

ISSN 2520-2073 (print)  
ISSN 2521-442X (online)

# TRAINING, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

*'An investment in knowledge pays the best  
interest'*

*- Benjamin Franklin*

**Vol. 7  
Issue 1  
2023**

Issue doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1  
Quarterly journal published by  
Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University)

# TRAINING, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

ISSN 2520-2073 (print)  
ISSN 2521-442X (online)

Quarterly journal published by RUDN University

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Dr Elena N. Malyuga	Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Moscow, Russia
Barry Tomalin	Glasgow Caledonian University London, London, UK
Dr Michael McCarthy	University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK
Dr Wayne Rimmer	University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
Dr Robert O'Dowd	University of León, León, Spain
Dr Olga V. Aleksandrova	Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russian Federation
Dr Lilia K. Raitskaya	Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University), Moscow, Russia
Dr Alex Krouglov	University College London, London, UK
Dr Igor E. Klyukanov	Eastern Washington University, Cheney, USA
Dr Mai Nguyen-Phuong-Mai	Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands
Dr Joongchol Kwak	Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, Korea
Dr Chai Mingjiong	Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, China
Dr Enrique Quero-Gervilla	University of Granada, Granada, Spain
Dr Iván Vicente Padilla Chasing	National University of Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia

## ADVISORY BOARD

Dr Evgeniya V. Ponomarenko	MGIMO University, Russia
----------------------------	--------------------------

## EDITORS

Elena N. Malyuga, Editor-in-Chief (RUDN University) [malyuga-en@rudn.ru](mailto:malyuga-en@rudn.ru)  
Barry Tomalin, Editorial Consultant (Glasgow Caledonian University London) [barrytomalin@aol.com](mailto:barrytomalin@aol.com)  
Elizaveta G. Grishechko, Executive Secretary (RUDN University) [grishechko-eg@rudn.ru](mailto:grishechko-eg@rudn.ru)

## COMPUTER DESIGN

Elizaveta G. Grishechko

## FOUNDER

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University)  
6 Miklukho-Maklay Str., 117198 Moscow, Russian Federation <http://eng.rudn.ru>

## PUBLISHER

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Moscow, Russia  
6 Miklukho-Maklay Str., 117198 Moscow, Russia

## EDITORIAL BOARD ADDRESS

6 Miklukho-Maklay Str., 117198 Moscow, Russia

## EDITORIAL BOARD POSTAL ADDRESS

6 Miklukho-Maklay Str., Office 97, 117198 Moscow, Russia

## PHONE

+7 (925) 585-67-46

## EMAIL

[tlcjournal@rudn.ru](mailto:tlcjournal@rudn.ru)

Training, Language and Culture is accessible online at <https://rudn.tlcjournal.org>  
Publication schedule: four issues per year coming out in March, June, September and December

Printing run 100 copies. Order No 25. Open price.  
Signed to print 15.03.2023. Date of imprint 17.03.2023. Format 60x84/8.  
Offset paper. Offset printing. Typeface "Optima, Impact".  
Printer's sheet 10,02

Printed at RUDN University Publishing House:  
3 Ordzhonikidze str., 115419 Moscow, Russian Federation  
Ph.: +7 (495) 952-04-41; Email: [publishing@rudn.ru](mailto:publishing@rudn.ru)



## AIMS AND SCOPE

Training, Language and Culture (TLC) is a peer-reviewed journal that aims to promote and disseminate research spanning the spectrum of language and linguistics, education and culture studies with a special focus on professional communication and professional discourse.

## FOCUS AREAS

Training, Language and Culture covers the following areas of scholarly interest: theoretical and practical perspectives in language and linguistics; culture studies; interpersonal and intercultural professional communication; language and culture teaching and training, including techniques and technology, testing and assessment.

## LICENSING

Publications from issue no. 3 2022 are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Public License (CC BY-NC 4.0), which allows unrestricted use of works for non-commercial purposes, subject to attribution. This means that people can share the material (copy and redistribute in any medium or format), as well as adapt it (remix, transform, and build upon the material) for non-commercial purposes as long as they give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as the license terms are being followed. For more information please read the summary of the CC BY-NC licence at Creative Commons.

Content published up to and including Issue no. 2 2022 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License (CC BY 4.0), which allows unrestricted use of works, including for commercial purposes, subject to attribution. This means that people can share the material (copy and redistribute in any medium or format), as well as adapt it (remix, transform, and build upon the material) for any purpose, even commercially, as long as they give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as the license terms are being followed. For more information please read the summary of the CC BY licence at Creative Commons.

## INDEXATION

The journal is currently indexed in Scopus, Russian Higher Attestation Commission List, Russian Index of Science Citation, DOAJ, Ulrich's Web, Linguistics Abstracts Online (Wiley), Google Scholar, EBSCO, ROAD, CyberLeninka, British Library, Bodleian Libraries (University of Oxford), Ghent University Library.

## ACCESS TO PUBLICATIONS

This journal is an open access journal. All articles are made freely available to readers immediately upon publication. Our open access policy is in accordance with the [Budapest Open Access Initiative \(BOAI\)](#) definition. It means that articles have free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. For more information please read [BOAI statement](#). This journal provides immediate open access to its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge (open license [Creative Commons](#)).

## PEER REVIEW

Training, Language and Culture is committed to ensuring a fair and productive peer review process to secure the integrity of the scholarly record. The purpose of peer review is to assist the Editors in making editorial decisions and through the editorial communications with the author it may also assist the author in improving the paper. Training, Language and Culture uses double-blind review, which means that reviewers are unaware of the identity of the authors, and authors are also unaware of the identity of reviewers. The typical period of time allowed for reviews is 3 weeks.

## PUBLICATION SCHEDULE AND VOLUME

The journal is published quarterly (four issues per year coming out in March, June, September and December) with each issue incorporating 6 to 8 original research articles, 1 to 4 reviews on relevant books and other publications on the subjects within the Aims and Scope of the journal, as well as reports on events and latest news. Print will be available on demand.

## ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

In selecting (review process included), preparing (editing) and publishing manuscripts, editors of Training, Language and Culture are guided by international standards of publication ethics. TLC Editorial Board will carefully and responsibly consider all reasonable complaints regarding violations found in published materials. Journal publisher, RUDN University, is a co-founder and member of the [Association of Science Editors and Publishers \(ASEP\)](#) and supports the [ASEP Declaration on Ethical Principles for Scientific Publications](#). The journal also adheres to the policies promoted by the [Committee on Publication Ethics \(COPE\)](#).

## COPYRIGHT NOTICE

The right of authorship belongs to the authors of articles. The authors transfer the rights to use the article (including the use and distribution of an article in the Open Access) to the publisher of the journal on a non-exclusive license (Publishing Agreement (Public Offer) available on TLC website). At the same time, authors remain full rightsholders.

Correspondence relating to editorial matters should be addressed to the Editors via journal contact email at [tlcjournal@rudn.ru](mailto:tlcjournal@rudn.ru)  
Online archive of all issues published in Training, Language and Culture is available at <https://rudn.tlcjournal.org/archive.html>

Responsibility for opinions expressed in articles and reviews published and the accuracy of statements contained therein rests solely with the individual contributors

Detailed information on the journal's aims and scope, editorial board, publication policy, peer review, publication ethics, author guidelines and latest news and announcements is available on the journal's website at <https://rudn.tlcjournal.org>

Publishing Agreement (Public Offer) to Publish an Article in the Academic Periodical 'Training, Language and Culture' is available online on the journal website at <https://rudn.tlcjournal.org/publication-policy.html>

# CONTENTS

- 5 **About our contributors**
- 7 **Introduction to Issue 7(1)** by Elena N. Malyuga

## Original Research

- 9 **ISSUES OF PRACTICALITY AND IMPACT IN CHECKLIST-BASED SCORING OF WRITING**  
by Zoltán Lukácsi and Borbála Fűkőh
- 21 **PROGRAMME LEARNING OUTCOMES (PLO) AS A MEASURE FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN POSTGRADUATE STUDIES: A CASE STUDY OF A MALAYSIAN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTION**  
by Izzah Ismail and Rohani Othman
- 40 **HERITAGE AND MINORITY LANGUAGES, AND THEIR LEARNING: A GENERAL BIBLIOMETRIC APPROACH AND CONTENT ANALYSIS**  
by M. Ángeles Jiménez-Jiménez, Adrián Segura-Robles and Ana M. Rico-Martín
- 58 **SUPERVISORS' WRITTEN FEEDBACK ON EFL GRADUATE STUDENTS' THESES: SURVEY-SOURCED EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF BEST PRACTICES**  
by Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh
- 70 **IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE UK HIGHER EDUCATION: HOW CULTURAL GENDERED IDENTITY IS SHAPED THROUGH LEADERSHIP PRACTICE**  
by Tanya Linaker
- 86 **AVIATION COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES AND LANGUAGE TRAINING DEVELOPMENT: PERSPECTIVES FROM PILOTS AND AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS**  
by Haryani Hamzah, Pramela Krish and Afendi Hamat
- 101 **DIGITAL POLITENESS IN ONLINE TRANSLATOR AND INTERPRETER TRAINING: THE LESSONS OF THE PANDEMIC**  
by Irina V. Tivyaeva and Diana R. Abdulmianova
- 116 **MITIGATION TOOLS AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN INVITATION REFUSALS: AMERICAN AND RUSSIAN COMMUNICATIVE CULTURES**  
by Angela V. Litvinova and Tatiana V. Larina

## Book Reviews

- 131 ***Teaching English for Tourism: Bridging research and praxis (a review)***  
original work by M. J. Ennis and G. M. Petrie (Eds.) reviewed by Wei Xu and Angelina Maria Ferreira Martins Cheang
- 134 ***Reconceptualising English for international business contexts: A BELF approach and its educational implications (a review)***  
original work by Elma Dedovic-Atilla and Vildana Dubravac reviewed by Barry Tomalin

## News & Events

- 137 **RUDN University News**
- 138 **TLC News**



## About our contributors

### Zoltán Lukácsi

Director of research and validation at Euroexam International. Gained his doctoral degree in English applied linguistics and TEFL/TESOL from the University of Pécs, Hungary, in 2013. His dissertation titled *Cohesion and Writing Quality* was published in 2016. Main research interests are foreign language testing, practical applications of test theories, validation and transparency in language testing, localisation in language testing, and CEFR-based measurement. As Secretary of the European Association for Language Testing and Assessment, he is a member of the EALTA Executive Committee and a member of the EALTA CEFR Special Interest Group. Also member of the Hungarian Accreditation Board for Foreign Language Examinations.

### Borbála Fűkőh

Research manager at Euroexam International. Gained her doctoral degree in applied linguistics from the University of Szeged, Hungary, in 2020. The title of her dissertation is *Establishing the Context and Scoring Validity of the Writing Tasks of Euroexam International's English for Academic Purposes Test*. Since 2015, published papers related to motivation in higher education, testing and portfolio assessment, and research-based test development. A member of several associations related to language testing and teaching, such as the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE) and the European Association for Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA) and is also a member of the EALTA Writing and Academic Purposes Special Interest Group. An external consultant of the Hungarian Educational Authority's Accreditation Centre of Foreign Language Examinations.

### Izzah Ismail

Full-time PhD in TESL student and Graduate Research Assistant for the UTM ER grant at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Her thesis focuses on the academic success among international postgraduate students at UTM.

### Rohani Othman

PhD, Senior lecturer at the Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Currently the principal investigator for a project under the UTM ER grant. Her research interests are Learning Outcome Assessment (OBE), Workplace Communication and English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

### M. Ángeles Jiménez-Jiménez

PhD in English Philology. Professor at the Faculty of Education and Sport Sciences of Melilla, University of Granada (Spain). Member of the Department of Teaching Language and Literature, English section. Researcher in the group Curricular Innovation in Multicultural contexts (Ref. HUM 0358). Main research lines focus mainly on plurilingualism, second/foreign language acquisition and intercultural education. A member of scientific committees of international journals such as *Porta Linguarum* and *Modulema*.

### Adrián Segura-Robles

PhD in Educational Sciences. Graduate in Psychopedagogy. Professor of the Didactic and School Organisation Department (University of Granada, Faculty of Education and Sport Sciences of Melilla). Member of the AREA research group (Ref. HUM-672). The scope of research interests covers education, technology, attitudes, and intercultural education. Has also participated as an external reviewer in different journals indexed in WoS and Scopus.

### Ana M. Rico-Martín

PhD in Spanish Philology. Senior lecturer at the Faculty of Education and Sport Sciences of Melilla, University of Granada (Spain). Member of the Department of Teaching Language and Literature. Researcher in the group Curricular Innovation in Multicultural contexts (Ref. HUM 0358). Key research interests are plurilingualism, bilingual education, second language acquisition and intercultural education. A member of the editorial board of the *Modulema* international journal, and also participates as an external reviewer for different international journals.

### Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh

Associate Professor at the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Research interests cover language studies and applied linguistics. Currently the Managing Editor of the *International Journal of Language, Literacy and Translation*.

### Tanya Linaker

PhD and MA in Russian Studies from SSEES, UCL and an MA in Applied Linguistics from Birkbeck College, London. After teaching at Northumbria University, moved to King's College London where she has taught Russian since 2002. As Team Leader in the Modern

Language Centre at King's, she is responsible for the delivering of Slavic and Middle Eastern language courses. She is also Centre Education Lead. Shares her expertise in teaching and assessment with colleagues from Cambridge, Manchester, Warwick and Reading Universities where she is an External Examiner. Has been a recipient of research and development grants. Areas of research include gendered professional identity and innovative language teaching pedagogy.

#### **Haryani Hamzah**

Has been acting as a licensed Air Traffic Controller since 2005. Research interests cover miscommunication, intercultural communication, and communication strategies in aviation. Holds an MPhil in English Language Studies, with the final thesis focusing on pilot and air traffic controller communicative discourse. Currently pursuing her PhD focusing on aviation language learning and competency.

#### **Pramela Krish**

Former Professor at the Centre for Research in Language and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Specialises in Applied Linguistics and has researched and published works on online language learning, mobile learning and teacher professional development. Has served in the editorial board of 3L Southeast Asian Journal of English Language. She is also in the Editorial Board of CALL-EJ. Has been appointed as external reviewer for teacher education programmes by the Ministry. Has served on review panels for funding and an active reviewer for academic journals both locally and internationally.

#### **Afendi Hamat**

Expert in e-learning systems design. Currently attached to Center for Language and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Has published in fields related to technology-enhanced language learning as well as social media and e-learning.

#### **Irina V. Tivyaeva**

Doctor of Philology, Professor at the Department of Linguistics and Translation Studies, Deputy Director, Institute of Foreign Languages, Moscow City University, Moscow, Russia. Research interests include language theory, research methodology, memory studies, translation theory, communication theory.

#### **Diana R. Abdulmianova**

PhD in Philology, Assistant Professor of the Department of Linguistics and Translation Studies, Institute of Foreign Languages, Moscow City University, Moscow, Russia. Research interests cover psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, research methodology, language theory, communication theory.

#### **Angela V. Litvinova**

PhD student, assistant lecturer at Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University). Research interests include sociocultural linguistics, cross-cultural pragmatics, politeness theory with the focus on English and Russian languages.

#### **Tatyana V. Larina**

Doctor Habil., Full Professor at Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University). Her research interests embrace cultural linguistics, cross-cultural pragmatics, discourse analysis, intercultural communication, communicative ethno-styles, and (im)politeness theory with the focus on English and Russian languages. She has numerous publications in Russian and English which comprise monographs, course books, book chapters and articles in peer-reviewed journals, including *International Review of Pragmatics*, *Intercultural Pragmatics*, *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, *Journal of Politeness Research* among others.

#### **Wei Xu**

Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, City University of Macau, PhD in Linguistics. Research interests include language education, second language acquisition, semantics and multilingual studies.

#### **Angelina Maria Ferreira Martins Cheang**

MA student in the Department of War Studies, King's College London, UK. Research interests include collective memory and ethnic identity, multicultural and multilingual studies.

#### **Barry Tomalin**

Editorial Consultant of Training, Language and Culture. A specialist in international communication, cultures, soft power and media. Founder and facilitator of the Business Cultural Trainers Certificate. Teaches at Glasgow Caledonian University London, the Academy of Diplomacy and International Governance at Loughborough University, UK.

## Introduction to Issue 7(1)

by Editor-in-Chief Elena N. Malyuga

Welcome to the March issue of Training, Language and Culture. The first issue of 2023 offers outstanding studies investigating a broad scope of problems within the realm of checklist-based scoring, programme learning outcomes, the learning of minority languages, supervisors' theses feedback, identity construction, the challenges of aviation communication, digital politeness in the post-Covid era, and the comparative analysis of the speech act of refusal.

In *Issues of practicality and impact in checklist-based scoring of writing* Zoltán Lukácsi and Borbála Fűkőh report on the practical implementation of a checklist-based scoring system of the Writing Paper of a high-stakes international proficiency examination in English. Focusing on the issues of practicality and impact, the authors put forward two key questions – how can scoring on the checklist be introduced so that the results reflect professional values, and how will stakeholders respond to scoring on the checklist. The interviews conducted focused on the format of the results, the content of the evaluation of the writing product, and also its usefulness in language learning. The result was a necessary compromise that eventually ameliorated the initial conflicting interests.

In *Programme Learning Outcomes (PLO) as a measure for academic success in postgraduate studies: A case study of a Malaysian Higher Learning Institution* Izah Ismail and Rohani Othman investigate the level of attainment of the eleven PLOs among international postgraduate students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia using descriptive statistics to disclose the percentage, mean scores and frequency of the forty-three items in the questionnaire. The authors reveal that the students possessed a high level of attainment of the eleven PLOs, which resulted in attaining academic success.

In *Heritage and minority languages, and their learning: A general bibliometric approach and content analysis* M. Ángeles Jiménez-Jiménez, Adrián Segura-Robles and Ana M. Rico-Martín present the first bibliometric study on heritage and minority languages, and their connection with learning. Following a bibliometric analysis, as well as the thematic and conceptual evolution of these publications, the results show a growing scientific interest in the topic from 2018. The study has important implications from both theoretical and practical points of view, offering relevant information to the

scientific community on heritage and minority languages and learning, as well as providing valuable data to enhance the teaching of heritage and additional languages and their treatment in the classroom.

In *Supervisors' written feedback on EFL graduate students' theses: Survey-sourced empirical evidence of best practices* Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh provides a detailed and structured narrative of written feedback provided by thesis supervisors in response to the thesis drafts of their EFL graduate students. The author seeks to identify the best practises in written feedback by thesis supervisors in linguistically demanding graduate programmes via qualitative research design, with the findings generally suggesting that written feedback is important for successful thesis writing and offering a useful perspective for new educators or lecturers who are unfamiliar with supervisory roles and responsibilities.

In *Identity construction in the UK higher education: How cultural gendered identity is shaped through leadership practice* Tanya Linaker presents a case study of the cultural gendered professional identity construction of an educational leader contextualised by an ethnically diverse and multilingual UK University language centre. The analysis reveals the dilemmatic aspects of the participant's identity as being agentive and constructed by others at the same time, staying the same and being subject to change and being unique yet wanting to belong to the group. The study adds to the body of research on gendered cultural leadership identity and demonstrates the transformative value of the narrative in constructing a gendered cultural leadership identity by bringing to the fore the dilemmatic agency of the narrator who conforms and at the same time resists the dominant professional and essentialist gender ideology through the course of small story telling.

In *Aviation communication challenges and language training development: Perspectives from pilots and air traffic controllers* Haryani Hamzah, Pramela Krish and Afendi Hamat investigate the issues of language training implemented for aviation specialists and seek to understand the needs of pilots and air traffic controllers. The findings suggest that it is imperative to have language training to improve aviation communication safety and standardise aviation phraseology and language. Besides, fundamental English language proficiency and non-standard phraseology use reduce efficiency in aviation communication. Hence, aviation language development and training needs to be improved, specifically through diligent monitoring and evaluation of the current needs of pilots and air traffic controllers.



In *Digital politeness in online translator and interpreter training: The lessons of the pandemic* Irina V. Tivyaeva and Diana R. Abdulmianova attempt to define the concept of digital politeness as applied to translator and interpreter training, make an inventory of digital politeness skills relevant to translator and interpreter competence, monitor students' progress in digital politeness during the online and hybrid training periods and assess the professional outcome of introducing relevant training into undergraduate and graduate programmes in Linguistics and Translation studies. The findings yield results suggestive of increased student awareness of the need to improve their online academic interaction experience and maintain best digital interaction practices when delivering university degree programmes in distance mode. The study also demonstrated that students see the digital politeness competence as a way to benefit professionally in their future career.

In *Mitigation tools and politeness strategies in invitation refusals: American and Russian communicative cultures* Angela V. Litvinova and Tatiana V. Larina look

into the ways the representatives of American and Russian cultures mitigate their refusal to an invitation by attempting to identify any culture-specific differences in the performance of refusal, as well as their social contexts. The findings revealed some differences in the role of the social factors in the realisation of refusals, while the impact of cultural contexts appeared to be more salient.

Finally, Wei Xu and Angelina Maria Ferreira Martins Cheang offer a review of *Teaching English for Tourism: Bridging research and praxis*, followed by Barry Tomalin's review of *Reconceptualizing English for International Business Contexts: A BELF approach and its educational implications*.

As is customary, recent news from RUDN University and TLC finalise the issue.

Training, Language and Culture welcomes contributions in the form of original research articles, book reviews and correspondence. Details are available online on the journal's website at [rudn.tlcjournal.org](https://rudn.tlcjournal.org). If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at [tlcjournal@rudn.ru](mailto:tlcjournal@rudn.ru).

# Original Research

## Issues of practicality and impact in checklist-based scoring of writing

by Zoltán Lukácsi and Borbála Fűköh

**Zoltán Lukácsi** Euroexam International, Hungary [zoltan.lukacsi@euroexam.org](mailto:zoltan.lukacsi@euroexam.org)

**Borbála Fűköh** Euroexam International, Hungary [fukoh.borbala@euroexam.org](mailto:fukoh.borbala@euroexam.org)

**Article history** Received October 13, 2022 | Revised January 29, 2023 | Accepted March 6, 2023

**Conflicts of interest** The authors declared no conflicts of interest

**Research funding** No funding was reported for this research

**doi** [10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1-9-20](https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1-9-20)

**For citation** Lukácsi, Z., & Fűköh, B. (2023). Issues of practicality and impact in checklist-based scoring of writing. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(1), 9-20.

*In 2016, Euroexam International launched an extensive research campaign with the aims of increasing transparency and accountability while preserving our professional values and achievements. Reviewing and renewing our scoring methodology was uppermost on the agenda, especially as the diverse potential in checklist-based scoring was particularly appealing in our context. Research and development had to conform to the administrative frameworks including time and financial constraints, as well as recognise stakeholder needs. In the present study, we report on the issues we had to tackle when introducing checklist-based scoring into practice. The participants of this mixed-methods research were 12 examiners, six EFL teachers and 28 language learners in four study groups. We used a total of 600 scripts by stratified random sampling from live examinations at levels B2 and C1. In the quantitative study, two division schemes were trialled to decide how to share the workload between examiner pairs. In the qualitative inquiry, teachers and language learners were invited to share their views on checklist-based feedback for formative purposes. With mutually beneficial compromises that enabled the successful introduction of our checklists for writing, the most important implication of this study is that evolving stakeholder needs can be fulfilled with adequate flexibility.*

**KEYWORDS:** *practicality, checklist-based scoring, writing, scoring methodology, practical implementation, English as a foreign language*



This is an open access article distributed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (CC BY-NC 4.0), which allows its unrestricted use for non-commercial purposes, subject to attribution. The material can be shared/adapted for non-commercial purposes if you give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Qualities of useful tests include reliability, construct validity, authenticity, interactivity, impact, and practicality (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) as reflecting the priorities of the context of application. While there is ample research into the theory and operationalisation of construct validity and reliability, there seems to be a relative lack of interest in what it entails to introduce

sound research results manifested as language test instruments into practice. This study reports on issues of practicality when introducing checklist-based scoring of writing in an international language testing system. Our main aim with this discussion is to throw light on the diversity of the obstacles to be tackled when implementing the findings of seemingly completed applied linguistic research.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. Practicality in language testing

Practicality is loosely equated with a response to resource requirements in the literature. Bachman and Palmer (1996, p. 35) claim that *'if the resources required for implementing the test exceed the resources available, the test will be impractical'*. The resources could be human, material, time, or the all-pervading financial. Taking a broader and consequently less precise approach, Brown and Abeywickrama (2019, p. 28) define practicality as *'the logistical, down-to-earth, administrative issues involved in making, giving, and scoring an assessment instrument'*. Mousavi (2009) emphasises the costs associated with each step of language test construction and administration. Similarly, Fulcher (2010) zooms in on budgetary issues in the two questions he proposes to consider under practicality.

Viewed from the vantage point of who is affected, resource-related issues can be allocated to the different stakeholders involved. If reading were to be tested as humans read outside of an exam environment, Rouet (2012) argues, the measurement construct could resemble authentic behaviour, but the time and effort required would repel candidates. By contrast, practicality can generate resistant interest despite fundamental conceptual flaws (Grishechko et al., 2015). Hambleton and Pitoniak (2006) point out that the Angoff-Tucker method of standard setting is erroneous, but its cheap and simple administration along with the speed of completion makes it popular among panellists. Similarly, measurement professionals use software on the basis of availability even though the underlying psychometric modelling is invalid (Verhelst, 2004).

Rater involvement is a prerequisite for the quality of practicality in scoring (McNamara et al., 2002). In the development of any method of scoring, East (2009) recommends a discussion-based approach where scores are discussed as evidence of salient features in the script. Harsch and Martin (2012) report on a scale revision where raters were involved in the trial and revision of the instrument including analysis and modification of wording and clarification, as well as assessment. Harsch and Rupp (2011) highlight the importance of gaining insight into what aspect of a descriptor examiners focus on when scoring via a pass or fail judgement. Apart from content, rater involvement is necessary to ensure that the sheer volume of the decisions to be made in assessment does not overburden examiners' working memory (Fulcher et al., 2011) or provoke fatigue (Ling et al., 2014).

Assessment literacy is vital when communicating scores to stakeholders (Zenisky & Hambleton, 2012). Ryan (2006) identifies the following eight characteristics for score reports to include: audience, scale or metric for reporting, reference for interpretation, assessment unit, reporting unit, error of measurement, mode of presentation, and reporting medium. However, Vogt and Tsagari (2014, p. 383) point out that the majority of the test preparation teachers they sampled (60.9%) received no training in 'using statistics'. Therefore, much of the literature recommends using clear and concise language and avoiding jargon and highly technical terms or statistics (Goodman & Hambleton, 2004; Hambleton & Meara, 2000; Wainer et al., 1999; Zhuk & Ivanov, 2022). Even though summative information takes priority in high-stakes proficiency testing, often in the form of pass or fail, Zenisky et al. (2009) emphasise the importance of tailored reports to meet the needs of different stakeholder groups, particularly as these tests contain diagnostic information. One example Zenisky and Hambleton (2012) give in this regard is identifying areas for development with subscores so that the candidate understands subject weaknesses.

### 2.2. Impact on application

Impact is the effect a particular test has on the individual (micro level) or as a social group (macro level) (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Impact, in the sense of 'test effect', is also referred to as 'washback' in the literature (Weigle, 2002). It also works at two levels. At the macro level of society, decisions based on test scores have a washback effect on education systems, whereas at the micro level of the individual, washback affects learners and teachers as to how assessment instruments affect practices and beliefs (Cohen, 1994).

Although the notion of washback is widely used in the context of test development and language testing, washback intentions of test designers are difficult to study and are *'often based on assumptions rather than on empirical evidence'* (Taylor, 2005, p. 154). Education environments are very complex, so it is not easy to find the reasons for a change in classroom practices, but there is empirical evidence that supports that based on test results, students can identify their strengths and weaknesses (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019), whereas teachers may set specific goals for students, as their perceptions are usually influenced by examinations and students' test results (Cheng, 2004). A major implication for large-scale high-stakes testing concerns results reporting and examiner training. Examiner training has



been proven to enhance consistency and reliability and reduce the impact of specific and unwanted examiner behaviour (Eckes, 2008; Van Moere, 2013; Weigle, 1998). Increasing the objectivity of the scoring procedure and making the most of the compulsory training and re-training hours is in the interest of exam providers in general (Weigle, 1994). In addition to this, involving the examiners and asking for their opinion in connection with the scoring process is key (Inoue et al., 2021; Rossi & Brunfaut, 2020). Hamp-Lyons (2007) points out that examiners need to feel included and valued, which also means that their contribution and their being part of the process must be appreciated.

It is important to bear in mind that in the case of subjectively scored tasks, examiners have special added value, as it is the examiner who *'lies at the centre of the process'* (Lumley, 2002, p. 267).

### 2.3 Checklist-based scoring

The CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 189) defines rating on a checklist as *'judging a person in relation to a list of points deemed to be relevant for a particular level or module'*. The checklist as a measurement instrument is particularly suited for level testing, when the ultimate aim of the assessment is to decide how much of the target learning goals have been embraced by the language learner. There is little theoretical guidance and literally no practical assistance in the CEFR as to how to construct a checklist beyond stating that (a) it may look like a questionnaire; (b) it may be a set of yes or no questions; and (c) it may take the form of a series of steps. The very term *'rating on a checklist'* is something of a misnomer itself, for in the case of dichotomous items, the unit of measurement leaves no room for levels of completion or mastery, even if the cumulative result can be meticulously detailed depending on the number of items on the list. It is also important to point out that the presence of checks or ticks does not suffice to identify a rating system as a checklist. Some of the successful research projects to develop a checklist include Kim (2010, 2011) and Struthers et al. (2013).

### 3. CONTEXT

Institution appears in the context of the international language testing traditions, i.e., it offers language exams which are levels tests and are linked to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). Being embedded in this tradition also means that Institution followed the trend of using scale-based tools for assessing writing.

The shortcoming of rating scales is a prevailing topic in assessment literature, and we may find various suggestions to counteract these (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Eckes, 2008; Hamp-Lyons, 1990; Harsch & Martin, 2012; Lukácsi, 2021; Wiggelsworth, 1993).

Earlier research conducted locally (Fűköh, 2020) unveiled that there is no consensus among Institution writing examiners on the interpretation of descriptors, and that the concepts of the construct need to be clarified in order to reduce the impact of specific and unwanted examiner behaviour. It became clear that no matter how experienced the examiners are, they have diverse and contrasting perceptions of the task and the rating scale. Moreover, their understandings are often contradictory and inconsistent. In response to this challenge, we launched a research project aiming at developing a level specific checklist-based scoring tool for the assessment of writing skills. The research and development project observed the following Institution values: consistency, flexibility, fairness, objectivity, and finally transparency. We believe that the checklist-based tool helps the Institution meet the challenges and keep their values at the same time.

Our research agenda spanned a total of six years starting in early 2016 and ending with administrative implementation in September 2022. Details of the development have been published elsewhere (Fűköh, 2020; Lukácsi, 2021), only the features relevant to the discussion of the present study will be listed here. Our system of checklists for assessing writing comprises a set of level-specific measurement instruments of varying lengths at levels B1, B2, and C1. As directed by initial discussions with examiners, the checklist items were never intended to reflect degrees of ability individually, but rather they were designed to determine the presence or absence of a construct element. Therefore, the items were first developed as yes or no questions, which were then transformed into binary statements scored dichotomously. Originally planned to be genre-specific, the checklists were later modified to be genre-inclusive where specific textual features are implied so that the integrity of a checklist is retained. As the checklists directly reflect the construct, their length in terms of the number of items is different. The checklist at level B1 has 15 items, level B2 has 36 items, and level C1 has 30 items. Besides, regardless of their volume, the items are grouped into the same component structure throughout the three levels. With varying numbers of items, our components as item bundles are clarity, complexity, effect, precision, and text structure.

#### 4. METHOD

The present study was composed of a first phase focusing exclusively on issues of practicality, and a second phase targeting areas of impact and practicality combined. In the first phase, we set out to explore how to introduce checklist-based scoring within the types and amount of resources available while preserving our level of professionalism. In the second phase, stakeholders were invited to share their impressions and

opinions of checklist-based scoring as a potentially unknown method comparing and contrasting it with previous experience with scale-based rating weighing up advantages and disadvantages of each. After checklist-based scoring was introduced as the administrative method in live examinations, the examiners were asked to provide feedback on the use of the instrument. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the major phases of the research design.

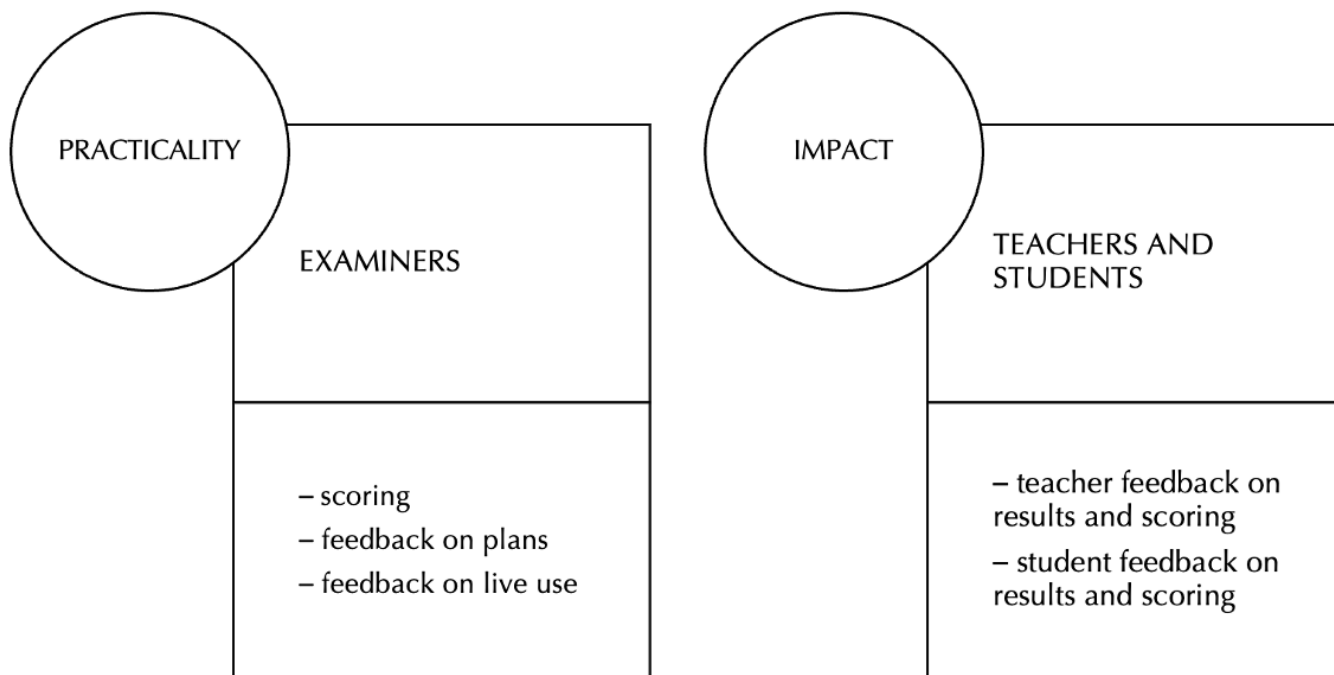


Figure 1. Schematic outline of the research design

The research questions in the study were: 1. How can scoring on the checklist be introduced so that (a) the results reflect professional values, and (b) concerns of practicality are mitigated at the same time? 2. How do stakeholders respond to scoring on the checklist?

