-speaking country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catalina</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>2 months in the US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Hungarian</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>India: 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Modern Greek</td>
<td>United Kingdom: 17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Latin</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Ivy   | Teacher  | 10                              | 4                                      | Spanish        | English             | 2 years                                       |
| Maribel | Teacher | 12                              | 8                                      | Spanish        |                    | 2 years                                       |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mathew</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiden</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data gathered by co-authors
*An Associate of Arts degree, comparable to the first few years of a Bachelor’s degree
ABSTRACT
This case study investigated the cross-linguistic ability to classify content words or nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs of undergraduates whose L1 is Spanish and are attending an A1 English course at university level. It was a transversal, descriptive and correlational research study. The descriptive objectives were to determine the level of effectiveness in the classification of content words in L1 as well as FL. The correlational objective determined the relationship between the participants’ performance level in the classification between their L1 Spanish and their FL English. Data were collected by means of an instrument which consisted of two A1 level texts, one in Spanish and the other in English. Each component of the instrument asked students to classify 40 underlined content words into their category. Results confirmed that there is a transfer between the ability to group content words in the L1 and in the FL, the higher the effectiveness in Spanish, the higher in English.

Keywords: cross linguistic study, content words, linguistic transfer, Spanish-English.

RESUMEN
Este estudio de caso investigó la habilidad interlingüística para clasificar palabras de contenido sustantivos, verbos, adjetivos y adverbios de estudiantes universitarios cuya lengua madre es español y están tomando un curso de inglés nivel A1. Fue un estudio transversal, descriptivo y correlacional. Los objetivos descriptivos fueron determinar el nivel de efectividad en la clasificación de palabras de contenido en ambos idiomas; mientras que el objetivo correlacional determinó la relación entre el nivel de eficacia en la clasificación en español y en inglés. Los datos fueron recolectados mediante un instrumento compuesto por dos textos de nivel A1, uno en español y otro en inglés. Cada componente tenía 40 palabras subrayadas que los participantes debieron clasificar en la categoría correspondiente. Los resultados confirman que hay transferencia entre la habilidad para agrupar palabras de contenido en L1 y LE, a mayor efectividad en español, mayor efectividad en inglés.

Palabras clave: estudio interlingüístico, palabras de contenido, transferencia lingüística, español-inglés.

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Introduction

The Universidad Católica Argentina -UCA-, Facultad Teresa de Ávila, is located in Paraná, the capital city of Entre Ríos province, Argentina. Its English courses have the teaching methodology of English for General Purposes. These have two annual levels, namely English I and English II, which undergraduates usually take between their first and third year of studies. Both courses are mandatory requisites of the curricula irrespective of the degree pursued. English is part of the core courses together with Anthropology and Ethics, Philosophy, Theology, and Moral and Social Commitment.

Within the scope of English I and the greatest part of English II, students are presented with the contents established for an A1 level by the CEFR. However, the last portion of the English II course, about 4 classes, is devoted to the teaching of reading comprehension and translation skills of career-related texts, i.e. the teaching methodology veers into that of English for Specific Purposes.

The textbook *Speak Out Starter* second edition by Eales F. Oakes S. and Dimond-Bayer S., Pearson Education (2016) is used as the main course guide of contents and coursework for the English for General Purposes approach. As for the English for Specific Purposes section, discipline-oriented materials are prepared by the module teacher making use of non-adapted career-related texts.

Throughout the whole course of studies, but mainly during the second part of English II, an issue of remarkable significance arises when the time for the introduction of word formation in English comes. In order to facilitate the recognition and understand the meaning of content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) the use of prefixes and suffixes in the English language is introduced. To exemplify, students are shown that typically the ending *-ly* corresponds to an English adverb, which is the equivalent to the Spanish suffix *-mente*. It is then when many students ask questions such as: “What is an adverb?” “How do I identify an adverb?”, often arguing they do not recall what lexical categories are and how they function in their L1. It goes without saying that the doubt is not exclusive to adverbs but applies to the other three grammatical categories alike. That is the moment when the teacher faces a problematic situation since undergraduates are thought to have L1 prior knowledge on grammatical categories and derivative words which should have been studied in primary and secondary school.

Learning a FL in a classroom context, as opposed to acquiring it in a naturalistic environment, is thought to make the relationship between prior prescriptive grammatical knowledge in the L1 useful for learning the FL. Presumably, FL learners -FLers- who know that in their L1 verbs refer to actions or states will be able to transfer that knowledge into the comprehension and functioning of verbs in the FL, despite the differences that both linguistic codes may have.

Thus, some questions emerged: do students really ignore how content words in their L1 work, or have they just forgotten how to technically explain it, but still understand their
functioning? Does L1 grammatical knowledge about lexical categories positively transfer into FL performance? Should EFL practitioners revise basic L1 grammatical contents to facilitate FL learning? These questions motivated a research project. The first three correlate with its objectives, and recommendations are given regarding the fourth one.

The study presented here investigated cross-linguistically the level of efficiency undergraduates at UCA, Facultad Teresa de Ávila, have when identifying the grammatical categories noun, adjective, verb and adverb in their L1 Spanish and their FL English. It also analysed whether that efficiency correlates between the undergraduates’ L1 and FL interlanguage performance. It was hypothesized that the research participants’ level of effectiveness in the classification of grammatical categories in the L1 correlates with their level of effectiveness in the FL. The better the performance in Spanish, the better the performance in English.

Theoretical framework

Cross-linguistic research
Cross-linguistic research refers to the underlying idea that languages are compared, in this case Spanish and English. Küntay (2014, p. 318) states that “crosslinguistic research has proven essential in addressing long-standing questions and opening new avenues in research about language development.” Furthermore, the author claims it can be adopted to “assess any domain of language development from phonological to pragmatic development … [and that] can be employed with populations of any age”.

Terminology clarification
It is worth mentioning that, for the sake of this article, the terms learning and acquisition will be used as synonyms. Likewise, the terms undergraduates, research participants, and university students are considered synonyms and will be used hereafter to instinctively refer to the sample subjects who are undergraduates attending the English II module at Universidad Católica Argentina, Facultad Teresa de Ávila. The words classification, grouping and sorting refer to one and the same thing, i.e. correctly grouping together same lexical types. Finally, the expressions grammatical categories, lexical categories and content words will be used interchangeably to signify nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs, i.e. the word classes that are part of this work and not all the parts of speech that exist.

The rest of this theoretical section is organised into three broad topics: general foreign/second language learning concepts of relevance for the study, FL learners, and the grammatical underpinnings that form part of the analysis.
FL/L2 learning concepts

Interlanguage
The same way that L1 grammar is not acquired overnight, the learning of a FL/ L2 is a process. In Fromkin’s (2011, p. 362) words: “The intermediate grammars that L2ers create on their way to the target have been called interlanguage grammars.” [emphasis was added].

We should take into account that the term grammar in this context does not refer to the teaching grammars prepared for FL/L2ers to aid them with the study of a new language, but rather to what is often called descriptive grammar, which is the whole set of rules speakers unconsciously possess about their language, i.e. phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics and lexicon.

The importance of the concept of interlanguage for this study is the understanding that, when in the process of learning a FL what the research participants are going to be assessed on is their interlanguages manifestation. This manifestation is also called linguistic performance, a concept which is explained further on.

L1 influence into FL/L2 learning
It cannot be denied that a person’s L1 has an impact on his/her FL/L2. This is most evident in phonological terms. Usually, a person who learns the FL/L2 after childhood will have an accent that traces back to his/her native language. Similarly, other aspects of the L1 can be transferred into the FL/L2, morphology and syntax. This has been reported to occur mainly in the initial learning stages (Fromkin, 2011). However, it would be imprecise to say that all linguistic errors manifested in FL/L2ers’ interlanguage are simply the result of their L1 influence. It is not yet understood why certain rules of the L1 transfer into the FL/L2 interlanguage and others do not. As Fromkin puts it (2011, p. 365):

It is clear … that although construction of the L2 grammar is influenced by the L1 grammar, developmental principles —possibly universal—also operate in L2 acquisition. This is best illustrated by the fact that speakers with different L1s go through similar L2 stages. (p. 365)

The fact that language learning occurs in stages which are predictable is one of the arguments that supports the idea of a Universal Grammar, or innate capacity human beings possess which allows them to acquire language (Chomsky, 1965, 1986). One other strong claim in favour of this view is the fact that the deaf develop language, sign languages in this case, in spite of being unable to hear and imitate sounds. This demonstrates that language acquisition does not necessarily depend on listening and repeating sounds, but it is an inborn capacity that human beings are endowed with just for the fact of being humans. What is more, not only do deaf children go through all the same stages hearing children do when learning their mother tongue, but also sign languages are as complex as any other language (Fromkin, 2011).
Language transfer, “or the influence of a person’s knowledge of one language on that person’s knowledge or use of another language” (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008, p. 1) is also referred to as cross linguistic influence, or simply transfer. Throughout this paper the three terms are used synonymously.

Implied Linguistic Competence vs Metalinguistic Knowledge
Learning a FL/L2 is not as easy as learning an L1. Except for people with serious mental disorders, every human being acquires a language, the language spoken in his/her context. Not everybody, however, is capable of mastering a second language, especially past adolescence. Paradis (2009, p. 110) contends that early bilinguals —children up to the age of 4 or 5— “acquire the second language implicitly, like the first, using procedural memory … after age 6 or 7, second language appropriation relies more on conscious learning, thus involving declarative memory”. Procedural memory refers to the automatic, unconscious memory system that underlies the process through which any L1 is acquired, i.e. implied linguistic competence -ILC-. Being automatic, ILC means effortless language processing, which is unaware of prescriptive grammar rules and focuses attention on communication of meaning. It controls prosody, phonology, morphology, syntax and mental lexicon. ILC is opposed to metalinguistic language knowledge —MLK— which is subserved by declarative memory, the fast and demanding conscious memory system associated with the learning and representation of facts and events that cannot be inferred but need to be learnt by rote, such as irregular verbal inflexions.

L1 and early FL/L2ers easily acquire language implicitly through ILC, while later FL/L2 learners find it far harder. According to Paradis such difficulty may be caused by native language entrenchment, called proactive negative influence of L1-, meaning that learners need to recourse more to declarative memory, probably due to the loss of brain plasticity after the optimal FL/L2 period. Paradis (2009, p. 135) asserts: “Skills in general (and implicit linguistic competence processing in particular) acquired during their optimal period are more resistant to attrition through disuse than learned material, but the acquisition of skills after their optimal period becomes more difficult with increasing age.”

The author explains that the optimal period applies only to components related to implicit linguistic competence, though not to vocabulary since this is controlled by declarative memory. The sound-meaning pairing of words and words lexical properties —vocabulary— whether in the L1 or in the FL/L2 depends on conscious awareness, so it can be learned and improved throughout life. The importance of this fact is that learning the explicit aspects of words is not affected by FL/L2 age onset and can be enlarged and improved through instruction.
The learners

Intelligence

Intelligence is a broad concept. Originally, emphasis was placed on two types of intelligence: logical-mathematical and verbal-linguistic. Those are the kinds mainly assessed through the IQ (Intelligence Quotient) test. That test was designed at the beginning of the 20th century by the French psychologist Alfred Binet and then updated by Spearman (1927) to evaluate children’s intelligence. Half a century later, Piaget (1950, 1952) studied the concept of intelligence using in-depth IQ tests.

In time, however, a more complex idea of intelligence started to be elaborated. Such is the case of the multiple intelligences theory developed by Howard Gardner in the 1980’s. Gardner (1983, 1993, 1997) claims that there are at least eight types of intelligences from which people draw on when faced with a situation to resolve. The eight identified intelligences are linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, naturalistic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence.

What intelligence is and what it is not

Gardner developed a well-founded study to determine what intelligence is. The criteria implemented are the following (Gardner, 2011, p. 487):

- [An intelligence] should be seen in relative isolation in prodigies, autistic savants, stroke victims, or other exceptional populations. In other words, certain individuals should demonstrate particularly high or low levels of a particular capacity in contrast to other capacities.
- It should have a distinct neural representation – that is, its neural structure and functioning should be distinguishable from that of other major human faculties.
- It should have a distinct developmental trajectory. That is, different intelligences should develop at different rates and along paths which are distinctive.
- It should have some basis in evolutionary biology. In other words, an intelligence ought to have a previous instantiation in primate or other species and putative survival value.
- It should be susceptible to capture in symbol systems, of the sort used in formal or informal education.
- It should be supported by evidence from psychometric tests of intelligence.
- It should be distinguishable from other intelligences through experimental psychological tasks.
- It should demonstrate a core, information-processing system. That is, there should be identifiable mental processes that handle information related to each intelligence.
The other side of the coin is that sometimes there is no clear-cut between an intelligence type and other cognitive abilities. Some lines of demarcation can be drawn, though. Intelligence is not the same as (Gardener, 2011):

- Transversal abilities such as motivation, personality, determination, creativity or attention which “apply across a range of situations” (Gardener, 2011, p. 491) and whose performance may vary from a certain task to another. Intelligence functions on specific content: math, music, language or space management, where transversal capacities are put in use.
- Learning style, the way learners better perceive, process, understand and retain new knowledge. To exemplify, some people learn better by touching or moving than by listening or paying attention to visual aids. There are those who prefer to study on their own in a quiet environment, while others make better profit from group sessions and some background music.
- Memory, which also has varied forms. For example, procedural memory plays its role when performing an automated task such as driving; semantic memory acts when recalling concepts, facts, object functions; episodic memory is the one that allows recalling experiences and events within its context.
- Skills, which are “the cognitive performances that result from the operation of one or more intelligences” (Gardener, 2011, p. 492) are influenced by context. A successful MTV presenter may be skilled out of the combination of linguistic, interpersonal musical and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences, for example.

To sum up, after the discussion presented above, it becomes clear that the field of intelligence research is an extremely fertile and prolific one. Any attempt to conduct research that covers just one of the intelligence types described would be a feat hard to accomplish which exceeds the scope of this case study. Thus, some considerations must be made. Firstly, the intelligence here studied is circumscribed to the domain of linguistic intelligence, however, not the full range of abilities that entail the building up of that intelligence were covered. Secondly, it is the sample subjects’ ability to group together lexical items both in their L1 and FL which was particularly assessed. Lastly, the term ability is understood as a capacity to fulfill a task, in this case the linguistic task of classifying content words in English and Spanish according to their grammatical category.