The participants in the present study were 12 examiners, six EFL teachers and 28 language learners in four study groups. The examiners had considerable experience in both teaching ( $M = 30.68$  years,  $SD = 10.24$ ) and testing ( $M = 21.16$  years,  $SD = 2.64$ ).

In the first phase, 400 scripts from the October 2021 level B2 examination, and 200 scripts from the December 2021 level C1 examination were used. The scripts were selected by stratified random sampling. The examiners were asked to complete a questionnaire about the use and practicalities of the checklist. It was also important to see how the other stakeholder groups

– language learners (or future test takers) and teachers – respond to checklist-based scoring. Learners in four study groups and their teachers were approached in schools, where the language learners completed Institution writing tasks at B2 and C1 level.

The writing products were marked with both the scale-based and the checklist-based rating tool, and further to the results, the teachers and learners were provided with an explanation of the scores and an evaluation of the products using both rating tools. To collect feedback on the reception of the results and the rating tool, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the learners and the teachers.

The interviews conducted focused on (a) the format of the results, (b) the content of the evaluation of the writing product, and also (c) its usefulness in language learning.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1. Phase 1: Practicality

The rationale behind the first phase of the study was to reduce the tension between the interests of sound research on one hand and those of practical implementation on the other. The research was deemed successful, yielding three coherent instruments trialled extensively as units. However, administrative considerations including time allocated for scoring along with concerns of examiner fatigue dictated that the workload should be curtailed. In order to maintain routine double-marking, where mostly for reasons of test security each product is scored by two examiners, we agreed to divide the checklists between the two examiners so that each script was scored by both, but they would work with different items. The research leaders

outlined a total of 10 different plans to divide the checklist at level B2. The plans were different in terms of (a) how even the item distribution was between the examiners and (b) the principles of the division. Eventually, two plans were tested in the first phase of data collection. In the first one (Plan A), the items were halved based on results obtained from factor analysis. In the second (Plan B), the items were classified into two groups based on expert judgement of content analysis. The two plans classified 20 items in the same way.

As the scripts were written in live test settings, the observed scores allocated in live scoring with the operational rating scales were available for comparison. These were completed in the datasets with the checklist-based scores collected in a fully-crossed design. The data collection design is presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Quantitative data collection design in phase 1*

WAVE 1	WAVE 2	WAVE 3
Live test scores from operational rating scale use	Plan A – Checklist part 1 - Examiner 1	Plan A – Checklist part 2 - Examiner 8
	Plan A – Checklist part 1 - Examiner 2	Plan B – Checklist part 2 - Examiner 1
	Plan B – Checklist part 1 - Examiner 3	Plan B – Checklist part 2 - Examiner 2
	Plan B – Checklist part 1 - Examiner 4	Plan A – Checklist part 2 - Examiner 3
	Plan A – Checklist part 2 - Examiner 5	Plan A – Checklist part 1 - Examiner 4
	Plan A – Checklist part 2 - Examiner 6	Plan B – Checklist part 1 - Examiner 5
	Plan B – Checklist part 2 - Examiner 7	Plan B – Checklist part 1 - Examiner 6
	Plan B – Checklist part 2 - Examiner 8	Plan A – Checklist part 1 - Examiner 7

In Table 1, the quantitative data collection design is presented as composed of three waves. Wave 1 took place during the live administration in October 2021. At the time, six rating scales were used with a score range of [0,5] each: (a) task achievement; (b) appropriacy; (c) cohesion; (d) coherence; (e) grammatical range and accuracy; and (f) lexical range and accuracy. Both raters used the same set of scales, so the cumulative sum of the observed scores had a theoretical maximum of 120 score points. Simple linear transformation was used to convert the observed scores into reported scores ranging from 0 to 100. Pass on the Writing Paper was attained at 60% on the reporting scale, that is 72 observed score points or more. In Waves 2 and 3, Plans A and B indicate the two trialled checklist division schemes, Checklist parts 1 and 2 stand for the first and second halves of the checklist items, and Examiners 1 through 8 mean the research participants. The data col-

lection design controlled for the effects of order both in terms of plan and part. In Waves 2 and 3, each examiner had a workload of 50 scripts per wave. The reported scores and the results from checklist-based scoring were closely correlated ( $r = .983$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The mean difference was statistically significant ( $M = 1.91$ ,  $t(399) = 13.281$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Nevertheless, given that the pass or fail classification showed exact agreement in 94.75% of all cases, its practical significance was negligible. This result provided further evidence that the operational rating scales could be replaced by checklist-based scoring without any major detrimental effect.

When comparing the two checklist division plans, we found that the mean sums were not different ( $M = 0.17$ ,  $t(398) = -0.348$ ,  $p = .728$ ). Further, the scores from Plan A yielded the exact same pass rate as those from Plan B. Following Glen (2021), scoring reliability was measured as examiner consistency (Table 2).



Table 2  
*Scoring reliability*

EXAMINER	PLAN	PART	$\alpha$
1	Plan A	Checklist part 1	.831
1	Plan B	Checklist part 2	.920
2	Plan A	Checklist part 1	.820
2	Plan B	Checklist part 2	.881
3	Plan B	Checklist part 1	.894
3	Plan A	Checklist part 2	.870
4	Plan B	Checklist part 1	.680
4	Plan A	Checklist part 1	.904
5	Plan A	Checklist part 2	.926
5	Plan B	Checklist part 1	.767
6	Plan A	Checklist part 2	.875
6	Plan B	Checklist part 1	.830
7	Plan A	Checklist part 1	.900
7	Plan B	Checklist part 2	.784
8	Plan B	Checklist part 2	.844
8	Plan A	Checklist part 2	.821

Scoring consistency was excellent ( $\alpha \geq .90$ ) in four cases, good ( $.90 > \alpha \geq .80$ ) in nine cases, acceptable ( $.80 > \alpha \geq .70$ ) in two cases, and questionable ( $.70 > \alpha \geq .60$ ) in one case (Glen, 2021).

Based on the results from statistical analyses, we concluded that the checklist could be divided into two halves without jeopardising the scoring system. The theory behind the division did not have an impact on the scores. By way of cross-validation, the study was replicated on a sample of 200 at level C1 in a similar data collection design with four examiners. The replication study yielded similar results.

While the quantitative analysis uncovered no evidence against arranging checklist items into two so that the workload related pressure of time and fatigue on examiners could be eased, it provided no guidance as to which of the trialled plans to adopt. Therefore, the research participants were asked to complete an online poll past scoring to collect information regarding their preferences. The six open-ended questions were designed to tap: (a) the nature and stages of the scoring process; (b) the manageability of the workload; (c) the level of perceived objectivity in the scores; and (d) the transparency of item allocation. The polls revealed that while examiners' scoring behaviour and practices were not homogeneous, two major processes surfaced. In a script-based approach, they read the scripts slowly try-

ing to associate text features with checklist items on the go, and then re-read the text for items they failed to score until finished. In an item-based approach, they studied the checklist along with the supporting material provided and grouped the items, sometimes colour coding them. Some even organised the scripts into more manageable batches of 10 and then they read the scripts for a group of items moving on to a different group on completion. In terms of the workload, they all managed to complete the task in time with 62.5% claiming it was a reasonable amount of work, 25% reported tiredness, and 12.5% said it was easier than expected. For the most part, the checklist proved useful in controlling unmodelled variance, while on a few occasions raters still relied on personal judgement. This unwanted behaviour was more typical with certain scripts than with specific items. In the polls, 62.5% of the participants reported that the script and the items directed their scoring, 12.5% said that some scripts evoked their personal opinion, and 25% said that there were some items where they were reluctant to limit their opinion. Looking back at scoring, half of the examiners reported that the selection of the items into Parts 1 and 2 was evident, whereas the other half said that generally it was clear, but some items seemed to stick out. They also expressed a preference for Plan B, i.e., expert judgement based on content analysis.

Based on the results of the qualitative data from the examiners, the checklist items were arranged under the five components outlined in Checklist-based scoring. The components were colour coded so that item selection was more apparent. Plan B was accepted but adapted so that all the items in the top-down components of effect and text structure were in Part 1, and all the items in the bottom-up components of complexity and precision were in Part 2. For the sake of a balanced workload, the items of clarity were divided between the two examiners.

As a result, by means of rearranging the items, creating an overt component structure, and dividing the checklist, we managed to balance research and administration easing examiners' workload while abiding by formal requirements.

### 5.2. Diagnostic potential as positive washback

Apart from increasing transparency and accountability as well as supporting scoring validity, the reasons for introducing checklist-based scoring included its strong diagnostic potential. By breaking down the construct into precisely defined elements, we intended to utilise the checklist outside of testing. Teaching and learning a foreign language could benefit from stream-

lined assistance as long as the concepts are unambiguously expressed. From the outset, there was general consensus that the linguistic jargon needed reformulation so that teachers and students could work efficiently and independently from the test centre. In May 2022, three educational specialists identified potentially problematic lexical items in the checklists at all three levels, and recommended ways of collapsing items in order to create a useful tool for language learning and test preparation. Table 3 offers a comparison of the checklist items of the clarity component and their corresponding features of good writing. As the table shows, complex linguistic and testing terms such as 'legible', 'lexicon', or 'comprehension' were replaced with easily accessible expressions like 'easy to read', 'words', or 'understand'. Some particularly oblique words, for example 'interference' were incorporated into another item with a largely similar content to create one combined feature.

Further, relatively transparent items with fairly similar content were also collapsed so that the number of features teachers and students would have to work with was more convenient. As a result, the measurement instruments were reformulated to create useful tools for language teaching and learning at the three levels.

Table 3

*Checklist items for scoring and features for teaching and learning*

CHECKLIST ITEMS FOR SCORING	FEATURES OF GOOD WRITING FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING
<i>Item_15</i> This text is legible, i.e., the reader doesn't have to guess what the writer is trying to say.	The writing is easy to read and just as long as it should be.
<i>Item_16</i> This text is the required length as defined by the task.	
<i>Item_17</i> There is little or no irrelevant information in this text.	This text is clear with no irrelevant information.
<i>Item_18</i> This text is clear and concise.	
<i>Item_19</i> The writer can use the English lexicon to express the intended meaning instead of periphrases or non-existent terms.	The writer can use English words to send a clear message instead of complicating terms.
<i>Item_20</i> Grammatical or linguistic errors in this text do not impede comprehension.	This text may contain errors, but the reader can easily understand it.
<i>Item_21</i> There is no L1 or L3 interference that makes reading difficult.	

In order to collect empirical data on the impact of the instrument, it was important to see how the other stakeholder groups perceive test results and the evaluation they receive about writing performance. The individuals who are directly affected by the results using the checklist-based and the scale-based instrument are the learners and their teachers. Both groups received the results of the students' writing performance, and they were explained what the scores and the results mean based on the two instruments. Following that, in the interviews, we asked them how they perceive the different evaluations of the writing products to see to what extent they find these positive or negative, i.e., to see the possible washback effect of the instrument.

Based on the interviews, it became clear that the teachers were familiar with the scale-based results, and they expressed views about its summative nature. Those who preferred the scale, referred to it as 'simple' and

'easy to understand'. They recognised that it is highly 'judgemental', but they also pointed out that this is a feature they prefer, as they want to judge their students' writing performance. One teacher also highlighted that by using the scale, 'it is easier to focus on the mistakes and the shortcomings of the writing product, which is difficult to do based on the positive statements of the checklist'. As opposed to this, it became clear that other teachers realised the diagnostic potential of the checklist as they could clearly see that the checklist items were much more 'detailed' and 'precise'. Another concept that occurred often through the interviews was the transparency of the checklist, which they identified as a clear indicator of formative assessment and a positive washback effect on teaching.

The emerging key words of teachers in connection with scale-based and checklist-based results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4  
*Keywords from teacher interviews*

SCALE	CHECKLIST
familiar	innovative
ordinary	compelling
summative	formative
simple	detailed
judgemental	diagnostic
abstract	precise
vague	transparent
subjective	concrete, specific

As for the students, they were equally less familiar with both instruments, so the innovative nature of the checklist was not mentioned by any of them. Evidently, students who are at B2, and especially at C1 level, are used to receiving evaluation on their writing products, and thus they were able to tell the difference between the two results and the content of the evaluation. Based on the interviews, we identified two different learner types: those who expect test-centred development in language classes, and others who are more interested in further developing their language skills, in other words, more learning-centred. The former expressed that they preferred 'simple' and 'brief' evaluation, whereas the latter praised the 'detailed' and 'transparent' nature of the checklist. One student said that they used the checklist items to list their strengths and weaknesses,

and 'wrote up a list of areas where there is room for development'. Following these ideas, we can see that the main difference between the two student types is that those who are test-centred were only interested in their pass/fail classification and expected a critical evaluation of their mistakes based on the scale, while the learning-centred students were happy to receive instructions as to how to build on and complement their existing knowledge based on the checklist. Remarkably, the test-centred students' critical attitude towards the checklist was present in the above-mentioned teacher's comment, in which they pointed out that the checklist is not suitable for marking and listing the mistakes in the writing product. The emerging key words of students in connection with scale-based and checklist-based results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5  
Keywords from student interviews

SCALE	CHECKLIST
critical	instructive
test-centred	learning-centred
broad	finely-grained
brief	detailed
general	specific
simple	precise
crude	transparent, fair

The research phase per se was finished after the large-scale trial and empirical data collection. Based on the results report and the feedback from the different stakeholders, we concluded that the checklist was a suitable scoring tool for level testing, and its practical implementation proved its manageability. In September 2022, the exam office decided to introduce checklist-based assessment of writing papers at B1, B2 and C1 levels.

The examiners of the live examinations took part in an extensive training and benchmarking session and were provided with various materials to support their work. In addition to this, after the exam sessions, they were invited to share their feedback on their scoring experience.

Preceding the date of the live examination, we arranged an online training session for all the examiners of the writing tasks. The training was divided into four parts: (a) practical information on the online marking platform, (b) information on the traits of the instrument and presentation of additional materials, (c) controlled practice using the instrument, and finally (d) free practice.

The examiners needed information on practical issues because the exam office decided to introduce a new online platform for marking the writing papers. Although the writing test is paper-based, examiners must record their scores on an online platform, which means that they had to learn to use a new platform and find a convenient way of reading the scripts on paper but reading the items and scoring the papers online.

In the second part of the training, the examiners listened to presentations about the instruments in general, and they familiarised themselves with the additional materials we provided to support the scoring process and to enhance the common understanding of the concepts and the construct elements of the checklists. It is

important to stress that these materials, including concept check questions for each checklist item, glossaries and definitions of the key words in the checklist are not part of the instrument. We designed them to ensure the comprehension of the items and to reinforce common construct interpretation within the examiners.

The final two practical parts focused on providing the examiners with hands-on experience for using the checklists. The examiners were given writing products they had not seen before, and first they familiarised themselves with samples that had been pre-scored and displayed examples of evidence for the scores. Following this, they practised scoring previously unseen candidate performances and locating evidence for their scores. These scripts had also been pre-scored, and at the end of the training, the examiners got feedback on their scores. The examiner training was a prerequisite to act as an examiner of the live administration.

In addition to examiner training, the next step prior to the live examination was the organisation of benchmarking sessions at each level. These sessions are held before each live exam session, and their purpose is to standardise examiner scores. The focus of these sessions is finding evidence in candidate scripts and discussing and clarifying the problematic construct elements.

By way of complementing the already large amount of support materials, we decided to launch opinion polls after each live administration to enhance the examiners' insider status. The open questions of the online polls asked about the examiners' feelings about the scoring experience. The first questionnaire after the September administration targeted examiners' general impression about the scoring experience with four questions (allocated time, difficulty, attention span, quality of writing products), after that they were invited to share negative and positive feedback about the on-



line marking platform and were encouraged to express their opinion about the possibility of scoring scanned writing products. The second poll after the October administration had 10 questions which tried to tap on examiners' growing, and possibly changing experience with using the instrument, and also asked for suggestions in connection with possible improvement of the scoring routine.

Interestingly, the examiners have completely different feelings about the scoring experience. Nevertheless, they all expressed positive feelings towards the checklist, and they all prefer the new instrument to scale-based scoring. Their comments vary to a great extent in connection with the allocated time and difficulty, the aspects they seem to agree on are the manageability of the amount of work and meeting the deadlines. As for future changes, and the possibility of improvement, they agree that swapping paper-based batches is a huge burden, and they look forward to scoring scanned

scripts online, but they also expressed their concerns about the quality of scanning and the possible illegibility of digitalised handwriting.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This research reported on the practical implementation of a checklist-based scoring system of the Writing Paper of a high-stakes international proficiency examination in English. The essence of the applied linguistic problem the study aimed to respond to was captured in the complex tensions between professional rigour, the administrative framework, available resources, and evolving stakeholder needs. The result was a necessary compromise that eventually ameliorated the initial conflicting interests. With some flexibility, we were able to ease examiners' workload by dividing the checklist, meet time and financial constraints, and provide a useful tool of diagnostic information with a strong formative potential for language teachers and students.

## References

- Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. D. (1996). *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests*. Oxford University Press.
- Brown, D. H., & Abeywickrama, P. (2019). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices* (3rd ed.). Pearson.
- Cheng, L. (2004). The washback effect of a public examination change on teachers' perceptions toward their classroom teaching. In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe, & A. Curtis (Eds.), *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods* (pp. 147-170). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cohen, A. (1994). *Assessing language ability in the classroom*. Heinle & Heinle.
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- East, M. (2009). Evaluating the reliability of a detailed analytic scoring rubric for foreign language writing. *Assessing Writing*, 14, 88-115. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2009.04.001>
- Eckes, T. (2008). Rater types in writing performance assessments: A classification approach to rater variability. *Language Testing*, 25(2), 155-185. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265532207086780>
- Fűkűh, B. (2020). *Establishing the context and scoring validity of the writing tasks of Institution's English for academic purposes test* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Szeged.
- Fulcher, G. (2010). *Practical language testing*. Hodder Education.
- Fulcher, G., Davidson, F., & Kemp, J. (2011). Effective rating scale development for speaking tests: Performance decision trees. *Language Testing*, 28(1), 5-29.
- Glen, S. (2021). Cronbach's alpha: Simple definition, use and interpretation. *StatisticsHowTo.com*. <https://www.statisticshowto.com/probability-and-statistics/statistics-definitions/cronbachs-alpha-spss>
- Goodman, D. P., & Hambleton, R. K. (2004). Student test score reports and interpretive guides: Review of current practices and suggestions for future research. *Applied Measurement in Education*, 17(2), 145-220. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15324818ame1702\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15324818ame1702_3)
- Grishechko, O. S., Akopova, A. S., & Grishechko, E. G. (2015). English linguistic purism: History, development, criticism. *Proceedings of Southern Federal University. Philology*, 4, 185-192. <https://dx.doi.org/10.18522/1995-0640-2015-4-185-192>

- Hambleton, R. K., & Meara, K. (2000). Newspaper coverage of NAEP results, 1990 to 1998. In M. L. Bourque & S. Byrd (Eds.), *Student performance standards on the national assessment of educational progress: Affirmation and improvements* (pp. 133-155). National Assessment Governing Board.
- Hambleton, R. K., & Pitoniak, M. (2006). Setting performance standards. In R. L. Brennan (Ed.), *Educational measurement* (pp. 433-470). American Council on Education and Praeger Publishing Group.
- Hamp-Lyons, L. (1990). Second language writing: Assessment issues. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Second language writing: Research insights from the classroom* (pp. 69-87). Cambridge University Press.
- Hamp-Lyons, L. (2007). Worrying about rating. *Assessing Writing*, 12, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2007.05.002>
- Harsch, C. & Martin, G. (2012). Adapting CEF-descriptors for rating purposes: Validation by a combined rater training and scale revision approach. *Assessing Writing*, 17, 228-250. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2012.06.003>
- Harsch, C. & Rupp, A. A. (2011). Designing and scaling level-specific writing tasks in alignment with the CEFR: A test-centered approach. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 8(1), 1-33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15434303.2010.535575>
- Inoue, C., Khabbazzashi, N., Lam, D. & Nakatsuhara, F. (2021). *Towards new avenues for the IELTS Speaking Test: Insights from examiners' voices*. British Council, Cambridge Assessment English and International Development Program. <https://www.ielts.org/teaching-and-research/research-reports>
- Kim, Y.-H. (2010). *An argument-based validity inquiry into the Empirically-derived Descriptor-based Diagnostic (EDD) assessment in ESL academic writing* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Toronto.
- Kim, Y.-H. (2011). Diagnosing EAP writing ability using the Reduced Reparameterized Unified Model. *Language Testing*, 28(4), 509-541. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265532211400860>
- Ling, G., Mollaun, P., & Xi, X. (2014). A study on the impact of fatigue on human raters when scoring speaking responses. *Language Testing*, 31(4), 479-499. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265532214530699>
- Lukácsi, Z. (2021). Developing a level-specific checklist for assessing EFL writing. *Language Testing*, 38(1), 86-105. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265532220916703>
- Lumley, T. (2002). Assessment criteria in a large-scale writing test: What do they really mean to the raters? *Language Testing*, 19(4), 246-276. <https://doi.org/10.1191/0265532202lt230oa>
- McNamara, T, Hill, K., & May, L. (2002). Discourse and assessment. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 22, 221-242. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190502000120>
- Mousavi, S. A. (2009). *An encyclopedic dictionary of language testing* (4th ed.). Rahnama Press.
- Rossi, O., & Brunfaut, T. (2020). Raters of Subjectively-Scored Tests. In J. I. Liontas (Ed.), *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching* (pp. 1-7). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0985>
- Rouet, J-F. (2012, June 2). *Reading skills in the information age: Cognitive processes and implications for assessment* [Paper presentation]. 9th EALTA Conference, Innsbruck, Austria.
- Ryan, J. M. (2006). Practices, issues, and trends in student test score reporting. In S. M. Downing & T. M. Haladyna (Eds.), *Handbook of test development* (pp. 677-710). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Struthers, L., Lapadat, J. C., & MacMillan, P. D. (2013). Assessing cohesion in children's writing: Development of a checklist. *Assessing Writing*, 18, 187-201. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2013.05.001>
- Taylor, L. (2005). Washback and impact. *ELT Journal*, 59(2), 154-155. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/eltj/cci030>
- Van Moere, A. (2013). Raters and ratings. In A. J. Kunnan (Ed.), *The companion to language assessment* (pp.1358-1374). John Wiley and Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118411360.wb-cla106>
- Verhelst, N. D. (2004). Item response theory. In S. Takala (Ed.), *Reference supplement to the manual for relating language examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (Section G). Council of Europe.
- Voigt, K., & Tsagari, D. (2014). Assessment literacy of foreign language teachers: Findings of a European study. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 11(4), 374-402.

- Wainer, H., Hambleton, R. K., & Meara, K. (1999). Alternative displays for communicating NAEP results: A redesign and validity study. *Journal of Educational Measurement*, 36(4), 301-335.
- Weigle, S. C. (1994). Effects of training on raters of ESL compositions. *Language Testing*, 11(2), 197-223. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026553229401100206>
- Weigle, S. C. (1998). Using FACETS to model rater training effects. *Language Testing*, 15(2), 253-287. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026553229801500205>
- Weigle, S. C. (2002). *Assessing writing*. CUP.
- Wigglesworth, G. (1993). Exploring bias analysis as a tool for improving rater consistency in assessing oral interaction. *Language Testing*, 10(3), 305-319. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026553229301000306>
- Zenisky, A. L., & Hambleton, R. K. (2012). Developing test score reports that work: The process and best practices for effective communication. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 31(2), 21-26.
- Zenisky, A. L., Hambleton, R. K., & Sireci, S. G. (2009). Getting the message out: An evaluation of NAEP score reporting practices with implications for disseminating test results. *Applied Measurement in Education*, 22(4), 359-375. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08957340903221667>
- Zhuk N. V., & Ivanov V. D. (2022). The combination of question and exclamation marks (!?) in some emotive types of statements (based on the material of the German language). *Bulletin of the Moscow Region State University. Series: Linguistics*, 6, 101-108. <https://dx.doi.org/10.18384/2310-712x-2022-6-101-108>

ZOLTÁN LUKÁCSI

Euroexam International, Hungary [zoltan.lukacsi@euroexam.org](mailto:zoltan.lukacsi@euroexam.org)

BORBÁLA FŰKÖH

Euroexam International, Hungary [fukoh.borbala@euroexam.org](mailto:fukoh.borbala@euroexam.org)

# Original Research

## Programme Learning Outcomes (PLO) as a measure for academic success in postgraduate studies: A case study of a Malaysian Higher Learning Institution

by Izzah Ismail and Rohani Othman

**Izzah Ismail** Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia [izzahismaill@gmail.com](mailto:izzahismaill@gmail.com)

**Rohani Othman** Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia [rohanothman@utm.my](mailto:rohanothman@utm.my)

**Article history** Received September 13, 2022 | Revised February 20, 2023 | Accepted March 6, 2023

**Conflicts of interest** The authors declared no conflicts of interest

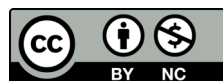
**Research funding** The research is supported by UTM Encouragement Research (UTM ER) Grant Scheme

**doi** 10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1-21-39

**For citation** Ismail, I., & Othman, R. (2023). Programme Learning Outcomes (PLO) as a measure for academic success in postgraduate studies: A case study of a Malaysian Higher Learning Institution. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(1), 21-39.

All Malaysian higher learning institutions (HLIs) must abide by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). MQA is an essential organisation established by the government to endorse and review the public and private HLIs curriculum. The accreditation complies with the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF). There are three levels of outcomes in MQF. Programme Educational Outcomes (PEO) is the umbrella of Programme Learning Outcomes (PLO) and Course Learning Outcomes (CLO). The scope of this paper only focuses on PLO. The PLO based on MQF under MQA is used to determine Malaysian tertiary level students' academic success. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) has outlined eleven PLOs to measure academic success in its postgraduate studies. The PLOs are enacted through Outcome-Based Education (OBE) throughout the entire course of study. Hence, this paper seeks to investigate the level of attainment of the eleven PLOs among one hundred international postgraduate students at UTM. This paper involves one phase of explanatory sequential design using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire to achieve the aim. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to disclose the percentage, mean scores and frequency of the forty-three items in the questionnaire. It is revealed that the students possessed a high level of attainment of the eleven PLOs, which resulted in attaining academic success. It is anticipated that resuming data collection and analysis from other sources will elucidate how students can attain a high level of attainment of the eleven PLOs.

**KEYWORDS:** academic success, higher education, outcome-based education, postgraduate students, programme learning outcomes



This is an open access article distributed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (CC BY-NC 4.0), which allows its unrestricted use for non-commercial purposes, subject to attribution. The material can be shared/adapted for non-commercial purposes if you give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As we are now living in the era of internationalisation, where not only businesses and cultures, but education too is not limited to domestic compounds (Ismail

& Othman, 2020), higher education is currently in high demand across the globe. The mobility of international students can be profitable for the students, their motherland, country of destination and those staying at home.



*'Most international students are aware of a strong bond between their experience studying abroad and their amplified academic success. Primarily, students recognise that going abroad will reach maturity faster and is the vital key to improving their life and career'*

Attractive host countries have excellent quality courses delivered in English, produce immense returns on skills, possess stable economic development, and expand labour markets (Chevalier, 2014). Various advantages can be gained when students pursue their studies abroad, especially tertiary level students. Due to that, parents, governments, organisations, and even the international students themselves are investing a large amount of money so that these students can pursue their studies abroad to gain rewarding experiences.

In higher learning institutions (HLIs), students' academic success is the dealbreaker for evaluating the excellence of the educational institutions. Most international students are aware of a strong bond between their experience studying abroad and their amplified academic success. Primarily, students recognise that going abroad will reach maturity faster and is the vital key to improving their life and career. York et al. (2015) depict academic success as the combination of academic achievement, satisfaction, acquirement of necessary skills and readiness, diligence, attainment of educational goals and post-tertiary performance. Singh (2016) describes that the percentage of international students furthering their studies in Malaysia rises yearly. The main intention of these students opting for Malaysia as their study hub is to upgrade their qualifications academically, specifically at the graduate level.

Jeyaraj (2018) claims that research at postgraduate levels *'involves the production of a thesis and there is a rather substantial body of literature that indicates students experience difficulties writing in this genre'* (Jeyaraj, 2018, p. 22). Even the public perceives academic writing as an issue. To attain thesis completion and academic success requires this vital and critical skill. Therefore, students are expected to acquire *'mastery in the conventions of academic writing in English so that they can meet the demands of their postgraduate studies'* (Jeyaraj, 2018, p. 22). Thus, it is essential for these students to gain mastery of the related skills and components as well as equip themselves with the needs and preparation to survive their postgraduate studies.

The students will be allowed to enrol in their respective faculties after fulfilling the entry requirement of the UTM School of Post-Graduate Studies. At the faculty level, they will be academically assessed through assignments, presentations, tests, examinations, dissertations, and thesis papers that require them to hand in their progress every semester. All efforts and progress will be reflected through their grade point average (GPA), cumulative grade point average (CGPA) and progress report grade for those who enrol as full-time research students at the end of every semester. The achievement and success of postgraduate students will be based on UTM's eleven programme learning outcomes (PLOs).

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The eleven outcomes are used to determine Malaysian tertiary level students' academic success through the implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) throughout the entire study courses or programmes. Malaysian HLIs must implement OBE as specified by the MQF for the courses and HLIs to be accredited by the MQA (Othman & Abdullah, 2019). The system has been incorporated in both public and private HLIs since 2005 (Abdullah, 2015). According to Rao (2020), OBE was first initiated by William Spady in the 1990s, particularly for the American education system. Eventually, OBE became well known and is being used by the tertiary education system switching the emphasis on what is learned instead of what is taught. OBE is a method of teaching that emphasises the attainment of learning outcomes that students should acquire at the end of the programme or level of qualification. The purpose of OBE is to assist learners in obtaining learning anticipation and to make sure that learners' progress and achievement are evaluated objectively (Abdullah, 2015; Damit et al., 2021; Kaliannan & Chandran, 2012; Rao, 2020; Sun & Lee, 2020; Othman & Abdullah, 2020).

Additionally, Rao (2020) finds that OBE, based on outcomes, gives precedence to end results, achievements, and purposes. In short, OBE has shifted the traditional education system into a fresh perspective that inclines towards students' autonomy. Taib et al. (2017) describe the OBE development as based on these three main parts – Programme Educational Outcomes (PEO), Programme Learning Outcomes (PLO), and Course Learning Outcomes (CLO). Table 1 below illustrates the definition of these three main parts in OBE as defined by Abdullah (2015).

Table 1  
*The definitions of PEO, PLO and CLO*

PROGRAMME EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES (PEO)	PROGRAMME LEARNING OUTCOMES (PLO)	COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES (CLO)
An extensive statement details how learners should possess and be capable of demonstrating the skills taught in the programme years after graduating. The skills mentioned are related to these three areas; cognitive (knowledge), affective (behaviour and soft skills) and psychomotor skills.	A specific statement that explains what learners are required to know and are able to demonstrate by the time of graduation. These involve the knowledge, attitudes and skills that learners gain in each level of qualification.	A more specific statement concerning what learners are expected to gain and attain at the end of the course/ programme.

At the tertiary level, learning outcomes are the description of what a learner should grasp, demonstrate and establish upon programmes or courses completion (Aithal & Kumar, 2016). It can also be regarded as the preferred result of the learning process concerning the attainment of knowledge and skills. The focal notion of these learning outcomes should be schemed based on the mastery learners are meant to develop and expand, not on the lessons' contents that educators plan to teach (Erikson & Erikson, 2019). Overall, learning outcomes are important to determine students' achievement and progress and simultaneously act as a determiner to measure HLIs success.

The tertiary education system in Malaysia is administered by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) (Sun & Lee, 2020). It is an essential organisation established by the government to endorse and review the public and private HLIs' curriculum to make certain that the courses offered are of a certain standard to uphold parents' involvement in funding their children's studies apart from ensuring the development and monitoring of the programmes to produce outstanding graduates for the workforce in the real world. The accreditation complies with the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF). MQF was established in 2007 upon the union decisions by all stakeholders. It is the nation's proclamation of its qualifications and standards in connection with its education system. According to the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQF, 2017), the MQA Act 2007 posits MQF as a comprehensive framework for all tertiary level qualifications, with a group of aims to be carried out and serviced by MQA. This framework is development-aligned and empowered by overarching government policies and regulations, substantively mandated for MQA, its stakeholders and in affiliation with HLIs and training academies.

This framework is fundamental to the quality assurance practice of MQA. Also, the framework is a tool that develops and groups qualifications based on a series of criteria that are consented to and guided by international practices and elucidate the acquired academic levels, learning outcomes, and academic commitment at each academic level. Other than that, the course design, learning aims and outcomes, teaching and learning methodologies, assessment techniques and approaches, delivery system, resources for support, including refinement and betterment involving the teaching and learning process, are incorporated in the quality assurance checklist. Hence, for HLIs' study programmes to get accredited by MQA, they need to meet both MQF and MQA criteria. As a whole, MQA aims to supervise the quality assurance implementation in Malaysian HLIs.

Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF, 2020) indicates that MQF is referred to and created against other global qualifications frameworks, namely in Europe, New Zealand, Australia, and England. The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQF, 2017) also adds that MQA obtained recognition through certification for its alignment to the INQAAHE Guideline to Good Practices for Quality Assurance in Higher Education from the year 2013 until 2019. Moreover, the ASEAN and several European peer reviewers have given positive views related to the accreditation as MQA is at a high degree of compliance with the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework.

It is important to note that Malaysia HLIs are committed to improving their position in world university rankings, thus necessitating the implementation of academic standards and guidelines that are applied worldwide. It is worth mentioning that the core strength of MQF is the strong connection with its stakeholders,

aligned national policies and fundamentally driven by MQA, its approaches and international partners for the development and improvement of the framework. The framework has eight levels of qualifications. Level 1 to Level 6 is undergraduate levels of qualifications, while the final two concentrate on the postgraduate levels of qualifications. The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQF, 2017) describes the two levels as follows.

Level 7 – Master’s Degree or Postgraduate Certificate. There are three types of qualifications at this level.