**Competence vs performance**

The extent to which humans can understand a language does not exactly correspond to the extent to which they can put that language into use. This idea was firstly published by Chomsky (1965), who called that dichotomy competence and performance, respectively. Later, Chomsky (1988) advanced one step further in the distinction and referred to competence as internalised grammar and to performance as externalised grammar to show two opposing views of Linguistics’ object of study.
The case study here presented focused on the observable phenomenon of the research participants’ linguistic production. In Chomskyan Linguistics, it is the undergraduates’ performance or externalised grammar about their ability to cross-linguistically classify lexical categories that was assessed.

**Prior knowledge**

When planning the contents for a study course teachers start from considering their learners’ prior knowledge. Hardly will an EFL practitioner expect his/her students to know nothing of the English language due to the status of *lingua franca* it has acquired. Consequently, English has turned into a common presence, not only in academic or business contexts, but also in daily activities, such as listening to music, watching a series, playing video games, or studying. Ausbel D. (1968) early understood that for new knowledge to be apprehended it requires 1) to be potentially meaningful, and 2) to be related meaningfully to learners’ prior knowledge. As a result, the path for new learning should start from prior knowledge, as teachers usually do.

Analogously, the grammatical aspects that were here studied, precisely content words in Spanish, are understood to be part of the research participants’ prior knowledge. The greatest majority of undergraduates at UCA, Facultad Teresa de Avila are from the province of Entre Ríos. According to the Primary School Level Curriculum Design of Entre Ríos Province (2011a) and the Secondary School Level Curriculum Design of Entre Ríos Province (2011b) elaborated by the *Consejo General de Educación* -CGE- [General Council of Education] of Entre Ríos Province, both during primary and secondary school learners receive a significant number of class hours of Spanish Language. Making an average between primary and secondary levels, Spanish Language class hours double Sciences, and triple Physical Education, Arts and Technological Studies.

The study of lexical categories in the mother tongue is assigned a place of particular significance across both schooling levels in Entre Ríos Province. Let us consider some excerpts from the curriculum designs that support this statement. As early as the first stage of primary school (year 1, 2 and 3) the curriculum design indicates that by the end of that period learners should be able to recognise (CGE, 2011a, p. 73)

- words used for naming (proper and common nouns)
- words used for describing nouns (descriptive adjectives)
- words used to indicate actions (action verbs)
- words used to indicate time, place and manner (time, place and manner adverbs)
- word families (simple derivative words)

The government document further indicates that those linguistic contents should be deepened during the second stage of primary school (years 4, 5 and 6). This time, all lexical categories should be taught, practised and reflected upon focusing on their morphological and semantic aspects. Once again, derivative words are a planned content. During the second
stage of primary school, however, they are supposed to be presented covering their full complexity in the Spanish language. This includes not only word formation (the use of prefixes, suffixes and compound words) but also the comprehension of derivative words’ semantic function in order to predict spelling, deduce the meaning of unknown words, and broaden vocabulary (CGE, 2011a).

By the same token, government authorities urge secondary schools to stimulate reflection on language through “constant and systematic work on normative, textual or grammatical aspects” [emphasis was added]. They instruct to revise, study and reflect on contents taught during primary school level regarding grammatical categories. Likewise, they mention that “the identification and classification of lexical categories should be studied for the purpose of encouraging reading abilities, sentence and text comprehension and production, and text genre understanding”. (CGE, 2011b, p. 58)

**Grammatical aspects**

**Word formation in the mind**

Particularly when teaching English for Specific Purposes —ESP—, students are presented with the idea that some words derive from others. To exemplify, in an ESP course meant for Law undergraduates at UCA Facultad Teresa de Ávila, the course material designed by Menis and Muzachiodi (2008, p. 1) gives some examples of the use of derivatives:

- Which of the drivers is legally responsible for the accident?
- The legalization of marijuana consumption is a controversial issue.
- This document needs to be legalized.
- It is illegal to sell alcohol to minors in our society.

Then, the course material indicates: “The words *legally, legalization, legalized* and *illegal* are derivative words “, meaning that they come from *legal*. Unlike words such as *law, count* or *pen*, which exist on their own, some words are structurally complex and are made of chunks, i.e. they are derivative words. *Law, count or pen* are said to be made up of a single morpheme, “the minimal linguistic unit… an arbitrary union of a sound and a meaning (or grammatical function) that cannot be further analyzed” (Fromkin, 2011, p. 62). *Legally, legalization, legalized and illegal* are made up of different morphemes that together form one word.

One question that has arisen is whether the mind stores words as single morphemes or with their structural complexity undivided. This issue is particularly important because it may orient language practitioners in their teaching practices, especially to make informed decisions when teaching derivative words. Aitchinson (2012, p. 116) concludes: “words are stored primarily as wholes but speakers are able to split up words if necessary”. Thus, a person may have acquired the meaning of the word *unabridged* as a whole, but if put to test,
he/she will be able to understand what *abridged* means by interpreting that the removal of the prefix *un-* has altered the word’s meaning. Similarly, he/she will know that the use of that prefix in another lexical item will transform the word into its opposite.

The structure of words derived from a root to which prefixes and suffixes are attached is a feature shared by the English and the Spanish language. This is one of the reasons why it is theorised in this study that a person’s ability to understand a word in his/her L1 Spanish may positively transfer into his/her FL English.

**Knowing a word**

Let us consider a further question, what does it mean to know a word? Be it an L1 or FL/L2, knowing a word means knowing its spelling, sound, meaning, and grammatical category or syntactic class. Most literate speakers know how to write the words of their language, even if they misspell them sometimes. If a person does not know a language he/she will not be able to say how many words are there in a phrase, so “knowing a word means knowing that a particular sequence of sounds is associated with a particular meaning” (Fromkin, 2011, p. 37). Moreover, the sound-meaning-spelling connection is completely arbitrary in words, that is the reason why homophones such as *here* and *hear* exist, sharing the same pronunciation but different spelling and meaning. Conversely, synonyms are words which share meaning but do not have the same spelling or sound, for example *trousers* and *pants*. Finally, the aspect about knowing a word which most concerns this study is that of syntactic class. *Fast* can be both an adjective or an adverb even if a person cannot consciously tell their grammatical category apart. However, that person will not probably misuse it in a sentence. This can be proved by the fact that the phrase ‘*He’s a fast*’ sounds incorrect to any English speaker while ‘*He’s a fast runner*’ or ‘*He runs fast*’ sound right. People’s mental lexicon contains information about whether a word is a noun, adjective, adverb, verb, preposition, etc. otherwise they would not be able to detect ungrammatical structures.

**Content words vs function words**

When using words in context it is considered that not all of them have the same importance for conveying meaning. Aitchison (2012, pp. 99-100) uses an analogy between word functions and building materials to make a wall. Building materials can be divided into two broad groups: on the one side the bricks, and on the other side the mortar or cement. She explains that:

the bricks can be equated with ‘content’ words, those words that have an independent meaning, such as *rose, queen, jump*. The mortar represents the ‘function’ words, those whose role is primarily to relate items to one another, as is ‘Queen of Hearts’, ‘work to rule’, ‘eggs for breakfast’.

Content words carry meaning on their own, so nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs belong to this category or, put differently, they are the bricks. Content words are sometimes
called open class words (Fromkin, 2011, p. 39) “because we can and regularly do add new words to these classes”. The noun selphie, for example, did not exist until recently when cameras were incorporated into smartphones and people started taking pictures of themselves, sometimes aided by a selfie stick, another neologism. In the spoken language, content words are normally marked with a strong form of pronunciation, outstanding from the rest of the words.

Function words, or the mortar, is a category formed by conjunctions, articles, auxiliary verbs, pronouns and prepositions. These words do not carry meaning by themselves but help to connect the utterances grammatically. In consequence, most of the time, a sentence can be understood even if a person is unaware of the meaning or uses incorrectly a function word. Also, for not being as relevant as content words, function ones are normally pronounced in their weak form. One other distinctive feature of this category is the fact that it is not as receptive as that of content words, i.e. coinage of content words is highly more likely than coinage of function words. Therefore, they are referred to as close class words.

Interestingly, it seems that the role that content and function words play in the mental lexicon is also different. Fromkin (2011, p. 348) informs that function words appear later in children language acquisition. Language development proceeds in stages, which are universal: babbling, holophrastic and telegraphic stages. In the telegraphic stage children already express themselves with correct word order and rules for agreement and case, which shows their knowledge of structure. However, though the telegraphic stage is the closest to adult speech and children can produce longer sentences, they still lack the use of function words. Fromkin (2011, p. 40) also argues that slips of the tongue only occur with content words when he reports that “the switching or exchanging of function words has not been observed.” What is more, according to Aitchinson (2012, p. 99), people hardly ever confuse word lexical type in slips of the tongue. On the contrary, when they mistakenly choose a word for another “nouns change place with nouns, verbs with verbs and adjectives with adjectives”, not reporting function words.

From the arguments put forward it seems evident that content words are more meaningful, earlier acquired and play a more important role as building blocks of languages.

**Identifying word class**

Whether in English or in Spanish there are three paths that can be followed to identify word class: semantic, morphological and/or syntactic. There can be occasions when just one of them is enough to determine if a word belongs to the nouns, adjectives, verbs or adverbs category. In contrast, there are cases when considering a combination of paths will be the most appropriate course of action.

The semantic path refers to the meaning a word conveys. Hence, most English speakers will know that table refers to a piece of furniture, that it is a noun, and will use it accordingly in a sentence without much difficulty. Similarly, they will know nice is an
adjective, *sing* is a verb and *usually* is an adverb. Useful as it may be, semantics is not always enough on its own since the same word can act differently. The words *exhibit* or *play* can be both nouns and verbs. The word *that* can belong to three lexical types: a pronoun as in ‘I like *that*’, a determiner as in ‘I like *that* hat.’, and a conjunction as in ‘I learned *that* she’s new here’. Oddly enough, the same word can be positioned twice and sequentially in a sentence but have different lexical functions. Such is the case of ‘I know *that* that hat is mine’, being the first *that* a conjunction, whereas, the second is a determiner. So as to illustrate semantics complexity with the case of a word in Spanish, the verb *retar* can be used. It has two completely different meanings: *to challenge* or *to scold* and, once again, it could be used in a single chunk with both: ‘Me *retó* a que le de un reto’ [He challenged me to scold him].

Another problem may arise when the meaning of the word is unknown. One of the ways of solving it is by considering its morphological aspect, which is the form a word has. For example, it is commonly known that the suffix *-tion*, or its Spanish equivalents *-ción/cción/sión*, form derivative nouns. Simply by reading the word *abrogation* a person may not understand its meaning but will know it is a noun just by its ending. Verbs may be recognised by their typical suffixes, such as *magnify, stigmatise* or by their inflectional properties manifested in the regular past *-ed* ending, the continuous forms *-ing* ending and the third person singular *-s/es/ies* endings. As in the case of the semantic path, the morphological one is useful though not infallible since it can be occasionally confusing or misleading. For instance, typically, the suffix *-ly* corresponds to a derivative adverb in English, being *-mente* its correspondent morpheme in Spanish. The words *scholarly, wobbly* or *friendly*, however, are adjectives. Likewise, the Spanish words *demente* and *inclemente* are not adverbs but adjectives, instead. To give another example, the word *studies* can act either as a verb into the third person singular of the Present Simple Tense, or the noun *study* in its plural form.

When semantics and morphology are not enough, we can resort to syntactics, which is the position a word occupies in a sentence. That is to say words are not considered in isolation but together with their context of occurrence. *Poor* can be an adjective as well as a noun if not context is provided. Yet, its grammatical category becomes clear in ‘The poor speak very *poor* French’. In the first case, *poor* is a noun because it is preceded by an article and is the subject of the sentence. In the second case, *poor* is an adjective, it is placed before a noun, a typical position for adjectives in the English language, and is modified by an adverb. Adverbs which do not end in *-ly* can also be identified making use of their syntactic position. *Very* in the example mentioned above is an adverb because it precedes an adjective and adverbs can modify verbs, adjectives or other adverbs. In Spanish, *bastante* is an adverb and can be recognised in this phrase ‘Esta pizza es *bastante* rica’ since it is modifying the adjective *rica*. 
Methodology

Research design
The project explored second-year English undergraduates’ cross-linguistic performance on word type classification. It was a transversal, descriptive and correlational research study. The descriptive objectives were to determine the level of effectiveness in the classification of content words in L1 as well as FL. The correlational objective determined the relationship between the participants’ performance level in the classification between their L1 Spanish and their FL English.

The results were analysed via the software SPSS. Descriptive statistics, i.e. mean frequencies, averages and distributions were calculated for all the results. On the other hand, inferential statistics were employed to assess the correlations between results in Spanish and results in English.

The instrument
For the sake of this research the instrument designed consisted of two components: a text in Spanish and a text in English. The first one is an extract of the story Continuidad de los parques by the Argentinian-born France-based author Julio Cortázar. The excerpt selected had around 120 words where 40 words were underlined, name it 10 nouns, 10 adjectives, 10 verbs and 10 adverbs. Below the text there was a four-column chart for the instrument takers to classify the underlined words into each category. The research participants were not aware of the fact that the correct number of lexical items per category corresponded to 10.

The second component was an adapted excerpt of a children’s tale in English —The foolish lion—, whose level of linguistic complexity equaled the research participants’ FL interlanguage level, i.e. A1, according to the CEFR. This text was of about the same length of the first component. Likewise, there were 40 content words underlined —corresponding 10 to each grammatical category studied—, and there was a chart for the grouping of highlighted items into the correct word type. Once again, the instrument takers were not informed that the correct number of lexical items per category corresponded to 10.

The instrument also collected sociodemographic data which included age, sex and degree being pursued. There is a copy of it in Appendix 1.

The sample
The research was conducted by the end of August 2018 with a non-probability intentional sample circumscribed to university students attending the module English II at UCA, Facultad Teresa de Avila. Second year students of English were chosen since undergraduates taking the first level were just being introduced into the English language. A total of 60 students participated, 10 males and 50 females, whose average age was 22, and from various degrees: Law, Psychology, Educational Psychology and Economy. See figure N° 1.
Data collection
The instrument was applied on two different days after the English class. Undergraduates had been previously informed about the research study and its aims, and explicitly expressed their interest to participate. The sheets of paper bearing both components of the instrument together with sociodemographic questions were distributed and students spent about 20 minutes resolving it. They were informed that neither dictionaries nor any other resource could be used to help them group together the words into their grammatical category.

The results obtained were systematised with the SPSS software.

Results
The first objective of this study was to determine the research participants’ level for classifying the grammatical categories noun, adjective, verb and adverb in their L1 Spanish. A perfect score of a 100% of effectiveness meant having 10 correct lexical items in each word category. Table N°1 specifies how grading was allotted according to the number of correct answers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nº correct answers</th>
<th>Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-8</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-3</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-1</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Correct answers and their corresponding concepts

As table 2 shows the highest mean score, at 8.8167 was performed at verbs classification, followed by adverbs at 7.65. The mean score for nouns was 6.8167 and the
category adjectives was a little below, at 6.0833. It is to be noticed that in the case of nouns grouping the mode —i.e. the most frequent number of correct classifications— was 8, which is the most distant between median and mode values. This may imply that there were students who performed at a very good level of effectiveness while others did poorly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Noun S.</th>
<th>Adjective S.</th>
<th>Verb S.</th>
<th>Adverb S.</th>
<th>Total Average in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>6.8167</td>
<td>6.0833</td>
<td>8.8167</td>
<td>7.6500</td>
<td>73.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>6.8500</td>
<td>6.1786</td>
<td>9.0750</td>
<td>7.6774</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Statistical data about content words classification in L1 Spanish

It can be said that undergraduates at UCA, Facultad Teresa de Avila perform satisfactorily at adverbs grouping, well at nouns and adjectives classification, and very well at verbs sorting.

The second objective of this study was to determine the research participants’ effectiveness in classifying the grammatical categories noun, adjective, verb and adverb in their FL English. Table 3 gives an overview of the results obtained. In this case the highest rate was that of nouns grouping and immediately after verbs classification at 7.55 and 7.30 respectively. Adjectives sorting was in third place at 6.30 followed by adverbs grouping which was the poorest category in the English language at 4.7667.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Noun E.</th>
<th>Adjective E.</th>
<th>Verb E.</th>
<th>Adverb E</th>
<th>Total Average in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>7.5500</td>
<td>6.3000</td>
<td>7.3000</td>
<td>4.7667</td>
<td>64.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>7.8214</td>
<td>6.2800</td>
<td>7.4400</td>
<td>4.8095</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Statistical data about content words classification in FL English

It can be noticed that the mode for nouns in both languages is on equal footing at 8, while the rest of the figures differ from one language to the other. At English nouns, adjectives and verbs classification, the subjects had a satisfactory performance compared with a poor level of effectiveness in adverbs.

The third objective of this case study was to analyse the correlation between the research participants’ effectiveness in classifying grammatical categories in their L1 Spanish and FL English. As table 4 shows there is a statistically significant correlation between the overall ability (total S. and total E. intersection) to classify content words in L1 and FL ($r= .503; p< .01$). This correlation is positive, meaning that the higher one variable the higher the other, and can be described as strong.
To make a more thorough correlational analysis each word class in the L1 Spanish was contrasted with the same lexical item in the FL English. The most statistically significant cross-linguistic correlations appeared between adverbs ($r = .457; p < .01$) and nouns ($r = .403; p < .01$). Verbs grouping between the L1 and the FL also showed a significant correlation ($r = .329; p < .05$). These 3 correlations are positive and moderate. L1 and FL adjectives, though, do not exhibit a statistically significant correlation, which can be called weak.

**Discussion**

This research was encouraged by a university teacher’s uncertainty and curiosity about her students’ competence and performance in terms of grammatical categories, specifically content words, both in their L1 and FL. The participant subjects were sixty Argentinian undergraduates whose native language is Spanish and study an A1 level of English at University. More often than not learners express their lack of knowledge about lexical items and their functioning in the L1. This fact caught the teacher’s attention since the grammatical aspect here studied is supposed to be part of the students’ prior knowledge. According to the General Council of Education of Entre Ríos Province —the location where this research was undertaken— the study of lexical categories is assigned a prominent place across primary and secondary schooling levels. Consequently, some questions emerged:

- Do undergraduates really ignore how content words in their L1 work? Or have they just forgotten how to technically explain it but still understand their functioning?
- Does grammatical knowledge about lexical categories in L1 Spanish transfer into FL English performance?
- Should EFL teachers proceed to revise basic L1 grammatical contents to facilitate FL learning?
Results demonstrate undergraduates at UCA, Facultad Teresa de Ávila have a general percentage of effectiveness in L1 content words classification of 73.16%, which is considered as “good”. This demonstrates that students outperformed their own expectations since when put to test they could resolve the exercise with a good level of correct answers.

In spite of the fact that the mean score for the four lexical categories assessed in English, 64.79%, is below the performance in Spanish the difference is not significant as it is only 8.36%. Being the subjects assessed Spanish native speakers such a small variance manifests once again the correlation between students’ performance in both languages in terms of the grammatical aspect studied. On top of that, the correlation between same word categories in L1 and FL revealed that the better the undergraduates performed in Spanish, the better they did in English, especially in adverbs, verbs and nouns. Thus, it can be said that the ability to classify content words in one language transfers into the other. This insight bears great importance for EFL teachers, curriculum designers and educational institutions because it means that FLers’ prior knowledge about content words in their mother tongue has an impact on their interlanguage. Consequently, instruction on the matter should be planned, encouraged, implemented and assessed during school time. Likewise, when planning English courses for FLers —especially if there is a need for students to understand the type and function of lexical categories— teachers should be aware that it might be advantageous to brush up some Spanish grammar concepts to improve performance in English.

It is worth mentioning that the correlation between the ability to classify grammatical categories in both languages is positive, which means that both variables move in tandem. If one variable increases or decreases, so does the other. Therefore, it could be theorised that the improvement of the FL ability to group content words might as well improve the same ability in the L1. Pondering that the study subjects were native Spanish speakers, that they had received training in L1 lexical types across 9 years of school instruction, that by the time the test was administered (August 2018) they had not yet been taught neither adverbs nor how to identify any word class in English, and that the general average of effectiveness in L1 words classification was higher than in the FL, it is reasonable to expect that it was their L1 which positively impacted on their FL interlanguage manifestation and not the other way round. Further studies, however, should delve into the impact that FL instruction on content words may have on L1.

This research has shed light on cross-linguistic transfer concerning content words and can serve as a stepping stone to further research. Evaluating how the variables studied manifest in younger and older subjects, in subjects with higher EFL levels, and the assessment of gender performance particularities are viable follow-up courses of action.
Conclusions

The findings reported here provide a valuable addition to the literature of language transfer regarding how L1 performance at content words classification relates to FL performance of the same ability. A cross-linguistic study of such ability is relevant because nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs are the most meaningful lexical types. Not only are they earlier acquired but also play a more important role (than function words) as building blocks of communication. The prominence content words are given in connected speech also supports this claim.

The results of the instrument applied offer clear evidence of the strong positive correlation between the ability to sort word class in the L1 and the FL. Accordingly, this study confirms that there is cross-linguistic influence in terms of grammatical categories classification between Spanish and English. In other words, the hypothesis that prompted this study, that “the research participants’ level of effectiveness in the classification of grammatical categories in L1 Spanish correlates with their level of effectiveness in the classification of grammatical categories in L2 English. The better the level of effectiveness in the classification of grammatical categories in FL Spanish, the better the level of effectiveness in the classification of grammatical categories in FL English,” was correct and supported by data.

References


APPENDIX 1

The Instrument
Edad: ……….. Sexo:…………… Carrera: ……………………………… Año: 2018

1. Lea el siguiente texto y clasifique las palabras o grupos de palabras subrayadas en la categoría a la que corresponden.

Había empezado a leer la novela unos días antes. La abandonó por negocios urgentes, volvió a abrirla cuando regresaba en tren a la finca; se dejaba interesar lentamente por la trama, por el dibujo de los personajes. Esa tarde, después de escribir una carta a su apoderado y discutir con el mayordomo una cuestión de aparcerías, volvió al libro en la tranquilidad del estudio que miraba hacia el parque de los robles. Arrellanado en su sillón favorito, de espaldas a la puerta que lo hubiera molestad y como una irritante posibilidad de intrusiones, dejó que su mano izquierda acariciara una y otra vez el terciopelo verde y se puso a leer los últimos capítulos. Su memoria retenía sin esfuerzo los nombres y las imágenes de los protagonistas; la ilusión novelesca lo ganó casi enseguida. Gozaba del placer casi perverso de irse desgajando línea a línea de lo que lo rodeaba, y sentir a la vez que su cabeza descansaba cómodamente en el terciopelo del alto respaldo, que los cigarrillos seguían al alcance de la mano, que más allá de los ventanales danzaba el aire del atardecer bajo los robles. Palabra a palabra, absorbido por la sórdida disyuntiva de los héroes, dejándose ir hacia las imágenes que se concertaban y adquirían color y movimiento, fue testigo del último encuentro en la cabaña del monte. Primero entraba la mujer, recelosa; ahora llegaba el amante, lastimada la cara por el chicotazo de una rama.

“Continuidad de los parques”, de Julio Cortázar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sustantivo</th>
<th>Adjetivo</th>
<th>Verbo</th>
<th>Adverbio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Lea el siguiente texto y clasifique las palabras o grupos de palabras subrayadas en la categoría a la que corresponden

In a forest lived a lion. He was old and couldn’t run fast anymore. One of the lion’s legs was hurt. As days went by it became more and more difficult for him to hunt. One day while he was walking through the forest in search of food, he came across an interesting cave. He peeped in and smelt the air inside the cave. “Some animal must be
staying here," he said to himself. He crept inside the cave only to find it empty. “I will hide inside and wait for the animal to return," he thought.
The cave was the home of a brown jackal. Every day, the jackal would go out in search of fresh food and return to the cave in the evening to rest. That evening, the jackal after having his meal returned home. But as he came closer, he felt something wrong. Everything around him was very quiet. “Something is wrong," the jackal said to himself. “Why are all the birds and insects so silent?".
Very slowly and cautiously, he walked towards his cave. He looked around him, watching for any signs of danger. As he got closer to the mouth of the cave, all his instincts alerted him of danger. “I have to make sure that everything is alright," thought the jackal. Suddenly, he thought of a plan.

Adapted from “The foolish lion”, a children’s tale.
Extensive Listening-while-reading: A Case Study applying the Minimalist Approach

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ABSTRACT
This paper is based on the concept of extensive listening-while-reading. It is an attempt to assist ‘vernacular-medium learners’ of English (i.e., learners whose medium of instruction is their mother tongue) to develop their listening skills in English by concentrating simultaneously on listening and reading. The study tries to prove the effect of the minimalist approach on the listening skills of the learners. The minimalist approach consists in indulging in at least a minimum listening input to reap maximum advantage. The experiment pattern comprises listening to an episode of the 6-minute English podcasts provided by the BBC Learning English website daily; reading aloud the same transcript along with the BBC presenter; recording the reading of one of the podcasts every week, and emailing it to the teacher. The study involves five vernacular-medium students though only one case is particularized herein. Our conclusion is that the students’ listening comprehension skills improved gradually.

Keywords: extensive listening, listening-while-reading, minimalist approach

RESUMEN
Este artículo trabaja con el concepto de escucha y lectura simultáneas. Busca asistir a “estudiantes de inglés educados en lengua vernácula” (es decir a estudiantes cuya escolarización se dio en su lengua materna) en el desarrollo de la habilidad de escucha en inglés. Intenta lograr esto haciendo que los estudiantes se concentren en escuchar y leer de manera simultánea. El estudio trata de comprobar el efecto del enfoque minimalista sobre la habilidad de escucha de los estudiantes. El enfoque minimalista consiste en dedicarse en al menos un mínimo a la escucha de audios en inglés para lograr un máximo beneficio. El diseño del experimento incluye la escucha diaria de un episodio del podcast “6-minute English” provisto por el sitio web de BBC Learning English; la lectura en voz alta de la transcripción junto con el presentador de la BBC; la grabación de la lectura de un podcast cada semana, y el envío por mail al docente. El estudio incluyó a cinco estudiantes educados en su lengua materna, aunque se enfocó en uno de ellos. Nuestra conclusión es que la comprensión auditiva de los estudiantes mejoró gradualmente.

Palabras clave: escucha extensiva, escucha y lectura simultáneas, enfoque minimalista

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Introduction

Listening to English successfully is a difficult skill for students who are not used to listening to programmes in English. Students who have been educated in schools where the medium of instruction is their regional language or mother tongue (termed ‘vernacular-medium learners’ in this paper) find listening an even more difficult skill, as they have not had adequate exposure to English at school. In India, the medium of instruction is English in most higher education institutions. So, for vernacular-medium learners who leave school to enter professional institutions, there is a need for competence in English LSRW skills. It is difficult for them to grasp ideas explained in English for they have had only a negligible listening and reading input. Moreover, they have to compete with English-medium learners who can handle the language with varying ease. Even learners educated in English-medium schools do not receive enough training in listening skills. However, some of them do listen to English programmes out of their individual interest or congenial home-background. On the other hand, the vernacular-medium learners have had no exposure to listening in English, as the result of which they show no interest when provided with listening input.

The inspiration behind this study is the teacher-researcher’s realization that vernacular-medium learners do not comprehend the materials dealt with in regular English classes or in their engineering classes, and that consequently they needed practice in listening and reading. The purpose of this paper is to show the effect of the minimalist approach on the learners’ listening skills through an extensive listening-while-reading task. The study is based on the following research questions:

1. How does extensive listening-while-reading tasks improve the listening comprehension of vernacular-medium learners?
2. Why does the minimalist approach work with vernacular-medium learners?

Background of the study

In the educational scenario of India, schools provide varying languages as the medium of instruction – the vernacular in most cases, the national language in many cases, and English in a few cases. So, there are two types of learners of English: (1) ‘English-medium learners’ – students whose language of instruction at school is English and who learn all subjects in English; (2) ‘Vernacular-medium learners’ – students for whom the medium of instruction is their mother tongue or the regional language, and so learn their subjects in their mother tongue or the regional language; these students are exposed to English only in the English language classes.

For the first group of learners, English instruction varies according to the schools they come from and their individual ability to grasp the skill. When the vernacular-medium learners enter professional institutions, they struggle to cope with their studies and find no time to devote themselves to improving on their English due to their tight schedule.
Therefore, they get comfortably stuck in an interlanguage, hoping to manage with the bare minimum English they have already acquired.

The present study was conducted at SSN College of Engineering, Chennai, India, with first year vernacular-medium engineering students during 2015 and 2016 and repeated during the next three semesters. In the academic year 2008-2009 the College of Engineering started an annual policy of educating 20 government school ‘toppers’ who are vernacular-medium students of a rural, low economic background. These students, who have undergone 10 + 2 years of school education in their mother tongue, have been exposed to English as a subject only from Standard 5 (Grade 5) onwards. Other than that, they have not had any experience listening to English. At the time of admission to college, they are offered a bridge course of 20 days for English acquisition just before the regular engineering classes begin, because the medium of instruction for the four-year engineering course is English. The management provides these students with free education, free hostel accommodation, a free laptop and free access to Wi-Fi connectivity.