A. Master’s Degree is one level above a bachelor’s degree. Typically, students would pursue a similar area of study as the knowledge at this level is more extensive and in-depth. There are three modes of study for a master’s degree. It can be course work mode, mixed (course work and research) and research-based mode. For coursework and mixed mode, the study duration is usually one year, while research mode usually takes up two years. Students are evaluated through dissertations, thesis papers, presentations, and reports. This certification ‘*demonstrates an in-depth, and significant advanced specialised theoretical or applied knowledge, which is current and with some at the forefront of a specific field of study or with inter/multi-disciplinary approach; or professional practice*’ (MQF, 2017, p. 25). Other than that, students ‘*demonstrate critical, evaluative and cognitive skills, and applied research skills or advanced professional practice to solve complex issues and problems with reasonable degree of originality and independence*’ (MQF, 2017, p. 25). The following two qualifications are specifically for students who have graduated from bachelor’s courses or equivalent. Both certifications permit students to gain and expand the knowledge skills developed in their bachelor’s course with the intention of pursuing further study or career development.

B. Postgraduate Certificate normally entails students completing one semester of study.

C. Postgraduate Diploma duration is between nine months to one year of full-time study.

Level 8 – Doctoral Degree or PhD. This is the highest level of qualification in the framework. The minimum duration of study is three years for full-time students. Typically, a master’s degree qualification is required to enrol in the PhD programme. PhD is the title for those who enrol in a research programme, whilst Doctoral Degree is for those in the coursework and mixed modes. Dissertation or thesis papers in a particular field of study are the output of this certification. At this level, students are required to ‘*demonstrate innova-*

*tive and advanced research skills, critical reflections, and competent to conceptualise, design and implement projects*’ (MQF, 2017, p. 27). Furthermore, ‘*it involves substantial, advanced, independent and original research and scholarship in a most advanced area of knowledge and emerging issues of a specific area of study in a discipline or multidiscipline, assessed against international standards*’ (MQF, 2017, p. 27).

There are two versions of learning outcomes established by the MQF. Version 1.0 has eight learning outcomes (MQF, 2020; UTAR Guidelines, 2016; Othman & Abdullah, 2019), while version 2.0 is developed based on the learning outcomes of version 1.0. However, it still maintains the fundamentals of the previous version. As stated by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQF, 2017), the purpose of building on a new version of the existing outcome is to improve, reinforce and tackle the ‘*developing needs, access, responsiveness, emerging skills or knowledge needs and coherency within the higher education and TVET sector*’ (MQF, 2017, p. 3). Hence, it behoves the MQA panels to update the framework after over ten years of its implementation in the higher education system to ensure its applicability and appropriateness. The newest version was approved in 2017 by the MQA Council Meeting (Ministry of Higher Education, 2021). Table 2 below displays version 1.0 and version 2.0 of the framework.

The Malaysian Qualifications Agency reasons that the revised outcomes resonate and mainly coordinate ‘*aspirations of the National Education Philosophy, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 as well as the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education)*’ (MQF, 2017, p. 14). Version 2.0 of MQF has been clustered, re-outlined and maintained. Thus, the new version stays relevant and internationally comparable.

In line with UTM’s mission to lead in the development of holistic talents and innovative technologies for universal well-being and prosperity, and the four core values – integrity, synergy, excellence and sustainability – the institution has outlined eleven PLOs as the measurement of academic success in postgraduate studies.

For students to achieve academic success, they need to be able to fulfil and acquire all PLOs as follows:

- PLO1 – Knowledge and Understanding (KW);
- PLO2 – Cognitive Skills (CG);
- PLO3 – Practical Skills (PS);
- PLO4 – Interpersonal Skills (IPS);
- PLO5 – Communication Skills (CS);

Table 2  
*The Malaysian Qualifications Framework of version 1.0 and version 2.0 Learning Outcomes*

THE FIVE CLUSTERS	VERSION 1.0	VERSION 2.0
Knowledge	(PLO1) Knowledge	(PLO1) Knowledge and
Cognitive Competency	(PLO2) Problem Solving and Scientific Skills	(PLO 2) Cognitive Skills
Functional Work Skills	(PLO3) Practical skills	(PLO3) Practical Skills
	(PLO4) Communication, Leadership and Team Skills	(PLO4) Interpersonal Skills
	(PLO5) Social Skills and Responsibilities	(PLO5) Communication Skills
	(PLO6) Value, Attitudes and Professionalism	(PLO6) Digital Skills
	(PLO7) Managerial and Entrepreneurship Skills	(PLO7) Numeracy Skills
Personal and Entrepreneurial Skills	(PLO8) Information Management and Lifelong Learning Skills	(PLO8) Leadership, Autonomy and Responsibility
		(PLO9) Personal Skills
		(PLO10) Entrepreneurial Skills
Ethics and Professionalism		(PLO11) Ethics and Professionalism Skills

PLO6 – Digital Skills (DS);  
 PLO7 – Numeracy Skills (NS);  
 PLO8 – Leadership, Autonomy and Responsibility (LAR);  
 PLO9 – Personal Skills (PS);  
 PLO10 – Entrepreneurial Skills (ENT);  
 PLO11 – Ethics and Professionalism skills (ETS).

With that in mind, this paper aims to investigate the level of attainment of the eleven PLOs among international postgraduate students at UTM. To that end, the researcher has conducted a preliminary study involving only one phase of a three-phase explanatory sequential analysis of a very extensive study on eleven international postgraduate students in UTM.

**3. METHODOLOGY**

This study aims to investigate the level of attainment of the eleven PLOs among international postgraduate students at UTM. The data gathered will verify and address the issue of this study. This is a preliminary study of a whole project which entails a very extensive study. For this paper, the researcher will do a preliminary study that encompasses only the quantitative aspect of the project. Hence, a quantitative research de-

sign will be employed to accomplish the study's objectives. According to Kowalczyk (2016), by implementing the quantitative method, researchers can utilise advanced and established statistical tests to guarantee that the outcomes have a statistical connection since this approach uses numbers to interpret findings. Powoh (2016) adds that in this research design, close-ended questions are used, and the researchers play no role in the research instruments. The benefits of this research approach are that it deduces conclusions for many people, and it is not time-consuming (Eyisi, 2016).

For the context of this study, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) has made it compulsory for its potential international postgraduate students to take one of the standardised English language proficiency tests such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) aligned tests; B2 First by Cambridge English Qualification (CEQ) or Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE Academic) or the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or programme like the ELS Certified Intensive English Programme (CIEP), to determine their English proficiency level and admission status. It is believed that making international students sit for either



one of the tests as the entry requirement could be the first step in preparing them to embark on their postgraduate studies as they are required to conduct research, produce papers, develop new skills and knowledge through their research work if they enrol as mixed mode or full research students.

Hence, purposive sampling will be employed to select the target participants as the researcher has a fixed purpose in mind. Alvi (2016) implies that this technique is beneficial to researchers as it is extremely economical and time effective since the criteria of the participants have been predetermined. Therefore, 100 international postgraduate students who have enrolled and completed one of these English preparatory courses: IEP CEFR, IEP IELTS, EPG conducted by Language Academy, UTM and are currently active status

students pursuing their master’s degree (Level 7 in MQF) or doctoral degree (Level 8 in MQF) in UTM have been selected as intended participants in this study.

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire consisting of forty-three items involving the eleven PLOs and their subdivisions will be utilised as the instrument of the study. The can-do statement questionnaire allows students to evaluate and review their experience and acquired knowledge of the eleven PLOs.

In sum, the questionnaire provides a comprehensive final evaluation of the eleven PLOs concerning students’ level of attainment to achieve academic success in their postgraduate studies.

Table 3 illustrates the breakdown of eleven PLOs with their subdivisions.

Table 3  
*The breakdown of eleven PLOs with their subdivisions*

PROGRAMME LEARNING OUTCOMES (PLO)	NUMBER OF SUBDIVISIONS
PLO1 Knowledge and Understanding (KW)	5
PLO2 Cognitive Skills (CG)	3
PLO3 Practical Skills (PS)	3
PLO4 Interpersonal Skills (IPS)	3
PLO5 Communication Skills (CS)	4
PLO6 Digital Skills (DS)	3
PLO7 Numerical Skills (NS)	4
PLO8 Leadership, Autonomy and Responsibility	7
PLO9 Personal Skills (PRS)	5
PLO10 Entrepreneurial Skills (ENT)	2
PLO11 Ethics and Professionalism	4
Total	43

The participants were given the flexibility of time to complete the questionnaire within a week of receiving it. Each PLO was analysed based on its subdivisions using descriptive statistics through SPSS for Mac-Version 27 to disclose the percentage, mean scores, and frequency. The findings were then used to summarise and describe the level of attainment of the eleven PLOs amongst the participants. The Likert scale utilised was

ranked from 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The average value of the scale would be 3 = Somewhat Agree. The obtained mean value above the average value of 3.67, displaying the participants had a high level or good strength of attainment of the eleven PLOs in their postgraduate studies. The rank is classed as follows (Table 4).

Table 4  
*Rank interpretation of results*

THE RANGE OF RESULTS	INTERPRETATION OF THE RANGE
1 to 2.33	Low or Developmental Area
2.34 to 3.66	Moderate or Adequate Effectiveness
3.67 to 5.00	High or Good Strength

#### 4. STUDY AND RESULTS

The Cronbach’s Alpha was employed to ensure the reliability of the instruments. The result based on the test for this study is 0.936 for 43 items. This concludes that the questionnaire was reliable and should be considered an acceptable and appropriate instrument for this study. Table 5 demonstrated the level of qualifications and the mode of study of the participants ( $N = 100$ ) in the pilot study.

Most participants (36.0%) are currently pursuing their studies in the doctoral degree through a research-based mode of study ( $N = 36$ ). 33.0% enrolling in UTM

as master’s degree students in coursework ( $N = 33$ ). Another 24.0% are the master’s degree in mixed mode students ( $N = 24$ ), and only 7.0%, equivalent to seven participants, are from the master’s degree in full research mode. These several levels of qualifications and mode of study are suitable indicators of students’ level of attainment of the eleven PLOs as different students will have various views and indications of the instrument’s content.

Table 6 presented the data gathered for PLO1 – Knowledge and Understanding (KW). There are five subdivisions of PLO1.

Table 5  
*The level of qualifications and mode of study*

LEVEL OF QUALIFICATIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
PhD Full Research	36	36.0%
Masters Full Research	7	7.0%
Master Mixed Mode	24	24.0%
Master Course Work	33	33.0%
Total	100	100.0%

The five subdivisions of PLO1 comprise the statements on how well the participants understand and acknowledge the overall checklists of their level of qualifications. KW1 with the mean score of  $M = 4.61$  indicates that students are in the good strength of understanding in the academic aspects concerning related works and assessments in their level of qualifications as most participants (57.0%) ranked 4 = Agree to the first aspect of PLO1. As for KW2 with the mean score of  $M = 4.53$ , the majority (64.0%) ranked 5 = Strongly Agree implying that students are attentive to the entry requirement and other requirements that need to be fulfilled by them for the students to be eligible for the certifications. KW3 focuses on the aspect of Grade Point Average (GPA), Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) for

coursework students and progress reports grades for mixed mode and full research students as the determiner of students’ performance in their postgraduate studies. A mean score of  $M = 4.53$  with the majority ranked 5 = Strongly Agree demonstrates that students reckon that their results indeed act as an indicator of their academic performance. The next aspect, KW4 is with regards to students’ skills to demonstrate their knowledge following the aims of the postgraduate course. A mean score of  $M = 4.53$  shows that all students can use their knowledge and they are familiar with their course outcomes. Finally, KW5 emphasises the aspect of students being able to present their postgraduate and research work in the form of presentations, explaining and expressing their ideas and

thoughts to supervisors or peers, fluently and smoothly. 49.0% of students with a mean score of  $M = 4.45$  strongly agree that they are capable of presenting their work coherently. This indicates that students are committed to their work. Those in the 4.0%, who ranked 3 = Somewhat Agree probably need an extra push for them to be confident in their work. Moderate motivational messages from teachers will improve the self-efficacy of students. One of the most important influences

that encourages learners in continuing their great efforts in the journey of learning is self-efficacy (Law & Che Hassan, 2015).

Overall, it can be concluded that students have attained a high level of attainment in the five subdivisions of PLO1, since these students have attended and completed the preparatory courses that equipped them with the necessary skills to survive their postgraduate studies.

Table 6

*The five subdivisions of PLO1 – Knowledge and Understanding (KW)*

SCALE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN SCORE
KW1: I am well versed in my academic aspects such as assignments and research areas			
3 = Somewhat Agree	7	7.0%	4.29
4 = Agree	57	57.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	36	36.0%	
KW2: I acknowledged that I need to meet the UTM entry requirement and fulfil UTM postgraduate requirement in order to complete my postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	3	3.0%	4.61
4 = Agree	33	33.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	64	64.0%	
KW3: I am aware that my results are the indicator/determiner of my competency in postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	1	1.0%	4.53
4 = Agree	45	45.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	54	54.0%	
KW4: I am able to demonstrate my postgraduate knowledge in accordance with the objectives of my postgraduate programme			
3 = Somewhat Agree	1	1.0%	4.53
4 = Agree	45	45.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	54	54.0%	
KW5: I am able to present my postgraduate work, coherently, whenever required			
3 = Somewhat Agree	4	4.0%	4.45
4 = Agree	47	47.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	49	49.0%	

Table 7  
The three subdivisions of PLO2 – Cognitive Skills (CG)

SCALE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN SCORE
CG1: I have a clear understanding of the acquired knowledge and information delivered during my postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	5	5.0%	4.48
4 = Agree	42	42.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	53	53.0%	
CG2: I am capable of finding relevant and latest literature, studies and references related to my postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	3	3.0%	4.52
4 = Agree	42	42.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	55	55.0%	
CG3: I am able to think critically and systematically during the process of teaching and learning			
3 = Somewhat Agree	6	6.0%	4.37
4 = Agree	51	51.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	43	43.0%	

The three subdivisions of PLO2 constitute students' thinking ability, the skills to expand the newly added knowledge and skills to search and gain new information regarding related context and area of study. CG1, with a mean score of  $M = 4.48$ , proves that students of Level 7 and 8 of MQF in UTM can stay focused and concentrate during the teaching and learning process as only 5.0% of them ranked the aspect 3 = Somewhat Agree which is still considered as a positive attitude. The second aspect of CG2 focuses on students' ability to find resources for their postgraduate studies. A mean score of  $M = 4.52$  indicates that most students are willing and enthusiastic to give extra effort in their studies and do not always depend on their lecturers and supervisors to spoon-feed them with relevant information and resources. The final aspect of PLO2 is laid out in CG3. With the majority of 51.0% ranked 4 = Agree and a mean score of  $M = 4.37$ , it conveys that students possess a high level of cognitive engagement as they can think critically and orderly during the process of learning acquisition. It is interesting to note that students attained a high level of attainment for all the subdivisions of PLO2. Therefore, it can be gathered that students have a keen interest in their postgraduate studies. Kpolovie et al. 2014 highlight that interest is a notion of

being enthralled, attracted, captivated and invigorated 'to cognitively process information much faster and more accurately in addition to the most effective application of psycho motor traits like self-regulatory skills, self-discipline, working harder and smarter with optimum persistence' (Kpolovie et al., 2014, p. 75).

The three subdivisions of PLO3 surround students' practical skills and how they implement them in their postgraduate studies. PS1 focuses on students' acquired skills to succeed in their postgraduate studies. With a mean score of  $M = 4.35$ , only six students (6.0%) ranked 3 = Somewhat Agree. The other fifty-three students (53.0%) ranked 4 = Agree, and forty-one students (41.0%) ranked 5 = Strongly Agree are competent and possess a high level of confidence in attaining academic success. Meanwhile, PS2 emphasises students' ability to work on their tasks with minimal supervision from lecturers and mentors. With a mean score of 4.17, three students (3.0%) reveal that they require constant supervision. In contrast, another thirteen students (13.0%) sometimes require their supervisors' and lecturers' attention to complete their tasks. The remaining students (48.0%) ranked 4 = Agree and another 36.0% ranked 5 = Strongly Agree have a high tendency to sort things out by themselves regardless of the aspects and possibly



Table 8  
*The three subdivisions of PLO3 – Practical Skills (PS)*

SCALE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN SCORE
PS1: I have the required skills and knowledge to excel in my postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	6	6.0%	4.35
4 = Agree	53	53.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	41	41.0%	
PS2: I can complete my work with minimal supervision from lecturers/supervisors			
2 = Disagree	3	3.0%	4.17
3 = Somewhat Agree	13	13.0%	
4 = Agree	48	48.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	36	36.0%	
PS3: I frequently make use of appropriate skills to complete my work (e.g., research skills to assess and gather relevant articles)			
3 = Somewhat Agree	6	6.0%	4.47
4 = Agree	41	41.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	53	53.0%	

Table 9  
*The three subdivisions of PLO4 – Interpersonal Skills (IPS)*

SCALE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN SCORE
IPS1: I am determined to attain academic success in my postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	3	3.0%	4.62
4 = Agree	32	32.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	65	65.0%	
IPS2: I am interested in attending workshops, conferences, talks and seminars to widen my knowledge and network			
3 = Somewhat Agree	3	3.0%	4.67
4 = Agree	27	27.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	70	70.0%	
IPS3: I am willing to take extra measures for the betterment of my postgraduate studies (e.g., publish articles, study abroad)			
3 = Somewhat Agree	3	3.0%	4.64
4 = Agree	30	30.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	67	67.0%	

have been trained to work independently. PS3 emphasises the incorporation of relevant skills to finish the tasks given. With a mean score of  $M = 4.47$ , six students (6.0%) ranked this final aspect in PLO3 3 = Somewhat Agree while the other forty-one students (41.0%) ranked 4 = Agree and most students (53.0%) ranked the highest scale. Those who ranked somewhat agree are probably the coursework and mixed mode students as the statement specifies research skills used to collect relevant articles. Overall, it can be seen that students possessed a high level of attainment in all subdivisions of PLO3.

There are three subdivisions of PLO4 that centres on interpersonal skills where students use their initiative to make their postgraduate studies interesting and fulfilling. IPS1 focuses on the students' determination to succeed academically in their postgraduate studies. A

mean score of  $M = 4.62$  indicates these international students have the will to complete their studies. In IPS2, students are asked about their willingness to attend seminars, conferences and other talks to broaden their social networking and knowledge. Scoring a mean of  $M = 4.67$ , most students (70.0%) express their readiness to participate in academic workshops and seminars. Other than broadening their perspectives on education, attending these talks can also assist them in improving their English language. The final aspect of PLO4 is stated in IPS3. With a mean score of  $M = 4.64$ , it appears that students are willing to take extra measures for a better progression in their postgraduate studies. All in all, students have achieved a good strength of attainment for all subdivisions in PLO4. This may be influenced by the motivation that they instilled within themselves to optimise their performance in their studies.

Table 10  
The four subdivisions of PLO5 – Communication Skills (CS)

SCALE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN SCORE
CS1: I possess good spoken and written communication skills			
3 = Somewhat Agree	10	10.0%	4.26
4 = Agree	54	54.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	36	36.0%	
CS2: I can articulate my ideas and opinions, coherently in spoken and/or written form			
3 = Somewhat Agree	9	9.0%	4.26
4 = Agree	56	56.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	35	35.0%	
CS3: I know how to simplify things to make them understandable			
3 = Somewhat Agree	5	5.0%	4.43
4 = Agree	47	47.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	48	48.0%	
CS4: I know how to arrange my words, orderly and systematically in spoken and/or written form			
3 = Somewhat Agree	9	9.0%	4.25
4 = Agree	57	57.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	34	34.0%	

PLO5 consists of four subdivisions that concern the possession of good communication skills, in speaking and/or writing. CS1 focuses on acquired speaking and writing skills. Most of the students (54.0) ranked 4 = Agree indicate that students have high confidence in communicating and writing in English as the UTM means of instruction is English. It is shown that the mean score of this subdivision is  $M = 4.26$ . CS2 focuses on the idea of coherently expressing and sharing thoughts and ideas in oral and written form. With a mean score of  $M = 4.26$ , and only nine students (9.0%) ranked 3 = Somewhat Agree, it indicates that the rest of the participants can effectively present their ideas and opinions, whether in oral or written forms. The next aspect, CS3, regarding clarifying things to make them un-

derstandable, scored a mean of  $M = 4.43$  as most students (48.0%) ranked 5 = Strongly Agree with the statement. It points out that students somehow have the skills to simplify things which can be a good way for them to accomplish their tasks on time.

The final statement, C4, concerns the wording and sentence arrangement in spoken and/or written form. With a mean score of  $M = 4.25$ , which means a higher level of attainment, all one hundred students ranked the statement with the lowest 3 = Somewhat Agree by nine students (9.0%), the majority (57.0%) rated 4 = Agree and thirty-four students (34.0%) ranked the highest 5 = Strongly Agree. To conclude, in all four subdivisions of PLO5, students show their competencies in communication skills.

Table 11  
*The three subdivisions of PLO6 – Digital skills (DS)*

SCALE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN SCORE
DS1: I integrate the use of technology in my postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	4	4.0%	4.56
4 = Agree	36	36.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	60	60.0%	
DS2: I admit that technological devices and applications ease my postgraduate journey (e.g., laptops, smart phones, Google)			
3 = Somewhat Agree	2	2.0%	4.72
4 = Agree	24	24.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	74	74.0%	
DS3: I am able to find the latest resources for my postgraduate studies because of technology (e.g., articles, slides, data)			
3 = Somewhat Agree	2	2.0%	4.61
4 = Agree	35	35.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	63	63.0%	

There are three subdivisions of PLO6 that centre on technology. In DS1, the statement indicates that students are incorporating technology in their postgraduate studies. With a mean score of  $M = 4.56$ , majority of students (60.0%) ranked 5 = Strongly Agree, thirty-six students (36.0%) ranked 4 = Agree and four student (4%) ranked 3 = Somewhat Agree. Maor and Currie (2017) describe a technology that expeditiously affects research methods such as software and data manage-

ment instruments. In implementing these latest technologies, students may expedite collecting, disseminating and analysing data. DS2 stresses the devices and applications that smoothen students' postgraduate journeys. The statement has a mean score of  $M = 4.72$ , demonstrating that the students attain a high level of PLO6. Lastly, the DS3 result of mean score  $M = 4.61$ , with the majority (63.0%) ranked 5 = Strongly Agree, and the remaining thirty-five (35.0%) ranked 4 = Agree,

also indicates that students are fully utilising technology to ease their postgraduate journey. In short, students are aware of the importance of technology in their studies.

It also helps students to manage their time better, hence why all the subdivisions of PLO6's mean score are above 3.66.

Table 12  
The four subdivisions of PLO7 – Numeracy Skills (NS)

SCALE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN SCORE
NS1: I am able to solve basic numerical problems			
3 = Somewhat Agree	2	2.0%	4.52
4 = Agree	44	44.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	54	54.0%	
NS2: I acknowledge the importance of numeracy skills in my postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	5	5.0%	4.56
4 = Agree	34	34.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	61	61.0%	
NS3: I utilise my numeracy skills to fulfil certain areas/subjects of my postgraduate studies (e.g., data analysis, statistics, software)			
3 = Somewhat Agree	4	4.0%	4.44
4 = Agree	48	48.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	48	48.0%	
NS4: I am able to present, interpret and explain own numerical data, in spoken and/or written form			
3 = Somewhat Agree	4	4.0%	4.40
4 = Agree	52	52.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	44	44.0%	

The four subdivisions of PLO7 focus on basic mathematical skills. NS1 displays that students can figure out basic mathematical problems. The majority of students comprised fifty-four students (54.0%) ranked 5= Strongly Agree, and another 44.0% ranked 4 = Agree with the statement. Only two (2.0%) ranked 3 = Somewhat Agree to indicate that they are having certain difficulties in solving basic problems of mathematics. The mean score of  $M = 4.52$  shows that students acquire a strong comprehension of the mathematical skills. NS2 focuses on the importance of mathematical skills in students' postgraduate studies. More than half of the students (61.0%) agreed that numeracy skills are essential, while only five (5.0%) ranked 3 = Somewhat

Agree, likely due to different modes of study and research designs. The second aspect scored a mean of  $M = 4.56$ . In NS3, the statement centres on the utilisation of their mathematical skills in a certain area of their study and all students ranked the lowest 3= Somewhat Agree, and the highest 5 = Strongly Agree with the same percentage of (48.0%) for both 4 = Agree and 5= Strongly Agree scales. A mean score of  $M = 4.44$  proves that students are employing their mathematical skills for certain areas of their area of study. Finally, NS4 is about presenting, interpreting and explaining students' mathematical data, whether in speaking or in writing. With a mean score of  $M = 4.40$ , the statement indicates the high level of attainment of PLO7 among the students.

Table 13

*The seven subdivisions of PLO8 – Leadership, Autonomy and Responsibility (LAR)*

SCALE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN SCORE
LAR1: I have a strong interest in my postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	2	2.0%	4.72
4 = Agree	24	24.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	74	74.0%	
LAR2: I know I am responsible for my own actions and decisions throughout my postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	3	3.0%	4.69
4 = Agree	25	25.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	72	72.0%	
LAR3: I am able to work independently with a minimal supervision of lecturers/supervisors			
2 = Disagree	3	3.0%	4.17
3 = Somewhat Agree	15	15.0%	
4 = Agree	44	44.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	38	38.0%	
LAR4: I am able to work in groups with minimal supervision of lecturers/supervisors			
2 = Disagree	3	3.0%	4.28
3 = Somewhat Agree	10	10.0%	
4 = Agree	43	43.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	44	44.0%	
LAR5: I admit that having frequent academic discussions with peers can boost my motivation to excel in postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	4	4.0%	4.60
4 = Agree	32	32.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	64	64.0%	
LAR6: I admit that frequent meetings with supervisors can have positive effects on my postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	3	3.0%	4.69
4 = Agree	25	25.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	72	72.0%	
LAR7: I have a good relationship with my peers			
3 = Somewhat Agree	3	3.0%	4.63
4 = Agree	31	31.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	66	66.0%	



There are seven subdivisions of PLO8 that surround the ability to take responsibility, be independent, and be a leader. The result of LAR1 proved that all participants were attentive to their postgraduate studies. This can be seen through the mean score  $M = 4.72$  and with the majority (74.0%) ranked 5 = Strongly Agree, the remaining (24.0%) ranked 4 = Agree, and two students ranked 3 = Somewhat Agree.

LAR2 touches on the accountability of the students throughout their studies. Similar to LAR1, the majority of the students (72.0%) ranked 5 = Strongly Agree, and the other twenty-five (25.0%) and three (3.0%) ranked 4 = Agree and 3 = Somewhat Agree as they acknowledged the responsibilities towards every action they make. In LAR3, working independently with minimal supervision is brought up. With a mean score of  $M = 4.17$  and only three (3.0%) that show they are not capable of working independently, others display that they have a high level of autonomy.

Slightly similar to LAR3, LAR4 is related to the students' capability to work in a group with minimal supervision from lecturers or facilitators. Only three students (3.0%) show that they are incapable of working in groups independently while others can. LAR5 is closely related to LAR4.

Findings showed that students enjoy peer discussion activities as it can boost students' motivation and engagement to succeed in their postgraduate studies, as indicated by the mean score of  $M = 4.60$  and the majority (64.0%) ranked 5 = Strongly Agree. LAR6 focuses on the meet-up with mentors. With a mean score of  $M = 4.69$ , it is safe to say that regular meetings with supervisors positively impact the students.

Finally, LAR7 focuses on the relationship between peers, where most students have a good relationship with their classmates and friends as the mean score of  $M = 4.63$ .

There are five subdivisions of PLO9. In PRS1, with a mean score of  $M = 4.69$ . It reveals that students are dedicated to their studies as more than half of them (71.0%) agreed with the statement on the highest scale. PRS2 shows through the mean score of  $M = 4.74$  and the majority (76.0%) ranked 5 = Strongly Agree, that the students are excellent at managing their time and discipline. PRS4 centres on being dependent on lecturers and mentors.

Based on the mean score of  $M = 4.20$ , most students are still manageable in terms of being dependent on their role models, even though one student (1.0%) indicates that they rely too much on their mentors. Fi-

nally, the results of PRS5 demonstrate all students do have their approaches and ways to enhance their skills and results, given that the mean score of this subdivision is  $M = 4.53$ .

The two subdivisions of PLO10 aim at publication and conference attendance as one of the requirements to fulfil before graduation. ENT1 reveals mixed results due to different study modes; hence the mean score is below 3.66. Those who ranked 1 = Strongly Disagree and 2 = Disagree are probably in the coursework mode that does not require them to publish or are most likely newcomers and are currently focusing on their proposal or attending compulsory lectures. Those ranked 4 = Agree might be waiting for the reviewers' decision regarding their articles.

Lastly, 52.0% of the participants have already published at least one article to meet the needs of their graduation requirements. Data gathered for ENT2 display a mean score of  $M = 3.66$ , demonstrating that the majority of students (58.0%) have participated in at least one conference.

There are four subdivisions of PLO11. EPS1 findings show that students acknowledge that they should act professionally and ethically throughout their studies, as indicated by the mean score of  $M = 4.69$ , and the only two scales they selected were 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree in which the majority (69.0%) ranked the latter. As for EPS2, more than half the participants (68.0%) ranked 5 = Strongly Agree, and the remaining (32.0%) ranked 4 = Agree, which brings the mean score of  $M = 4.68$  that, indicates the high level of attainment of EPS2 in PLO11.

Every HLLs has its thesis format and criteria for each assessment. Findings in EPS3 displayed that all participants, with the majority (74.0%) ranked 5 = Strongly Agree and the remaining four (26.0%) ranked 4 = Agree, have a great understanding of the format and are trying their best to meet the requirements of every assessment. For the final aspect of PLO11, EPS4 emphasises the act of plagiarising. Almost all participants (79.0%) oppose the act of copying. This shows that students have a high level of professionalism and ethics. The skill assists students in developing positive attitudes and a tendency to mould them to be better in any aspect. It is one of the soft skills that graduates must develop before entering the job market.

As explicitly stressed by Zabidi et al. (2020), elements of soft skill encompass the ability to apply high degrees of morals in any practice alongside social interaction.

Table 14  
*The five subdivisions of PLO9 – Personal Skills (PRS)*

SCALE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN SCORE
PRS1: I am fully committed to my postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	2	2.0%	4.69
4 = Agree	27	27.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	71	71.0%	
PRS2: I always submit my assignments on time			
3 = Somewhat Agree	2	2.0%	4.74
4 = Agree	22	22.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	76	76.0%	
PRS3: I am actively involved in my postgraduate studies			
3 = Somewhat Agree	6	6.0%	4.56
4 = Agree	32	32.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	62	62.0%	
PRS4: I do not rely too much on my lecturers/supervisors			
2 = Disagree	1	1.0%	4.20
3 = Somewhat Agree	18	18.0%	
4 = Agree	41	41.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	40	40.0%	
PRS5: I make own initiatives to improve my skills and grades			
3 = Somewhat Agree	4	4.0%	4.53
4 = Agree	39	39.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	57	57.0%	

Table 15  
The two subdivisions of PLO10 – Entrepreneurial Skills (ENT)

SCALE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN SCORE
ENT1: I have published at least one article to fulfil my study requirements. I learned a lot about paper publishing			
1 = Strongly Disagree	36	36.0%	3.38
3 = Somewhat Agree	3	3.0%	
4 = Agree	9	9.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	52	52.0%	
NS2: I acknowledge the importance of numeracy skills in my postgraduate studies			
1 = Strongly Disagree	30	30.0%	3.66
3 = Somewhat Agree	1	1.0%	
4 = Agree	11	11.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	58	58.0%	

Table 16  
The four subdivisions of PLO11 – Ethics and Professionalism (EPS)

SCALE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN SCORE
EPS1: I act professionally and ethically throughout my postgraduate studies			
4 = Agree	31	31.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	69	69.0%	
EPS2: I am well aware of ethics, privacy, and confidentiality while conducting postgraduate tasks (e.g., interview, questionnaire)			
4 = Agree	32	32.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	68	68.0%	
EPS3: I am following the format given by the university and making sure all criteria are met for every task and assignment			
4 = Agree	26	26.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	74	74.0%	
EPS4: I do not condone plagiarism			
1 = Strongly Disagree	1	1.0%	4.74
3 = Somewhat Agree	2	2.0%	
4 = Agree	18	18.0%	
5 = Strongly Agree	79	79.0%	

## 5. CONCLUSION

There is a shred of clear evidence from the data that these international postgraduate students possess a high level of attainment of the eleven PLOs, as the mean score of most subdivisions in the eleven PLOs are above 3.67. However, achieving academic and social excellence entails more than possessing a high level of attainment of the eleven PLOs. Kassarnig et al. (2018) stress that recognising the factors that affect academic progress is crucial in academic research. A heap of studies has explored the aspects that measure academic achievement through various methods and techniques. Accomplishment is essential in education. Low academic achievement is rooted in educational issues. These non-achievers often feel that they lack knowledge and are unwilling to use their abilities, skills and strengths, which lead to the losing of interest and motivation that are imperative for academic success.

Students' attainment of the eleven PLOs is certainly the outcome of their ability to process knowledge and new information related to a specific area of study as well as the outstanding quality of the lecturers, supervisors and the implementation of the suitable methods and techniques in the teaching and learning process. However, it is quite clear that some participants in this study seem to face difficulties in their postgraduate studies with the strong possibility of experiencing com-

munication barrier issues rooted in a low level of English. Moreover, the surging competition from education hubs across the globe requires Malaysia to strengthen its higher education value proposition, capacity, and capabilities in order to enhance the appeal and competitiveness in the region and beyond (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). Concerning the above matter, it entails Malaysia to uplift its higher education identity further, not only for the quality of life and the best value for money. It must also be acknowledged, referred to and recognised internationally for its expertise in research and academics.

This paper has presented on only a small scale the preliminary findings of a more extensive study. Ergo, it is still too early to reach any compelling conclusions. However, it is anticipated that resuming data collection and analysis from other sources, namely interview sessions with the participants and their designated supervisors will enhance the views on how students can attain a high level of attainment of the eleven PLOs and, consequently, discover the answers to the low-ranked statements in the questionnaire, such as why students are incapable of working independently with minimal supervision from lecturers and supervisors and how level 7 and 8 students still face challenges in articulating their thoughts and ideas coherently in spoken and written form.

## References

- Abdullah, M. S. (2015). Evaluation of students' learning outcome: An experience sharing teaching agribotany at Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia. *International E-Journal of Advances in Education*, 1(2), 95-104. <https://dx.doi.org/10.18768/ijaedu.97273>
- Aithal, P. S., & Kumar, P. M. (2016). Student performance and learning outcomes in higher education institutions. *International Journal of Scientific Research and Modern Education*, 1(1), 674-684.
- Alvi, M. H. (2016, March 23). A manual for selecting sampling techniques in research. <https://mpr.ub.uni-muenchen.de/70218>
- Chevalier, A. (2014). How to attract foreign students. <https://mpr.ub.uni-muenchen.de/70218>
- Damit, M. A. A., Omar, M. K., & Puad, M. H. (2021). Issues and challenges of Outcome-based Education implementation among Malaysian vocational college teachers. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(3), 197-211. <https://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v11-i3/8624>
- Erikson, M. G., & Erikson, M. (2019). Learning outcomes and critical thinking – good intentions in conflict. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(12), 2293-2303.
- Eyisi, D. (2016). The usefulness of qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in researching problem-solving ability in science education curriculum. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(15), 91-100.
- Ismail, I., & Othman, R. (2020). A review of literature on the English language entry requirement for international students into postgraduate programs in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(11), 543-549.
- Jeyaraj, J. J. (2018). It's a jungle out there: Challenges in postgraduate research writing. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 18(1), 22-37.