The subjects of the present study are five such engineering students. They attended the teacher-researcher’s two courses and agreed to cooperate with her in developing their English listening skills. These students took an entry-level “Cambridge English Placement Test” (CEPT), in which one was placed at A1 level and the other four were at A2 level. It is to be noted that English-medium students in these courses generally score from B1 to C2.

**Literature review**

Awareness of the importance of the listening skill has been instilled in students in countries outside India over the years; yet in India it continues to be ignored, especially in the ESL classroom setting, where there is little possibility of working with a digital sound system. Nunan (1997) considered listening as ‘the Cinderella skill’ in second language learning because it had been overshadowed by its elder sister, speaking. Listening and reading, according to him, were secondary skills, or means to other ends, rather than ends in themselves (Nunan, 1997). Nowadays it is an accepted fact that listening deserves special attention for proper English acquisition.

Hulstijn (2003) points out that computers can be successfully used in acquiring listening skills, and that the Internet provides opportunities for a considerable amount of L2 listening input. He explains the cognitive model of language processing and shows how the brain processes sounds automatically and efficiently to recognize words in speech. He adds that this knowledge can be used in Computer Assisted Language Learning to enhance proficiency in listening skills. L2 learners must make themselves familiar with the phonology of the language, learn plenty of words and automatize their ability to recognize words. The more efficiently learners become at processing the text without effort at lower levels of word recognition and sentence parsing, the better they will process information at higher levels of meaning and content (Hulstijn, 2003). If the teacher’s goal is to develop
vernacular-medium learners’ listening skill, students will need more practice than the one provided during the few classroom periods allotted to the English language. Therefore, extensive listening input outside the classroom will be required. According to Flowerdew and Miller (2005), the advent of technology has made it possible to listen extensively to the radio, TV programs and movies outside the classroom. Renandya and Farrell (2011) define extensive listening as

all types of listening activities that allow learners to receive a lot of comprehensible and enjoyable listening input. These activities can be teacher-directed dictations or read-alouds or self-directed listening for pleasure that can be done inside and outside the classroom. The key consideration here is that learners get to do a lot of meaningful listening practice.

Renandya (2011) says extensive listening provides a cognitive map, that is, a network of linguistic information from which learners can “build up the necessary knowledge for using the language” (Nation & Newton, 2009). Renandya (2011) also discusses a number of other language learning benefits associated with extensive listening: it enhances learners’ ability to cope with speech rate; it improves their word recognition skills and listening vocabulary; it helps them become more fluent listeners; it gives them opportunities to experience a high level of language comprehension; and it develops their general proficiency in the language.

The main advantage of extensive listening is that if the learners indulge in it, they obtain listening input which transforms itself into meaningful listening drills and helps them develop their skill, because “listening is best learnt through listening” (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). Researchers in reading also have confirmed the importance of extensive reading to acquire reading skills as “reading is best learnt through reading” (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). According to Brown (2016), extensive listening focuses on students listening to a varied and relatively large amount of input, often outside the class. Wilson (2008) and Field (2008) advocate the idea of extensive listening along with the idea of autonomous listening, where students can work at their own pace to develop listening skills outside the classroom. Harmer (2015) confirms the beneficial impact of extensive listening on the general language ability of the students. The word “extensive” is used in this paper to mean that the listening task is not part of the syllabus and that it is completed by the learners outside the classroom.

In 1996, Krashen advocated “Narrow Listening” as a low-tech, inexpensive, and pleasant way to obtain comprehensible input outside the classroom. He says that the ‘acquirers’ collect several brief tape-recordings of proficient speakers discussing a topic and listen to the tape as many times as they like at leisure. Thus, repeated listening to topics of interest and familiar contexts help to make the input comprehensible. Topics are gradually changed so as to expand the learners’ competence comfortably (Krashen, 1996). The term ‘narrow listening’ (or focused and repeated listening) referred to by Krashen implies the completion of one simple type of task to start to make language learning possible. This is
also extensive listening, in the context I have used it, because it is done outside the classroom.

Field (2007) too makes a strong case for extensive listening and reading to ensure that the acquisition of L2 is possible beyond courses and outside the classroom. He adds that learners’ empowerment consists of gaining freedom to learn outside the teaching context and the ability to continue learning after the instruction has finished. He also emphasises the need to design programmes to enable learners to achieve lifelong learning (Field, 2007). As per Burns and Siegel (2018), listening classes should involve both pedagogic and authentic tasks in order to develop listening fluency.

There is always a need to instil in the learners a metacognitive awareness, especially when they are new to language learning. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) argue that “when listeners exercise metacognition awareness and knowledge about L2 listening, they are able to orchestrate the cognitive process more efficiently and effectively.” They have shown how “the metacognition processes of planning, monitoring, problem solving and evaluation can be incorporated into a pedagogical sequence that encourages learners to activate the processes involved in real life listening.” Further studies also confirm that metacognitive awareness of listening comprehension strategies developed learners’ listening abilities (Bozorgian, 2014; Chou, 2017).

Vandergrift and Goh (2012) suggest that extensive listening activities should be planned based on the following principles:

1. Variety: listening to as many different types of authentic listening texts as possible, on a variety of themes and topics;
2. Frequency: planning a daily or weekly routine for a defined period of time), and
3. Repetition: providing the learners with the advantage of repetition to become familiar with the content, vocabulary and the structure of the spoken text.

I would like to add a fourth principle to the existing three principles mentioned above:
4. Rate of speech, that is, providing beginners with materials containing slower pace speech.

McBride (2011) investigated the effect of rate of speech on L2 learners’ development of listening comprehension and found evidence to suggest that exposing L2 learners to slow and clear spoken input can encourage second language acquisition. She also adds that learners need to have an exposure to a wide range of speaking styles, but when dealing with beginners, a slower, clearer style of speech that allows them to notice the details about the input, is appropriate.

It is not common to find teachers training students in listening, but it is common to find them testing students in listening. If testing a skill without teaching it is not acceptable for reading, writing, and speaking, it should not be acceptable for listening (Schmidt, 2016). Goh (1997) introduced the use of “listening diaries” as a learning tool to increase the learners’ metacognitive awareness of their listening skill. Schmidt (2016) affirms that the
students’ use of “listening journals” helped teachers focus on the improvement of their overall listening skill. Chen (2017) attempted to guide students to learn to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening activities by utilizing listening journals and curated materials which raised their metacognition awareness and students recognised the benefits of keeping listening journals. They were able to plan for their listening, monitor their comprehension, solve comprehension problems, and evaluate their approach and outcome.

To develop listening, Woodall (2010) too alludes to concentrating simultaneously on listening and reading extensively: “Listening while reading would lead to more reading and more effective reading, with possible future gains in fluency for listening and reading skills” (Woodall, 2010). The study by Brown, Waring, and Donkaewbua (2008) reveals that students prefer the reading-while-listening mode compared to read only or listen only mode. It is interesting to note that further studies have proved that ‘listening-while-reading’ groups showed better listening fluency and vocabulary gain than ‘read only’ and ‘listen only’ groups (Chang, 2011; Chang & Millet, 2014; Chang & Millet, 2016). Gobel and Kano (2014) report on a year-long ‘listening-while-reading’ program run for university first year students. The results of the evaluation show that though there was not much improvement in their general English proficiency, listening-while-reading had a significant effect on reading rate and vocabulary recognition. Similar studies were conducted in 2018, reporting better vocabulary acquisition and superior skills in the reading-while-listening mode (Nakashima, Stephens, & Kamata, 2018; Teng, 2018). Mestres, Baró, and Garriga (2019) report on the positive linguistic (vocabulary gain) and non-linguistic outcomes (preference for the mode) of reading-while-listening program in young learners. Renandya and Jacobs (2016) state that “the best way to improve language proficiency is to engage L2 students in extensive reading and listening.” Chang, Millett and Renandya (2019) maintain that L2 learners could benefit from the provision of additional support when doing extensive listening and reading and experience a higher level of comprehension. While tracking the eye movements in reading only and reading-while-listening mode, Conklin et al. (2020) found that L2 learners showed similar eye movements to L1 learners in the reading-while-listening mode. Duy and Peters (2020) recommend that the mode of input should depend on the preference of the learners.

Although linguists and ELT experts have supported extensive listening, narrow listening, repeated listening and listening-while-reading, extensive listening is not yet a properly researched area, maybe because it is completed outside the classroom. The documentation of extensive listening is difficult, since the teacher-researcher cannot control the conditions of the experiment as it does not happen in the classroom. This study considers these views and advocates an extensive listening-while-reading task using the minimalist approach.
Methodology. The minimalist approach to language learning

Rost (2013) provides numerous resources for teaching, researching and exploring listening for practitioners and researchers. Likewise, teachers introduce students to an innumerable number of language learning websites. Students are perplexed with the plethora of possibilities, and the sum total is that they decide not to do anything at all. This teacher-researcher advocates a minimalist approach to language learning, that is, indulging in at least a minimum listening-input to achieve maximum gain. ‘Minimalist’, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, New 9th edition, is “an artist, a musician, etc. who uses very simple ideas or a very small number of simple elements in their work.” Based on this definition, the “minimalist approach” to language learning encourages learners to listen to at least a minimum input along the day. Hence, this study suggests introducing students to just one website or one exercise so that not much time is spent on the task. If the teacher insists on the minimum input, it is possible for the students to abide by her instructions. On the other hand, if the teacher suggests too tedious an assignment, the students may discard the idea altogether. The minimalist approach in this study is used to enhance the listening skills of the learners through a minimum amount of listening input per day. Here the teacher-researcher proposes listening to just one episode of “6-minute English”, the podcasts provided by the BBC Learning English website daily.

Results and insight into methodology:
the experiment in progress and data collection

As already stated, the current experiment involved five vernacular-medium students who agreed to cooperate in the study. In keeping with this teacher-researcher’s minimalist approach to language learning, the exercise “6-minute English” programme from the BBC Learning English website was chosen. As a guideline, one activity, “Robots” was completed in the regular English lesson by the whole class. Later, the above-mentioned five students were specifically asked to listen to an episode every day. After listening to it, they had to read the transcript aloud along with the BBC presenter. Then at the end of every week, they had to record their reading of an episode and send it to the teacher by email for analysis.

The teacher-researcher persuaded them into believing the following arguments to raise their metacognitive awareness: the website is easily accessible; they could work on the episode at leisure; it required only six daily minutes; the rate of speech of the programme was slower; the transcripts of the episodes were available; the English used in the programme was simple because it was designed for the immigrants of the UK; and above all, the exercise trained them to become lifelong learners. The teacher-researcher gave them a notepad to record what they had listened to, as per the opinion of experts (Goh, 1996; Schmidt, 2016, Chen, 2017). On the same day, an email was sent to make them conscious of the seriousness of the study they had undertaken (as shown in Appendix 1).
Extensive Listening-while-reading in the First Year

As indicated already, this study reports in detail on the case of only one student whose name is abbreviated to JK. His progress is chosen for analysis as he was regular with the exercises, and the only one who continued completing the task in the subsequent semesters. JK’s entry level score at CEPT was A2. He listened to the following episodes in the first semester of the first year, and sent them to the teacher-researcher for analysis. The abbreviation ‘AR’ in Table 1 stands for JK’s ‘Audio Recording’ available to the teacher-researcher:

Table 1: JK’s Listening Episodes in the First Semester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Listening Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/11/2015</td>
<td>Transport Device (AR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2/11/2015</td>
<td>Do We Read to Show Off?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3/11/2015</td>
<td>Summer-born Kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4/11/2015</td>
<td>The Earth’s Core</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6/11/2015</td>
<td>The Proms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>12/11/2015</td>
<td>The Impact of Plastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>14/11/2015</td>
<td>What Makes us Laugh?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

JK discontinued his listening exercises before the end-semester examination, that is, when his study-holidays began. Two listening comprehension tests were given to all the students of the English Lab during the first semester, in which JK scored 4/40 and 6/40. This result was taken as pre-test in the experimental design. The two tests were based on IELTS previous question papers.

In the second semester of the first year, JK said that he listened to many episodes but sent only the following recordings:

Table 2: JK’s Audio Recordings in the Second Semester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Listening Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14/02/2016</td>
<td>Underwater Living (AR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25/02/2016</td>
<td>The Ebola Outbreak (AR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2/03/2016</td>
<td>Food Bank (AR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10/03/2016</td>
<td>Literacy Heroes (AR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21/03/2016</td>
<td>Odd Job Interviews (AR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>31/03/2016</td>
<td>Purple Tomatoes (AR)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extensive listening-while-reading in the second & third year

JK continued the listening exercises in the second year too. He was asked to send his Audio Recordings on a monthly basis as against the weekly basis in the first year. He discontinued his listening sessions once again when the end-semester study-holidays began. In the fourth and fifth semesters, he sent the following Audio Recordings as shown in Table 3 for analysis:
Table 3: JK’s Audio Recordings in the Fourth and Fifth Semesters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Listening Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 March 2017</td>
<td>Life Expectancy (AR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 April 2017</td>
<td>Women's Right to Vote (AR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 May 2017</td>
<td>Who do you Think you are? (AR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 June 2017</td>
<td>Water Burial (AR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 July 2017</td>
<td>Asking the Right Questions? (AR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5 Aug 2017</td>
<td>It's Good to Talk (AR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 Sept 2017</td>
<td>Would the World Stop without Clocks? (AR)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A listening comprehension test was taken in the English Lab at the end of the third year by the above-mentioned five vernacular-medium students. The test was also based on an IELTS previous question paper. JK scored 32/40 with one spelling mistake which was ignored. This result was taken as the post-test in the experimental design.

**Discussion**

At the end of the first, second and third year, the students’ feedback was collected. JK’s responses are recorded without any correction and provided in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3. His answers were so positive that the gratification of the teacher-researcher is beyond words. In the initial stages, JK could not put words together to make sense. But when the minimalist approach was introduced, he cooperated very well. In fact, he did not stop with just the exercise; he went on to listen to films and English serials. In spite of his hectic academic schedule, he succeeded in doing the exercises even though the teacher was less demanding in his keeping with the minimalist approach.

**The teacher-researcher’s insights in the first year**

Taking into consideration the English acquisition of JK at the initial stages, the study noted the following points:

- JK’s vocabulary was limited; the following words were mispronounced: embarrassing, private, surprisingly, canned, preserve, claustrophobic, preservation, liable, dilemma, suspected, sue, crisis, donated, tinned, dignity, dyslexia, convince, inappropriate, desperate, controversial, psychologist, corporation, exaggerated, ripening, etc. Later, JK was asked to pronounce those words, and he articulated them correctly except for words new to him like, ‘Embarrassing, canned, claustrophobic, dilemma, sue, dignity, dyslexia, exaggerated and ripening.’ The mispronunciations may have been due to oversight.

- JK’s pronunciation was immensely influenced by his mother tongue. At first, he could not pronounce words like, ‘Ebola, lean, undersea and tinned.’ But when the words were repeated, he made a better attempt.

- However, the way he said ‘food’ in the seventh recording with a long / u: / was admirable, a point to be praised since many English-medium students do not get it...
right. Unfortunately, JK pronounced the article “a” with a palatal on-glide all the time, a mother-tongue interference he could not overcome.

• JK’s reading speed improved; his first recordings took 8 minutes or more, while towards the end, he could finish in 7 minutes.
• JK’s listening comprehension showed progress; he read the last passages with less mistakes and pauses, which proved a higher level of comprehension.

On the whole, the teacher-researcher has nothing more to add than quote JK’s concluding words exactly:

Mam I would like to say something. You are the one of the teacher who cares about rural students. Because of you only mam, I am in this level. Now I can speak with my friends in English because of your training mam. Improving my English skill by watching some English movies, serials, reading newspaper, etc. You direct the way to improve my English, now I am following that mam. I am very proud to say I am your student. I owe my thanks (sic).

The Teacher-researcher’s Insights in the Second & Third Year

The study indicates that JK acquired a functional level of English. The recordings show that his acquisition of English vocabulary, pronunciation, reading speed, listening comprehension as well as confidence improved.

• JK’s vocabulary showed a marked improvement; he understood most of the words.
• JK’s pronunciation was still immensely influenced by his mother tongue. The following words were mispronounced: Live, binge, vocabulary, suffragettes, national, wear, cemeteries, off guard. The words ‘host’ and ‘clothes’ were pronounced with an /a/ sound. He could not properly pronounce words like ‘binge’ and ‘suffragettes’ in the first attempt, but he pronounced them correctly in all the subsequent readings. Another mistake was pronouncing the silent ‘b’ and ‘h’ in ‘dumb’ and ‘honestly’ respectively.
• JK consistently mispronounced certain words. For e.g. ‘wear’ was pronounced as ‘we err.’ The word ‘vocabulary’ was mispronounced throughout the recordings.
• JK’s reading showed some improvement in stress. For e.g. when he read ‘deep compassion’ and ‘great women,’ he did stress ‘deep’ and ‘great.’
• JK’s reading aloud showed that he could read better without many mistakes.
• JK read with more clarity and his tone showed a better level of comprehension.
• JK’s reading speed, however, did not show a marked difference from his first-year speed.
• Above all, JK’s voice became bolder gradually, showing confidence because he was able to use English at a functional level.

It has to be noted here that JK listened not only to the 6-minute BBC English programme but also to several listening sources outside the classroom. For example, he watched movies, serials and TED talks in English. By the end of the fifth semester, when he
sent the last 6-minute recording, he had already attended 4 periods per week of Technical English courses during the first two semesters; and also 20 to 25 periods per week of engineering classes taught in English, which adds to the ‘live listening’ or the ‘one-to-one listening’ done during the 5 semesters. Since JK belonged to the government-school-topper-scholarship category, he took special lessons too on most of the engineering subjects in English. Most of all, the fact remains that he was probably coached by a number of friends and classmates who patiently explained the engineering concepts to him in simplified English, perhaps on request. Therefore, the credit of JK’s English acquisition goes to all of the above besides the 6-minute English programme.

In all, JK has listened to 14 episodes in the first semester, 46 episodes in the second semester, 60 episodes in the second year and 90 episodes in the third year. As already stated, he had been placed at A2 level in the Cambridge English Placement Test (CEPT). As mentioned before, JK’s score for listening comprehension was 6/40 for the first semester. But at the end of the third year, his score was 32/40, that is, it improved from A2 to C1.

The listening input of the other 4 students was almost negligible, because it was difficult for them to cope with the other courses. But obviously, they were exposed to the ‘live listening’ sessions of lectures and interactions with friends throughout the 5 semesters. Possibly because of that, for the post test, these students went from a lower B2 to a higher B2. So, finally they moved from an A1-A2 to B2. It needs to be noted here that JK, at the beginning of the fourth year, sent an email to the teacher-researcher (see Appendix 4) saying that he got a job in an engineering company.

**Limitations and Scope for Further Studies**

This is a small-scale study, as the subject of the research is only one student. Another limitation, as stated in the section above, is that it is debatable whether JK improved his listening and speaking skills because of the tasks carried out as part of this research or because of the courses he attended or the extra listening he cared to do. This is a study done for vernacular-medium students with limited exposure to English. They are similar to EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in an international context, where English is not the medium of instructions in schools. This study can be applied to any similar situation where the students need a steady input of English to develop their English skills. The major result of this study is that JK gained confidence in his English skills though with a minimal steady input.

For further studies, research on quantifying the results can be carried out to investigate the impact of the minimalist approach on the listening skills of a large number of learners. The approach can be further extended from the listening skill to the other three skills to prove the effect of the minimalist approach to language learning in general.
Conclusion
The present study is based on the concept of extensive listening-while-reading as an attempt to assist vernacular-medium engineering students of English to develop their listening skills in English by concentrating simultaneously on reading and listening. The study adopts a minimalist approach to language learning as visualized by the teacher-researcher, that is, indulging in at least a minimum listening-input to achieve maximum advantage. The study involved five vernacular-medium students who varied in their output according to their individual input. Only one case, that of JK, is particularised herein. The results showed that the sessions assisted him to improve his vocabulary and listening comprehension. He is confident in using English at the functional level. The significance of this research is that the improvement in JK’s performance is a point of awareness and inspiration not only to the rest of the four students but also to the whole class. The secret of success in the study is the minimalist approach employed by the teacher-researcher.

References


Appendix 1

The following email was sent to make students aware of the seriousness of the study they had undertaken:

“Dear ------

I’m glad you have decided to take the first step to improve your English, and you should be very happy about it. Congratulations! I am reminding you of the exercise I suggested this morning:

Listen to an episode of the “6-minute English” programme from the BBC Learning English website every day with your headphones on.

Listen to the same episode a second time and read it aloud along with the BBC presenter.

At the end of every week, read aloud any one episode; record it, and send it to me regularly.

I am sure you will find this exercise rewarding. Do remember that you are working towards your own advantage. Thank you.

Happy listening!

D------”
Appendix 2

JK’s Responses at the End of the First Year
At the end of the year, the students were asked to answer the following questions: JK’s answers are recorded here without any correction:

1. Did you understand the episodes of “6-minute English”?
   “By honestly speaking, I couldn't understand all the meaning of that conversation. But after watching that episodes I tried to know the meaning of some words by using google. After that I watched again and understood some little conversation.” (sic).

2. What do you feel about your level of English now?
   “Previously I was having a fear in English. After watching these episodes I slightly entered into watching some English serials as you suggested. So I can understand that episodes better than previous time. By saying about my level of English now I am in moderate level only. I know my English is not good enough. I want to improve my level. Surely one day I will become one good speaker in English, my level will increase into high” (sic).

3. Was this exercise beneficial to you in any way?
   “This exercise really change myself. It improves my listening skill, speaking skill and writing skill. Nowadays I can read and understand the newspaper somewhat, I can watch English movies with understanding. Now I am trying to speak with my vernacular-medium friends in English. I can understand English during my engineering periods. BBC exercise is my first step to improve my English” (sic).

Appendix 3

JK’s Responses at the End of the Second & Third Year
At the end of the second year, the students were asked to answer the following questions: JK’s answers are recorded here:

1. Did you listen to the “6-minute English” every day in the second year from 4 March 2017 to 2 Sep 2017?
   “Surely, during the above specified period I listened to the "6-minute English" everyday mam.”

2. Did you understand the episodes of “6-minute English”?
   “I could really understand the meaning of each episode of "6-minute English".”

3. What do you feel about your level of English now?
   “I am really improved in speaking now. I can understand English movies and serials nowadays. It makes me to be proper in pronunciation. At the end of the 2nd year, my level of English improved drastically. I am very proud myself because now I can talk to my friends in English. They also talk to me in English not like before mam.”
4. Was this exercise beneficial to you in any way?
   “Yes, it improves mainly my vocabulary mam. My pronunciation is improving. I can understand the episodes mostly because I am checking the meaning of new words. I can understand words in the context also. Thank you for your help.”

Appendix 4

It needs to be noted here that JK, at the beginning of the fourth year, sent an email to the teacher-researcher:

   Dear mam,
   I am very glad to inform you that I got placed in Tech------. Without your guidance it wouldn't be possible. As a rural scholarship student, it was my dream to get into core company (sic). The BBC listening practice helped me a lot to improve my skills. I will be grateful for your guidance.
   Thank you,
   With respectful regards,
   JK

D. John
Bringing pronunciation back into the ESL/EFL classroom: Current research trends and recommendations for teachers and teacher trainers

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ABSTRACT
Pronunciation instruction in English as a second/foreign language classes has often been limited or outright ignored in communicative approaches to second language (L2) teaching. In parallel, pronunciation research in the last two decades has witnessed a major paradigm shift driven by the premise that learners’ speech needs to be intelligible and not necessarily native-like. L2 pedagogy, however, has not taken full advantage of the substantial body of research produced under this approach. The goals of this paper, therefore, are to bridge the gap between scholars and practitioners and to make recommendations for teachers and teacher trainers. The paper reviews the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction, synthesizes research on what aspects of English pronunciation should be taught and how, and examines English teachers’ cognitions, beliefs, and training in pronunciation instruction. The last section discusses learners’ goals and identities regarding English pronunciation within the English as a Lingua Franca framework.

Keywords: EFL, ESL, intelligibility, pronunciation instruction, teacher training

RESUMEN
La enseñanza de la pronunciación del inglés como lengua segunda o extranjera ha sido a menudo restringida o directamente ignorada en enfoques comunicativos de la enseñanza de una segunda lengua (L2). Al mismo tiempo, en las últimas dos décadas la investigación en el campo de la pronunciación ha atravesado un gran cambio paradigmático impulsado por la premisa de que el habla de una L2 debe ser inteligible y no necesariamente sonar nativa. Sin embargo, las pedagogías de la enseñanza de una L2 no se han hecho eco de los resultados de la investigación producida dentro de este enfoque. Por ende, el objetivo del presente trabajo es contribuir a cerrar la brecha entre investigadores y profesionales de la enseñanza de lenguas, así como presentar recomendaciones para profesores y formadores de profesores. El artículo analiza la efectividad de la enseñanza de la pronunciación, sintetiza estudios previos sobre qué aspectos de la pronunciación se deben enseñar, recomienda cómo deben enseñarse y explora las creencias, el sistema de cogniciones y la formación de profesores en lo relacionado con la enseñanza de la pronunciación. Por último, el trabajo analiza las metas e identidades que poseen los estudiantes en cuanto a la pronunciación en un marco que entiende al inglés como una lengua franca.

Palabras claves: enseñanza de la pronunciación, formación de profesores, inglés como segunda lengua, inglés como lengua extranjera, inteligibilidad

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Introduction

Most teachers will agree that speaking, one of the four skills traditionally addressed in the second language (L2) classroom, is the hardest to master as it involves using linguistic knowledge (often limited in the case of L2 learners) to produce language in real time. Most teachers also believe that L2 learners improve their speaking abilities as their grammar and vocabulary expand, which gives learners further confidence and a broader linguistic repertoire from which to draw. Seldom, however, is pronunciation seen as a building block of speaking competence or addressed pedagogically. The scant attention to pronunciation in current L2 teaching approaches arguably resulted from a counterreaction to previous methods of language teaching, in particular audiolingualism and contrastive analysis, where pronunciation became associated with decontextualized drills, repetition activities, and the avoidance of pronunciation ‘errors’ that resulted from the first language (L1). In the more meaning-oriented instruction of communicative language teaching (CLT), pronunciation has been left aside, considered an element of learning that would be “picked up” as a byproduct of communicative language use.

Although most L2 pronunciation scholarship had focused on naturalistic settings, that is, how pronunciation develops simply as a result of being immersed in the L2 community (e.g., Flege et al., 1997), the last two decades have seen an increased interest in how learners acquire pronunciation in a classroom, virtual environment, or any other context where someone manipulates or intervenes in the learning process. This type of research thus falls within instructed Second Language Acquisition (ISLA), whose goals include understanding L2 learning conditions and processes in instructed settings and how these conditions and processes facilitate the development of an additional language (Loewen, 2020). Findings from ISLA studies on pronunciation, however, have barely reached teachers nor have they impacted pronunciation instruction (PI) in the classroom. The goal of this paper, therefore, is to bridge the gap between scholars and practitioners by summarizing main trends in L2 pronunciation research and making recommendations for teachers and teacher trainers.

This paper will review studies conducted in classrooms as well as in more controlled, laboratory-based settings, which can also be considered ISLA research as they fit the definition by Loewen (2020) and others (e.g., Long, 2017) requiring a manipulation that potentially impacts learning. In some cases, however, noteworthy results from naturalistic research are also reviewed since they apply to the instructed setting. References consist of articles published in international, peer-reviewed journals and books by leading figures in the field. I privilege scholarship published within the last five years to reflect the state of the
art in the discipline. Finally, I include research from both English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). Unless noted, findings from one context can usually be applied to the other.

**Is pronunciation instruction effective?**

Recent meta-analyses and narrative reviews synthesizing PI research have provided evidence that targeting pronunciation makes a positive difference in L2 learners’ phonological development. For example, out of the 15 quasi-experimental (with a pretest and posttest design) studies surveyed in Saito (2012), 13 showed improvement resulting from PI. The two studies where improvement was not found probably contained an intervention that was too short or pretest scores that were at ceiling and did not allow for improvement in the posttest. Most studies in Thomson and Derwing (2015) showed significant improvement after learners received PI, although these gains were clearer where instruction targeted narrow constructs—such as the problematic /i/-/u/ vowel contrast in English, while few studies examined how instruction can improve learners’ overall comprehensibility in the L2. Building upon the meta-analytic study by Lee, Jang and Plonsky (2015), Saito and Plonsky (2019) synthesized results from 77 studies, comprising 2,573 participants, 1,961 of whom received PI while 612 were control participants. Results from a fine-grained statistical analysis suggested that the effectiveness of PI is clearer for segmental and suprasegmental features (as opposed to global measures) and when speech is elicited in controlled tasks.