- Kaliannan, M., & Chandran S. D. (2012) Empowering students through outcome-based education (OBE). *Research in Education*, 87(1), 50-63. <https://dx.doi.org/10.7227/RIE.87.1.4>
- Kassarnig, V., Mones, E., Bjerre-Nielsen, A., Sapiezynski, P., Lassen, D. D., & Lehmann, S. (2018). Academic performance and behavioral patterns. *EPJ Data Science*, 7(10), 1-16.
- Kowalczyk, D. (2016). Research methodologies: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. <https://goo-gl.ink/JUnbE>
- Kpolovie, P. J., Joe, A. I., & Okoto, T. (2014). Academic achievement prediction: Role of interest in learning and attitude towards school. *International Journal of Humanities, Social Science and Education*, 1(11), 73-100.
- Law, M. Y., & Che Hassan, N. (2015). Self-efficacy, learning strategies, and academic achievement among Malaysian future educators. *Jurnal Pemikir Pendidikan*, 6, 31-48.
- Maor, D., Currie, J. K. (2017). The use of technology in postgraduate supervision pedagogy in two Australian universities. *International Journal of Education Technology in Higher Education*, 14(1), 1-15.
- MQF. (2017). Malaysian Qualifications Framework (2nd ed.). <https://shorturl.at/ewxN2>
- MQF. (2020). Malaysian Qualifications Framework. [http://www.etawau.com/edu/Department/Malaysian\\_qualification\\_framework.htm](http://www.etawau.com/edu/Department/Malaysian_qualification_framework.htm)
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2015). Executive summary: Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (higher education). Ministry of Education Malaysia.
- Ministry of Higher Education. (2021, February 25). Malaysian Qualifications Framework 2nd Edition. <https://www.mqa.gov.my/pv4/mqf.cfm>
- Powoh, T. (2016). *Research methods: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*. Horizons University Press.
- Rao, N. J. (2020). Outcome-based education: An outline. *Higher Education for the Future*, 7(1), 5-21.
- Singh, M. K. M. (2016). An emic perspective on academic writing difficulties among international graduate students in Malaysia. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 16(3), 83-97.
- Sun, P. H., & Lee, S. Y. (2020). The importance and challenges of outcome-based education – a case study in a private higher education institution. *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, 17(2), 253-278.
- Taib, H., Salleh, S. M., Md Zain, B. A., Azlan, M. A., Mahzan, S., Hafeez, Z. A., Ong, P., ... & Ngali, Z. (2017). Programme Learning Outcomes assessment and continuous quality improvement in faculty of Mechanical and Manufacturing, UTHM. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Applied Science ICAS2016* (pp. 165-174). University of Banja Luka.
- UTAR Guidelines. (2016). UTAR guidelines on Outcome-Based Education (OBE). <https://lkcfes.utar.edu.my/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Outcome-Based-Education-OBE.pdf>
- Othman, W. N. A. W., & Abdullah, A. (2019). Determining the potential of graduate analytics based on the iCGPA system: A systematic literature review. *IIUM Journal of Educational Studies*, 7(2), 3-21.
- Othman, W. N. A. W., & Abdullah, A. (2020). Student learning progress as predictor for graduate employability performance. In *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Software Engineering & Computer Systems* (Article 012019). IOP Publishing. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1088/1757-899X/769/1/012019>
- York, T. T., Gibson, C., & Rankin, S. (2015). Defining and measuring academic success. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 20(1), 1-20.
- Zabidi, M., Mohd Arshad, A., Ab Hamid, N., Ab Wahab, M. H., & Mansor, S. K. (2020). The lecturers' belief on ethics and professional moral values in teaching practice. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 16(2), 77-83. <https://doi.org/10.24191/AJUE.V16I2.10299>

IZZAH ISMAIL

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia [izzahismaill@gmail.com](mailto:izzahismaill@gmail.com)

ROHANI OTHMAN

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia [rohanothman@utm.my](mailto:rohanothman@utm.my)



# Original Research

## Heritage and minority languages, and their learning: A general bibliometric approach and content analysis

by M. Ángeles Jiménez-Jiménez, Adrián Segura-Robles and Ana M. Rico-Martín

**M. Ángeles Jiménez-Jiménez** University of Granada, Spain [mangeles@ugr.es](mailto:mangeles@ugr.es)

**Adrián Segura-Robles** University of Granada, Spain [adrianseg@ugr.es](mailto:adrianseg@ugr.es)

**Ana M. Rico-Martín** University of Granada, Spain [amrico@ugr.es](mailto:amrico@ugr.es)

**Article history** Received January 21, 2023 | Revised February 21, 2023 | Accepted March 6, 2023

**Conflicts of interest** The authors declared no conflicts of interest

**Research funding** This research was supported by the R&D project 'LEyLA' (Ref. PID2021-123055NB-I00) funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by 'ERDF A way of making Europe'

**doi** 10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1-40-57

**For citation** Jiménez-Jiménez, M. A., Segura-Robles, A., & Rico-Martín, A. M. (2023). Heritage and minority languages, and their learning: A general bibliometric approach and content analysis. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(1), 40-57.

*The cultural and linguistic diversity that characterises our current society has led to different ways of considering languages and their status in their respective communities of use. Nowadays, not only the dominant language prevails, but other languages that characterise any social group are also increasingly taken into account, and there are studies on how they can influence the learning of the set of languages that a person uses in his or her context, and even in the teaching and learning process in general. Among these languages that represent the identity of that individual, we can find those of heritage. This paper represents the first bibliometric study on heritage and minority languages, and their connection with learning. The study period spans from the first paper published in 1989 until today, using SciMAT, software developed for longitudinal scientific mapping analysis, so this research contributes to reduce the existing gap in the scientific literature, and offers a starting point for the study of this topic. As much as 1341 research publications from the Web of Science dealing with this issue were processed and analysed. Following a bibliometric analysis, as well as the thematic and conceptual evolution of these publications, the results show a growing scientific interest in the topic from 2018, with the USA being the country with the highest production. Research was mainly carried out at universities, and the predominant research areas are Linguistics, Education and Psychology. Likewise, among the most productive authors, Silvina Montrul stands out. Finally, the main topics of interest for the scientific community are bilingualism and multilingualism, followed by maintenance of heritage languages and their speakers.*

**KEYWORDS:** heritage language, minority language, content analysis, bibliometric study, bilingualism, multilingualism



This is an open access article distributed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (CC BY-NC 4.0), which allows its unrestricted use for non-commercial purposes, subject to attribution. The material can be shared/adapted for non-commercial purposes if you give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As a consequence of migratory movements and the awareness of what a multifaceted contact involves, encompassing different cultures, languages, ways of think-

ing, etc., the interest in bilingualism first, and then in multilingualism, has grown considerably. From this, heritage and minority languages have also been the focus of multiple studies, especially in the field of educa-

tion in the area of language teaching (Gómez García, 2022; Henderson Lee, 2018). The heritage language is a minority language acquired as a first language (L1) in a context of early bilingualism or multilingualism, where it has a very reduced use compared to the majority language, in addition to a low cultural, educational, and socio-political status, which causes its linguistic attrition and an incomplete acquisition of its morphosyntax. Consequently, its speakers cannot be considered fully multilingual (Montrul, 2022).

Cummins and Danesi (1990) are among the first authors to investigate these languages in Canada – excluding native languages and the two official languages of the country, French and English – as well as the consequences in the educational context. They point to Canada as a pioneer, followed by the United States, in studies on the incorporation of these languages in elementary education, which go back to the 1970s, and highlight the positive results they have in language learning (Danesi, 1991).

In addition to cognitive and educational benefits, Feuerverger (1991), another of the first authors to work on this topic, points out the identity benefits, exemplifying them with the research participants, university learners of their own heritage languages in Canada, who emphasise the importance of literacy in these languages both at school and at home, the role they represent as an element of cohesion with their own cultural group, and in their identification with their home country.

The language acquisition of bi-/multilingual children depends on several elements, among them the onset age of acquisition, the structural relationship of the languages they know, their quantity and frequency of use at home and, as noted above, the socio-political consideration of these languages (Montrul, 2022). Studies such as those of Deuchar and Quay (2000), Paradis (2007) or Montanari (2013), among others, demonstrated the ability that multilingual children may have in establishing an early differentiation between their languages if these are developed in a satisfactory way, so that their linguistic competences may be enriched during schooling if they receive a similar input in all their languages and thus form themselves as balanced multilinguals. However, this is not the usual situation, rather, the majority language is the one most worked on school and the one with the most contexts of use inside and outside home, so that, in general terms, the degree of competence among a speaker's languages differs greatly, occurring as subtractive bilingualism with in-

complete acquisition (Montrul & Silva-Corvalán, 2019; Silva-Corvalán, 2018) or, even, the attrition of previously acquired elements of their own heritage language.

As this topic is so important for the development of multilingualism in our society, where heritage languages play, and must play, an indisputable role, this paper presents the first scientific map of the heritage/minority language-learning binomial, by the analysis, using intelligent bibliometric tools such as SciMAT (Cobo et al., 2012), of the academic bibliographic production at different levels and according to different criteria: diachronic evolution, geographical distribution, main languages, research areas and predominant Web of Science (WoS) categories, most productive authors, and most highly cited papers.

The complete bibliometric analysis thus becomes a key tool for evaluating ongoing actions and research and, thus, disseminating their results. In this context, the main objective of this paper is to present a bibliometric analysis of the heritage/minority language-learning relationship, covering authorship, production and thematic analysis, as well as a scientific mapping analysis with the aim of covering the main and secondary research topics related to this issue since there is evidence of these studies in WoS. To this end, this research first quantifies the main performance-related indicators to continue with the use of SciMAT as a computer-based science mapping tool, in order to analyse the areas of development of scientific knowledge associated with the thematic binomial mentioned above, in a defined period of time (Cobo et al., 2012; López-Robles et al., 2020). The result will be bibliometric information and scientific maps useful for the continuation and promotion of research policies on heritage languages and for scholars interested in linguistic diversity, language teaching, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, as well as ethnographic or anthropological studies.

This paper aims to establish the evolution of the concept of heritage languages in relation to learning, by addressing the following research questions.

1. What bibliometric indicators exist around publications on heritage, minority languages and learning?
2. What are the main research topics related to heritage and minority languages and learning?
3. What is the centrality and development of these topics?
4. What are the most important topics in terms of production and impact?
5. How have these topics evolved since the beginning of their publication in WoS?

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND DATASET

### 2.1. Research design

In this study, an approach to analysis based on the principles of classical and current bibliometrics is used. Among the advantages of such techniques is the search, registration and analysis of great amount of information with the aim of studying and predicting the evolution of the scientific literature (Martínez et al., 2015). In order to implement the study, the procedures and standards set by experts in this type of research were followed (Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). Specifically, for the development of the analysis we focused on the study of keywords and the h indicator (Hirsch, 2005). For the selection of these indicators, various studies of similar impact and multidisciplinary fields are used as a basis (Cobo et al., 2011b; Parra-González & Segura-Robles, 2019).

On the other hand, this type of design allows us to graphically obtain different maps with nodes to delimit the performance and positioning of localised topics and subtopics related to heritage and minority languages and learning. Similarly, these analytical actions led to the thematic development of the terms listed in WoS publications for the period under analysis.

### 2.2. Analysis procedure

In order to reduce possible biases in the study, the analysis was carried out following a series of steps outlined in the scientific literature.

1. Choice of the database provider of documents: Web of Science, as it is considered to be the best by the scientific community.

2. Selection of keywords: *Heritage Languages*, *Minority Languages*, and *Learning*.

3. Development of the search equation: 'TS = ('heritage language\*' OR 'minority language\*') AND (learn\*).

4. Search in the metadata of title, abstract and keywords of the documents registered in WoS.

This first search generated a total of 1386 raw results, later reduced to 1341 sources. To refine the search process and further analysis of documents, various criteria were used to include and exclude publications. The exclusion criteria used were documents expected to be published in the year 2023 and repeated or poorly indexed documents in WoS. This procedure is reflected in the following flow chart based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (PRISMA-P) matrix (Figure 1).

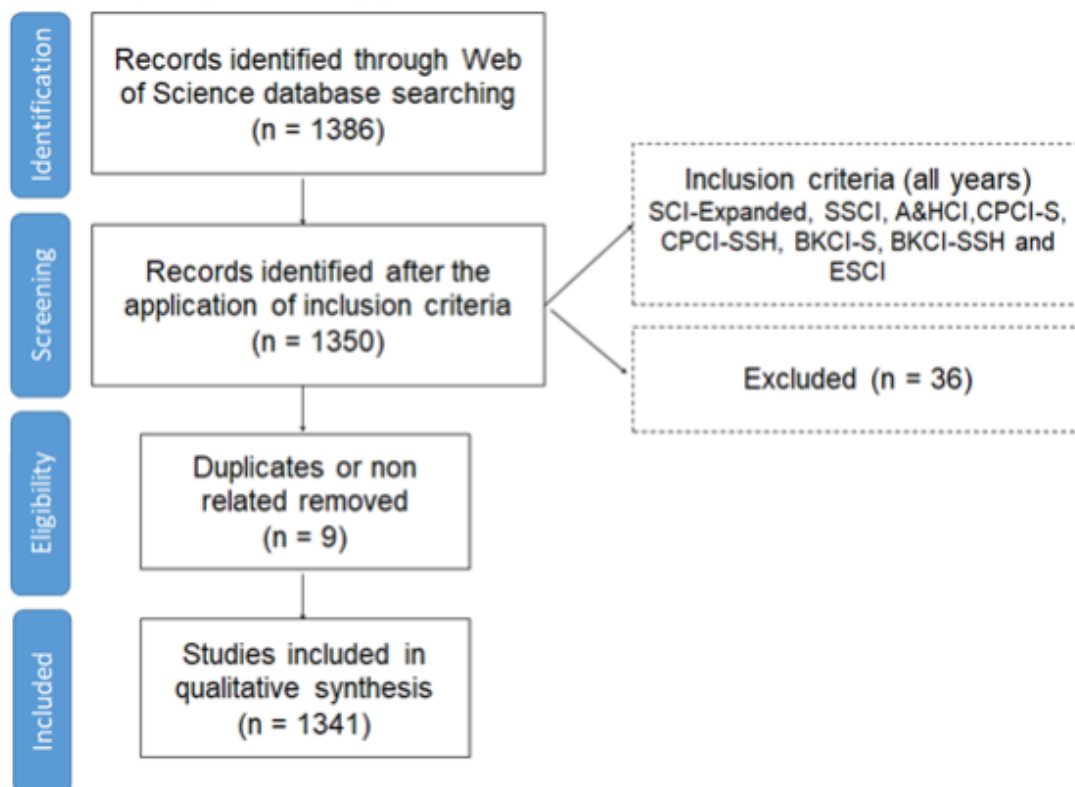


Figure 1. Flowchart based on the PRISMA-P protocol

The document analysis was carried out using two main applications. Specifically, *Analyse Results* and *Creation Citation Report* (tools integrated in the WoS platform) were used to collect and analyse data related to the selected vectors and SciMAT was used to analyse the conceptual evolution. In this case, SciMAT was chosen for its deduplication and visualisation process based on strategic diagrams and thematic areas, making it easier to understand and interpret the results. The applied bibliometric methodology identifies four phases of analysis within a specific period (Cobo et al., 2011a; López-Robles et al., 2019a; López-Robles et al., 2019b).

1. Detection of research topics on heritage and minority languages and learning. This is carried out by applying a clustering algorithm (Coulter et al., 1998) on a standardised co-word network (Callon et al., 1983).

2. Visualisation of the research topics and the thematic network. The detected research topics are classified according to their centrality values and density range in a strategic diagram (Callon et al., 1991; He, 1999). Centrality measures the degree of interaction between networks, while density measures the internal strength of the network. According to both types of measures, a research field can be visualised as a set of research themes and represented in a two-dimensional strategic diagram. In this way, themes can be classified into four categories (Cobo et al., 2011b) (see Figure 2).

A. Motor themes (quadrant Q1): this quadrant collects the relevant themes in order to develop and organise the research field. They are known as the motor themes for the field, given that they present a robust centrality and high density.

B. Highly developed and isolated themes (quadrant Q2): these are the ones that, despite being strongly related and highly specialised, are peripheral, i.e., they do not have the appropriate background or importance for the field.

C. Emerging or declining themes (quadrant Q3): this quadrant collects relatively weak topics that low density and centrality. They are mostly emerging or disappearing themes.

D. Basic and transversal themes (quadrant Q4): they are relevant themes for the research field but are not well developed.

3. Discovery of thematic areas. Research topics are analysed by means of an evolution map, which relates those maintaining a conceptual nexus throughout consecutive periods.

4. Performance analysis. It is necessary to analyse both quantitatively and qualitatively the relative contribution of the research topics and thematic areas to the entire field of research. This way, it is possible to identify the most productive and relevant areas within the field (Table 1).

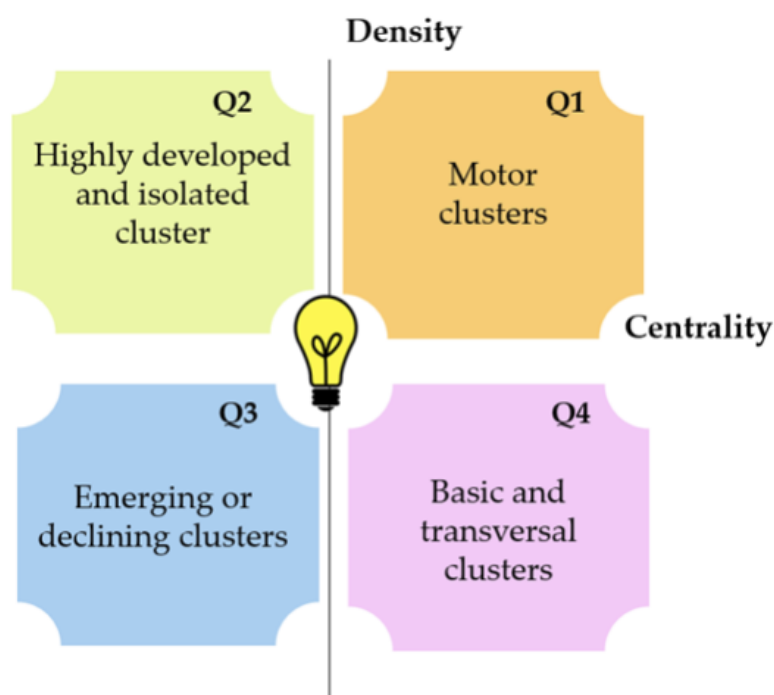


Figure 2. Categories of thematic analysis according to SciMAT

Table 1  
*SciMAT configuration indicators*

CONFIGURATION	VALUES
Analysis unit	Keywords authors, keywords WoS
Frequency threshold	Keywords: P1 = (2), P2 = (2), P3 = (2)
Network type	Co-occurrence
Co-occurrence union value threshold	Keywords: P1 = (2), P2 = (2), P3 = (2)
Normalisation measure	Equivalence index
Clustering algorithm	Maximum size: 7; Minimum size: 3
Evolutionary measure	Jaccard index
Overlapping measure	Inclusion Index

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. Bibliometric analysis

This section deals with the evolution of the heritage/minority language-learning binomial in terms of publications, citations and impact, analysing the following bibliometric indicators: diachronic evolution, geographical distribution, main languages, research areas and predominant WoS categories, most productive authors, and most cited papers, since publications on the matter have been found up to the present, this is, between 1989 and 2022.

Regarding the growth of the literature, it is observed that it has followed an increasing pattern during the study period (see Figure 3a). This type of trend is common in thematic analyses of the literature, verified by the  $r^2=0.90$  value, which shows a positive current growth rate. In the 2017-2018 period, the year-on-year growth percentage is 52.33%, this being the most marked growth. We should obviously be cautious when interpreting the 2021-2022 period as papers are still being added to WoS, and this change is not yet interpretable.

In relation to the geographical distribution of the publications, these studies traditionally point to the United States and Canada as the first countries to address this topic and, particularly in this study, those with the highest scientific production (see Figure 3f), with the United States being far ahead (42.73%, 573 publications). It is followed by Canada, which accounts for 9.09% with 122 publications. The rest of the papers are distributed among a wide variety of countries.

Figure 3g also shows that North American universities are the organisations with most publishing in this matter in the period 1989-2022, especially in the United States, with a total of 253 publications, 18.86% of the total production. The University of Toronto (Canada) contributes 1.86% with 25 scientific papers, and the University of the Basque Country (Spain) with 24 productions (1.78%).

Scientific dissemination depends to a large extent on its vehicular language. Among the languages of publication, English stands out far above the rest (95.37% of the total production). In the 1341 references found, three languages of dissemination were preferentially used, as shown in Figure 3b, only 30 papers were written in different languages (2.23% of the production analysed). Moreover, it can be noted that, both for the areas of knowledge (Figure 3d) and the general WoS categories (Figure 3e), Linguistics stands out in the first place with 950 articles and 58.46% respectively.

Along with the organisations endorsing the articles, and the areas and categories in which they fall, it is essential to determine the most productive authors and the most cited papers in the period 1989-2022, which can support an evaluation of the evolution of the research field. Figure 3c shows the most productive authors, where equivalent figures are observed; Silvina Montrul (University of Illinois, USA) stands out with 16 papers (1.19%), followed by four authors with the same number of publications; and closing the group is the Spanish author Jasone Cenoz (University of the Basque Country, Spain) with 10 articles (0.74%).



Finally, as shown in Figure 3h, there is a paper that stands out in citations compared to the others, the contribution by Flores and Rosa, *Undoing appropriateness:*

*Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in Education* (2015), published in the *Harvard Educational Review*.

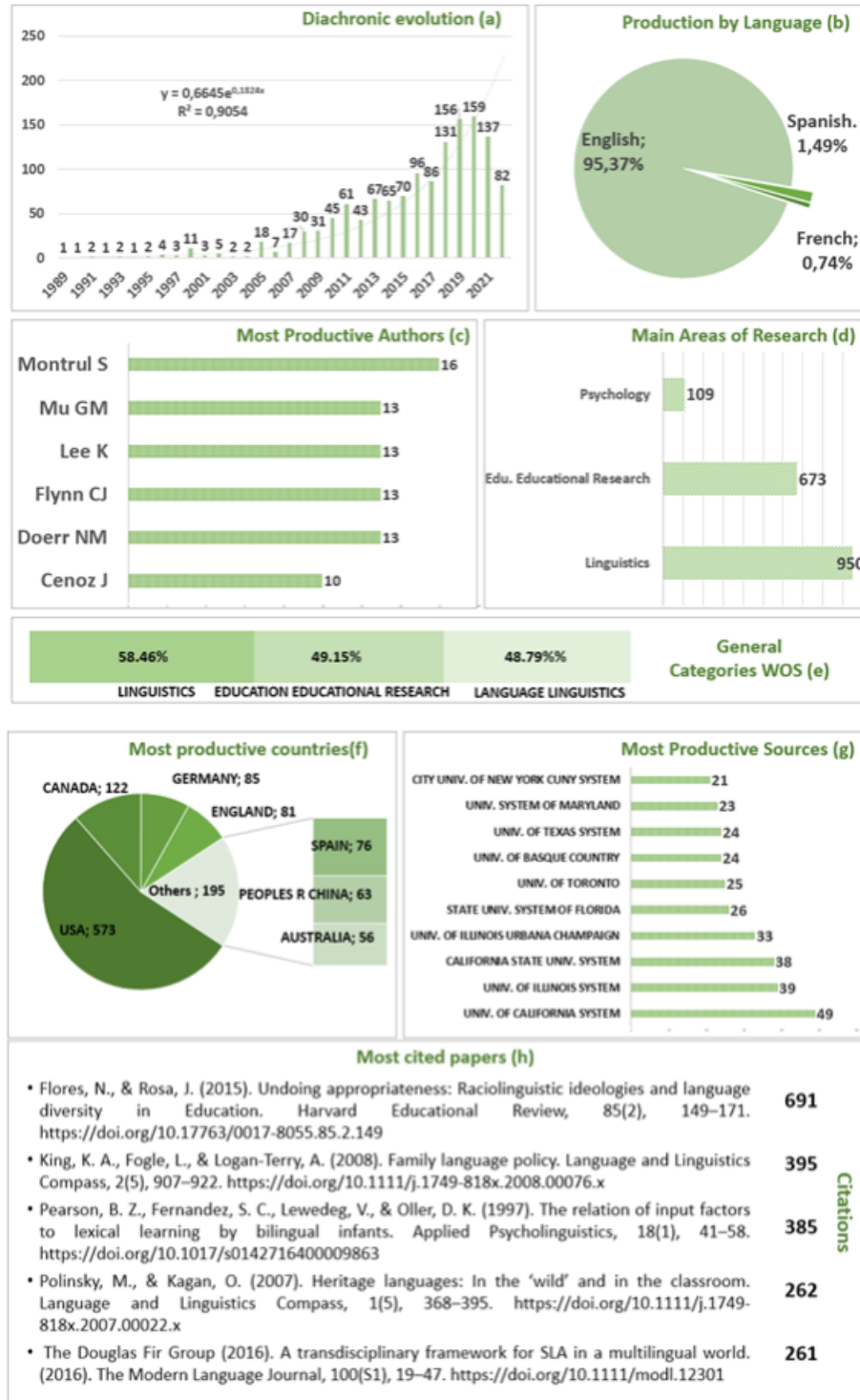
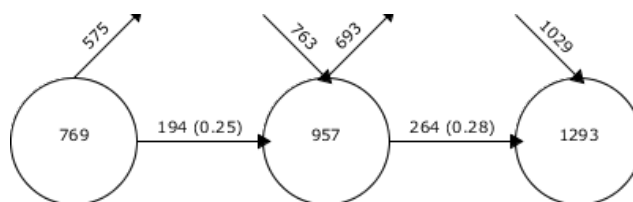


Figure 3. Diachronic evolution of production (a), production by language (b), the most productive authors (c), main areas of research (d), general categories in Web of Science (WoS) (e), most productive countries (f), most productive sources (g), and most cited papers (h)

### 3.2. Thematic evolution analysis

For this analysis, the documents were classified into three main blocks: P1 (1989-2013), P2 (2014-2018) and P3 (2019-2022). The criterion used to divide these periods is the number of documents published for each one, trying to be consistent with their growth for the total period. The outward arrow indicates the number of keywords that are maintained in the next period,

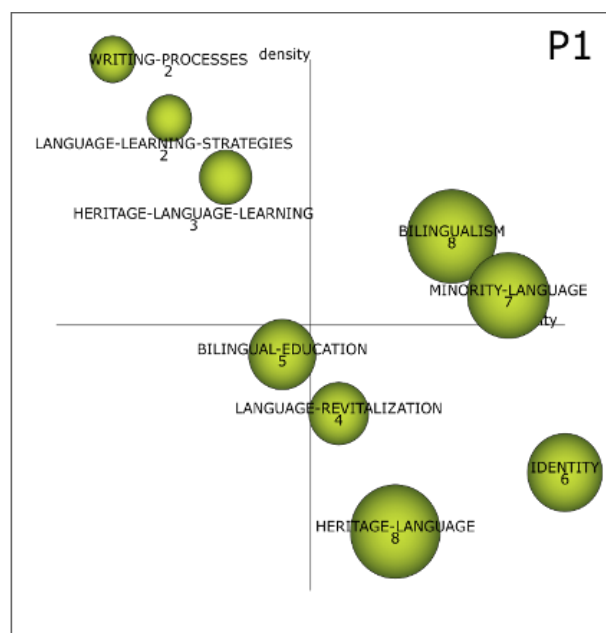
while the inward arrow indicates the new words included for the period. Between periods there is a keyword consistency of 0.25 and 0.28, indicating that there has been significant variability in topics across periods. In addition, the growth of keywords from 575 to 1029 shows that the research field is evolving and is attracting the attention of researchers who are trying to work with and relate new concepts or perspectives (Figure 4).



Throughout this section, we show three compositions, following the established periods and the strategic diagram mentioned above (based on the values of centrality and density obtained). Moreover, the images and their size represent the reference proportional value, calculated according to the h-index.

During the period from 1989 to 2013, nine research topics related to heritage and minority languages were identified, as shown in the strategic diagram P1 (Figure 5). Five of them are considered key (motor

themes, and basic and transversal themes): *Bilingualism*, *Minority Language*, *Language Revitalisation*, *Heritage Language*, and *Identity*. Based on the h-index, the following topics stand out: *Heritage Language*, *Bilingualism*, *Minority Language*, and *Identity*. It is important to mention that the main research topics identified are included in the key themes (motor themes, and basic and transversal themes), i.e., none of them falls in a different sector from these. In addition, *Bilingual Education* stands out as the only emerging theme.



Temática	Cuadrante	Documentos	G-Index	H-index
MINORITY-LANGUAGE	Q1	11	10	8.37
BILINGUALISM	Q1	9	9	8.49
WRITING-PROCESSES	Q2	2	2	2
LANGUAGE-LEARNING-STRATEGIES	Q2	2	2	2
HERITAGE-LANGUAGE-LEARNING	Q2	3	3	3
BILINGUAL-EDUCATION	Q3	7	6	5.48
HERITAGE-LANGUAGE	Q4	18	12	9.8
IDENTITY	Q4	11	11	8.12
LANGUAGE-REVITALIZATION	Q4	4	4	4

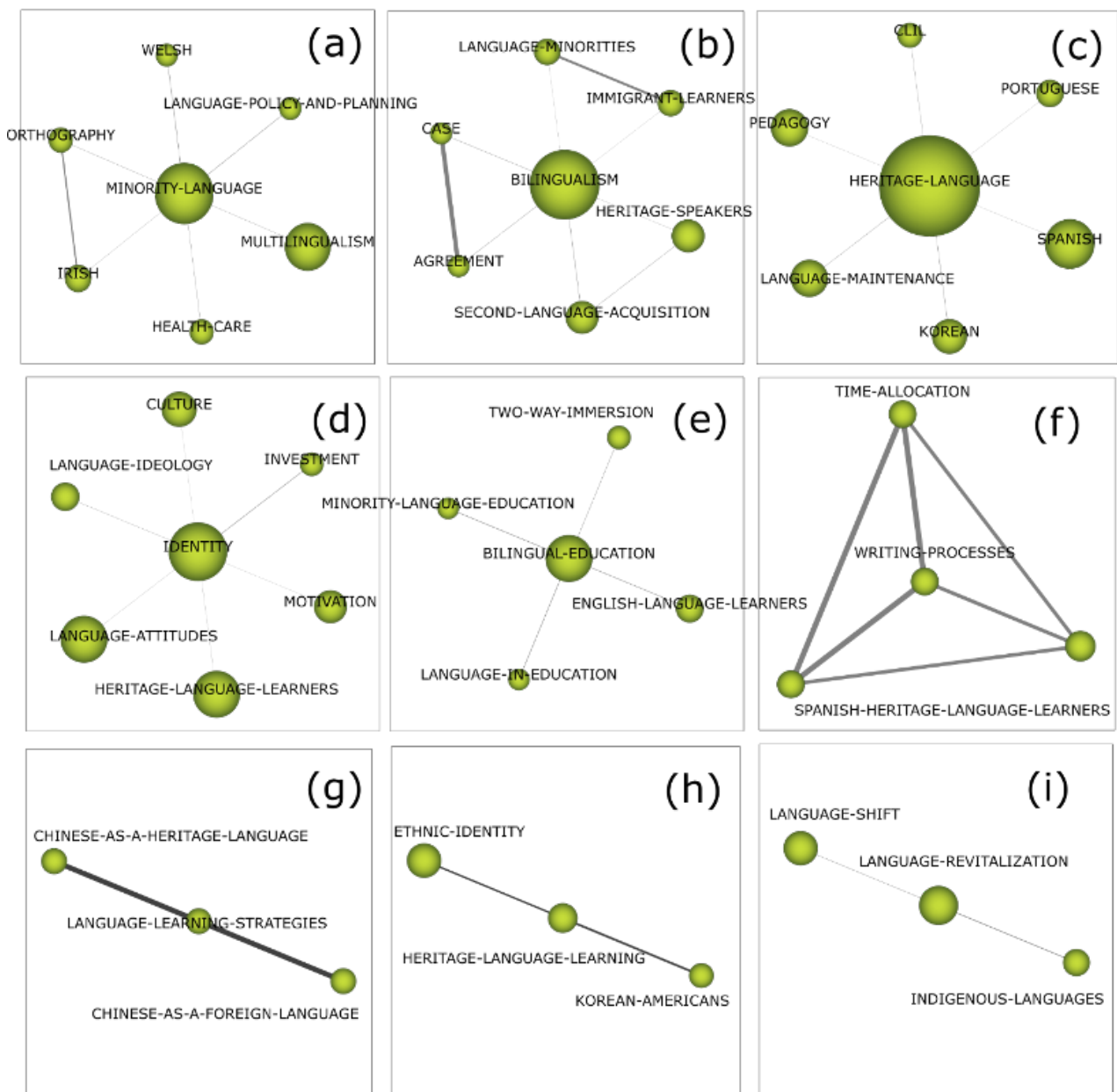


Figure 5. Strategic diagram and performance from 1989-2013 (P1). Thematic networks. (a) Minority Language, (b) Bilingualism, (c) Heritage Language, (d) Identity, (e) Bilingual Education, (f) Writing Process, (g) Language Learning Strategies, (h) Heritage Language Learning, (i) Language Revitalisation

For the second period analysed, between 2014-2018, nine research topics, directly related to heritage languages, were identified, as shown in the strategic diagram P2 (Figure 6). In this case, there are still five motor themes, and basic and transversal themes for the period: Multilingualism, Identity, Heritage Language, Minority Language, and Bilingualism. Likewise, when classified according to their h-index, *Minority Language*

stands out in first place, followed by *Bilingualism* and *Heritage Language*. These two, *Heritage Language* and *Bilingualism*, continue to appear as basic or transversal topics, although they have lost relevance when compared to the previous period.

Finally, *Motivation* appears for the first time within the group of emerging themes during the overall study period.