Regarding methodology, these syntheses and reviews strive to broaden their scope, hence they are mostly—but not exclusively—about L2 English. They are important not only because they bring together similar questions put forward in previous studies, but also because they signal the field has matured and produced substantial findings that deserve critical examination. In addition, by scrutinizing methodological trends in the field, these reviews recommend new directions in research designs. For instance, Saito and Plonsky (2019) discuss their results around three main dimensions involving research on the effects of PI: (a) what construct is being measured (whether it is specific, such as individual segments, or global, such as degree of foreign accent), (b) how pronunciation samples are collected (through a controlled task, such as reading a list of words, or a spontaneous one, such as narrating a story), and (c) how pronunciation is measured (objectively, such as an acoustic analysis of sounds, or subjectively, such as overall impressions by human raters).

Saito and Plonsky found that most studies (57.1%) used controlled tasks to elicit pronunciation, which complements Thomson and Derwing’s (2015) review of 75 pronunciation studies, where 56% used controlled tasks exclusively. As a recommendation for the field, these authors urge researchers to incorporate more spontaneous elicitation tasks to increase the ecological validity of their studies.
In conclusion, data from these meta-analytic and narrative reviews provide evidence that instruction leads to greater gains in pronunciation when compared to mere exposure to the language. When no or small effects are found, this is often due to issues in the design and not necessarily because PI is ineffective. Researchers are encouraged to use the lessons learned to extend and replicate the existing body of literature. Also, several studies reviewed in these syntheses were conducted in lab settings; therefore, applications to the classroom are not always apparent. Future research—even if limited to observations at the initial stages—should concentrate on pronunciation learning as it occurs in more ecologically valid contexts, such as the classroom or virtual environments.

**What aspects of English pronunciation should we teach?**

If asked whether they would like to sound like native English speakers, most L2 learners would say yes. English teachers and ISLA researchers know, however, this is extremely difficult to achieve. The most important question is whether sounding like a native speaker is necessary for successful communication. Though the answer seems obvious, the native speaker paradigm has been pervasive since audiolingualism and it has not only misguided instruction but also caused frustration for learners and teachers alike. The departure from this paradigm began in the 1990s when scholars such as Derwing and Munro introduced three crucial constructs in the field of L2 pronunciation research, namely *intelligibility*, or how much of what speakers say can be understood, *comprehensibility*, or the amount of effort required to understand speakers, and *accentedness*, or the degree to which speech deviates from a native variety or standard (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Munro & Derwing, 1995). In a landmark article, Levis (2005) pushed the paradigm forward by contrasting the dominant *nativeness* principle, which holds that “it is both possible and desirable to achieve nativelike pronunciation in a foreign language” with the *intelligibility* principle, which proposes that “learners simply need to be understandable” (p. 370).

Priorities for teaching pronunciation change drastically when we shift the focus from nativeness to intelligibility. Instruction can target pronunciation features that are most important for intelligible and comprehensible speech. Choosing critical aspects also allows instructors to maximize the often-limited contact students have with English in an instructed setting. Recent research under this new paradigm sheds light on what this instruction may look like. A major consideration is the focus on segmental versus suprasegmental features of English pronunciation. For many decades suprasegmental information was believed to carry more importance. Anderson-Hsieh et al. (1992), for example, has frequently been cited to support this claim. In this and similar studies, however, pronunciation was operationalized as degree of nativelikeness, thus crediting the nativeness principle. When comprehensibility and intelligibility are considered, however, the picture is not so clear. Recent studies suggest that comprehensibility is affected not only by pronunciation but also by factors such as lexical richness and grammar (Isaacs & Trofimovich, 2012). Some studies support the notion
that suprasegmental features contribute the most to comprehensible speech in English (e.g., Gordon & Darcy, 2016). However, as the field moves to an intelligibility and comprehensibility paradigm, we need to revise what we know about the segmental and suprasegmental dimensions of English and how it affects pronunciation (for more on this issue, see Zielinski, 2015). That said, in the view of scholars such as Derwing and Munro, “there is little value in attempting to determine a definite answer” in part because “difficulties of each kind [segmental or prosodic] depend to some degree on the learner’s L1” (2015, p. 73).

I agree with Derwing and Munro. Learners’ L1 is crucial in prioritizing what segmental and suprasegmental information to teach. Spanish speakers, for example, are known for having problems with the pronunciation of consonant clusters in both word-initial (e.g., /sk/ in “school”, /sp/ in “spirit”) and word-final (e.g., /tʃt/ in “watched”) positions. In the last example, mispronouncing the verb ending may cause intelligibility issues ([wɔntʃt] vs. [wɔntʃ]). In contrast, the widely researched /l/-/ɹ/ contrast which causes problems for Japanese speakers is not an issue in the context of L1 Spanish. At the suprasegmental level, the complexities of English stress—with its long words and secondary stress patterns—seem to pose a challenge for most learners regardless of L1. Combinations of different L1s and even individual learners’ idiosyncrasies result in abundant variability within a classroom; therefore, instructors are advised against a one-size-fits-all approach (Munro et al., 2015). It is beyond the scope of this article to summarize the vast literature on segmental and suprasegmental features of English pronunciation and how to teach them. Readers should refer to Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), which breaks down pronunciation learning within a communicative approach and has rightfully established itself as a favorite among ESL/EFL teachers. Levis (2018) thoroughly reviews many of the traditional segmental and suprasegmental challenges in English pronunciation from the perspective of the intelligibility principle. Finally, as an example of a publication that addresses L1-specific challenges, Gómez González and Sánchez Roura (2016) provide an excellent resource to understand and better teach Spanish speakers learning English.

The concept of functional load provides another useful tool to determine what aspects of English phonology teachers need to prioritize. This concept posits that some sound contrasts carry more weight than others, and thus are more important in determining error gravity and intelligibility. Factors such as word class (part of speech), word frequency, and position of the sound in the words that form a minimal pair work together to determine if the sound contrast has a high or low functional load. For example, the contrast /s/-/z/ in initial position has a low functional load (6% on Catford’s scale, 1987) as it appears in relatively few minimal pairs and for words that are not very frequent in the language (e.g., ‘seal’ vs. ‘zeal’), whereas the functional load rises to 38% when the contrast is considered in word-final position (e.g., ‘piece’ vs. ‘peas’), though in some cases context and word class will disambiguate the pair (e.g., noun ‘rice’ vs. verb ‘rise’). Vowel contrasts such as /æ/-/ʌ/ (as in
“cat” vs. “cut”) have high functional loads, as expected (though see discussion in Sewell, 2017, on dialects with vowel neutralization). Originally applied to L2 pronunciation more than three decades ago (Brown, 1988; Catford, 1987), this concept has recently produced a number of studies that test its principles, especially in relation to what contrasts affect speakers’ intelligibility and comprehensibility the most. Munro and Derwing (2006) found that utterances with low functional load errors (e.g. /f/-/θ/) produced by Cantonese speakers learning English were associated with increased comprehensibility, as compared with utterances with high functional load errors (e.g., /s/-/ʃ/), a result confirmed in a recent study of Japanese learners of English by Suzukida and Saito (2019). In sum, results from L2 English functional load research, in conjunction with L1-specific challenges, may help ESL/EFL teachers set instructional priorities for segmental features of English that will yield the greater outcomes when attempting to increase learners’ comprehensibility.

How should we teach pronunciation?
The recent surge in L2 pronunciation research has also pointed out best practices for PI in the classroom. As noted by Saito (2012), pronunciation instruction “has been notorious for its overdependence on decontextualized practice such as mechanical drills and repetition, reminiscent of the audiolingual teaching methods of several decades ago” (p. 842). Baker (2014), one of the few studies that relied on actual classroom observations, noticed that the preferred type of pronunciation activities among five experienced ESL teachers was indeed controlled in nature, such as repetition drills, discrimination and recognition of sounds, and reading words or sentences out loud focusing on specific pronunciation features. This kind of instruction potentially enhances pronunciation in controlled speech production but might be less useful for the development of spontaneous speech. In addition to being limited in scope, PI tends to be reactive, that is, in response to learners’ errors (Couper, 2017; Foote et al., 2016). For example, in 40 hours of videotaped lessons taught by three experienced ESL instructors in Canada, Foote et al. (2016) found that 78 (or 86%) out of 91 pronunciation-related episodes were teachers’ reactions to learners’ errors, while only the remaining 14% consisted of preplanned activities that targeted pronunciation. In this context, mainstream pronunciation pedagogy desperately needs proactive interventions where pronunciation is purposefully included in lesson plans. A few ideas and examples follow on how to accomplish this, along with research that supports them.

Some strategies and methods for PI fit within well-known approaches to general L2 instruction (see Couper, 2015, for an extensive review). Principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), for example, have been empirically tested in the realm of pronunciation and initial evidence suggests that TBLT can indeed be extended beyond grammar and lexis, as recently covered in a special issue of Studies in Second Language Acquisition (Gurzynski-Weiss et al., 2017). TBLT literature posits that the benefits of tasks lie in their ability to draw learners’ attention to form while they collaborate with an interlocutor towards a
communicative goal. In pronunciation learning, where accurate perception of L2 sound contrasts is crucial, tasks may direct learners’ attention to key phonetic forms and hence aid in the development of speech perception and production (Mora & Levkina, 2017). The common debate in ISLA on implicit versus explicit learning and instruction has also trickled down to pronunciation teaching. Though dismissed during initial communicative approaches, explicit instruction is now believed to have an important role in pronunciation development. As Darcy (2018) proposes, explicit instruction can raise awareness of specific phonetic features and, with time and practice focused on meaning, learners can develop automaticity of features initially learned explicitly. Readers are advised to consult Darcy (2018) and Darcy et al. (2012), two open-source publications packed with research-grounded, practical suggestions on how to bring English PI into the classroom.

When teachers need to respond to learners’ pronunciation issues, research suggests that there are better options than the commonly used overt corrections or direct requests to repeat a word. For instance, quasi-experimental studies have highlighted the effectiveness of reactive corrections (i.e., feedback) coupled with form-focused instruction (Saito & Lyster, 2012a, 2012b). Saito (2015) found that Japanese students who received four hours of form-focused activities along with recasts (i.e., reformulations of learners’ production in a target-like manner) on their production of English /ɹ/ improved their production of this sound significantly more than control group participants who only received form-focused instruction. Recasts on learners’ production in Parlak and Ziegler (2017), however, did not lead to benefits in the development of lexical stress in English in either face-to-face or computer-mediated instructional settings. Although recasts are the most common type of corrective feedback in L2 instruction and their benefits have been widely documented in general L2 research, their nonintrusive nature also means recasts may go unnoticed by learners. Indeed, teachers interviewed in Baker and Burri (2016) declared that they sometimes needed a more direct approach to providing pronunciation feedback, as recasts did not always work, which authors also corroborated while observing classes taught by these instructors. These findings call for further investigation into the role of recasts in L2 phonology, particularly in classroom settings, where these techniques can be challenging to implement.

Recent years have seen a surge in innovative techniques and tools to teach English pronunciation. Gestures, for example, are often used in the teaching of suprasegmental features. In an attempt to study the range and usefulness of gestures, Smotrova (2017) observed a beginner-level class taught by an experienced ESL teacher and found that a variety of gestural tools such as clapping and head tilts, used by both teacher and students, facilitated understanding and production of English words stress, syllables, and rhythmic patterns. Shadow reading (or shadowing), an activity that requires learners to listen to speech while trying to imitate it as closely as possible, has been sporadically used in pronunciation
teaching, but recent research has supported its benefits for pronunciation development (Foote & McDonough, 2017).

Technology has also emerged as an ally for both teachers and learners, as more and more people worldwide use apps, software, and websites to learn and teach English (see Fouz-González, 2015, for a review on technology and pronunciation). Technology-supported learning seems particularly relevant as I write this article during a world pandemic (COVID-19) which has seriously limited traditional, classroom-based instruction. Even though many sites claim to help learners improve their pronunciation, only a few are created with findings from pronunciation research in mind. For example, *English Accent Coach* (Thomson, 2017) offers a free, interactive platform designed to help learners recognize English sounds. Thompson (2012) used this technology to train Mandarin speakers to perceive English vowels. YouGlish is a powerful and fun tool that allows users to search for specific words, hear them used in different contexts (sometimes hundreds or thousands, depending on word frequency), and see a transcription of the audio. Users can not only listen to idiosyncratic uses of the word but also observe dialectal variations (now American, British, and Australian English are available). Twitter has been successfully used to deliver short lessons on commonly mispronounced English words (Kartal & Korucu-Kis, 2020; Mompean & Fouz-González, 2016). These studies show that new technologies and social media can draw learners’ attention to specific aspects of English pronunciation through the use of popular and readily available audiovisual materials, which increases learner engagement and motivation (for example, consult Mompean & Fouz-González, 2016, who provide an appendix with a list of tweets used in the study). Technology can also be used to deliver instruction synchronously, as an alternative to classroom instruction. Research in this area suggests that computer-mediated communication (CMC), while not superior, is at least as effective as face-to-face (FTF) communication for pronunciation learning (Loewen & Isbell, 2017; Parlak & Ziegler, 2017), which mirrors findings on the effectiveness of CMC and FTF instruction beyond pronunciation (Ziegler, 2016). These findings bode well for ESL/EFL instruction conducted partially or fully in a virtual learning environment.

**How are we preparing instructors to teach pronunciation?**

Despite the mounting body of work that suggests PI makes a difference, survey-based research has shown ESL/EFL teachers believe PI is important but feel unprepared to implement it. As Darcy highlights, the “consistent uncertainty voiced by teachers about teaching pronunciation and the overall low satisfaction they feel about how they teach it stands in contrast to their clear perception of its importance” (2018, p. 18). In the context of ESL teachers in Canada, Foote et al. (2011), extending a study by Breitkreutz et al. (2001), found that only 23% out of 201 participants considered PI not worth undertaking. At the same time, however, only half felt completely comfortable teaching segmental (58%) and suprasegmental (56%) aspects of English pronunciation, while 75% desired more training in
pronunciation. Similarly, Uruguayan EFL teachers interviewed in Couper (2016) viewed PI as an important component in the classroom but were uncertain how to incorporate it into their lesson plans. Brazilian EFL teachers in Buss (2016), in contrast, felt mostly comfortable teaching pronunciation but—in line with previous studies—expressed a desire to have more pronunciation training. A small sample of ESL teachers from New Zealand interviewed in Couper (2017) acknowledged the importance of both segmental and suprasegmental features but their answers in other parts of the survey also showed that in the classroom they focused on segmental accuracy. These trends in EFL/ESL teaching are mimicked by L2 teachers of other languages such as Spanish (Nagle et al., 2018), and French and German (Huensch, 2019), which further suggests the field of ISLA as a whole should critically review how and if teachers are being trained to impart effective PI.

The debate over whether native or nonnative English speakers are more effective teachers of the language seems particularly relevant in the teaching of pronunciation. Anecdotally, we have all heard several students (and a few teachers) say that native speakers naturally have ‘better’ pronunciation and serve as better models for learners. An increasing number of scholars, however, are investigating this issue and proposing we categorically reject the notion of native speakers as the ideal teacher, not only for pronunciation (e.g., Murphy, 2014) but in general ESL/EFL teaching (Selvi, 2014). All other factors being equal, nonnative teachers can be as effective as native speakers. In a study designed to compare students’ accentedness and comprehensibility in English as a factor of having a native or nonnative teacher, findings from Levis et al. (2016) revealed that learners’ improvement between pretest and posttest was not related to the instructor but, perhaps unsurprisingly, to students’ motivation to learn English as well as their use of—and exposure to—English outside the classroom. Furthermore, Murphy (2014) discusses that nonnative speaker teachers may possess unique assets such as an increased sensitivity to the challenges they experienced themselves as students (e.g., case study by Gordon, 2019) and the positive role model of someone who achieved very high proficiency in the L2 ‘despite’ not being a native speaker.

Training is critical in helping teachers develop knowledge of and best practices in PI (Murphy, 2014). While previous research has suggested that the practices of more experienced teachers are difficult to change through training (Darcy, 2018), novice instructors and student teachers appear to be more malleable and receptive to education in PI. For example, Burri, Baker, and Chen (2017) concluded that novice (pre-service) teachers are more likely to adopt new and innovative teaching techniques for PI than in-service teachers are. Framed within a language teachers’ cognition approach (Borg, 2006, 2011), studies that assessed the impact of training have also seen changes in teachers’ beliefs about and attitudes towards PI. Burri, Chen, and Baker (2017) followed the development of both identity and teacher cognition among 15 student teachers enrolled in a postgraduate course on English pronunciation at an Australian university. Findings from a qualitative analysis
revealed that participants changed deeply during the 13-week course, in crucial areas such as their identities as native or nonnative teachers or the importance they attributed to PI. In a pre- and posttest design, Buss (2017) also found that a course in English phonology and pronunciation positively changed the awareness of PI among 18 undergraduate TESL students at a Canadian university.

In terms of how to best train English instructors in pronunciation, I echo the sentiments of several scholars who remind us that training in English phonetics and phonology is not the same as training in pronunciation pedagogy (Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Henderson et al., 2015; Murphy, 1997, 2014). Courses in English phonetics and phonology are common throughout the world as part of the preparation of ESL/EFL teachers. These courses raise teachers’ awareness of formal aspects of English and, in the case of nonnative speakers, they may also help teachers improve their own pronunciation. Therefore, these courses are intended to help teachers, but they do not necessarily or directly help the learners with whom those teachers work. A course or module in the pedagogy of pronunciation should train teachers to handle English pronunciation in a manner that best meets learners’ needs. The next and final section focuses on learners’ needs and goals regarding PI in today’s world.

**English pronunciation for a globalized world**

Teachers might ask what variety of English they need to teach. This question is particularly relevant in terms of pronunciation, where dialectal differences become apparent sooner than they do for grammar or vocabulary. Teachers should adopt the variety of English they feel most comfortable with if English is not their first language. Irrespective of what variety of English (native or chosen) they prefer, teachers should be wary of ideas associated with *standard* or *proper* pronunciation, historically associated with British Received Pronunciation (RP) and more recently with General American (GA) English. In a globalized world, English is increasingly an international language, shaped and owned by its users, as the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes paradigms have taught us (Bhatt, 2001; Jenkins, 2007). The community of English users is composed of speakers who learned English as their first language and those who have learned it as an additional language.

Jenkins’s (2000) Lingua Franca Core (LFC) compiled a set of segmental and suprasegmental features believed crucial for intelligible speech, regardless of speakers’ L1 or accent. For example, aspirated fortis plosive consonants /p/, /t/, /k/ in stressed syllable-initial position are part of the LFC, while dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are not. For vowels, contrasts between long and short vowels are part of the LFC as well. Zoghbor’s (2018a) recent examination of the LFC, for example, found support for most of the LFC features for Arabic-speaking learners of English. Principles established in World Englishes and ELF approaches, however, are not without their critics. Tsang (2019), for instance, argues that these principles are not always realistic or easy to implement (e.g., how are instructors
around the world, many of whom are still working in contexts with beliefs and teaching materials that favor ‘standard’ varieties of English, expected to present learners with a wide range of nonstandard varieties and convince them of their usefulness?) or overlook the fact that intelligibility is often subjective, dependent on factors such as interlocutors’ proficiency level and, more importantly, familiarity with and attitudes toward the speaker’s variety or accent. Tsang proposes, therefore, ‘glocalizing’ (adapting to a globalized world while also attending to specific local needs) the ESL/EFL curriculum. Tsang’s proposal contemplates the possibility that teachers and administrators in certain contexts choose to teach and assess pronunciation based on their specific needs and learners’ goals, even if the result is choosing a ‘standard’ variety such as RP or GA English.

Much of the discussion so far implicitly argues that learner’ priorities should dictate how we approach PI. This might seem self-evident, but teachers and curriculum developers, acting in good faith, often impose what they think is best for learners. In reality, however, students’ goals for learning English vary dramatically even inside the same classroom. Recommendations to uphold intelligibility over nativeness, for example, are based on what scholars and teachers consider most practical and achievable. Yet, there could be learners who truly desire to eliminate their accents. These students also deserve to receive sound pedagogy and advice from their instructors. Learners might also aspire to acquire the pronunciation of a certain English variety due to past experiences with English and the communities where it is spoken (e.g., travel abroad or interests in English-speaking pop culture) or with whom they hope to interact in the future. In a study of English learners’ linguistic identities in South Korea, for example, Park (2020) reported that participants wished to sound like an English native speaker of the United States, probably due to the multilingual nature of Seoul and the high value attributed to American English. In contrast, Francophone and Chinese learners of English in Quebec, Canada, were judged as less loyal by peers in their own communities if their English sounded too nativelike, thus highlighting complex issues of identity and affiliation with the L1 and L2 communities (Gatbonton et al., 2005).

Some scholars suggest that the first step in helping learners shape their identities as speakers of English in a global community is to expose them to many varieties of English (Jenkins, 2012; Pennington, 2015). Easy access to digital audios from around the world and tools such as YouGlish provide teachers with unprecedented opportunities to bring multiple varieties of English into the classroom. Still, the notion that learners can make these choices on their own might be too idealistic. Zohgbor (2018b), following authors such as Tsang who advocate for a more context-sensitive approach to PI, reminds instructors it is often difficult to predict what kind of English learners will need, especially in EFL contexts. I would add that many learners might see English just as another course or subject they need to pass and they may not anticipate using it beyond the EFL classroom. Teachers must be cognizant of these realities when setting priorities for pronunciation instruction.
Conclusion

This paper has tried to demonstrate that pronunciation can and must be addressed in ESL/EFL teaching and learning. An impressive amount of research on L2 pronunciation in the last two decades has paved the way to accomplish this goal. We now possess a better understanding of how teachers can implement effective pronunciation instruction and how learners’ phonological competence develops in an instructed setting. Language teachers have the unique opportunity—and responsibility—to aid learners improve their pronunciation when their learning ceases or slows down, their L1 gets in the way, and mere exposure to the L2 appears not to be enough.

This paper covered a wide variety of topics in L2 pronunciation instruction. I hope I have whetted readers’ curiosity to consult the references in this paper, especially those broad in scope and with practical application (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Grant, 2014; Levis, 2018). Instructors inclined to undertake their own investigations are encouraged to design classroom-based studies, perhaps with their own students. Themes in this paper can serve as a springboard for these teachers/researchers to generate ideas and design their studies. Crucially, we need to further test the effectiveness of new technologies and methodologies in pronunciation teaching and learning. Replication is also critical to advancing sound pedagogies; what works for learners in one context might not work well or at all in another. Longitudinal studies that follow learners over an extended period of time (e.g., several years) will also shed light on what aspects of pronunciation develop naturally and which ones require targeted instruction. Teacher trainers and personnel in administrative positions are strongly encouraged to evaluate and modify, if necessary, how pre- and in-service instructors are trained to teach L2 pronunciation. Even a short module on L2 pronunciation instruction within a course of studies or in professional development endeavors can motivate teachers to implement some of the techniques and methodologies discussed above. This is an exciting time to be a second language pronunciation researcher. This paper has shown this is also an exciting time to expand pronunciation instruction in ways that better help learners develop their communicative competence in a second language.

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Academic event report

Conversaciones Sobre Lenguas Extranjeras: A Cycle of Interviews to Foreign Language Teaching Specialists in the Southern Cone

As a result of Covid-19, the world as we knew it no longer exists. Our everyday life has changed radically. This pandemic has put the world in lockdown, which, along with the ensuing isolation, has provoked uncertainty and fear about the future. People are eager to communicate with each other and new ways of contacting the world outside the walls of our homes have proliferated. Technology and its multiple online platforms have transformed our geography and landscapes, moulding different scenarios which now allow us to explore novel means to connect so as to retain a sense of community. The pandemic has also blatantly exposed social inequality since a huge sector of the world population has been excluded from these virtual interactions due to lack of technological resources.

In this context of inequalities and confinement, a cycle of interviews to specialists of foreign language teaching was created. From its headquarters in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Conversaciones sobre lenguas extranjeras invites professionals who engage in language teaching in different levels of the educational system to be interviewed by Mariano Quinterno. Every Wednesday, at 8:00 pm, live on Instagram, the interviewer and the interviewees embark on a dynamic dialogue, which is enriched by comments and queries made by the audience in the chatbox. For a whole hour, the (g)local foreign language community converges to discuss new trends and central concerns in our profession, not only opening a channel of communication between a specialist and a wide audience from all over the country and beyond, but also, and above all, democratising knowledge.

Mariano Quinterno is an English language specialist and a teacher educator in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) didactics, language and literature with a vast trajectory in the field. This makes him a valid interlocutor to carry out this one-hour conversation every week with well known colleagues. The specialists engage in conversations which focus on different areas, such as Applied Linguistics, Phonology, Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Translanguaging, (Cultural) Translation, Literacy, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), Critical Citizenship, Research, Young Learners, Play, Drama,
Language Acquisition, Critical Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics, Teachers’ Unions, Grammar, FLT (Foreign Language Teaching) Didactics, Teaching Material, Digital Technology, Literature, FLT to Senior Learners, Language Appropriation, Critical Intercultural Education, among others.

Based on our description so far, this cycle seems to be similar to many other local projects created at the same time and for the same reasons. The big question is what makes this cycle different, and, most importantly, to what an extent it offers an innovative view of foreign language teaching.

Conversaciones inscribes itself in, and re-signifies, Joaquín Torres García’s famous motto “Our North is the South.” This Uruguayan visual artist painted “Inverted America” in 1943 (figure 1), which is a direct provocation to a dominant Eurocentric worldview. By drawing the Equator at the bottom and the River Plate area in the centre, and by turning the geopolitical map of the Southern Cone upside down, the painting offers a clear shift of perspective. Interestingly, Torres García’s painting and Conversaciones have both made a U turn: “Inverted America” has challenged hegemonic views of the North and the South and, similarly, Conversaciones has metaphorically turned the map of foreign language teaching upside down by giving a voice to local specialists. What principle did Conversaciones adopt in order to encourage innovation and transformation?

First and foremost, all the specialists interviewed belong to the Southern Cone and most of them work locally. Only a very few live and work in the UK and keep strong ties with local academic circles. This choice is crucial to distinguish Conversaciones from other similar cycles. Giving local voices the opportunity to express their views on foreign language teaching on social media in prime time gives local experts visibility and defies the international supremacy of the northern hemisphere (Europe and North America) when it comes to discussing the role of foreign language teaching in our context. By so doing, the cycle challenges our heritage of European imperialism and pursues to decolonise academic practices. Inevitably, this leads to question the affluent contemporary foreign language learning industry of the North, which produces teaching material to be used worldwide, reinforcing hegemonic neoimperialist ideologies and perpetuating inequality.

In an attempt to work towards decolonizing the curriculum, the question of who owns the languages we speak and teach was brought to the forefront again and again in the different interviews. The concept of ‘Native-speakerism’, representing the unresponsive ‘native speaker’ hegemony still so present in our teaching context, was definitely challenged.
Following Kumaravadivelu’s exhortation to take action against it by the non-native subaltern, interviewees, as members of that non-native speaker community, defied imposed phonetic norms, cultural stereotypes (of themselves and others), heteronormative views, political biases, naturalised ethnic, social, gender and economic privileges, pedagogical approaches “for export” - among others - and provided examples of their own teaching practice that undo the invisibility and silencing we have been framed into.

In one of the interviews, the term ‘English as a Lingua Franca’ was explored in relation to the claim of ownership over the English language and the adherence to a less hegemonic perspective which challenges the native-speaker supremacy. This act of renaming is a clear example of an action taken by the subaltern community which gives visibility to an overwhelming number of speakers of different first languages who choose to, or need to, communicate among themselves through English (Seidlhofer, 2011). In other words, English as a Lingua Franca becomes the language of the decentred: whereas it keeps the colonial heritage of oppression and domination, it also empowers subaltern communities to use it on their own terms. It becomes the site of convergence of international speaking communities in the field of science, education, culture, technology, diplomacy, business and tourism.

Another relevant choice the cycle takes is the use of Spanish to carry out the conversations. By bringing the first language of the specialists and the audience to the forefront, the plurilingual approach to FLT becomes evident. If the cycle had chosen one foreign language, it would have been restrictive, limiting access to specialists of other additional languages in the region. In this way, Conversaciones embraces a wider language teaching community, and creates a virtual space for dialogue and interaction through a common first language to work towards building a Southern Cone criticality in FLT, incarnating Torres García’s motto “Our North is the South.” Moreover, the cycle reignites previous attempts at collaborative work on local linguistic policies. In Argentina, for example, the National Ministry of Education produced and shared important documents, such as Proyecto de mejora para la educación inicial de profesores para el nivel secundario (2011) and Núcleos de Aprendizajes Prioritarios (NAP) para la educación primaria y secundaria - lenguas extranjeras (2012), which brought together specialists of different foreign languages to agree on approaches, content, concepts, perspectives and forms of assessment in FLT.