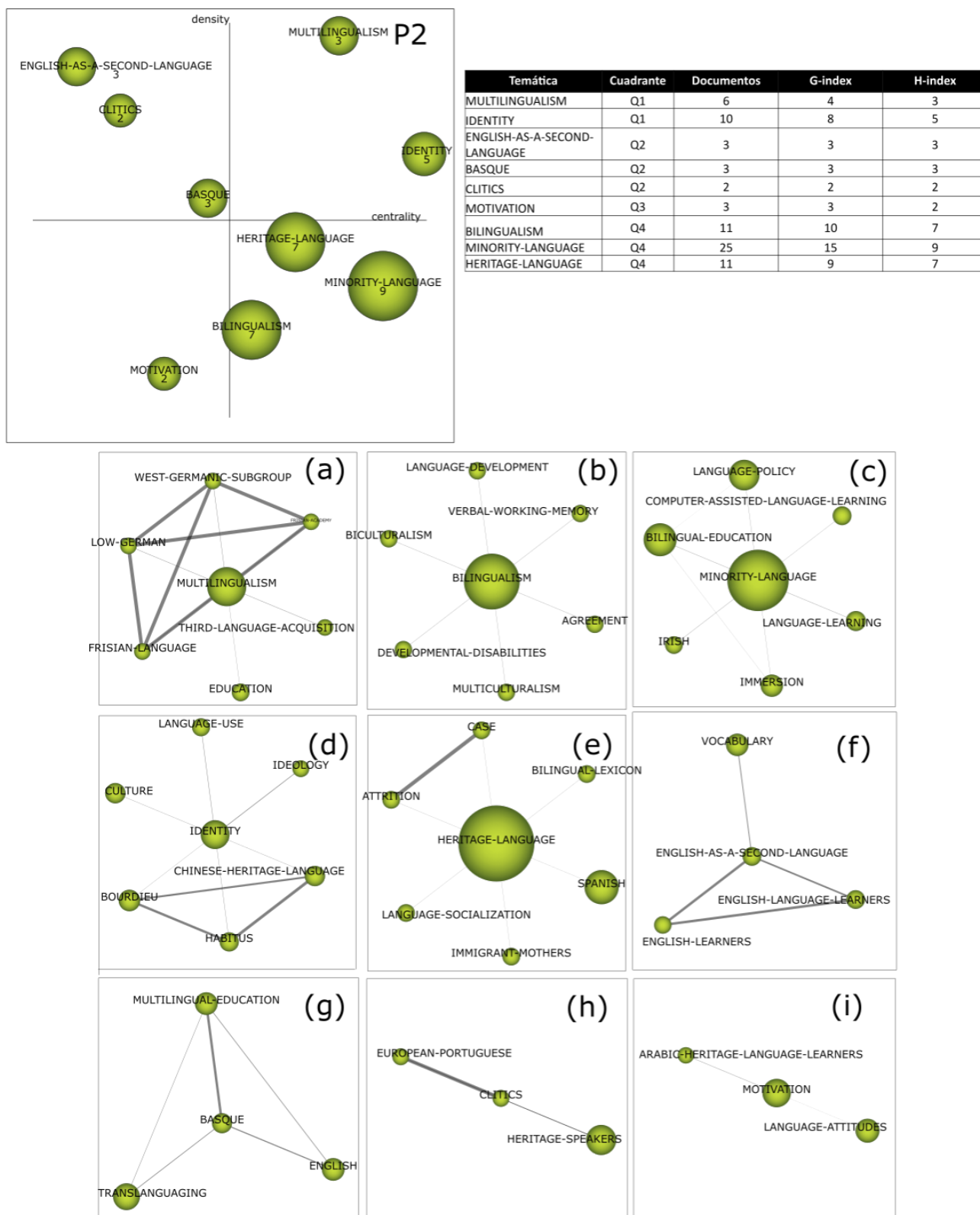


Figure 6. Strategic diagram and performance 2014-2018 (P2). Thematic networks: (a) Multilingualism, (b) Bilingualism, (c) Minority Language, (d) Identity, (e) Heritage Language, (f) English as a Second Language, (g) Basque, (h) Clitics, (i) Motivation

Finally, during the third period (2019-2022), eleven related research topics were identified (Figure 7). In this regard, six research themes are considered key due to their contribution to the growth of heritage languages knowledge (motor themes, basic and transversal themes): *Spanish*, *Heritage Speakers*, *Heritage Language Maintenance*, *Multilingualism*, *Bilingualism*, and *Language Maintenance*. Compared to the preceding period, most of the motor themes are lost, although *Multilingualism* and *Bilingualism* remain. Based on the

*h*-index of the topics studied, *Bilingualism* and *Multilingualism* stand out, although, as in the previous period, they keep losing relevance. There is no relevant theme present in all three periods; rather, those identified as motor and basic or transversal themes change categories across the periods.

However, it is noteworthy that new terms such as *Childhood* appear among the highly developed but isolated themes, and *Translanguaging* as an emerging theme.

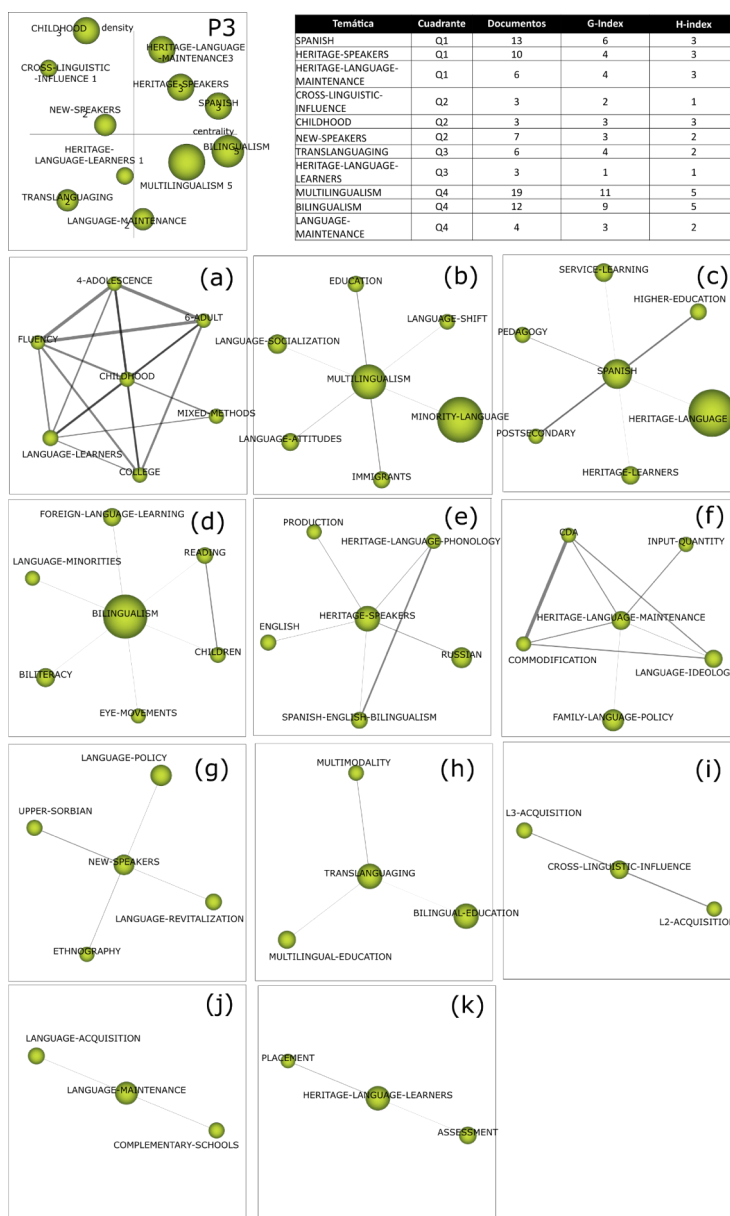


Figure 7. Strategic diagram and performance 2019-2022 (P3). Thematic networks. (a) Childhood, (b) Multilingualism, (c) Spanish, (d) Bilingualism, (e) Heritage Speakers, (f) Heritage Language Maintenance, (g) New Speakers, (h) Translanguaging, (i) Cross Linguistic Influence, (j) Language Maintenance, (k) Heritage Language Learners



### 3.3. Conceptual evolution map

To conclude this section of results, it is possible to analyse the raw conceptual evolution between the different periods, thus discovering whether there are shared themes or how these evolve over time. The solid line shows that the connected clusters share the main theme, the dashed line points that the groups share elements that are not the main themes, and the absence of a line means discontinuity. On the other hand, the thickness is proportional to the inclusion index and the volume of the spheres is proportional to the h-index of the documents associated with each cluster (Cobo et al., 2012).

Figure 8 shows the conceptual evolution for the periods analysed. Thus, several important relationships are detected throughout these periods. The strongest and most stable relationship (maintained among the three periods), marked in green, is found between the concepts *Minority Language*, *Multilingualism* and *Multilingualism*, together with *Minority Language*, *Minority Language* and *Multilingualism* in addition to *Bilingual Education*, *Minority Language* and *Multilingualism*.

The thematic fusion of the different periods in a single concept, *Multilingualism*, can therefore be detected.

In the purple shading we find the evolution of the main themes, which vary throughout the three periods, thus we find that in P1 and P2 the main theme of *Heritage Language* is maintained, but in P3 there is a direct relationship with *Spanish*.

Finally, marked in pink, there is a recurring theme among the three periods, which is related to *Bilingualism*. Moreover, the relationship among them is very strong, so that, although many themes appear and disappear throughout these three periods, this theme is always transversal to them.

Apart from the large coloured line of relationships we find two very direct ones: *Identity* and *Motivation* between P1 and P2, and *Basque* and *Translanguaging* between P2 and P3.

## 4. DISCUSSION

In view of the results of this bibliometric analysis of the scientific production on heritage and minority languages and learning carried out from 1989 to 2022, in terms of the **number of contributions** per year, the interval 1989-2007, included in the first period of analysis (1989-2013), is characterised by publications in WoS that could be described as anecdotal due to their small number. Researchers began to become aware of the status of the languages of immigrants arriving in host coun-

tries, such as the United States, where half of the student population in major cities already had minority origins in the last decade of the 20th century. As McLaughlin (1989) points out, this implied a challenge for teachers at the time, and so dual language programmes began to be introduced.

As the years go by, triggered by the growth of the population from other origins, with other languages and cultures, the interest in addressing the heritage and minority languages of students and their relationship with learning is reflected in a gradual increase in publications focusing on this phenomenon, as seen between 2008 and 2017, spanning the first two periods of this research (1989-2013 and 2014-2018). However, it was not until 2018 when the number of references grew considerably in line with multilingual education, where the language of social minorities, increasingly present in the school environment, was consequently more widely recognised both in school (García & Sánchez, 2018; Yiakoumetti, 2022), and in family learning (Little, 2019; Mattheoudakis et al., 2020).

With regard to the **geographical distribution** of the publications reviewed, the main countries of reference are the United States and Canada, with the former standing out, whose significant immigration from many and very different countries has increased the number of studies referring to minority languages and heritage languages (see Bonness et al., 2022; Carreira, 2017; Fairclough & Belpoliti, 2016; Gomez García, 2022; Montrul, 2008; Wu et al., 2011).

According to these data, as **entities** oriented both towards the training of future professionals and research into the phenomenon in question, the United States universities stand out in terms of publications on heritage and minority languages, followed at a great distance by the Canadian University of Toronto and the Spanish University of the Basque Country. Although the first countries stand out due to the importance of the migratory movements received, the Basque Country is a bilingual Spanish-Basque community, in which the latter is considered a minority language (Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; Gorter & Cenoz, 2011). In addition, it is a community that also receives immigrant populations mainly from countries such as Portugal or Morocco, which are attended to with specific language programmes (Etxeberria & Elosegui, 2008).

If we look at the **languages of publication**, the predominance of English is indisputable. This result is concomitant with the countries and organisations with the greatest scientific production, in addition to the fact that

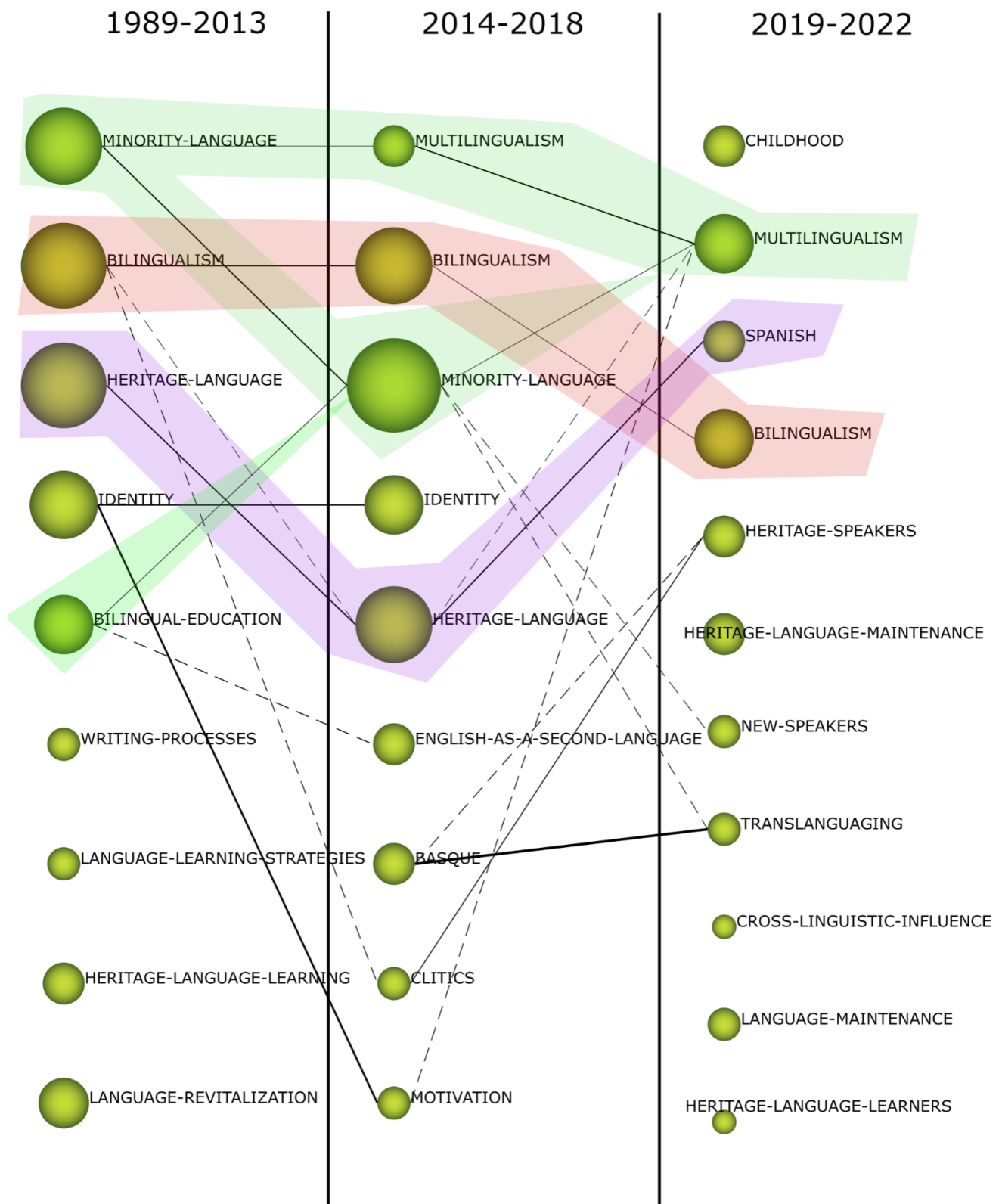


Figure 8. Conceptual evolution of the thematic areas over the periods

*'If we look at the languages of publication, the predominance of English is indisputable. This result is concomitant with the countries and organisations with the greatest scientific production, in addition to the fact that English is the language of international recognition for this dissemination and, therefore, the one with the greatest presence in WoS, whose core journals belong mainly to English-speaking countries'*

English is the language of international recognition for this dissemination (Suzina, 2021) and, therefore, the one with the greatest presence in WoS, whose core journals belong mainly to English-speaking countries.

The publications found in this study are mainly concentrated in two major research areas within the Social Sciences: Linguistics and Language, and Education and Educational Research. These areas are consistent with the main **thematic categories** of Web of Science established by Thompson Reuters related to this research, except that among these, Psychology also stands out. The topic of heritage/minority languages and learning belongs unequivocally to these areas and categories, but, in addition, it is closely linked to the science that studies the mental processes and behaviours of individuals, with some authors referring to the cognitive processes involved in language learning and any of its skills (Parshina et al., 2021; Polinsky & Scontras, 2020; Yiakoumetti, 2022), to the beliefs and attitudes of families regarding their heritage language (Lee, 2013), or to the convenience or not of using this language in teaching people with certain disorders or disabilities (Carioti et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2019).

In the ranking of the **most productive authors** according to the WoS database, in first place is Silvina Montrul, a linguist specialising in second language acquisition at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (USA).

This is followed by a group of four authors with the same number of productions, thirteen. They are: Neriko Musha Doerr, cultural anthropologist, professor at Ramapo College in New Jersey (USA); Colin J. Flynn, linguist specialising in bilingualism and second language acquisition, and professor at Dublin City University (Republic of Ireland); Kiri Lee, linguist at Lehigh University, Pennsylvania (USA); and Guanglun Michael Mu, sociologist of Education and professor at the Uni-

versity of South Australia and finally, Jasone Cenoz Iragui, from the University of the Basque Country (Spain), a specialist in multilingualism and second and third language acquisition.

As for the **most cited works**, the first is *Undoing appropriateness: Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in education* (Flores & Rosa, 2015), from the Education and Educational Research area. Its criticism of linguistic appropriateness in multilingual contexts, from the viewpoint of the racialised hearing subject, gives it a very high number of citations and this number is progressively increasing.

The second of the most cited works is the article entitled *Family language policy* (King et al., 2008), included in the area of Linguistics. The authors describe what they call family language policy, bringing together two independent and very disconnected fields of study, namely language policy and child language acquisition. From a social point of view, both determine the maintenance of minority languages.

Next, we come across *The relation of input factors to lexical learning by bilingual infants* (Pearson et al., 1997), in the areas of Linguistics and Psychology. It is an investigation of simultaneous bilingual (English-Spanish) pre-primary children to study the correlation between language exposure and vocabulary learning.

The next work in the citation order is the article entitled *Heritage languages in the 'Wild' and in the classroom* (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007), included in the area of Linguistics. It is an investigation with low-level speakers in which recurrent features of heritage languages are identified with respect to phonology, morphology and syntax.

Finally, *A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world* (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016), belonging to the areas of Education and Linguistics. This collective is composed of leading authors in the area of additional language acquisition, such as Dwight Atkinson, Heidi Byrnes, Meredith Doran, Patricia Duff, Nick C. Ellis, Joan Kelly Hall, Karen E. Johnson, James P. Lantolf, Diane Larsen-Freeman, Eduardo Negueruela, Bonny Norton, Lourdes Ortega, John Schumann, Merrill Swain, and Elaine Tarone. In this volume they share their knowledge about their studies and research in the different fields of work. Therefore, it is an interdisciplinary framework.

As far as the **thematic evolution** of the concepts of this research is concerned, the results show a great variation in the study interval, although the main themes that are maintained are, firstly, *Bilingualism* and, later,

*'As far as the thematic evolution of the concepts of this research is concerned, the results show a great variation in the study interval, although the main themes that are maintained are, firstly, Bilingualism and, later, Multilingualism, maintaining this order in their conceptual development over time, as linguistic diversity has become ever more present in society'*

*Multilingualism*, maintaining this order in their conceptual development over time, as linguistic diversity has become ever more present in society.

Those terms that become crucial in the last period analysed (2019-2022) reflect the evolution that the concept of languages has undergone, going from general terms such as *Bilingualism* and *Multilingualism* to others more specific in the field such as *Heritage Language Maintenance*, *Heritage Speakers* and *Spanish*. Importantly, most of the publications are from the USA, where the immigration they experience comes mainly from countries with Spanish as an official language, principally from Mexico (García & Sánchez, 2018).

A similar explanation can be found in the **conceptual evolution**, in which highly related concepts such as *Minority Language*, *Bilingual Education* and *Multilingualism* stand out. In this regard, the cultural and linguistic diversity that characterises today's society generates an interest in bilingual education, initially and in multilingualism, subsequently (García, & Sánchez, 2018; Montrul, 2022; Paradis, 2007), just as stated in the previous paragraph. In the last period (2019-2022) a very close relationship between *Heritage Language* and *Spanish* also appears. All the concepts are complemented by a transversal one, *Bilingualism*, as the binding germ of the remaining concepts and the starting point of the first research that addressed the phenomenon of languages in contact, in the context of which heritage and minority languages are included.

On the other hand, between the first and second periods (1989-2013 and 2014-2018) an important relationship between *Identity* and *Motivation* stands out. In this regard, Gómez García (2022) points out that cultural identity is reinforced by maintaining the heritage language and this motivates the speaker to learn it.

There is also a very direct relationship between two terms from the last two periods (2014-2018 and 2019-2022), *Basque* and *Translanguaging*. Here, we

have to refer to many scientific studies focused on the Basque Country (Spain) and its language, as it is considered a minority language within the Spanish national panorama, and the incipient stream in language didactics that advocates translanguaging (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; García & Sánchez, 2018; García & Wei, 2014).

## 5. CONCLUSION

This article represents the first bibliometric study of heritage and minority languages and their connection with learning, since the first published paper in 1989 to the present day, using SciMAT, an open-source software developed for longitudinal scientific mapping analysis, so that this research contributes to reducing the existing gap in the scientific literature and provides a starting point for the study of the issue in question. Thus, it focuses on the analysis and description of the evolution of research topics on heritage/minority languages and learning, and the main related concepts available in the literature.

In terms of bibliometric volume, 1341 original research papers on our object of study have been processed and analysed, which have shown a remarkable increase in recent years (2019-2022). It is still expected that this interest will continue to grow, given the continuous movement of people worldwide and their settlement in places where the language of communication is different from their own, putting it at risk of disappearing in the families themselves, a situation of insecurity that will continue in the future, although the importance of including them in the teaching and learning process of students to strengthen their identity and belonging to the group is under study. This is the reason for the growing interest of researchers mainly from *the United States* and *Canada*, especially those belonging to different research areas, among which *Linguistics*, *Education* and *Psychology* stand out, although there are other disciplines concerning Language Teaching, Sociolinguistics, Ethnic Studies, Anthropological or Cultural Studies, which can be supported by research such as the one presented in this article. In addition, the main topics that are trending in the scientific community working on them are identified, such as *Bilingualism* and *Multilingualism*, and, later, *Heritage Language Maintenance* or *Heritage Speakers*, focusing research into more specific topics.

This work has important implications from both theoretical and practical points of view. First, from the theoretical point of view, study results offer relevant information to the scientific community on heritage and



minority languages and learning, since the papers reviewed are all included in WoS, which makes them relevant in the field. In addition, the data provided, such as keywords, most outstanding authors, most cited works, areas of publication, etc., can help researchers to deepen their studies. Secondly, from a practical point of view, the information obtained is fundamental for the teaching of heritage and additional languages and their treatment in the classroom.

Despite these positive implications, some limitations of the study must be considered. On the one hand, although the data have been cleaned with SciMAT, the WoS database has its own cleaning, so there may be some alterations or repetitions when working with a large number of publications. On the other hand, future work is needed to further research into heritage lan-

guages and their importance for integrating and teaching in the best possible conditions students coming to our multilingual classrooms as members of migrant families with several generations in the host country and languages other than the language of instruction. It is fundamentally in this context where an important trend in language didactics has emerged on the teaching of additional languages using translanguaging as a learning strategy for the development of the linguistic repertoire, mainly at an early age.

### Acknowledgements

This publication is part of the R&D project 'LEyLA' (Ref. PID2021-123055NB-I00) funded by MCIN/AEI/ 10.13039/501100011033 and by 'ERDF A way of making Europe'.

### References

- Bonness, D. J., Harvey, S., & Lysne, M. S. (2022). Teacher language awareness in initial teacher education policy: A comparative analysis of ITE documents in Norway and New Zealand. *Languages*, 7(3), Article 208. <https://dx.doi.org/10.3390/languages7030208>
- Callon, M., Courtial, J. P., & Laville, F. (1991). Co-word analysis as a tool for describing the network of interactions between basic and technological research: The case of polymer chemistry. *Scientometrics*, 22(1), 155-205. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF02019280>
- Callon, M., Courtial, J. P., Turner, W. A., & Bauin, S. (1983). From translations to problematic networks: An introduction to co-word analysis. *Information (International Social Science Council)*, 22(2), 191-235.
- Carioti, D., Stucchi, N., Toneatto, C., Masia M. F., Broccoli, M., Carbonari, S., ... & Berlingeri, M. (2022). Rapid automatized naming as a universal marker of developmental dyslexia in Italian monolingual and minority-language children. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 783775. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.783775>
- Carreira, M. (2017). The state of institutionalization of heritage languages in post-secondary language departments in the United States. In O. E. Kagan, M. M. Carreira, & C. Hitchins Chik (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of heritage language education* (pp. 347-362). Routledge.
- Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2017). Minority languages and sustainable translanguaging: Threat or opportunity? *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 38(10), 901-912. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2017.1284855>
- Cenoz, J., & Valencia, J. (1994). Additive trilingualism: Evidence from the Basque Country. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 15(2), 195-207. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716400005324>
- Cobo, M. J., López-Herrera, A. G., Herrera-Viedma, E., & Herrera, F. (2011a). An approach for detecting, quantifying, and visualizing the evolution of a research field: A practical application to the Fuzzy Sets Theory field. *Journal of Informetrics: An International Journal*, 5(1), 146-166. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2010.10.002>
- Cobo, M. J., López-Herrera, A. G., Herrera-Viedma, E., & Herrera, F. (2011b). Science mapping software tools: Review, analysis, and cooperative study among tools. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 62(7), 1382-1402. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/asi.21525>
- Cobo, M. J., López-Herrera, A. G., Herrera-Viedma, E., & Herrera, F. (2012). SciMAT: A new science mapping analysis software tool. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 63(8), 1609-1630. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.22688>

- Coulter, N., Monarch, I., & Konda, S. (1998). Software engineering as seen through its research literature: A study in co-word analysis. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 49(13), 1206-1223. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-4571\(1998\)49:13%3C1206::AID-ASI7%3E3.0.CO;2-F](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4571(1998)49:13%3C1206::AID-ASI7%3E3.0.CO;2-F)
- Cummins, J., & Danesi, M. (1990). *Heritage languages: The development and denial of Canada's linguistic resources*. Our Schools/Our Selves Education Foundation, Garamond Press & James Lorimer Publications.
- Danesi, M. (1991). Revisiting the research findings on heritage language learning: Three interpretive frames. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 47(4), 650-659. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.47.4.650>
- Deuchar, M., & Quay, S. (2000). *Bilingual acquisition: Theoretical implications of a case study*. Oxford University Press. <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/bilingual-acquisition-9780198299738?cc=ru&lang=en&>
- Etxeberria, F., & Elosegí, K. (2008). Basque, Spanish and immigrant minority languages in Basque schools. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 21(1), 69-84. <https://doi.org/10.2167/lcc344.0>
- Fairclough, M., & Belpoliti, F. (2016). Emerging literacy in Spanish among Hispanic heritage language university students in the USA: A pilot study. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 19(2), 185-201. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2015.1037718>
- Feuerverger, G. (1991). University students' perceptions of heritage language learning and ethnic identity maintenance. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 47(4), 660-677. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.47.4.660>
- Flores, N., & Rosa, J. (2015). Undoing appropriateness: Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in Education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 85(2), 149-171. <https://dx.doi.org/10.17763/0017-8055.85.2.149>
- García, O., & Sánchez, M. (2018). Transformando la educación de bilingües emergentes en el estado de Nueva York. *Language Education and Multilingualism*, 1, 138-156. <https://dx.doi.org/10.18452/19032>
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gómez García, E. (2022). Examining the influence of Spanish heritage language learners' critical language awareness (CLA). *Languages*, 7(3), Article 190. <https://dx.doi.org/10.3390/languages7030190>
- Gorter, D., & Cenoz, J. (2011). Multilingual education for European minority languages: The Basque Country and Friesland. *International Review of Education*, 57, 651-666. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11159-011-9248-2>
- He, Q. (1999). Knowledge discovery through co-word analysis. *Library Trends*, 48(1), 133-159. <https://hdl.handle.net/2142/8267>
- Henderson Lee, S. (2018). Heritage language. In J. I. Lintonas (Ed.), *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching* (pp. 141-176). John Wiley & Sons.
- Hirsch, J. E. (2005). An index to quantify an individual's scientific research output. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 102(46), 16569-16572. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0507655102>
- King, K. A., Fogle, L., & Logan-Terry, A. (2008). Family language policy. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 2(5), 907-922. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2008.00076.x>
- Lee, B. Y. (2013). Heritage language maintenance and cultural identity formation: The case of Korean immigrant parents and their children in the USA. *Early Child Development and Care*, 183(11), 1576-588. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2012.741125>
- Lim, N., O'Reilly, M. F., Sigafos, J., Ledbetter-Cho, K., & Lancioni, G. E. (2019). Should heritage languages be incorporated into interventions for bilingual individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders? A systematic review. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 49, 887-912. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3790-8>
- Little, S. (2019). 'Is there an app for that?' Exploring games and apps among heritage language families. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 40(3), 218-229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2018.1502776>
- López-Robles, J. R., Guallar, J., Otegi-Olaso, J. R., & Gamboa-Rosales, N. K. (2019a). El profesional de la información (EPI): Bibliometric and thematic analysis (2006-2017). *El profesional de la Información*, 28(4), Article e280417.



- López-Robles, J. R., Otegi-Olaso, J. R., Porto-Gómez, I., & Cobo, M.-J. (2019b). 30 years of intelligence models in management and business: A bibliometric review. *International journal of information management*, 48, 22-38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2019.01.013>
- López-Robles, J. R., Otegi-Olaso, J. R., Porto-Gómez, I., Gamboa-Rosales, H., & Gamboa-Rosales, N. K. (2020). Understanding the intellectual structure and evolution of Competitive Intelligence: A bibliometric analysis from 1984 to 2017. *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management*, 32(5), 604-619. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09537325.2019.1686136>
- Martínez, M. Á., Cobo, M. J., Herrera, M., & Herrera-Viedma, E. (2015). Analyzing the scientific evolution of social work using science mapping. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 25(2), 257-277. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1049731514522101>
- Mattheoudakis, M., Chatzidaki, A., & Maligkoudi, C. (2020). Heritage language classes and bilingual competence: The case of Albanian immigrant children in Greece. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 23(8), 1019-1035. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2017.1384447>
- McLaughlin, D. (1989). Power and the politics of knowledge: Transformative leadership and curriculum development for minority language learners. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 66(3), 41-60. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01619568909538648>
- Montanari, S. (2013). Productive trilingualism in infancy. What makes it possible? *World Journal of English Language*, 3(1), 62-77. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v3n1p62>
- Montrul, S. (2008). Second language acquisition welcomes the heritage language learner: Opportunities of a new field. *Second Language Research*, 24(4), 487-506. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0267658308095738>
- Montrul, S. (2022). The development of the heritage language in childhood bi-/multilingualism. In A. Stavans & U. Jessner (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of childhood multilingualism* (pp. 537-554). Cambridge University Press.
- Montrul, S., & Silva-Corvalán, C. (2019). The social context contributes to the incomplete acquisition of aspects of heritage languages: A critical commentary. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 41(2), 269-273. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0272263119000354>
- Moral-Muñoz, J. A., Herrera-Viedma, E., Santisteban-Espejo, A., & Cobo, M. J. (2020). Software tools for conducting bibliometric analysis in Science: An up-to-date review. *El profesional de la Información*, 29(1), Article e290103. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.ene.03>
- Paradis, J. (2007). Early bilingualism and multilingual acquisition. In P. Auer & W. Li (Eds.), *Handbook of multilingualism and multilingual communication* (pp. 15-44). Mouton de Gruyter.
- Parra-González, M. E., & Segura-Robles, A. (2019). Producción científica sobre gamificación en educación: Un análisis cuantitativo. *Revista de Educación*, 386, 113-135. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4438/1988-592X-RE-2019-386-429>
- Parshina, O., Sekerina, I. A., Lopukhina, A., & von der Malsburg, T. (2021). Monolingual and bilingual reading processes in Russian: An exploratory scanpath analysis. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 57(2), 469-492. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/rrq.414>
- Pearson, B. Z., Fernández, S. C., Lewedeg, V., & Oller, D. K. (1997). The relation of input factors to lexical learning by bilingual infants. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 18(01), 41-58. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716400009863>
- Polinsky, M., & Kagan, O. (2007). Heritage languages in the 'Wild' and in the classroom. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 1(5), 368-395. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2007.00022.x>
- Polinsky, M., & Scontras, G. (2020). Understanding heritage languages. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 23(1), 4-20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728919000245>
- Silva-Corvalán, C. (2018). Bilingual acquisition: Difference or incompleteness? In N. L. Shin & D. Erker (Eds.), *Questioning theoretical primitives in linguistic inquiry: Papers in honor of Ricardo Otheguy* (pp. 245-268). John Benjamins.
- Suzina, A. C. (2021). English as lingua franca. Or the sterilisation of scientific work. *Media, Culture & Society*, 43(1), 171-179. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0163443720957906>
- The Douglas Fir Group. (2016). A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100(S1), 19-47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12301>

Wu, H. P., Palmer, D. K., & Field, S. L. (2011) Understanding teachers' professional identity and beliefs in the Chinese heritage language school in the USA. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 24(1), 47-60.

Yiakoumetti, A. (2022). Teachers' language use in United Kingdom Chinese community schools: Implications for heritage-language education. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 899428. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.899428>

M. ÁNGELES JIMÉNEZ-JIMÉNEZ  
University of Granada, Spain [mangeles@ugr.es](mailto:mangeles@ugr.es)

ADRIÁN SEGURA-ROBLES  
University of Granada, Spain [adrianseg@ugr.es](mailto:adrianseg@ugr.es)

ANA M. RICO-MARTÍN  
University of Granada, Spain [amrico@ugr.es](mailto:amrico@ugr.es)

# Original Research

## Supervisors' written feedback on EFL graduate students' theses: Survey-sourced empirical evidence of best practices

by Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh

**Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh** Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia [manjeet@usm.my](mailto:manjeet@usm.my)

**Article history** Received January 25, 2023 | Revised February 23, 2023 | Accepted March 6, 2023

**Conflicts of interest** The author declared no conflicts of interest

**Research funding** This research reported in this article is supported by Universiti Sains Malaysia Bridging Grant

**doi** 10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1-58-69

**For citation** Singh, M. K. M. (2023). Supervisors' written feedback on EFL graduate students' theses: Survey-sourced empirical evidence of best practices. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(1), 58-69.

*This research provides a detailed and structured narrative of written feedback provided by thesis supervisors in response to the thesis drafts of their EFL graduate students, as most prior research focused on the students' perspectives. Specifically, the objective of this research is to identify the best practises in written feedback by thesis supervisors in linguistically demanding graduate programmes via qualitative research design. In the context of this research, qualitative data was compiled from one-to-one interviews with lecturers-cum-thesis supervisors, who supervise EFL graduate students in linguistically demanding graduate programmes. The graduate programmes in management, communication, social sciences, and languages at a Malaysian public university were selected. The focus of the data collection is on the thesis supervisors' perspective in providing written feedback to the thesis drafts of their EFL graduate students. Findings were categorised into three main areas that are the focus of feedback provided, the manner in which it was provided, and the advice supervisors would give to a new supervisor. Overall, the findings suggest that written feedback is important for successful thesis writing. The findings bode well for the quality of thesis supervision provided by supervisors, particularly in providing feedback to EFL graduate students and improving EFL graduate students' thesis drafts through gradual refinement of their academic writing. The findings are also useful for new educators or lecturers who are unfamiliar with supervisory roles and responsibilities.*

**KEYWORDS:** best practices, English as a foreign language, graduate programme, supervisor, thesis, written feedback



This is an open access article distributed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (CC BY-NC 4.0), which allows its unrestricted use for non-commercial purposes, subject to attribution. The material can be shared/adapted for non-commercial purposes if you give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Feedback is one of the backbone elements of teaching and learning in higher education (HE). Specifically, a supervisor's feedback on a thesis is essential for improvement as thesis writing is challenging for non-native English speakers, especially for non-native (L2) graduate students. A thesis is a very specific academic genre that is component structured, and each component has a focused objective(s) to fulfil the requirements

of their discipline-specific communities of practises (Bitchener et al., 2010). In the context of this study, feedback, particularly written feedback from thesis supervisors, is fundamental in assisting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Master and PhD students in linguistically demanding graduate programmes to improve their thesis writing to an acceptable standard, as postulated by Cafarella and Barnett (2000) and Taheri and Younesi (2015). Furthermore, in Hyland's (2013) and

Rimaz et al.'s (2015) research, graduate students indicated a need for supervisor written feedback to support their writing. The majority of previous research has focused on undergraduate student writing responses (see Del Rio et al., 2017). At the graduate level, various studies have looked into the challenges of thesis writing from the perspective of postgraduate students at the graduate level (see Ali et al., 2016; Wisker & Kiley, 2014); however, research into the types of responses supervisors provide to their students' theses and the benefits of the feedback is lacking. As a result, further investigation of this issue would be beneficial to thesis supervisors and their students.

Previous research on global context by Bitchner et al. (2011) and Wang and Jiang (2015) has emphasised the need for a greater understanding of thesis feedback provided to postgraduate students by their supervisors, due to potential issues with the type and level of feedback communicated, as well as how the feedback is communicated. Furthermore, in the Malaysian HE's EFL graduate thesis supervision scenario, there is a research gap focused on the best practises in thesis supervision (Hazita et al., 2014), such as supervisory practises and communication methods, and thesis student reactions to supervision approach among thesis supervisors to enhance postgraduate (MA and PhD) supervision. Baydarova et al. (2021) also claimed that there is a clear misalignment of expectations between doctoral students and their supervisors. Doctoral students have experienced long completion times and high attrition rates as a result of the incongruity. Hence, further research is necessary, since the quality and quantity of knowledge shared in theses produced through best practices in thesis supervision can benefit the academic community and the HE sector by improving written feedback and increasing student satisfaction.

Malaysia, as a hub of international education, attracts many international students from all over the world. Malaysia currently hosts a large number of EFL graduate students, particularly at the PhD level, from Asia (such as China, Bangladesh, and Pakistan), South-east Asia (such as Indonesia), and the Middle East (such as Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Qatar). EFL graduate students from these countries – especially those in linguistically demanding programmes like Language, Management, and Social Sciences – require dedicated and rigorous supervision, as their EFL background makes thesis writing in English difficult. Therefore, investigating the perspectives of supervisors supervising these selected groups of graduate students is warranted

for effective and efficient supervision in terms of providing feedback to students' theses. This study, via survey-sourced empirical evidence aims to provide a detailed narrative of written feedback provided by thesis supervisors in response to thesis drafts submitted by EFL graduate students. This study looked specifically at best practices in written feedback by thesis supervisors, which is typically given in linguistically demanding graduate programmes in Languages, Communication, Social Sciences, and Management at a public university in Malaysia. The study thus addresses the following research question: what are the current best practices for supervisors' written feedback on EFL graduate students' theses in linguistically demanding graduate programmes in Languages, Communication, Social Sciences, and Management?

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. Feedback in general

Academic writing at the MA and PhD levels leads to an outstanding thesis. Chokwe (2015) argued that many university assessment tasks require students to demonstrate their learning and academic competence through writing. In fact, academic writing skills are deemed as priority skills among university students, whether undergraduates or graduate students. In this regard, feedback is essential to achieving a high level of writing competency and ensuring sustainable improvement in academic writing, while gradually producing a thesis ready for examination. Feedback is a vital component that must be integrated into the teaching process to ensure that learning has taken place. It is through feedback that thesis supervisors have the opportunity to engage with their thesis students' academic writing process. According to Hyland (2009), continuous feedback allows students to be enculturated into their disciplinary literacy and epistemologies. Furthermore, as previously stated by Kumar and Strake (2007), feedback from supervisors serves as a training ground for PhD students to improve their work. It is regarded as an important learning experience for students to be able to advance in their training, particularly in writing.

In line with the need for this study, Pearson and Brew (2002) argued that supervisors have a tendency to supervise based on their own prior experiences as research students. Hyland (2009) contended further that the feedback provision mechanism in higher education is experiencing problems due to a mismatch between supervisor expectations and student fulfilment of those expectations. The supervisor's and student's under-

*'Gaining an understanding of thesis supervisors' perspectives on providing feedback to their graduate students' thesis writing, particularly EFL students, will serve as a guide for supervisors' professional development and follow-up programmes dealing with thesis feedback'*

standing of the cultural context and expectations of their disciplinary community differ. As a result, there is a need to understand supervisors' narratives of providing feedback, which are currently rarely documented. Gaining an understanding of thesis supervisors' perspectives on providing feedback to their graduate students' thesis writing, particularly EFL students, will serve as a guide for supervisors' professional development and follow-up programmes dealing with thesis feedback for graduate students.

## 2.2. Kinds of feedback

The type of feedback provided is crucial for thesis students to understand the expectations of their disciplinary community (Azman et al., 2014). Feedback directly provides input to improve one's writing, reading, and speaking abilities, as well as content competency. As presented by Hyland (2009), it also conveys implicit messages about the student's discourse community, its values and beliefs, the student's identity in the community, and the nature of disciplinary knowledge.

Moreover, based on his analysis of 60 feedback commentaries in master's programmes, Hyatt (2005) classified feedback comments into six categories. Phatic comments establish and maintain good relations, while developmental comments assist students in continuously improving their work. Alternatively, structural comments provide feedback on how to improve the organisation of the work, while stylistic comments focus on the use of academic language. This is followed by methodological comments about research method design, analysis, and other methodological issues, and finally, administrative comments about course-related issues. Commentaries on content, style, and development are frequently found, while other categories rarely received comments.

In Kumar and Stracke's (2007) study, they proposed a group of feedbacks, such as 'in-text feedback comments', which refer to on-the-spot thoughts expressed through the use of dialogue by supervisors, and 'overall

feedback', which is primarily a text that summarises the main concerns or general feedback to be considered by students. They also proposed a feedback conceptual framework that included: referential (editorial, organisational, or content), directive (suggestion, question, or instruction), and expressive (praise, criticism, or opinion).

## 2.3. How feedback is provided

The purpose of feedback is improvement. However, feedback has drawbacks if it does not provide specific advice to guide improvement (Ghadirian et al., 2014) and lacks message clarity. These may result in a student's misinterpretation or inability to interpret (Carless, 2006; Chanock, 2000). As a result, Carless (2006, p. 219) advocated for an understanding of the '*psychology of giving and receiving feedback*', in order to provide effective feedback. In their survey of feedback on writing at the doctoral level, Gulfidan and Walker (2011) identified twelve categories of feedback as required by students, which includes: writing arguments and justifications; statement of clarity and understandability; information incorporation and omission; progression and shift between sentences, paragraphs, or sections; and formatting (e.g., tables, APA style). According to Gulfidan and Walker's (2011) findings on preferences for 'receiving feedback', electronic feedback is preferred over hand-written feedback. Furthermore, they indicated that students preferred clear and explicit feedback that was devoid of ambiguity. The feedback must also include detailed guidance for revising the paper. When compared to general comments, feedback that provides detailed, specific comments is preferred. Among the disfavoured feedback are comments that are difficult to incorporate into their revision, symbols or marks without explanation, and feedback that puts pressure on them to change their writing style (Gulfidan & Walker, 2011).

## 2.4. Theoretical perspective

For this study, two theoretical perspectives will be used. The first is genre theory, which investigates the discourse patterning of academic genres such as thesis. Genre theory emphasises the importance of understanding the discourse requirements and expectations of one's discourse community (Hyland, 2005; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Paltridge, 2002; Swales, 1990).

The second viewpoint employs Lee and Murray's (2015) supervision framework perspective. Lee and Murray's perspective is based on three approaches. The

functional approach focuses on task supervision. Supervisors are comment feeders, providing referential and directive comments in consultation, and guiding supervisees to complete a task. The second approach entails enculturation, which involves assisting supervisees in becoming members of their community. In this context, supervisors expose their thesis supervisees to discipline-specific terminology, writing conventions, and power relationships. The tacit and explicit modes of enculturation are primarily accomplished through feedback on the supervisee's thesis. The third approach, critical thinking, emphasises inquiry-based learning through critical thinking skills, argumentation skills, reflection, and personal growth. The emphasis of this approach is a mutual relationship between the knower and learner in terms of knowledge construction and its interdependence with the second approach, which provides the thesis supervisee with a sense of ownership over their thesis writing, socialisation into their academic community, and the development of identity as graduate students and researchers. Finally, quality relationship as the last approach in this perspective encompasses the transformative nature of the supervision process, which involves three active participants (supervisor, supervisee, and product). Power relations govern the transformation, which is governed by disciplinary, institutional, geographical, and historical context. The quality relationship approach emphasises transformation through written comments from supervisors, engagement with the comments to improve thesis drafts by thesis supervisees, and finally, producing a product that is a thesis based on research conducted.

### 2.5. Related studies

Mirador (2000) analysed the written comments of seven university academics on the formative and summative written products of graduate students. The findings revealed 12 common moves, such as suggestion for improvement, highlighting weakness, probing, and overall judgement. Holbrook et al. (2004) went on to evaluate feedback on three levels. They began by investigating the structure of feedback reports, the methods of communication, the attributes of examiners' evaluative comments, and the viva procedures. The second level was concerned with the frequency and prevalence of different categories of comments. The findings from the three levels of analysis revealed that thesis examiners played various different roles, such as mentor-colleague, supervisor-instructor, and assessor-arbiter. Subsequently, a study of 60 extensive graduate educational

studies assignments revealed six dominant types of written comments: phatic, developmental, structural, stylistic, methodological, and administrative. This was followed by the three most common types of comments: content, style, and development (Hyatt, 2005).

Another study investigated the classification of comments on a PhD dissertation based on Holmes' categorisation of speech functions, which is dominantly referential and the other two functions, directive and expressive (Kumar & Stracke, 2007). Referential speech function consists of editorial, organisation, and content comments. The directive speech function includes questions, instructions, and suggestion comments. Finally, praise, criticism, and opinion represent the expressive speech function.

Bitchener et al. (2011) compiled another set of supervisor feedback categorisation involving content, requirements, cohesion/coherence, linguistic accuracy, and appropriateness. Linguistic accuracy and appropriateness were the most common types of feedback. Following that are comments on content, requirements, and cohesion/coherence. As important as effective written feedback is for thesis students' writing, it is also critical to investigate the feedback provided, and how feedback is provided, while reflecting on the appropriateness and sufficiency of the written feedback. There is clearly a scarcity of research on feedback practises from the perspective or lens of thesis supervisors. As a result, more research should be conducted through their lens.

## 3. METHODS

### 3.1. Research design

This study was conducted to explore the best practices in written feedback given by thesis supervisors to EFL thesis supervisees. To achieve the aim of this study, a qualitative method was employed involving purposive sampling and one-to-one interviews with each of the thesis supervisors (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

### 3.2. Sampling

This study involved a non-probability sampling method using purposive sampling. Ten selected lecturers from the disciplines of Languages, Communication, Management, and Social Sciences were invited to participate in the study. Two Languages lecturers, two Social Sciences lecturers, one Communication lecturer, and one Management lecturer accepted the invitation to participate in the study as in-depth, semi-structured, one-to-one interview participants. The following criteria



*'The interviews were conducted at the offices of the thesis supervisors, and each interview lasted approximately one hour. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants at each session'*

were used to select lecturers from each of these disciplines: they have been on the faculty for at least ten years; they have graduated postgraduate students (MA and PhD through research-based programmes); and they are currently supervising students. The participants were briefed on the study and informed of the study's voluntary nature and withdrawal policy.

### 3.3. Instruments

The interview protocol used in this study was adapted from Bitchener et al. (2011). The interview questions centred on three areas: the focus of the feedback provided, the mechanism for providing feedback, and the participants' advice on good supervision practises for new supervisors. The interview questions in the instrument focused on investigating best practises in written feedback among supervisors, and they were divided into the following sections: (1) the student's competency in writing; (2) the purpose of feedback; (3) the focus of feedback; (4) how the feedback is provided; (5) the expectations of the student responses to feedback; (6) the experiences of the student responses to feedback; (7) the effectiveness of feedback; (8) supervisory training – nature of training and recommendations; and (9) advice for new supervisors.

The purpose of the semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interview with six thesis supervisors was to obtain a detailed narrative of their best practises in providing written feedback to their postgraduate students' thesis drafts. Rather than gathering findings from the perspective of postgraduate students, as is common in currently available studies, the investigation focuses on the best practises among thesis supervisors in providing written feedback to postgraduate students' thesis drafts. Since they work directly with the thesis supervisees, thesis supervisors *'are likely to be more knowledgeable and informative about the subject under investigation'* (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 378).

The interviews were conducted at the offices of the thesis supervisors, and each interview lasted approximately one hour. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants at each session. This was fol-

lowed by the audiotaped interviews. During the interview sessions, the participants were encouraged to discuss issues pertaining to the best practices in providing written feedback to thesis supervisees' written drafts and final thesis.

### 3.4. Data analysis

At the end of each interview, the researcher audiotaped and transcribed it. After completing the six transcriptions of the one-on-one interviews, the transcriptions were analysed for emerging patterns using a qualitative data analysis software, NVivo version 10. The coding of the data was established using thematic analysis that is a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The captured themes of the data from the interview transcripts answered the research questions and represented the patterned responses within the created data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase was aided by the qualitative data analysis software NVivo version 10. The data was screened in five phases: familiarisation with the data (i.e., generating initial codes), searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The findings are discussed in three areas: the focus of the feedback provided, the manner in which it was provided, and the advice supervisors would give to a new supervisor.

## 4. STUDY AND RESULTS

### 4.1. Objectives of providing feedback

The six lecturers, who were interviewed, listed many reasons for providing feedback. Essentially, the lecturers are expected to provide positive feedback in terms of understanding the context of the research. At the same time, the lecturers indicated that feedback would minimise the risks of failing to defend their thesis during the viva session. Feedback is also intended to guide students in finding resources and expanding their reading coverage. Lecturers also indicated that feedback creates awareness among the EFL thesis writers of their writing abilities. This will indirectly motivate thesis writers to enhance their writing skills or to initiate corrective actions to improve their thesis writing skills. Feedback to thesis writers also allows lecturers to inform EFL thesis writers about the writing mechanism, such as ensuring cohesiveness and coherence in their writing and effectively communicating their ideas. The following is an excerpt from one of the lecturers.

*'In terms of prioritising feedback elements, one lecturer indicated that, in addition to the content of the research, language is an important factor in presenting ideas, followed by appropriate formatting in accordance with institutional guidelines. Aside from that, all respondents agreed that their primary goal in providing feedback is to improve the quality of work'*

S1: ...I want the best from my students. As their supervisor, the expectation we have on our students is that they understand the context of the research and provide the fundamental inputs of that research that they are doing...

#### **4.2. Prioritising feedback elements**

In terms of prioritising feedback elements, one lecturer indicated that, in addition to the content of the research, language is an important factor in presenting ideas, followed by appropriate formatting in accordance with institutional guidelines. Aside from that, all respondents agreed that their primary goal in providing feedback is to improve the quality of work. According to one respondent, feedback is an essential part of the learning process for both the thesis supervisor and the thesis writer.

S5: My priority is to let students learn because the process of learning should be appreciated and valued by both parties.

#### **4.3. Mechanism of providing feedback**

There are many avenues available for thesis supervisors to deliver their feedback. Some respondents keep track of the feedback they give in stages using a recording system that involves hard copy and soft copy documents. This encompasses making reference to previous feedback and ensuring that it guides current and future feedback. The length of the feedback provided is also considered. There is also a difference in the way feedback is channelled. Comments to EFL thesis students living abroad are sent via email, whereas comments to EFL thesis students residing in Malaysia are conveyed on paper. International students studying abroad are then required to respond to the comments in table form, and thesis students studying in Malaysia must submit a draft copy that includes the list of responses.

S6: ...in the past I've been using... just writing on the theses themselves. So, I will have the hard copy and write... on the hard copy. But I find... with that, I am not able to track what I've been doing because, you know, when you have a copy, you give it back to the students and you don't have a copy of that. So now I've resorted to using the tracking system on words ... I find it is more difficult for me... in terms of going through because usually they give me in bulk. But I find that helps me later to track what feedback I've given them also in what have they done to fix it.

#### **4.4. Focus of feedback content**

Thesis supervisors provide feedback on the strength and weaknesses of the thesis students' writing. In terms of the weakness, the thesis supervisor (S1) prefers the thesis students to follow his or her style of writing, whereas the other thesis supervisors prefer the thesis students to be independent in terms of having their own style of writing, as the emphasis is on writing the literature review section. The thesis supervisor also prefers that students adhere to academic writing phases and carefully organise the academic content.

S6: ...depends on a student to student... come up with ideas and strengthen them, come up with suggestions on how to contribute to the knowledge.

The feedback system for EFL thesis students' writing is centred on a low level of criticality as well. Thesis students tend to report information in detail that can instead be summarised or discussed concisely and critically. Furthermore, thesis students' inability to write a good problem statement and operationalise it into research objectives causes a setback in critically reviewing the literature. Alternatively, feedback is provided to EFL thesis students to help them improve their written communication skills, as they are weak in academic writing. This is due to a lack of writing proficiency in the English Language. Concurrently, feedback is centred on communication of the gap investigated in the research.

S3: ...coming up with a good statement of the problem and from their operationalising it into objectives... Besides that, they're not able to critically look at the literature review. They're just able to write about the past work. Past studies, related studies in the field.

#### **4.5. The scope of feedback**

The scope of feedback provided by the thesis supervisors focuses primarily on content knowledge, accuracy, completeness, and relevance. Respondent S1

*'Thesis supervisors stated that feedback was also provided to EFL students' thesis writing in terms of the argument development. The respondent indicated seeking detailed write-up from the students involving critical writing skills, reporting, and reviewing and presenting ideas. Coherence is emphasised in presenting their statement of problem and research objectives with clarity. Coherence is emphasised in presenting their statement of problem and research objectives with clarity'*

stated that content is a critical aspect of thesis writing that cannot be compromised. At the same time, in terms of accuracy, language errors, such as spelling errors, are discouraged to the extent where EFL students must use an e-dictionary as a spelling guide. Thesis supervisor, S1 also stated that he or she provides guidance to the EFL thesis student in preparing and conducting data analysis. In such situations, thesis students gain hands-on experience with the assistance of their thesis supervisors. At the same time, S2 stated that feedback is provided based on the relevance of the thesis students' writing to review the related literature. The thesis supervisors also emphasise accuracy and completeness to ensure the relevance of the thesis students' writing.

S2: *...whether I give feedback in this area or not. Yes, of course, sometimes you read the theses and you tried to give comments in terms of their relevance whether or not they already have it, for example, if they are reviewing body of knowledge they did, whether they are reviewing the right materials or whether they should expand, or go deeper...*

#### 4.6. Genre knowledge

Thesis supervisors emphasise genre knowledge elements in their feedback. Genre knowledge, as indicated by respondent S1, involves the knowledge of thesis structure. S1 stated that EFL thesis students must be aware of and adhere to the format of a thesis in terms of inclusion and exclusion of chapters. As for S2, EFL thesis students must understand the type of text they are dealing with, as well as the different communicative functions of each chapter of a thesis. Thesis students should be able to compartmentalise their writing in ac-

cordance with suitable move structures for each chapter of a thesis, such as the introduction, methodology, or discussion chapters.

S2: *Students have to know what should go in an introduction, what goes in the literature review in the methodology and how to write a result section and discussion. I give a lot of feedback related to the different parts of the thesis.*

#### 4.7. Rhetorical structure / organisation

In terms of the feedback on rhetorical structure or organisation, thesis supervisors indicate that as independent learners, EFL thesis writers must develop their own organisational style for their work. However, S2 indicated that postgraduate students require guidance in organising their ideas or thoughts. Respondents also suggested that feedback should be provided on the structure and organisation to ease readers.

S1: *The organisation needs to be suitable as a post-graduate. They need to understand to what extent that thesis is deep enough to be explored so that we have rhetorical form and so on.*

#### 4.8. Argument development

Thesis supervisors stated that feedback was also provided to EFL students' thesis writing in terms of the argument development. The respondent indicated seeking detailed write-up from the students involving critical writing skills, reporting, and reviewing and presenting ideas. Coherence is emphasised in presenting their statement of problem and research objectives with clarity. The major concern in their feedback is the lack of cohesion in the five chapters of a thesis. Respondents also advise their students to avoid padding out the literature review chapter, while focusing more on arguing with the literature.

S3: *... their main weakness is this. They're not able to coherently write according to the research objectives and statement of the problems... there is an issue of cohesion and coherence in students' writing... there are five chapters, sometimes do not gel. There's no cohesion in the five chapters.*

#### 4.9. Linguistic accuracy and appropriateness

In terms of linguistic accuracy and appropriateness, S1 prioritised linguistic accuracy.

S1: *... for postgraduate level, the accuracy of the language itself is very important so that you can actually explain in academic way too so that everyone can understand your study.*

#### **4.9.1. How do you determine whether or not your feedback is successful?**

S2: *If I give feedback and they improve, then I know it's helpful. If I give feedback and they don't improve, they still do the same thing. Then I have to check whether the feedback is successful or not.*

#### **4.9.2. What factors are taken into consideration when providing feedback?**

The knowledge that they have in the research (proficiency level)

S2: *... sometimes when students send you [their parts], you have to give more and more feedback. You have to give a more guided, clearer feedback. Then if the students are at a later stage when they are already so much better, I just give you a bit like 'Oh, this is good. You should continue doing this.'*

#### **4.9.3. When do you provide feedback and why?**

S2: *All the time. But of course, like I said, sometimes people need more feedback in the beginning. I think usually for postgraduate students they need a lot of feedback in the beginning and a lot of feedback at the end. These are the two very important stages in between when they are out there collecting data or really analysing, that's when they can sort of comprehend on their own.*

#### **4.9.4. How do you provide feedback?**

S3: *...I usually show comments in bold or in colours, as to what exactly my feedback is based on their work, for international students. For local students, usually they submit their hard copy. So, it is written and oral to support and of course I use quotes, symbols in their work.*

#### **4.10. Face-to-face feedback interaction**

In terms of face-to-face feedback interaction, respondents indicated that they have it with their students. This activity is predicated on the notion that students and supervisors must have a mutual understanding of the written feedback provided. Feedback meetings or face-to-face feedback interactions can also guide them in determining the future direction of their research. In terms of timing, S3 stated that the feedback meeting is conducted every fortnight or once a month. S5 argued that the benefits of feedback meetings include the ability to align their thoughts and those of their students, as well as the ability to discuss differences in order to reach a consensus.

S5: *I have feedback meetings with my students and because I need to make sure that we reach the same understanding on comments that I have given. And, if I comment, I normally say, 'I suggest you do this, to do these things'. However, if the students do not agree, then, we can always discuss back and find-tune to ensure that both parties reach more quality work.*

#### **4.11. Thesis student response to thesis supervisor feedback**

Thesis supervisors expect their thesis students to accept the feedback provided. The feedback must be acknowledged by improving their work and incorporating the feedback into their writing. One respondent had a negative experience with international postgraduate students, who refused to accept the feedback given. Furthermore, respondents expect students to work on the feedback by consulting them if they have queries about it.

S3: *... have bad experiences especially with international students. They're very stubborn in terms of trying to argue their stance in that particular feedback ... resolution to solve the problem ...As I tell them to look at the literature and decide what I have, what they think about my feedback based on the literature.*

#### **4.12. Prior feedback provision training**

In terms of the thesis supervisors' prior training history on providing feedback, the findings revealed that the majority did not receive training on giving feedback to thesis drafts. The manner in which feedback is given is primarily determined by the experience of the thesis supervisors. One respondent, S1, indicated that training was received during the supervisor's own postgraduate study, and another received training through discussions and feedbacks from other supervisors, as well as courses organised by the university.

S2: *... when I first came to xxx (name of university), they do provide, like a training on how to provide supervision, how to supervise students, but the rest I learned from experience.*

S6: *No, not really ... My training is on...with my supervisor ... I think that was a good training.*

#### **4.13. Feedback provision training**

The respondents agreed on the importance of training in feedback provision techniques. In the context of this study, thesis supervisors noted that they should be provided with practical workshops or seminars to improve their feedback provision skills. The respondents



also requested for feedback guidelines. Furthermore, the type of training requested differs from training on ways of writing a chapter.

*S3: If training is provided, I would prefer a workshop actually...a workshop in terms of outlining exactly the expectations of a lecturer in providing feedback for international and local postgraduate students.*

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study has provided several key points to consider when providing effective feedback for thesis supervision. The findings of this study concur with the findings of Jafarigohar et al. (2018), who reported the identification of seven major categories of comments by thesis supervisors: academic conventions, referencing style, using a suitable formatting template, content, organisation, grammar and sentence structure, and method. Prior literature also corroborates these findings (Mhunpiew, 2013; Surry et al., 2010). Literature has indicated that manually written feedback has been replaced with technologically advanced online written feedback provision, reducing face-to-face interactions between supervisors and supervisees to a bare minimum.

According to Hyland and Hyland's (2001) study, supervisors do not expect high standards from their students, and refrain from providing too many comments as this will demotivate the students. However, Hoomanfar et al. (2018) argued that supervisors expect a higher level of content complexity in dissertations, which contradicted their findings. This prompts supervisors to provide additional comments in this area in order to assist PhD students (and their dissertations) in fulfilling the requirements for viva submission. As a result, the current study agrees with the latter.

According to Lee (2007), the literature has also provided insights for a more process-oriented supervisory role that allows for the development of collaborative knowledge creation. Naturally, the unequal role of supervisor and supervisee necessitates considerable negotiation. As a result, a collaborative relationship between supervisor and supervisee will foster greater graduate independence and competency to be nurtured.

The findings suggest that feedback from thesis supervisors is crucial in guiding supervisees, particularly EFL supervisees, in their studies. At the same time, a significant drawback is that thesis supervisors are not given any training in terms of the structure of feedback provision for thesis supervisees. Furthermore, supervision in a global and intercultural context requires the thesis su-

perisors to have intercultural competence, in order to provide feedback to thesis supervisees from different parts of the world. According to Hazita et al. (2014), Malaysia currently has a significant number of postgraduate students from Arab countries, and an increase in EFL graduates from China is expected following the Covid-19 worldwide pandemic. For these students, constructive feedback is very important due to the lack of exposure to the academic literacy genre in their own educational environment. East et al. (2012) previously claimed that in order to maintain the supervisor-student relationship and provide effective feedback, thesis supervisors must consider the different understandings, cultural backgrounds, and learning strategies inherited and practised in their learning that students bring into the thesis supervisor-supervisee relationship.

According to the findings of this study, a good thesis produced by postgraduate students is also heavily influenced by the relationship with the thesis supervisor. Ciampa and Wolfe (2019), Carter and Kumar (2017), and Mulliner and Tucker (2015) all stated that effective critical feedback from the thesis supervisor is essential for thesis writing. Structured feedback on the various aspects investigated in this study will motivate graduate students to be consistent in their writing, produce a quality thesis, and fulfil the graduation period requirement. Furthermore, thesis supervisors should be provided with the necessary training through formal channels, in order to improve their competency in providing feedback. In relation to this, the National Strategic Plan for Higher Education 2007, which aims to increase the number of PhD holders in Malaysia to 60,000 by 2023 (Ait Saadi et al., 2018), thesis supervisor feedback competency is an issue that requires attention. Such attention, in the form of thesis supervisor training in terms of providing feedback, engaging with students, being sensitive to cultural differences, and respecting the supervisor-supervisee relationship, will complement the government initiative to ensure supervisee satisfaction with thesis supervision.

The feedback provided by thesis supervisors is a vital component of thesis supervision. As a result, supervisors should be equipped with good supervisory skills and practises, in order to guide their thesis supervisees in their writing, particularly EFL postgraduate students in linguistically demanding academic programmes. In this context, relevant workshops to assist supervisors in identifying and diagnosing challenges, as well as responding to those challenges in students' writing, can be added to the professional development agenda.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The findings emphasised the focus of feedback provided, the manner in which it was provided, and the advice supervisors would give to a new supervisor. Focus of feedback highlighted the reasons supervisors provide feedback, category of feedback – content and/or language, and strength as well as weakness of thesis writing in terms of content knowledge, accuracy, completeness, and relevance. Secondly, the manner in which written feedback was provided entailed mechanism of providing written feedback via online or offline channel and the format of feedback provision. Finally, advice given by supervisors to new supervisors offered insights about pre-supervision training and during supervision training.

The quality and appropriateness of thesis supervision are critical to ensuring successful theses submission for examination, and constructive and detailed feedback on written work from supervisors is a key characteristic of good research supervision. This study, which included a large number of thesis supervisors in linguistically demanding graduate programmes, as well as a large number of Malaysian and international thesis students (EFL students) at Malaysian higher education

institutions, provided significant insights into the current thesis supervisor-supervisee relationship in the context of theses feedback. Moreover, the findings revealed current practices that are practically common and comparable among thesis supervisors across universities. It will also provide researchers with an opportunity to incorporate good feedback practices, in order to improve supervision quality through constructive feedback from lecturers. Indirectly, it will enhance graduate student satisfaction, which will consequently attract more incoming graduate students. The findings will undoubtedly serve as a foundation for a future longitudinal study involving other universities. As this is a preliminary in-depth study focusing on six supervisors, the findings of the supervisory feedback practices will guide a larger study. Subsequently, the larger study will eventually frame a pedagogical approach to supervising MA and PhD students that incorporates effective supervisory style and techniques for effective critical thesis writing.

### Acknowledgements

This research reported in this article is supported by Universiti Sains Malaysia Bridging Grant.

## References

- Ait Saadi, I., Collins, H. E., & Dash, D. P. (2018). Researcher development in Malaysia: A reflection on action. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, 9(2), 259-273. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SGPE-D-18-00013>
- Ali, P. A., Watson, R., & Dhingra, K. (2016). Postgraduate research students' and their supervisors' attitudes towards supervision. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 11, 227-241. <https://dx.doi.org/10.28945/3541>
- Azman, H., Nor, N. F. M., & Aghwela, H. O. M. (2014). Investigating supervisory feedback practices and their impact on international research student's thesis development: A case study. *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 141, 152-159. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.05.028>
- Baydarova, I., Collins, H. E., & Ait Saidi, I. (2021). Alignment of doctoral student and supervisor expectations in Malaysia. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 16, 1-29. <https://doi.org/10.28945/4682>
- Bitchener, J., Basturkmen, H., & East, M. (2010). The focus of supervisor written feedback to thesis/dissertation students. *International Journal of English Studies*, 10(2), 79-97. <https://dx.doi.org/10.6018/ijes.10.2.119201>
- Bitchener, J., Basturkmen, H., East, M., & Meyer, H. (2011). Best practice in supervisor feedback to thesis writers. <https://akoaooteaeroa.ac.nz/best-practice-supervisor-feedback>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Caffarella, R. S., & Barnett, B. G. (2000). Teaching doctoral students to become scholarly writers: The importance of giving and receiving critiques. *Studies in Higher Education*, 25(1), 39-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/030750700116000>
- Carless, D. (2006). Differing perceptions in the feedback process. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(2), 219-233. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075070600572132>



- Carter, S. & Kumar, V. (2017). Ignoring me is part of learning: Supervisory feedback on doctoral writing. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 54(1), 68-75. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2015.1123104>
- Chanock, K. (2000). Comments on essays. Do students understand what tutors write? *Teaching in Higher Education*, 5(1), 95-105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135625100114984>
- Chowke, J. M. (2015). Students' and tutors' perceptions of feedback on academic essays in an open and distance learning context. *Open Praxis*, 7(1), 39-56. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5944/open-praxis.7.1.154>
- Ciampa, K., & Wolfe, Z. (2019). Preparing for dissertation writing: Doctoral education students' perceptions. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, 10(2), 86-10. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1108/SGPE-03-2019-0039>
- Creswell, J., & Plano Clark, V. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Sage Publications.
- Del Rio, M. L., Diaz-Vazques, R., & Sanfiz, J. M. M. (2017). Satisfaction with the supervision of undergraduate dissertations. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 19(2), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787417721365>
- East, M., Bitchener, J., & Basturkmen, H. (2012). What constitutes effective feedback to postgraduate research students? The students' perspective. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 9(2), Article 7. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5376/1/1.9.2.7>
- Ghadirian, L., Syarifard, A., Majdzadeh, R., Rajabi, F., & Yunesian, M. (2014). Challenges for better thesis supervision. *Medical Journal of Islam Republic of Iran*, 28, Article 32. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/pmc4154287>
- Gulfidan, C. & Walker, A. (2011). A Model for doctoral students' perceptions and attitudes toward written feedback for academic writing. *Research in Higher Education*, 52, 508-536. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11162-010-9204-1>
- Hazita, A., Nor Fariza, M. N., & Hnan, O. M. A. (2014). Investigating supervisory feedback practices and their impact on international research student's thesis development: A case study. *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 141, 152-159. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.05.028>
- Holbrook, A., Bourke, S., Lovat, T., & Dally, K. (2004). Qualities and characteristics in the written reports of doctoral thesis examiners. *Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology*, 4, 126-145.
- Hoomanfar, M. H., Jafarigohar, M., Jalilifar, A. R., & Hosseini Masum, S. M. (2018). A comparative study of graduate students' self-perceived needs for written feedback and the supervisors' perceptions. *Research in Applied Linguistics*, 9(2), 24-46.
- Hyatt, D. F. (2005). 'Yes, a very good point!': A critical genre analysis of a corpus of feedback commentaries on Master of Education assignments. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 10(3), 339-353.
- Hyland, K. (2005). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. Continuum.
- Hyland, K. (2009). *Academic discourse*. Continuum.
- Hyland, K. (2013). Faculty feedback: Perceptions and practices in L2 disciplinary writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 22, 240-253. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2013.03.003>
- Hyland, F., & Hyland, K. (2001). Sugaring the pill: Praise and criticism in written feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10(3), 185-212.
- Hyland, K. & Tse, P. (2004). Metadiscourse in academic writing: A reappraisal. *Applied Linguistics*, 25(2), 156-177. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/applin/25.2.156>
- Jafarigohar, M., Hoomanfar, M. H., & Jalilifar, A. (2018). A typology of supervisor written feedback on l2 students' theses/dissertation. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 21(2), 43-87.
- Kumar, V. & Stracke, E. (2007). An analysis of written feedback on a PhD thesis. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12(4), 461-470. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562510701415433>
- Lee, A. (2007). How can a mentor support experiential learning? *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 12(3), 333-340. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104507078455>
- Lee, A., & Murray, R. (2015). Supervising writing: Helping postgraduate students develop as researchers. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 52(5), 558-570. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2013.866329>
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (1993). *Research in education: A conceptual understanding*. Harper Collins.