Conversaciones has created a very strong and interconnected regional language teaching community on the web and has woven a tapestry of themes and concepts that run through the different talks. The specialists converse with Mariano Quinterno, with the audience and with each other reengaging in the discussion of heated topics from previous interviews and adding new possible meanings related to their areas of expertise. For example, the transversal dimension of Comprehensive Sexuality Education became evident in talks about literature, language acquisition, planning and analysing teaching materials, to mention but a few. The FLT paradigm shift of the last 30 years was one of the main topics of
discussion: content-based approaches challenge former grammar-based methods which taught languages in a cultural vacuum. Native-Speakerism is questioned when it comes to appropriating accent, pronunciation and agency. The many implications of the cultural become a topic of discussion among literature and language experts, who exhort the audience to notice the power of literature to either culturally colonise or empower subaltern communities. In this sense, intercultural education gives visibility to the cultures of the subaltern in dialogue with other cultures, and supports the production of local teaching material which focuses on our realities so that students can relate to them. Teacher research which explores our own teaching practice gives us, local language professionals, a voice to develop our own identities as practitioners, researchers and scholars of the Southern Cone.

All in all, Conversaciones clearly offers an innovative view of foreign language teaching which empowers local professionals to develop our own criticality and share our views, theories and teaching practice: the South has definitely become our North. And, to cap it all, it takes place in a very popular virtual space as a live session on Instagram.

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References
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Academic event report

ACPI Symposium: On Challenges and Opportunities: Emergency Remote Teaching

The ACPI Symposium was held online via Zoom on August 8, 2020 and organized by Cordoba’s Professional Teacher Association (ACPI). Participants were teachers and administrators from different provinces in Argentina, neighboring countries and some countries overseas. The association brought together key speakers for an exploration of the current conditions in which English is taught during the pandemic. The symposium combined four different structured presentations and Q&A sessions on the challenges and opportunities emergency remote teaching has created for English foreign language teachers in Argentina.

The objective of this symposium was twofold:

a) Provide teachers with a platform to share their experiences and learn new strategies to navigate the current situation as successfully as possible in their own contexts.

b) Foster a sense of community among teachers during these challenging times.

Luciana Fernández was in charge of the opening session with the topic The Power of Visual Literacy to Enhance Language and Thinking Skills. During her presentation, she discussed the importance of teaching visual literacy in the foreign language classroom, mainly during emergency remote teaching sessions, when students are heavily exposed to visual material. She explored the concept of visual literacy as a staple of 21st century skills and defined it as the ability to interpret, recognize, appreciate and understand information presented through visual semiotic resources (Serafini, 2014). To make this concept more meaningful to the context of foreign languages, she also defined language as the ability to use the target language with structural accuracy and vocabulary in order to be able to express ideas, thoughts, needs, feelings and more in formal and informal settings on a variety of topics. Her deep consideration of these concepts was valuable to understand how the use of visuals in the language classroom could enhance language communication, meaningful use of structures and vocabulary and thinking skills. According to Fernández, the speaker, visuals can trigger the meaningful use of the four macroskills, motivate foreign language
learners, and provide opportunities for students to practice and apply language forms and thinking strategies learnt in the classroom. In this session, teachers explored practical and high quality visual literacy activities to enhance language acquisition. By the end of the first talk, the strategic use of visuals in the classroom became more relevant than ever as teachers were guided to choose rich audiovisual materials to exploit during their online sessions or stimulate their students’ independent learning at home.

In the second session of the morning, *Pronunciation, the Cinderella of Language Teaching*, Florencia Giménez and Maria Garay reflected on the role of pronunciation during these challenging times. They emphasized the importance of teaching pronunciation even during these challenging times. Even in the brick-and-mortar classes, pronunciation may not be taught as thoroughly as other language aspects. During the workshop, the speakers discussed some of the reasons why pronunciation finds itself in a relegated state and offered alternatives to incorporate pronunciation instruction into online sessions and into tasks students solve at home. The workshop tackled some common “myths” around pronunciation and explored current beliefs about its teaching. A brief overview of segmental and suprasegmental features was first introduced to set the basis to analyse the new descriptors for oral skills presented by the CEFR in the Companion Volume (2018) at B1 and B2 levels. Notions connected with phonological control were operationalized to help the audience understand the importance of pronunciation as a central tool to achieve successful communication. The participants were presented with practical tips to integrate pronunciation to the language class, both systematically and incidentally. Besides and most relevant in these current sanitary conditions, the audience got an overview on how to use several online resources to enrich the teaching and learning experience during online sessions and promote autonomous learning in the field.

In the second half of the day, Carolina Orgnero and Dolores Trebucq devoted their session to reflect on the current state of affairs in education. During their presentation, *Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT): what have we learned so far?*, the speakers explained that ERT (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020) emerged from the teachers’ commitment to continue teaching in these unprecedented circumstances. The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on all the spheres of our lives. In the field of education, most teachers and students were forced to start classes in an unfamiliar setting that challenged them out of their comfort zones, and with little or no training in digital environments. Undoubtedly, teachers have done wonders with the resources they had by working around the clock in the belief that the pandemic was going to last 15 days… In this workshop, the speakers invited us to reflect upon the emergency remote teaching carried out so far and to socialize the insights gained over this particular period. With this aim in mind, the speakers shared the theoretical framework underlying the implementation of virtual classrooms in the Facultad de Lenguas, Universidad de Córdoba, during the pandemic. At the practical level, they engaged participants in collaborative activities to illustrate the key elements of the
framework of Community of Inquiry (Garrison, 2009): social presence, cognitive presence and teacher presence. The presence of these elements could be an indicator of success. Attendees were asked to participate sharing their ideas through apps such as Menti.com or using pen and paper to draw and share their views through the chat embedded in the video conferencing software. At the end of this workshop, teachers were empowered with tools to plan and design the second semester based on informed decisions that would not only enhance their teaching practices in their own teaching context but also contribute to consolidate virtual education, an option that might become the new normal.

To close this symposium, Alastair Grant presented his view of what returning to school after the coronavirus pandemic could imply. In his presentation Where do we go from here? From response pedagogy to post-pandemic education, he reflected on the responsive and adaptive role of the teachers as they learned to teach remotely in a new setting in a short time. Then, he posed the question how “response pedagogy” would be transformed to adapt itself to the need of a new normal. During his collaborative meeting, he invited the audience to examine how teachers had responded to Covid-19 by successfully working together. Then, he shared a range of strategies and activities that could be deployed in the classroom as well as online to cater for both contexts during these circumstances and in the world that the future may hold for both teachers and students. In his closing words, he emphasized the importance of resorting to collaborative work with fellow colleagues during these challenging times to support and learn from one another.

There are no rules or playbook to teach during a lockdown, so these speakers emphasized the importance of reflecting on what we have learned during the first semester to make wise pedagogical decisions during the second semester. Some of the aspects addressed during the symposium were the need to communicate honestly with other members of the educational community, to prioritize students’ needs while remaining flexible, to establish new routines and to foster collaborative tasks to create a sense of community in a virtual environment. The coronavirus pandemic came to challenge not only our way of living but also our conceptions of what teaching and learning means.

The main aim of this symposium was to provide teachers with a moment to reflect on the decisions taken during the first semester. To this end, each session engaged the audience in the reflection of what emergency remote teaching is and in the discussion of different teaching alternatives to take the best informed pedagogical decisions during these unprecedented times. This emergent type of teaching was conceived to provide students with easy access to education from home. Its design has required creative problem solving to meet the needs of specific learning communities in our local context. ERT has challenged teachers to learn about technology and to work out solutions to problems that previously tech support would have solved for them. This symposium celebrated the flexibility that most teachers have exhibited to adapt to these circumstances. Now, it is up to each of us to
consider, When the time comes and we all return to our classrooms, what teachings from ERT will we take with us to the regular brick-and-mortar class?

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References


Academic event report

Discussing ELT with... Instagram livestream sessions as an opportunity to reflect in times of coronavirus

Introduction
Organised by the English Department of the Instituto de Profesorado Sedes Sapientiae, Gualeguaychú, Argentina, a series of 11 live sessions\(^1\) were held on Instagram and YouTube from May 17 to June 27. The guests were ELT specialists and technology experts Darío Banegas, Lucía Soriano @utopiaeducacion, Scott Thornbury, Alex Corbitt, Marc Prensky, David White, Penny Ur, Dolores Orta, Cristina Banfi, Judith Harris and Jeremy Harmer.

The initial objective was to reflect on the sudden virtualization of lessons due to the Social, Preventive and Mandatory Isolation and lockdown declared in Argentina in March this year. The number of followers who joined the series and its popularity made us think it is a cultural trend worth reflecting on, and an opportunity to make sense of what we are going through. From these dialogues, categories of analysis arose, especially related to bonding with students, with the need to revise our teaching practice, and with the relevance of content and assessment.

Teaching with technology
Both Corbitt and Harris said that before introducing technology in the classroom, we should ask ourselves whether using a tool helps students do or learn something they could not do before, or whether it helps them do it better. If there is no justification that the tool will make learning better or allow them to do something they could not do before, then it is not necessary to use that tool. They reminded us of the affordances and constraints of technology.

\(^1\) A recording of each session is available at [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-FR_60rkG84CLU08BVPKYf6UqiYRNt](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-FR_60rkG84CLU08BVPKYf6UqiYRNt)
In a new culture where attitudes and beliefs have changed significantly, Prensky said that the adults of today are the last pre-internet generation. We are gradually becoming symbiotic with machines, which obviously affects language learning. Using translators or dictionaries are both different ways of using technology in relation to language. Children have a symbiotic relation with technology just like older generations had with books, i.e. the relationship with reading has been foundational for centuries in a way the relationship with technology is foundational nowadays.

Prensky also gave examples of using technology for language learning. He highlighted that the power of technology is to do things we could not do before, like communicating live with people in other parts of the world. He suggested that we can ask students to record a daily conversation and then learn to say it in English. Thus, they will be dealing with their own dialogues and not somebody else’s, which is the case of most textbooks. Banegas, Corbitt and Orta also mentioned ways of making content and material more closely related to students’ identity: restoring, remixing and such like.

The sudden move into online teaching has been a challenge to us all, since we had to go digital in this lockdown. “When you need it, you learn it. We are good at that as human beings”, said White. Most teachers naturally transferred what they had been doing in the classroom into their Zoom lessons, according to Thornbury. This means a lot of synchronous face-to-face teaching, which can be really tiring for students as well as teachers. It is not necessary to spend a lot of time in front of a screen. It is not about repeating our classroom practices online but trying out new things. It is an opportunity to personalize teaching even more. We should use apps that foster communication and creativity and those that provide input, especially through reading and listening. To sum up, Thornbury said students need input, focus on meaning, interaction and feedback.

Asked whether Tik Tok can be a meaningful way of drilling, Thornbury said any app or tool that is widely popular with young learners is worth exploiting because they are already using it. Although Tik Tok is limited as regards how much language can be introduced, repetition in both listening and speaking is beneficial for learning: “Nobody is denying that repetition is necessary in language learning, perhaps not the mindless kind of one”. He added that repeating exposes us to language and research is conclusive that receptive skills are necessary for learning. He also said that any task that involves scripting and rehearsing is useful.

The relevance of content
All the experts agreed on the value of using content suitable for the students’ needs. Besides, materials created by students, such as anecdotes, poems, stories or descriptions prove to be more motivating to them, as they deal with topics which interest them. When asked how to motivate students to read, Corbitt suggested teachers should curate good texts that might mirror students’ identities and provide windows into others’ experiences at the same time,
while involving students in creative writing. He mentioned “restoring” texts as a technique in which texts are rewritten from a different point of view. He mentioned an example when he was working in the Bronx and had his students rewrite Harry Potter as if it had taken place there as a way of bringing kids’ identities into the stories.

White highlighted the fact that there is not much point in remembering information nowadays, but rather in being able to do something with it, especially when learning languages. He also warned us that all written homework can be just a copy-and-paste exercise.

Banfi talked about the tension between coverage and depth when developing the contents included in the syllabus. The need to cover too much content in a superficial way encourages only memorisation. She suggested we focus on using language properly according to the context. It all starts with awareness: we need to teach students to be able to decode their environment, cautiously approach the situation, and manage it with the language they have learned.

Testing and assessment
As regards assessment, the interviewees feel it should reflect the type of activities done in class and, in these particular times, it is preferable to give students brief meaningful activities and provide appropriate feedback. The use of mock tests and rubrics help teachers and students agree on assessment criteria and provide formative assessment at the same time. It is also important to give students the opportunity to rewrite or correct the assignment after getting feedback. Soriano said that “the idea of testing as a surprise is old school”. Ur recommended announcing tests in advance and saying what they will be like. She suggested using rehearsals or asking students to design tests as well. For fast finishers, she recommended adding optional exercises with a bonus.

Thornbury admitted that communicative testing is difficult and he used the analogy of having to assess runners. One way is to carry out a battery of tests to see which one is physically better and another one is to tell them “You see that tree over there? Well, ready, set, go” and then assess them accordingly. He referred to that as “performance testing”. Testing communication should be like that and simple rubrics can help tremendously. He said it is a lot easier to assess grammar activities but, in the end, communicative assessment is much more valid.

Bonding as a key factor
Soriano encouraged us to see ourselves as listeners, not just speakers, and to take some minutes at the beginning of the lesson to ask students how they are feeling. White believes that online education can be more inclusive since mix-modes provide more opportunities to write questions and engage: “it’s less confrontational to ask a question in a digital environment than it is when you’re in a massive room face to face”. There are winners and
losers in this situation, he concluded. He encouraged us to decide what things we put back in and what things we can never go back to. When discussing the need to move online overnight, Harmer expressed that he was pleased to see that many teachers understood that it was all about empathy and caring: “reaching out really matters”.

Reflections and projections
The experts agreed on the importance of letting students know the value of what they are learning and on the fact that this can motivate them. They also mentioned that technology is improving in such a way that it might soon take over many of the skills we teach in the classroom. Thus, we need to rethink what we teach. As for teaching online, they highlighted the importance of bonding and scaffolding. They acknowledged that it is not easy to go digital overnight. It is not about being a jack of all trades but rather specialising in one or two tools and making the most of them. Their final advice in these times of lockdown and sudden virtualization of lessons was to take it easy and bear in mind that we are doing our best.

Although lockdown has been a tough situation, we believe that it has meant an opportunity to reconsider some of the issues that already needed reconsidering and has given us a chance to reflect on what we gained and what we cannot go back to when we finally return to face to face education.

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