- Mhunpiew, N. (2013). A supervisor's roles for successful thesis and dissertation. *Education Review*, 3(2), 119-122.
- Mirador, J. F. (2000). A move analysis of written feedback in higher education. *RELC Journal*, 31(1), 45-60. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/003368820003100103>
- Mulliner, E., & Tucker, M. (2015). Feedback on feedback practice: Perceptions of students and academics. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 42(2), 266-288. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2015.1103365>
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Collins, K. M. (2007). A typology of mixed methods sampling designs in social science research. *The Qualitative Report*, 12(2), 281-316. <https://dx.doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2007.1638>
- Paltridge, B. (2002). Thesis and dissertation writing: An examination of published advice and actual practice. *English for Specific Purposes*, 21, 125-143. [https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906\(00\)00025-9](https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(00)00025-9)
- Pearson, M., & Brew, A. 2002. Research training and supervision development. *Studies in Higher Education*, 27(2), 135-150. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075070220119986c>
- Rimaz, S., Dehdari, T., & Dehdari, L. (2015). PhD students' expectations from their supervisors: A qualitative content analysis. *Journal of Medical Education Development*, 9(4), 56-71.
- Surry, D. W., Stefurak, T., & Kowch, E. G. (2010). Technology in higher education: Asking the right questions. In D. Surry, T. Stefurak, & R. Gray (Eds). *Technology in higher education: Social and organizational aspects* (pp. 1-12). IGI Global.
- Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge University Press.
- Taheri, M., & Younesi, J. (2015). PhD students' attitude model about the feedback of academic. *Educational Psychology*, 10(34), 44-66.
- Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences. Sage Publications.
- Teddlie, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed methods sampling: A typology with examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1, 77-100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689806292430>
- Wang, T., & Jiang, L. (2015). Studies on written corrective feedback: Theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, and future directions. *English Language Teaching*, 8(1), 110-120. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v8n1p110>
- Wisker, G., & Kiley, M. (2014). Professional learning: Lessons for supervision from doctoral examining. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 19(2), 125-138. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2012.727762>

MANJET KAUR MEHAR SINGH  
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia [manjeet@usm.my](mailto:manjeet@usm.my)

# Original Research

## Identity construction in the UK higher education: How cultural gendered identity is shaped through leadership practice

by Tanya Linaker

**Tanya Linaker** King's College London, UK [tanya.linaker@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:tanya.linaker@kcl.ac.uk)

**Article history** Received September 12, 2022 | Revised November 19, 2023 | March 6, 2023

**Conflicts of interest** The author declared no conflicts of interest

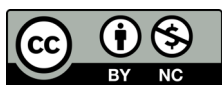
**Research funding** No funding was reported for this research

**doi** 10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1-70-85

**For citation** Linaker, T. (2023). Identity construction in the UK higher education: How cultural gendered identity is shaped through leadership practice. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(1), 70-85.

*This article is a case study of the cultural gendered professional identity construction of an educational leader contextualised by an ethnically diverse and multilingual UK University language centre. The leadership identity of the female participant is co-constructed by the researcher through narrative-in-interaction to reveal its dilemmatic nature, being agentic and influenced by external forces and being unique vis-a-vis belonging to the wider community, staying the same and being subject to change. The study is presented within a Post Structuralist framework and views discourse as a means of identity construction. The implicit and explicit identity claims are elicited through small story analysis at three levels of positioning – against story actors, against the interlocutor and in relation to global discourses to ensure the best scrutiny of multiple and contradictory identity claims. The article gives voice to the underrepresented ethnic minority of female educational leaders by revealing boundaries to leadership identity development against discourses of gender ideology, marriage, ethnicity, migration, illness, death, work/life balance, professional success, and leadership learning. It also aims to contribute to the body of research on small story and positioning analysis.*

**KEYWORDS:** *identity construction, gendered identity, global discourse, narrative-in-interaction, identity claims, positioning analysis, small story analysis*



This is an open access article distributed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (CC BY-NC 4.0), which allows its unrestricted use for non-commercial purposes, subject to attribution. The material can be shared/adapted for non-commercial purposes if you give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of this article is a female educational leader responsible for a team of teachers of Arabic from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. She has been nominated three times for an excellence award by her students and twice for outstanding leadership and managerial support by her colleagues. The gendered identity construction of a female educational leader from a culturally and linguistically diverse background working in the Foreign Languages Department at a UK University is an under researched area. The research findings of this study will shed light on the barriers in per-

sonal and professional leadership development in a culturally specific educational setting. The aim of the project is to gain an understanding and add to the knowledge of cultural gendered professional identity construction of an educational leader through small story analysis (Bamberg et al., 2007). The study's contribution to knowledge is limited to one participant. However, it is relatable within the specific context and is validated through the discourse. It will contribute to research on small stories (Bamberg, 2006; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) as a site of identity construction and positioning analysis of the dilemmatic nature

of identity – agentive vis-à-vis constructed by external forces, remaining the same or becoming different, being unique and belonging to the wider community (Bamberg, 2011).

The article will address the following research question: what aspects of gendered and cultural educational leadership identity emerge from the small story analysis? This question will lead to a sub-question: what indexes identity shift from dilemmatic to agentive when aligning or resisting dominant societal discourses of leadership, gender, and culture? By answering these questions, the article will attempt to reveal the transformative aspect of cultural gendered leadership identity construction through small story telling.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

### 2.1. Paradigm rational

This study has been informed by constructionist ontology, interpretivist epistemology and qualitative methodology – interpreting the world as a social construct (Cohen et al., 2018; Kosta & Isakova, 2022). The rich qualitative data is generated, analysed, and interpreted within a specific situation at a particular time (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) with the researcher being part of the research topic, having an impact on the researched (Coleman & Briggs, 2002).

The research is foregrounded in a Post Structuralist paradigm as it allows a high degree of subjectivity, reflexivity and potential for an emancipatory, transformative educational research project (Jameson, 2012) with the researcher being an agent of the research process, bringing with them their personal characteristics, values and beliefs (Hammersley, 2013), and having the ability to exercise a nuanced and sensitive approach to deconstructing the dichotomies of gender and leadership discourses (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

Due to the interpretative nature of this research its validity is measured by the credibility and authenticity of the data and its dependability resulting from construction of meaning through contextual data (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The researcher's membership of the community under research allows for a deeper understanding of the participant's life trajectory and a greater agency in co-constructing her story, lending further credibility to the analysis (Riessman, 2015).

### 2.2. Identity

The methodology is based on identity research through narrative inquiry and narrative-in-interaction (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Barkhuizen et al.,

2014; De Fina, 2009) with narrative being a key site for identity construction (Van De Mieroop et al., 2022), specifically, gendered identity construction through reflective storytelling (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

The narrative approach views identity as a discursive construct, which changes according to a particular context (Antaki & Widdicombe, 2008; De Fina, 2009; Blommaert, 2005), fluid in interactive positioning (Bucholtz & Hall, 2022), regarding individuals as agents, constructing their identities through language and culture (Archakis & Tsakona, 2012). Bamberg (2011) considers identity as dilemmatic, thus making claims across three main socio-cultural aspects – being stable yet changing, being unique yet the same as others and being agentive yet constrained by the broader socio-historical context.

The current study is foregrounded in research into the dilemmatic nature of identity in education: teachers' continuity/discontinuity, permanence/change (Werbinska, 2015), positioning yourself within and at the same time outside the community of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, Archakis & Tzanne, 2005), being agentive, yet subjected to the dominant gender ideologies (Baxter, 2003).

The article also draws on research in foreign language teachers' identity construction through the intersection of ethnic, racial, cultural, and gendered aspects, using autobiographical narratives (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004), highlighting the plurality of complex and shifting identities (Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Barkhuizen, 2017; Gallardo, 2019).

### 2.3. Discourse

The discourse is viewed as a means of identity construction and shaping of social reality (Archakis & Tsakona, 2012), where the participants draw on their linguistic resources to construct identities (Cameron, 2001), embedded in discourse as a social practice and negotiated using particular linguistic means (Foucault, 2018; Fairclough, 2003) and performative acts (Butler, 2006; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

The researcher distinguishes between discourse, as social interactive practice (little d) and societal Discourse (big D) as a system of practices and ideologies, which help construct identities and affect or are affected by an individual's agency (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Gee, 2014). The study analyses the way the gendered cultural leadership identity is constructed and engaged in interaction with dominant discourses of gender, culture and leadership (Ford, 2006).

The discourse of gender is particularly important for this study and draws on the theories of gatekeeping (Holmes, 2007), 'doing gender', according to the assigned biological sex (West & Zimmerman, 1987), male versus female interactive models (Gumperz, 1982; Tannen, 1994), gendered identity construction in social and workplace interaction (Cameron, 2001; Coates, 2004; Holmes & Schnurr, 2006; Holmes, 2007), not conforming to societal expectations (Litosseliti, 2003), women and 'the glass ceiling', developing gendered identity categorisations (Mullany, 2022), negotiating gender identities in male-dominated companies (Ely, 1995) and in mixed-sex professional settings (Baxter, 2003). The study draws on research into sexism in the workplace, which can be antagonistic and benevolent (paternal, protective) (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and post-feminist discourse of choice and individuality (Gill, 2014), which can make sexism invisible and perpetuate masculine hegemony (Gramsci et al., 1971) and egalitarian myth (Gill, 2014).

#### 2.4. Sampling

The case study has been chosen as the best investigative research instrument for a small-scale enquiry with the focus on gathering personal data (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). The researcher's self-reflexive positioning is central to all stages of enquiry from selecting the theoretical framework and methodology to collecting and analysing data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013) through the prism of the researcher's assumptions and bias (Merriam, 2009). The researcher uses self-reflection as a tool to minimize the risk of imposing their own ideologies on the interpretation of the data (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015) and create a polyphonic effect between the voices of the researcher and the researched (Baxter, 2003).

Through sharing similar biographical data with the participant/narrator (common educational background, professional status, and migration experience) the researcher's agency comes to the fore of the analysis (Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Wortham, 2000). Both the researcher and the participant come from the countries with traditional hegemonic gender roles, and both are used to juggling multiple and conflicting family and professional responsibilities. This commonality of backgrounds enhances the perspective of an inside researcher. The researcher and the participant have a collegiate relationship as a community of practice, engaged in common activity through interactive shared practice (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999).

#### 2.5. Data collection

The research is data driven and aimed at analysing identity work by eliciting small stories from the participant through an unstructured interview lasting 60 minutes and conducted without a script to facilitate an unobtrusive and comfortable atmosphere, starting with a narrative-inducing question in order to highlight the most salient stories (Elliott, 2005). The interviewer follows the lead of the interviewee, allowing for reflection, supporting the participant in remembering and evaluating events (Wagner & Wodak, 2006) and providing prompts for elicitation of meaning. The interview has been recorded via Teams, listened, transcribed, read several times for data immersion and to ensure reliability and validity, establishing iterative links between the empirical data and theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

#### 2.6. Data analysis

The positioning analysis (Davies & Harre, 1990) is used to analyse small stories as acts of gendered identity performance (Butler, 2006) at a given time and space. The analysis has been carried out at three levels: positioning in relation to the characters within the story or the story world; positioning in relation to the interlocutor/researcher and in relation to dominant discourses or master narratives (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). The first two levels of positioning through interaction reveal the ideological positioning of the narrator as either complicit or countering dominant discourses (Bamberg, 2006).

The elements of the Labov and Waletzky (1997) analytical model, consisting of abstract, orientation (time, place, participants, setting) and evaluation embedded in the complicating action, resolution, and coda (relevance) are used to outline the narrative structure and highlight the linguistic strategies and performative aspects of identity at the first level of analysis.

#### 2.7. Ethics

The case study complies with research ethical principles, including minimising potential physiological, psychological, and emotional harm, obtaining informed consent, providing anonymity and the right to withdraw from the project and acting ethically and responsibly at all times, following the University guidance on using Teams for research interviews.

The researcher has exercised 'ethic of care' (Costley & Gibbs, 2006) of the participant and sensitivity about the ownership of data (Cresswell, 2013). In order to protect the researcher's integrity, the participant was

sent the interview transcript with the invitation to make comments and corrections. Following standard anonymity procedures of using a pseudonym and disguising identities of colleagues, the researcher had to reveal some identity details, such as gender and ethnicity, which are essential for this research design.

### 3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter provides a review of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature on women in leadership in Higher Education in order to highlight the importance of the topic and identify the gap in the knowledge of cultural/gendered/ethnic intersectionality in the context of educational leadership and identity construction. There is a need to distinguish between leadership, which is inspirational, innovative, and motivational, and management, which is operational, analytical and stable (Kitchin & O'Connor, 2015), however, the two concepts are often interchangeable in the narrative.

The theory of educational leadership brings female gendered identity construction into a particular focus, highlighting problematic areas of women's success in higher education across the world, including the global gender gap in senior leadership, perceived expectations of leaders in conflict with normative gender performances, lack of job security, identity work to manage self-doubt, occupational stress, gender bias and misrecognition of competencies, unmanageable workloads and the unsustainable work/life balance of women being caught between two 'greedy organisations' – family and career (Morley, 2013).

The body of research into educational leadership uncovers masculine hegemonic patriarchal discourse and masculine leadership culture (Harley, 2003), obstructing women's careers (Doherty & Manfredi, 2010), disproportional representation of male over female academics, particularly in senior executive and research roles (McTavish & Miller, 2009), and recommends interventions through leadership programmes, gender mainstreaming, and mentoring (Morley, 2013).

The need to identify barriers to female leadership and investigate perceptions of leadership in higher education has led to further studies on women confronting misogyny (Morley, 2011, 2013), hidden sexism, intimidation and marginalisation, and the think 'leader' think 'male' leadership approach (Savigny, 2014; Bakhtikireeva & Valentinova, 2022).

Further research into gendered practices and power relations in the UK Universities reveals a marked gender career disadvantage of women leaders (Deem,

2003), facing the 'double bind' (having to be professional and womanly at the same time) and the 'double burden' (doubling labour at home and at work) (Cotterill & Letherby, 2005).

The interplay between leadership and gendered identity has gained significance among post-heroic leadership scholars, i.e., those, who consider that leadership should be displayed at every organisational level and view it as decreasingly masculine (Billing & Alvesson, 2014), more collaborative, relational, shared and distributed (Fletcher, 2004). Leadership is the art of influencing others (Andrews, 2016) to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2016) through the everyday practice of leading or 'lived experience' (Kempster, 2006), collaborative networks (Fletcher, 2004), situated curriculum (Kempster & Steward, 2010), observational learning (Kempster, 2006), authentic leadership experience (Shamir & Eilam, 2005) and emotional intelligence – the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others (Goleman, 2004).

Educational leadership research brings into focus an emergent leader (Kempster, 2006), an agent initiating change at a high level of pedagogical excellence, while female educational leadership is viewed as inspirational, innovative, and motivational (Kitchin & O'Connor, 2015).

The need to understand the nature of women's leadership has led to research into female leadership (Olsson & Walker, 2003), 'gender fatigue' or weariness of constructing a gender-neutral workplace on the one hand and powerlessness through facing discriminatory practices on the other hand (Kelan, 2009), and recognising feminine traits of gendered leadership practice as powerful leadership capital (Elliot & Stead, 2008).

The backlash theory further explores how perceived incongruity between a traditional female gender role and stereotypical leadership behaviour of dominance and self-promotion (Eagly & Karau, 2002) leads to a backlash in displaying power (Brescoll, 2011), identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), identity control (Alvesson et al., 2008), emotional labour (Iszatt-White, 2009) and emotional management (Hochschild, 2012).

The scholarship on female leadership maintains that leadership goes beyond leading a group of individuals, but also ideas and communities, where the personal and social are interconnected, signalling the tension between stereotypical gender role expectations and the post-heroic leadership style, emphasising the link between leadership, context, and culture (Elliott &



Stead, 2008). However, more empirical evidence is needed to find out how women learn to lead, particularly in culturally specific educational settings using a narrative approach.

The Post Structuralist research into female leadership views identity in a local, contextualised, culturally specific setting, produced and reproduced through the language (Burr, 1995), allowing for more nuanced and complex investigation of tensions between leadership, gender, culture and identity discourses, which can be contradictory, multiple and fragmented (Ford, 2006). Thus, leadership identity work has been highlighted through the study of intersection between educational leadership and ethnicity in the UK (Antaki & Widdicombe, 2008) and between gender, ethnicity, and leadership in the US context (Livingston et al., 2012). However, there is a gap in research into gendered ethnic leadership identity in the UK Higher Education sector.

The Feminist post-colonial perspective shifts the focus from gender only to culture, race, religion, and class privilege, acknowledging the need to understand leadership from a different cultural perspective and contest the ontological position of white Western leadership (Blackmore, 2013). The research into female leadership needs to be culturally specific and go beyond racially and culturally neutral studies of competing masculine and feminine models of leadership, examining tension between societal stereotypical perceptions of leadership competence and the racial, gender and cultural identity of individual leaders (Showunmi et al., 2019), privileging the masculine and disadvantaging the feminine (Billing & Alvesson, 2014).

This societal discourse permeating a particular culture is reflected in studies of educational leaders confronted by discourse of masculine hegemony in the workplace and gender roles assigned to a woman as a home maker and caregiver. Thus, it is contextualised by the cultural experience of female leaders of Arabic origin, whose social status is encumbered by traditional gender ideology linked to religion, gender segregation, male guardianship and societal perception and tension between egalitarian Islamic principles towards gender parity and discriminatory gender practices (Koburtay & Abuhusein, 2021), revealing the need to unlock the barriers to women in education leadership.

The literature reviewed has identified problematic areas in female leadership and the need for further research into female leadership in higher education, mediated by culture. The current case study of cultural gendered identity construction of a female leader in UK

higher education will shed light on some areas of research into personal and professional identity construction and explore how female leadership is developed through the intersection of gender and culture in multi-cultural settings of business and foreign language teaching.

## 4. STUDY AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Study outline

The participant, Sofia (pseudonym), constructs her identity chronologically, signposting her career path and inserting small stories as most telling memories, outlining the most significant stages in her professional career and her personal life. Her business career starts in the Middle East, followed by the career gap due to marriage and migration. The change in personal circumstances prompted her to turn to teaching and build a successful career in the UK Higher Education. Sofia's narrative is marked for its dramatic performance achieved by the choice of linguistic, narrative, and rhetorical resources.

The small stories set in professional contexts of business, teaching and leadership are discursively embedded in the narrative to illustrate the strategies the narrator uses to position herself in relation to the story world and its characters, the interlocutor, and the global discourses (Bamberg, 2006). The section below presents the three levels of positioning analysis.

### 4.2. Positioning level 1: Positioning against story actors

#### 4.2.1. Story 1

Sofia begins with an abstract, stating that her career in educational leadership did not come by choice, thus projecting a non-agentive figure of someone who has been confounded by personal circumstances of marriage, relocation, motherhood and later the death of a partner. The theme of not making a conscious choice in her career emerges at the beginning of the narrative and re appears at the critical moments of her life story trajectory.

*I did not choose it, it chose me (14). So, what I'm doing right now is... none of my choice (16). It just came, and the job and the career has insisted that I should come and be there (17).*

Sofia's identity construction through the narrative is punctuated by her references to the external forces shaping her agency, particularly at the crucial landmark moments. The orientation contextualises her career in the Middle East. She says:

*'In her evaluation as being agentive in decision making, she struggles with the loss of her professional identity, as emphasised by the contrasting topoi, creating the image of strength (empowered, accomplishment) in relation to her career and the image of weakness (lost, missing) in relation to her persona'*

Most of the women who were there at this time were Europeans. So, the number of Arab females who can fulfil the job... and Arabic was an important language required (35-37).

While understanding her educational, gender and linguistic advantages, she displays a lack of confidence in her appointment as a business manager and positions herself as very grateful (38) for the opportunity and:

Trying to **prove** myself. Not to lose it and not to be called a failure (100). Someone with master's and it all sounded good on papers whether I delivered or not, I didn't know at the time (84-86).

This non-agentive, submissive to a higher force's stance is invoked regularly across the narrative as one the most recurring themes. The repetition of a third person plural in reference to the higher force, regulating her career path and the use of indefinite pronouns such as 'someone', 'anyone' in reference to herself linguistically mark her non-agentive positioning towards the story actors.

The story of Sofia's life in the Middle East tells of the close relationship between personal and professional in her identity work. Her career progresses well until the complicating action of a love interest:

I was very happy in my job until I fell in love with the top man (44).

The conflicting demands of her job and personal life have become untenable in the traditional context of male dominated power relations and lead to a resolution, which is twofold:

On the one hand, her professional agency started to emerge:

I grew in this post, and I started to discover myself (39).

On the other hand, her family life was a failure, the price she paid for her emerging professional career:

The downside, of course... was my **family** life. So, you pay the price (93).

In spite of the constraints placed on Sofia's agency due to circumstances of her gender and culture, her reference to *failure* in her personal life is counterbalanced by her professional success, which, in turn, has transformed her personality. She positions herself as someone who does not fit into the role culturally assigned to her, but claims her agency as a strong and independent person:

It was a very, very **difficult** decision because this job was so important for me, so I had to **decide** job or personal life (116-118). I followed my heart (199).

The resolution comes with her divorce, followed by another marriage to the company director and resignation from her job. The coda is rendered emphatically by repetition of the intensifier *very* and the use of key words, *difficult*, *decision*, *decide*.

The juxtaposition of the metaphor *followed my heart* and *being responsible* further reinforces the personal versus professional conflict, from which her new persona has emerged.

In her evaluation as being agentive in decision making, she struggles with the loss of her professional identity, as emphasised by the contrasting topoi, creating the image of strength (*empowered*, *accomplishment*) in relation to her career and the image of weakness (*lost*, *missing*) in relation to her persona:

Financially, the job has **empowered** me to provide my daughter with a good education, when I left the job, you know, I became... a sort of... a **housewife**, OK? And this the time this is the period where I was... *lost* (131-133).

But suddenly after a while you start to miss... that feeling of accomplishment (137-138).

In relation to her new husband, Sofia's narrative reinforces her identity dilemma of personal fulfilment on the one hand and lack of professional accomplishment on the other hand. The other side of her dilemmatic agency – staying the same and wanting to change – is reinforced by the syntax of using the verb of motion *becoming* referring to her husband, as opposed to a static verb *I am*.

Watching him from afar and **missing him**, looking how **successful** he's becoming, and I am in the **background** (145-148).

#### 4.2.2. Story 2

The next landmark event in Sofia's life marks an agentive involvement of her husband, who steps in to help her carve a new professional identity after relocation to the UK, as in the orientation:

*It's not easy to find it in other places. Especially in Europe and in the UK, you have to start from scratch (154-155).*

He recommends her as a teacher of Arabic at a University. Sofia's narrative reflects her identity struggle and lack of confidence as a result of her professional identity loss expressed by self-questioning, hesitation devices, pauses, temporal coordinates such as *and then, after so many years, and when*, etc.

*The whole thing after that... so and... teaching? Oh, let's, why not? Yeah, try it... Uh, after so many years of trying to find myself (188-194).*

Her identity is constructed by the discourse of gender and culture (loss of professional confidence and security due to cultural constraints) and by other actors (her husband). This agentive turn helps Sofia's professional identity emerge from being conflicted and lacking in confidence:

*How can I **convince** the people that I'm the right person? (199).*

*They could not find anyone good and then they chose **me** (231).*

The complicating action of her going to the interview without prepared notes makes her mobilise her internal resources and act naturally.

*I went there very, very nervous, left everything and I started to share the language with them. You know, as **me** (203-205).*

The resolution of her getting the job as an Arabic lecturer leads to the coda. She positions herself as a teacher indexed by positive self-evaluation when recounting the feedback she received, using phrases such as *natural lecturer, very engaging, very warm, connection with the students, the way she smiles, goes close to the students*. The antagonists in the story (her observers) are deprived of agency, indexed by the pronominal third person. Her professional teaching persona performs in opposition to external forces and is rendered through an *acting* metaphor.

*It became like a job of **acting**. You know, you go to the theatre, you **perform**, the spectators sort of clapping for you. And you go back home very happy with your performance. Yeah, that you suddenly, you have discovered you shape their future (330-333).*

This story illuminates her positioning in relation to her students as a co-dependent actor, whose performed identity (Butler, 2006) becomes embodied in the course of interaction. At the same time, she acknowledges her agentive involvement in shaping her students' future, thus co-constructing herself as a powerful agent.

#### 4.2.3. Story 3

The 'crucible experience' (Bennis & Thomas, 2002) in Sofia's career comes with the illness and subsequent death of her husband. She refers to immediate and profound change in her personality from the moment she hears the news, metaphorically describing it as changing physical locations, (*going through doors*) and pointing to the abruptness and immediacy of the action (repeated use of *in one second, suddenly*). She is confounded by the discourse of illness and death, as reflected in the quick transition from the abstract (*something came*), to complicating action (*cancer diagnosis*) and to evaluation through the use of personification and the indefinite pronoun *something that comes* in reference to cancer being a powerful agent, which has shaped her identity.

*Something came and changed all of this. **Every** aspect of people's life in one second, in one second. You know you come from the door... one person and you go out from the same door, a different person altogether (342-346).*

However, her resolution to turn the negative life event into a building block for her professional identity construction positions her as an agentive figure resisting the circumstances – she returns to teaching. She evaluates this move as becoming a *solid person*, who is *very vulnerable and very strong* (353) at the same time, indexing the transition metaphorically by constructing a performed identity.

*You close the door of your house, and you go, and you are a performer again (354).*

The resolution is brought about by her embarking on a leadership career by positioning herself as someone who no longer imitates somebody else's leadership style (as she did in the business world) but interrogates it agentively.

*Why don't you think about this? Why don't you think about that? There was a sense of arrogance at that time (397-400).*

*OK, so why? Why? Why do you want me to do this? Why are you asking this question? What is behind this process? So, is this lack of confidence in **me**? (416-420).*

In relation to the people she works with she positions herself as an agentive figure, who resists arrogance and micromanagement and influences others.

She builds her position as a critical emerging leader (Kempster, 2009) in opposition to the assigned leader at that department, who is lacking experience and confidence, but who learns to rely on Sofia instead.

Sofia's leadership identity is further constructed through notable people (Kempster, 2006). At first, she declines the managerial position and instead looks for other learning experiences:

*And I learned **who** I should choose to work with not only just as a manager, but **choose** your manager as well, if you want to fulfil your job **properly** (436-438).*

She agentively positions herself as a manager who makes conscious choices regarding her leadership learning. When she has an opportunity to learn from someone with a *sense of authority and knowledge* (465), she accepts the formal managerial position and re-asserts her identity as a collaborative educational leader.

*I felt that both of us are going to build this together. So, for me it was a sense of collaboration (467).*

Her positioning as a follower of a charismatic leader (Parry & Kempster, 2014), shapes her own leadership identity.

#### 4.2.4. Story 4

When prompted to talk about challenging leadership moments, Sofia's story illustrates authentic leadership development through self-knowledge (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). She positions herself as an assertive and competent leader against the colleague who undermines her authority on gender and ethnic grounds. She sets the context in the abstract by the repeated use of the intensifier *very*.

*Politically, gender and ethnicity where I'm working and managing a team are very, very, very important elements (514).*

The conflicting situation resolves in the sacking of the male colleague. Sofia's positioning shifts from being *docile and kind* to becoming *ruthless*, invoking a post-feminist discourse of choice (Fletcher, 2004).

*I had a huge, big challenge because of my **gender, mainly**. And because of **my ethnicity**. Because the ethnicity where you come from our region, there are so many frictions between certain countries (526-529).*

Her assertive leadership positioning is claimed by contrasting the male colleague's *unfair* with her *fair game*, him being *on his own* and her *good managerial approach*.

Sofia's situated learning of leadership practice (Kempster & Stewart, 2010) has drawn on the complexities of leading a diverse team, where female ethnic minority leaders can be discriminated against, undervalued, and stigmatised on the grounds of their cultural, gendered, and ethnic identity (Showunmi, 2019).

The evaluation sheds light on her dilemmatic identity of developing an agentive power in the face of an adverse conflict situation yet wanting to avoid conflict and remain true to her natural non-confrontational self.

*Conflict would come and you should just stand up and defend your position (543).*

*So, you try certain **strategy** because you know you want to solve it in the best possible way. And also, I am keen not to cause trouble in the department (553-554).*

Sofia positions herself as a thoughtful leader, with emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2004). She draws parallels between her leadership learning and authentic leadership examples, to which she attaches particular meaning (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), as in her story of meeting the Head of the United Nations:

*And I noticed that the most **gentle**, the most **humble**... top people were the most respected (572).*

In the coda Sofia projects the image of an authoritative and supportive leader, who is confident in her leadership abilities, is well respected by her team and also generous in developing her team members.

#### 4.3. Positioning level 2: Positioning against the interlocutor

At level 2 positioning (self in relation to the audience) Sofia perceives the researcher/interviewer as an empathetic figure. She indexes her agreement, reiteration of statements, confirmation of opinions and positive evaluations throughout the narrative:

*Very interesting question. I love the question (281).*

*Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely (293).*

She displays confidence in the researcher, only occasionally requesting confirmation of confidentiality regarding local professional context. These requests are framed in a way of apology, seeking to reconfirm the trust and solidarity, to ensure no offence is caused. Sofia is keen to have the interlocutor's good opinion of her and hedges any statements about herself by using self-deprecating phrases such as *allow me, I hope you know, I am sorry to tell you, allow me to say this*, etc.

The interplay between her personal and professional aspects of identity comes to the fore when the interviewer encourages her to elaborate on aspects of her marriage as in this example.

Interviewer: *And how did your husband react to that? (101).*

In response, Sofia acknowledges that the job changed her personality and describes how by learning to be assertive in her professional capacity she became more assertive at home.



*'The interlocutor co-creates Sofia's educational leadership identity by sharing the moral purpose of improving students' learning experiences. Her story illuminates an interrelationship between the contextual, situational nature of leadership learning and enactment of leadership practice'*

Sofia: *I didn't continue to be the docile. Mm-hmm... accepting female anymore. Anyway, I started to see a place for myself in the society and at home, so it actually has **shaped** my personality and yes, so suddenly I discovered that I may **not** be the same person that was married to the person (103-110).*

Sofia's professional experience has led to strengthening her agentive stance as a woman. The interactive element has helped delve deeper into the intersectional nature of identity co-construction.

The researcher interrogates Sofia's contradictory claims of identity change from being *ruthless* in the business world to becoming *kind* as a teacher.

Interviewer: *So, did you have this ruthlessness in your first job?*

Sofia: *Very much so, especially working with men and other women competing with you (261-265).*

Further interaction reveals that Sofia had to show ruthlessness (Butler, 2006), while not being ruthless by nature, comparing herself with a *docile animal* playing the prescribed male leadership role (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Sofia: *It's like a cat going and getting her clothes ready. Just in case. You know, even though you are a lovely, docile animal, but your clothes are **out**, just in case (268-269).*

When discussing educational leadership identity, Sofia positions herself as a natural, authentic (Shamir & Eilam, 2005) educational leader. To the researcher's inquiry into her learning journey and whether or not she projected some of the lived experience (Kempster, 2006) of having to be ruthless and assertive in business to her educational leadership style, she admitted that *ruthlessness* for her was a coping mechanism, a response to bullying, which she did not need to exercise in her educational leadership job.

As she said: *So the ruthlessness... started to disappear with experience and you feel comfortable in your own skin as well, and also the local environment is working (293-294).*

Sofia and the interviewer co-construct her identity as assertive in the face of external agents (other teachers and students) who discriminated against her on the grounds of her ethnicity and gender (Savigny, 2014).

Her leadership experience made her turn the negative incident of bullying and micromanagement into a learning opportunity and *make things better by bringing peace* rather than metaphorically *taking the sword out of its sheath*. She started to develop a leadership style shaped both by her gender and her cultural identity. She said:

*And that's when I started to see the difference in my personality. I became more... **peaceful** and **docile** and at the same time more **experienced** in managing (312-314).*

The interlocutor co-creates Sofia's educational leadership identity by sharing the moral purpose of improving students' learning experiences. Her story illuminates an interrelationship between the contextual, situational nature of leadership learning and enactment of leadership practice (Kempster & Stewart, 2010). The positive experience of leadership is co-constructed interactively and indexed by key evaluative vocabulary, for example: *culturally compatible, exciting opportunities, rewarding students, golden age of the language centre, started to flourish, a sense of camaraderie, supporting each other.*

#### 4.4. Positioning level 3: Positioning against global societal discourses

The analysis of the narrative identifies the key discourses which co-construct Sofia's leadership gendered cultural identity, which can be broadly placed in three categories: professional discourse, marriage discourse and leadership discourse. The three of them are closely interlaced with each other and invoke dilemmatic identity work by staying the same in the face of change, while being unique vis-à-vis being the same as others and being agentive yet subjected to the outside agents of the broader socio-historical context.

Sofia's agentive positioning starts to emerge through the masculine professional discourse and gendered constraints as her career in business progresses. As she says:

*The job has started also to change my personality (103).*

She further on constructs her professional identity in the context of the Middle Eastern discourse of hegemonic masculinity (Gramsci et al., 1971) claiming leadership agency by confronting circumstances (Turner &

Mavin, 2008) and learning leadership through lived experience (Kempster, 2009). She observes and copies her colleague's leadership style, reflecting on landmark experiences (Day, 2000), and gradually emerging as a leader.

*I would stay at this meeting just **watching** them how they deal with each other (80).*

Sofia evaluates her leadership style metaphorically as a *mother* or *mother hen* (26), who is caring and supportive and a *people person* (41) who is also good at communication and building relationships, thus doing gendered identity work in a predominantly masculine business world against benevolent sexist discourse (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Sofia eventually divorced her husband and married her company director. The resolution of Sofia's divorce and her subsequent remarriage, culminating in her resigning from her position, is a further example of her agency being on the one hand constrained by the traditional gendered cultural discourse of the Middle East (Afioni, 2014), and on the other hand becoming stronger in the face of adversity and pushing cultural gender boundaries by choosing to *follow her heart* (119).

Her evaluation of the cultural gendered professional constraints encountered by women in the Middle East is critical to her decision to abandon her career. She says:

*Because of the culture of the Middle East, it was not possible for me . . . to continue working and **being** the wife of the boss (53).*

She refers to further boundaries created not only by gender, but also ethnic and racial inequalities prominent in that environment with a hierarchical culture of young European white men dominating the business leadership world. Sofia explains:

*So, you can see the number of posts assigned. A high-level post would be assigned to **male** and . . . And sort of men and not only men, they had a specific desire to appoint **white**-skinned men (66-67).*

She constructs her teaching identity through her gender and in contrast to her business identity, aligning herself with postfeminist discourse (Gill, 2014), performing gendered identity at work. As she says, she is *acting normal, not like a robot*. She attributes her gender qualities to teaching – *very strong form of empathy, motherhood, you look at your students, I'm talking as a mother here, being a warm, kind, caring, mother hen type*. The repetitive use of the first-person pronoun is metaphorically enhanced.

*Giving the students something from me, from the **culture**, from my **heart** (217).*

*My gender as a **female** is dominating here, how I deal with my students and the gender. Not only gender but my role as a mother.*

*And the mother would be strict when it is required and **loving, understanding, patient** (251-259).*

In contrast, she sees the business world as fake and unnatural. She has to exercise emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012) to perform in the masculine professional discourse. She says:

*You **had** to be on your toes all the time. You **had** to be aware of everything. The political issues. You had to be **very** careful of what you say (243-245).*

Her husband died and Sofia moved house. The death of her husband and the move to a different city - have led to her agentive stance against the discourses of illness, death, and relocation. Her narrative highlights each career change from teaching to leadership, using metaphorical phrases such as *knocking on doors, entering doors*, as if she is physically moving in the labyrinth of career opportunities, where doors sometimes open straight away and at other times not. However, her journey is not random and non-agentive. She is driven by the newly acquired *courage to go and sell myself* (366) and the self-care needing to be geographically close to her workplace. Having built her confidence as an empathetic teacher, she knows her value and is selective in her professional choices.

Sofia's professional identity becomes further enhanced through the discourse of educational leadership learning. The qualities she acquired in the business world (organizational skills, thinking ahead, planning) become essential in constructing her leadership identity. While projecting a natural identity as a teacher, she acknowledges that leadership is a learned experience. She explains:

*And it doesn't come sort of immediately you had **to work** on it.*

At the same time, she admits that she did not become a leader through training.

*The managerial skills are not taught as part of your role as a teacher.*

This experience is conditioned by the environment, making her identity less agentive and more dilemmatic on the one hand: she *flourishes* in the favourable working environment with like-minded individuals, aligning herself to a post-heroic discourse of distributed leadership (Northouse, 2020) and mutual support. She goes on:



*You know, we started **to flourish** because there was a sense of **camaraderie**. Among us that we are all supporting each other. . . And when I was finally sort of recognised, yes, as someone who can manage (498-500).*

On the other hand, Sofia's agency develops in confrontation with the misogynistic behaviour of a male colleague, who discriminates against her on the grounds of her 'inferior' gender and ethnicity. This story invokes antagonistic sexist (Glick & Fiske, 1996) discourse and ethnic female leader discourse (Showunmi, 2019). It illustrates Sofia's leadership learning through conflict situation, in which she overcomes her gender and cultural boundaries set by traditional gender ideology (Koburtay & Abuhusseini, 2021), experienced by female leaders in diverse multi-ethnic communities, thus positioning herself as an actor against the discourse of misogyny and ethnic discrimination.

The dilemmatic agency of Sofia's identity of being true to herself yet having to change to fit in with the hegemonic masculinity of the leadership culture in which she operated is indexed metaphorically. She uses the phrase, *learning their game*, implying that it was not her natural style, but something she had to put on, learning to be assertive and respected by regulating her identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). She says:

*I was so **keen** to learn their **game**... how do you assert yourself? Why is so and so much more respected than so and so, and that was very, very important (87-90).*

Sofia strategically reflects upon her leadership style and turns this negative experience of bullying into an opportunity to learn through reflection. She positions herself as a *peaceful*, rather than *ruthless* leader, thus building her agentive stance as a leader with traditionally feminine characteristics, conforming to a post-heroic, postfeminist leadership discourse of autonomy and choice (Fletcher, 2004; Gill & Scharff, 2011). The term 'feminine' leadership is used here in contrast to conventional 'masculine' style only in the context of this study. However, there should be awareness of essentialist labelling (Billing & Alvesson, 2000).

Sofia and the researcher construct a discourse of solidarity reflecting on their career choices, both experimenting with provisional selves (Ibarra, 1999), keen to make a change and yet lacking an agency, but gradually developing power in the face of adversity. The increased confidence between the interlocutors is brought about by the researcher taking the initiative to share stories, which mirror each other's experiences of

professional failure (as a fitness instructor and as an interior designer) and help make meaning of these experiences outlining the common discourse of being outsiders, thus projecting themselves as not belonging, navigating between sameness and difference (Bamberg, 2011), in-group and out-group identity by re-iterating and echoing the key phrases: *that is not me at all, it was not a career for me, your brain is not engaged, I distanced from it, I would be a total failure*. All phrases intensified by emphatic use of direct speech and exclamations such as: *Oh, my goodness!* Sofia's leadership identity is co-constructed through interaction as someone who gets stronger and wiser in the face of adversity and develops leadership agency in opposition to conflicting discourses of gender, culture, and ethnicity.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The analysis reveals the dilemmatic aspects of the participant's identity as being agentive and constructed by others at the same time, staying the same and being subject to change and being unique yet wanting to belong to the group. Sofia's narrative reflects the development of her agency in making personal and professional choices against gendered and cultural constraints of Middle Eastern business community, hierarchical leadership structure of a UK University, patriarchal marital discourse, discriminatory professional discourse, and the discourse of death.

The participant's identity shifts from dilemmatic to agentive in the course of the narrative, which is invoked linguistically through vocabulary choice and the use of metaphors in reference to her career as a businessperson, teacher and educational leader, closely linked to her persona as a wife and a mother. The study demonstrates the transformative value of the narrative in constructing a gendered cultural leadership identity by bringing to the fore the dilemmatic agency of the narrator who conforms and at the same time resists the dominant professional and essentialist gender ideology through the course of small story telling.

Positioning herself in relation to story actors, Sofia uses an agentive stance towards her career progression and professional success in the face of adversity arising from an essentialist hegemonic masculine professional and gendered discourse of inequality and discrimination. The dilemmatic aspect of constancy and change is invoked through the use of a semantically contrasting vocabulary (Kiklewicz, 2022) denoting strength and empowerment on the one hand and loss and weakness on the other.

In relation to the interlocutor Sofia maintains strong in-group identity through the discourse of solidarity, empathy, and collaboration. Her teaching and leadership identity shifts from dilemmatic to agentive resisting the discourse of sexism and ethnic inequality. She makes implicit identity claims against the discourse of adversity caused by negative personal (illness and death) and professional (bullying, misogyny) experiences, using the evocative language of metaphor as in *opening and closing doors, acting as a docile animal and taking the sword out of its sheath*.

The narrative demonstrates the shift from dilemmatic to more agentive positioning in the move towards alignment with discourse of post-heroic and postfeminist leadership, making explicit claims of using her gendered identity and relational, collaborative leadership practices to become an authentic leader.

Sofia's small stories illuminate the force of interactive narrative in identity construction in relation to the global discourses of gender ideology, marriage, ethnicity, migration, illness, death, work/life balance, professional success, and leadership learning. These discourses

overlap and come to the fore at certain narrative turns to highlight the dilemmatic and agentive aspects of Sofia's identity construction: of constancy and change, being the same as other and being different, resisting and at the same time conforming to gender and professional ideologies through implicit and explicit identity claims.

This study adds to the body of research on gendered cultural leadership identity. The implication for professional practice is to reveal the boundaries to leadership identity development by giving voice to the underrepresented ethnic minority of female educational leaders revealing their agentive and non-agentive positioning within the discourses of teaching, leadership learning and gender ideology, using narrative as an emancipatory tool.

The recommendation for further research is to obtain comparable data by increasing the sample of participants and conducting ethnographic and auto-ethnographic observations in order to achieve a more in-depth analysis and better understanding of identity construction through discursive practices.

## References

- Afiouni, F. (2014). Women's careers in the Arab Middle East. *Career Development International*, 19(3), 314-336. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1108/CDI-05-2013-0061>
- Alvesson, M., & Karreman, D. (2000). Varieties of discourse: On the study of organizations through discourse analysis. *Human Relations*, 53(9), 1125-1149. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0018726700539002>
- Alvesson, M., Lee Ashcraft, K., & Thomas, R. (2008). Identity matters: Reflections on the construction of identity scholarship in organization studies. *Organization*, 15(1), 5-28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508407084426>
- Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(5), 619-644. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00305>
- Andrews, M. (2016). Going beyond heroic leaders in development: Going beyond heroic leaders. *Public Administration and Development*, 36(3), 171-184. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.1761>
- Antaki, C., & Widdicombe, S. (2008). *Identities in talk*. Sage Publications.
- Archakis, A., & Tsakona, V. (2012). *The narrative construction of identities in critical education*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9781137264992>
- Archakis, A., & Tzanne, A. (2005). Narrative positioning and the construction of situated identities: Evidence from conversations of a group of young people in Greece. *Narrative Inquiry*, 15(2), 267-291. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1075/ni.15.2.05arc>
- Bakhtikireeva, U. M., & Valentinova, O. I. (2022). 'Language thinking' from the perspective of systemic linguistics. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 26(1), 224-244. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-30149>
- Bamberg, M. (2006). Stories: Big or small. Why do we care? *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 139-147. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.16.1.18bam>
- Bamberg, M. (2011). Who am I? Narration and its contribution to self and identity. *Theory & Psychology*, 21(1), 3-24. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0959354309355852>

- Bamberg, M., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Small stories as a new perspective in narrative and identity analysis. *Text & Talk*, 28(3), 377-396. <https://doi.org/10.1515/TEXT.2008.018>
- Bamberg, M. G. W., De Fina, A., & Schiffrin, D. (2007). *Selves and identities in narrative and discourse*. John Benjamins. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1075/sin.9>
- Barkhuizen, G. P. (2017). *Reflections on language teacher identity research*. Routledge.
- Barkhuizen, G. P., Benson, P., & Chik, A. (2014). *Narrative inquiry in language teaching and learning research*. Routledge. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203124994>
- Baxter, J. (2003). *Positioning gender in discourse a feminist methodology*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230501263>
- Bennis, W. G., & Thomas, R. J. (2002). Crucibles of leadership. *Harvard Business Review*, 80(9), 39-124.
- Billing, D. Y., & Alvesson, M. (2014). Leadership: A matter of gender? In S. Kumra, R. Simpson, & R. J. Burke (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of gender in organizations*. Oxford University Press. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199658213.013.009>
- Billing, D. Y., & Alvesson, M. (2000). Questioning the notion of feminine leadership: A critical perspective on the gender labelling of leadership. *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 7(3), 144-157. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1468-0432.00103>
- Blackmore, J. (2013). A feminist critical perspective on educational leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 16(2), 139-154. <http://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2012.754057>
- Blommaert, J. (2005). *Discourse: A critical introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Brescoll, V. L. (2011). Who takes the floor and why: Gender, power, and volubility in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 56(4), 622-641. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0001839212439994>
- Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2022). Locating identity in language. In C. Llamas & D. Watt (Eds.), *Language and identities* (pp. 18-28). Edinburgh University Press. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9780748635788-006>
- Burr, V. (1995). *An introduction to social constructionism*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2006). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203824979>
- Cameron, D. (2001). *Working with spoken discourse*. Sage Publications.
- Coates, J. (2004). *Women, men, and language: A sociolinguistic account of gender differences in language* (3rd ed.). Pearson Longman.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Coleman, M., & Briggs, A. R. J. (2002). *Research methods in educational leadership and management*. Paul Chapman.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), 3-21.
- Costley, C., & Gibbs, P. (2006). Researching others: Care as an ethic for practitioner researchers. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(1), 89-98. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075070500392375>
- Cotterill, P., & Letherby, G. (2005). Women in higher education: Issues and challenges. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 28(2), 109-113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2005.04.001>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Davies, B., & Harre, R. O. M. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20(1), 43-63. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5914.1990.tb00174.x>
- Day, D. V. (2000). Leadership development: A review in context. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 11(4), 581-613. [https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(00\)00061-8](https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(00)00061-8)
- De Fina, A. (2009). Narratives in interview: The case of accounts. *Narrative Inquiry*, 19(2), 233-258. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.19.2.03def>
- De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2015). *The handbook of narrative analysis*. Wiley Blackwell.
- Deem, R. (2003). Gender, organizational cultures and the practices of manager-academics in UK Universities. *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 10(2), 239-259. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1468-0432.t01-1-00013>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2013). *The landscape of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

- Doherty, L., & Manfredi, S. (2010). Improving women's representation in senior positions in universities. *Employee Relations*, 32(2), 138-155. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01425451011010096>
- Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573-598. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573>
- Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (1992). Think practically and look locally: Language and gender as community-based practice. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 21(1), 461-488. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.21.100192.002333>
- Elliott, C., & Stead, V. (2008). Learning from leading women's experience: Towards a sociological understanding. *Leadership*, 4(2), 159-180. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715008089636>
- Elliott, J. (2005). *Using narrative in social research qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Ellis, C. S., & Bochner, A. P. (2006). Analyzing analytic autoethnography: An autopsy. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4), 429-449. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241606286979>
- Ely, R. J. (1995). The power in demography: Women's social constructions of gender identity at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(3), 589-634. <https://doi.org/10.2307/256740>
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.
- Fletcher, J. K. (2004). The paradox of postheroic leadership: An essay on gender, power, and transformational change. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(5), 647-661. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2004.07.004>
- Ford, J. (2006). Discourses of leadership: Gender, identity and contradiction in a UK public sector organization. *Leadership*, 2(1), 77-99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715006060654>
- Foucault, M. (2018). *The order of things* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Gallardo, M. (2019). *Negotiating identity in modern foreign language teaching*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gee, J. P. (2014). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Gill, R. (2014). Unspeakable Inequalities: Post feminism, entrepreneurial subjectivity, and the repudiation of sexism among cultural workers. *Social Politics*, 21(4), 509-528. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxu016>
- Gill, R., & Scharff, C. (2011). *New femininities: Post-feminism, neoliberalism and subjectivity*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230294523>
- Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). The ambivalent sexism inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70(3), 491-512. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.70.3.491>
- Goleman, D. (2004). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ. Working with emotional intelligence*. Bloomsbury.
- Gramsci, A., Hoare, Q., Nowell-Smith, G., & Mottram, E. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Lawrence and Wishart.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Language and social identity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hammersley, M. (2013). *What is qualitative research?* Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781849666084>
- Harley, S. (2003). Research selectivity and female academics in UK Universities: From gentleman's club and barrack yard to smart macho? *Gender and Education*, 15(4), 377-392. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540250310001610580>
- Hochschild, A. R. (2012). *The managed heart commercialization of human feeling*. University of California Press.
- Holmes, J. (2007). Monitoring organisational boundaries: Diverse discourse strategies used in gate-keeping. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39(11), 1993-2016. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2007.07.009>
- Holmes, J., & Meyerhoff, M. (1999). The community of practice: Theories and methodologies in language and gender research. *Language in Society*, 28(2), 173-183. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S004740459900202X>
- Holmes, J., & Schnurr, S. (2006). 'Doing femininity' at work: More than just relational practice. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 10(1), 31-51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-6441.2006.00316.x>
- Ibarra, H. (1999). Provisional selves: Experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(4), 764-791. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2667055>
- Iszatt-White, M. (2009). Leadership as emotional labour: The effortful accomplishment of valuing practices. *Leadership*, 5(4), 447-467. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1742715009343032>



- Jameson, F. (2012). *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Duke University Press.
- Kayi-Aydar, H. (2019). Language teacher identity. *Language Teaching*, 52(3), 281-295. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444819000223>
- Kelan, E. K. (2009). Gender fatigue: The ideological dilemma of gender neutrality and discrimination in organizations. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 26(3), 197-210.
- Kempster, S. (2006). Leadership learning through lived experience: A process of apprenticeship. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 12(1), 4-22. <https://doi.org/10.5172/jmo.2006.12.1.4>
- Kempster, S. (2009). Observing the invisible: Examining the role of observational learning in the development of leadership practice. *The Journal of Management Development*, 28(5), 439-456. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621710910955976>
- Kempster, S., & Stewart, J. (2010). Becoming a leader: A co-produced autoethnographic exploration of situated learning of leadership practice. *Management Learning*, 41(2), 205-219. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507609355496>
- Kiklewicz, A. (2022). Typology of pragmatic implications from the point of view of interaction between pragmatics and semantics. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 26(1), 139-161. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-26538>
- Kitchin, R., & O'Connor, P. (2015). *Management and gender in higher education*. Manchester University Press.
- Koburta, T., & Abuhusein, T. (2021). Normative Islam, prejudice and women leaders: Why do Arab women leaders suffer? *Journal of Gender Studies*, 30(2), 177-189. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2020.1863195>
- Kosta, P., & Iskakova, G. Z. (2022). New tendencies in the study of modality: epistemic modality and evidentiality. *Bulletin of the Moscow Region State University. Series: Linguistics*, 6, 25-40. <https://dx.doi.org/10.18384/2310-712x-2022-6-25-40>
- Labov, W. & Waletzky, J. (1967). Narrative analysis. In J. Helm (Ed.), *Essays on the verbal and visual arts* (pp. 12-44). University of Washington Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2013). *The constructivist credo*. Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Litosseliti, L. (2003). *Using focus groups in research*. Continuum.
- Livingston, R. W., Rosette, A. S., & Washington, E. F. (2012). Can an agentic black woman get ahead? The impact of race and interpersonal dominance on perceptions of female leaders. *Psychological Science*, 23(4), 354-358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611428079>
- McCaslin, M., & Scott, K. (2003). The five-question method for framing a qualitative research study. *Qualitative Report* 8(3), 447-461.
- McTavish, D., & Miller, K. (2009). Management, leadership and gender representation in UK higher and further education. *Gender in Management*, 24(3), 178-194. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17542410910950868>
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (3rd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Morley, L. (2011). Misogyny posing as measurement: Disrupting feminisation crisis discourse. *Contemporary Social Science*, 6(2), 223-235. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2011.580615>
- Morley, L. (2013). The rules of the game: Women and the leaderist turn in higher education. *Gender and Education*, 25(1), 116-131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2012.740888>
- Mullany, L. (2022). Gendered identities in the professional workplace: Negotiating the glass ceiling. In C. Llamas & D. Watt (Eds.), *Language and identities* (pp. 179-190). Edinburgh University Press. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9780748635788-020>
- Northouse, P. G. (2016). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (7th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Olsson, S., & Walker, R. (2003). Through a gendered lens? Male and female executives' representations of one another. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 24(7), 387-396. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730310498604>
- Parry, K., & Kempster, S. (2014). Love and leadership: Constructing follower narrative identities of charismatic leadership. *Management Learning*, 45(1), 21-38. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1350507612470602>
- Pavlenko, A., & Blackledge, A. (2004). *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts*. Multilingual Matters.
- Riessman, C. (2015). Twists and turns: Narrating my career. *Qualitative Social Work*, 14(1), 10-17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325014522285>

- Savigny, H. (2014). Women, know your limits: Cultural sexism in academia. *Gender and Education*, 26(7), 794-809. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2014.970977>
- Shamir, B., & Eilam, G. (2005). 'What's your story?' A life-stories approach to authentic leadership development. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(3), 395-417.
- Showunmi, V. (2019). *Leadership and cultural identity*. In I. Jungwirth & C. Bauschke-Urban (Eds.), *Gender and diversity studies: European perspectives* (pp. 300-321). Verlag Barbara Budrich. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvqsf36t.18>
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory, procedures and techniques*. Sage Publications.
- Tannen, D. (1994). *Gender and discourse*. Oxford University Press.
- Turner, J., & Mavin, S. (2008). What can we learn from senior leader narratives? The strutting and fretting of becoming a leader. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 29(4), 376-391. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730810876168>
- Van De Mierop, D., Clifton, J., & Schnurr, S. (2022). Narratives as social practice in organisational contexts. *Narrative Inquiry*, 32(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.21090.van>
- Wagner, I., & Wodak, R. (2006). Performing success: Identifying strategies of self-presentation in women's biographical narratives. *Discourse & Society*, 17(3), 385-411. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0957926506060251>
- Werbinska, D. (2015). Language-teacher professional identity: Focus on discontinuities from the perspective of teacher affiliation, attachment and autonomy. In C. Gkonou, D. Tatzl, & S. Mercer (Eds.), *New directions in language learning psychology* (pp. 135-157). Springer International Publishing. [https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23491-5\\_9](https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23491-5_9)
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 125-151.
- Wortham, S. (2000). Interactional positioning & narrative self-construction. *Narrative Inquiry*, 10(1), 157-184. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1075/ni.10.1.11wor>

TANYA LINAKER  
King's College London, UK [tanya.linaker@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:tanya.linaker@kcl.ac.uk)



# Original Research

## Aviation communication challenges and language training development: Perspectives from pilots and air traffic controllers

by Haryani Hamzah, Pramela Krish and Afendi Hamat

**Haryani Hamzah** National University of Malaysia, Malaysia [yaniamzah@gmail.com](mailto:yaniamzah@gmail.com)

**Pramela Krish** National University of Malaysia, Malaysia [pramela@ukm.edu.my](mailto:pramela@ukm.edu.my)

**Afendi Hamat** National University of Malaysia, Malaysia [fendi@ukm.edu.my](mailto:fendi@ukm.edu.my)

**Article history** Received January 23, 2022 | Revised February 26, 2023 | March 6, 2023

**Conflicts of interest** The authors declared no conflicts of interest

**Research funding** No funding was reported for this research

**doi** 10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1-86-100

**For citation** Hamzah, H., Krish, P., & Hamat, A. (2023). Aviation communication challenges and language training development: Perspectives from pilots and air traffic controllers. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(1), 86-100.

*Having error-free communication in air-to-ground communication is somewhat nonsensical in real-life conditions. Multiple factors, external or internal, inevitably cause miscommunication or misunderstanding. During unprecedented situations, the ability to adapt and language competency becomes a significant factor in ensuring that communication between pilots and air traffic controllers can succeed. Aviation English falls under English for Specific Purposes and acts as a lingua franca for aviation communication. Thus far, language training is still inadequate to prepare pilots and air traffic controllers during emergencies or non-routine situations. The open-ended survey was conducted before the first development phase of the aviation communication competence framework. The rationale of this survey is to understand the need and perception of aviation language among pilots and air traffic controllers. The findings suggest that although they feel confident using aviation English in radiotelephony, most agree that it is imperative to have language training to improve aviation communication safety and standardise aviation phraseology and language. The findings also suggest that fundamental English language proficiency and non-standard phraseology use reduce efficiency in aviation communication. Furthermore, cultural and linguistic diversity among pilots and air traffic controllers creates misunderstandings and non-understanding in interactions. These findings suggest that aviation language development and training can be improved by diligent monitoring and evaluating the current needs of pilots and air traffic controllers.*

**KEYWORDS:** *English for specific purposes, aviation English, aviation language development and training, non-native speakers, intercultural communication*



This is an open access article distributed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (CC BY-NC 4.0), which allows its unrestricted use for non-commercial purposes, subject to attribution. The material can be shared/adapted for non-commercial purposes if you give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the aviation language has significantly progressed since International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) implemented the language proficiency requirement for non-native speaker (NNS) pilots

and air traffic controllers. Subsequently, the testing for aviation language has become the primary focus for researchers, language practitioners, and linguists worldwide. Aviation authorities, organisations, and academicians collaborate in constructing the most suitable test

to measure language competency amongst NNS pilots and controllers. However, this circumstance made the development of aviation English sparse, and only a little research has been done to explore and improve the understanding of the language. Furthermore, globalisation has inevitably shifted aviation communication towards intercultural communications (Hazrati, 2015), which requires pilots and air traffic controllers to have specific skills to interact across different cultures. These skills need to be learned and trained, especially for NNS who do not possess the skill naturally. Mekkaoui and Mouhadjer (2019) and Bullock (2019) suggest that appropriately well-trained, experienced language trainers and teachers are imperative for NNS pilots and air traffic controllers to enhance their language ability. Pilots and air traffic controllers' day-to-day tasks require them to be expeditious and flexible to meet traffic demand. Although this undertaking on aviation language is not the same for every country, there are challenges for NNS countries. Most NNS countries are either economically challenged or lack the expertise to improve and provide the necessary language training for pilots and air traffic controllers (Park, 2012; Kim, 2018; Mekkaoui & Mouhadjer, 2019; Bullock, 2019).

Based on previous studies, the critical solution to improving aviation communication safety is advanced and copious research in language training and development, including experts in aviation operational and human factors and linguists to help address the gaps in aviation communication safety. Hamzah and Fei's (2018) previous findings in pilot-controller communicative discourse suggest that communicative abilities among NNS pilots and air traffic controllers could be improved by implementing language skills in aviation training with current and relevant testing and development of aviation language. This article aims to understand aviation communication challenges and language training needs among pilots and air traffic controllers.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Research design

The survey presented in this paper was conducted before the first phase of developing a framework for aviation communication training. This survey is part of the need analysis for the aviation language framework and explores pilots' and air traffic controllers' perspectives on current development and

training for aviation language. The survey was conducted to identify the extent of the radiotelephony problem and the need for aviation language training to improve communication safety.

This survey is crucial for this study to identify learning theories and methods suitable for aviation language training from the perspectives of NNS pilots and air traffic controllers. The survey questions are a tool to elicit information from NNS air traffic controllers and pilots operating in Malaysia airspace. The survey follows the cross-sectional survey design created via google forms and consists of questions regarding ELPT level, years in service as a pilot or air traffic controller, current aviation communication safety and their opinion on the type of training in aviation communication. The questionnaire consists of 12 questions. The first three questions in the instrument prompted background information, followed by questions on the current development of aviation language in Malaysia. Other questions encouraged pilots and air traffic controllers to give their opinion and suggestions on aviation communication safety and training. Member checking for validity and reliability was conducted with aviation experts before the survey was distributed to ensure survey questions would elicit information that would fulfil the objectives of this study.

### 2.2. Respondents of the study

A total of 110 NNS pilots and air traffic controllers operating in Malaysian airspace completed the survey. All pilots and air traffic controllers hold a valid licence and have achieved a minimum level 4 (operating) ELPT. The duration of years respondents worked as pilots or air traffic controllers shows in Table 1, and their current ELPT is in Table 2.

Table 2 shows respondents' ELPT level for pilots and air traffic controller; a total of 64.1% (n=50) of pilots achieved level 6, while 32% (n=25) achieved level 5 and only 3.9% (n=3) at level 4. On the contrary, a total of 78% (n=25) controllers at level 4, a total of 9.4% (n=3) achieved level 5 and 12.5% (n=4) at level 6.

### 2.3. Data collection and analysis

The survey questions are combinations of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Questions 1, 2, 3 are multiple-choice questions on background. Questions 4, 6 and 10 are yes or no questions; questions 5, 7, 9, and 12 are open-ended questions to elicit more information or opinions. While question 11 prompted types of language training for aviation communication.

The data were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for multiple-choice questions

to analyse frequency statistics for the data. The open-ended answer was analysed qualitatively by creating themes and subthemes.

Table 1  
*Years as an active pilot or air traffic controller*

LESS THAN 5 YEARS	6-10 YEARS	11-20 YEARS	21-30 YEARS	31 YEARS AND ABOVE
21 (22.7%)	31 (28.2%)	31(28.2%)	14 (12.7%)	9 (8.2%)

Table 2  
*Current ELTP for pilots and air traffic controllers*

ELPT	TOTAL	PILOT	CONTROLLER
Level 6	54 (49%)	50 (92.6%)	4 (7.4%)
Level 5	28 (25.5%)	25 (89.3%)	3 (10.7%)
Level 4	28 (25.5%)	3 (10.7%)	25 (89.3%)
Total	110 (100%)	78	32

### 3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Aviation communication, commonly referred to as radiotelephony amongst aviators, is an essential part of communication. Air-to-ground communication often becomes a challenge for pilots and air traffic controllers during unprecedented situations and bad weather conditions. Based on past research by (Tajima, 2004; Cookson, 2009; Prinzo et al., 2010), this problem is often due to a lack of fundamental English and vocabulary restrictions among NNS controllers and pilots. However, these errors can easily be overcome with experience and shared context (Molesworth & Estival, 2015; Hamzah & Fei, 2018). Although English acts as a lingua franca for aviation communication, its form and use are different from ordinary English. The use of English lies upon standard phraseology published by ICAO and within aviation jargon and context. The manual on implementing ICAO language proficiency requirements (DOC9835) and Cir.323 under ICAO guide organisations to develop language training for pilots and air traffic controllers worldwide.

The manual (DOC9835) discussed the use of English within the aviation setting and how imperative aviation specialists are in implementing appropriate language training and testing programmes. The critical summary for ICAO language proficiency requirements

according to the ICAO manual are: strengthen the requirement for English to be provided by service providers from recommendation to that of a Standard (Annex 10); establish minimum skill language proficiency requirements for flight crews and air traffic controllers (Annex 1); introduce an ICAO language proficiency rating scale applicable for native and non-native speakers (Annex 1); clarify the requirement for the use of both plain language and phraseologies (Annexes 1, 10); standardise the use of ICAO phraseologies (Annex 10); recommend a testing schedule to demonstrate language proficiency (Annex 1); provide for service provider and operator oversight of personal compliance (Annexes 6, 11).

Past incidents and accidents proved that communication between pilots and air traffic controllers plays a pivotal part in aviation safety. One example of miscommunication occurred in 2017 at Medan Indonesia. A Boeing 737-900 aircraft operated by PT. Lion Mentari Airlines (Lion Air). The aircraft was a scheduled passenger flight from Banda Aceh to Medan, flight number JT197. Another aircraft was an ATR 72-500 operated by PT. Wings Abadi Airlines (Wings Air) is a scheduled passenger flight from Medan to Meulaboh, flight number IW1252. Medan controller issued a clearance to IW1252:

*Medan Controller: Wings Abadi ONE TWO FIVE TWO behind traffic Lion short final landed passing line-up behind runway TWO THREE from intersection DELTA additional clearance after departure direct Meloubah.*

*IW1252: After departure direct to Meulaboh Wings Abadi ONE TWO FIVE TWO.*

*Medan Controller: Namu tower.*

IW1252 proceeded to taxi and line up for departure runway 23; JT197 was on approach for landing when IW1252 taxied and lined up runway 23. JT197 landed on the runway and impacted with IW1252 on the runway a few seconds after landing. Although all passengers and crews survived, both aircraft were greatly damaged.

The miscommunication occurred when Medan controller issued the clearance to IW1252; the controller gave too much information in one transmission. Taxi clearance was issued together with after-departure and traffic information. The controller should keep their instruction concise and clear without ambiguity. The language structure of the instruction created vague information. The taxi clearance should be given first without any other information that could complicate the instructions. IW1252 did not give a full readback; this further complicates interactions' misunderstandings. The controller failed to confirm whether the pilot understood the instruction given. The pilot had the intention to expedite their departure hence by requesting taxiway DELTA for intersection departure; this is where the pilot had a presupposition of departure clearance since the controller failed to emphasise full readback.

Another example is a collision between Boeing MD-87, registration SE-DMA and Cessna 525-A, registration D-IEVX. While SE-DMA departed on runway 36R of Milano Linate airport, D-IEVX taxied into the active runway because of a misunderstanding due to the alternative use of words in instructions. SE-DMA continued on the runway and was temporarily airborne before stopping impacting a baggage handling building. D-IEVX remained unmoving on the runway; post-impact fire destroyed most aircraft. All crews and passengers of both aircraft suffered fatal injuries, and ground handling staff inside the building were injured and burned. The accident occurred for multiple reasons; code-switching in radio communication between Italian and English, and the ground controller issued ambiguous clearance and low visibility at the airport. The high-volume traffic for controllers; the ground controller had been in contact with eleven aircraft during

the time, and the final safety report stated that within 15 minutes and 58 seconds, the controller handled approximately 120 radio communications. While the tower controller was in contact with six aircraft for 11 minutes and 38 seconds, the controller managed 73 radio communications. Multiple factors contributed to the causes that led to the accident. Although communication rarely becomes the primary cause of accidents, it will always be one of the contributing factors. Under this circumstance, it is essential to have systematic and structured language testing and training for pilots and air traffic controllers.

Language-related standards and recommended practices (hereafter SARPs) are categorised into three main categories; (1) Annex 10 SARPs clarify the languages that are permitted in radiotelephony; (2) Annex 1 SARPs establish proficiency skill level requirements as a prerequisite for licensing; (3) Annexes 6 and 11 provide for service provider and operator responsibility. Aviation organisations and language experts develop and initiate aviation language testing for NNS pilots and air traffic controllers, according to DOC9835.

ICAO mandated English language requirements in 2008 for NNS considering the number of incidents and accidents that occurred due to lack of language proficiency among NNS pilots and air traffic controllers. The English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) is a compulsory requirement for NNS pilots and air traffic controllers worldwide to work in the aviation industry. Since the ICAO manual and annexes only serve as guidance in implementing ELPT, the modules and materials for the training and testing vary from one organisation to another, even within the same countries. Due to this circumstance, the perspective and the practice of the training and testing standard is diverse within the range recommended by ICAO (Alderson, 2009, 2010; Fan & Jin, 2013).

Emery (2014) highlighted aviation English testing by addressing issues in language testing, specifically in aviation English. Emery lists out four issues that he finds valid: (1) In testing language for specific purposes, how specific is specific? (2) How does one decide what is to be tested? (3) Can one be relatively sure that one is not testing subject-matter knowledge rather than linguistic or communicative abilities? (4) How can one predict from one performance on a specific test to performance in real life? Emery (2014) emphasises the need to develop tests that fit the specified test takers and how the fundamental English component in radiotelephony is under research because access to sensitive data is

*'Mastering the language is imperative for them to meet the traffic demand efficiently. Twelve years have passed since the ICAO implemented English for aviation (ELTP) with a minimum requirement of level 4 (operational) for every non-native speaker pilot and air traffic controller who is set to work in an international setting. Since then, the number of research on testing and materials development for testing in native speakers and non-native speakers' countries has increased significantly'*

scarce in the professional domain. He agrees with Douglas (2000) that air traffic controllers and pilots should be assessed differently since their objectives in communication are different, and their perspectives on the task differ from one another. Furthermore, Emery added that ICAO stated that test materials should be relevant to their work roles (ICAO, 2010).

ELPT often becomes a frustrating issue among pilots and controllers in non-native countries. The main problem for test-takers is mainly due to how irrelevant the test feels compared to real-life communication (Kim, 2013). From the beginning, Moder and Halleck (2009) explored the variation in oral proficiency amongst air traffic controllers regarding work-related radiotelephony and non-specific English tasks on aviation topics. The findings show that aviation professionals in the sample scored below operational level 4 on the radiotelephony task, in which the task given was adapted from actual routine radiotelephony. The study concludes that the ICAO proficiency tests should include phraseology and unexpected work-related situations. Subsequently, Douglas (2004) remarks that in his survey of aviation tests concerning ICAO implementation of English tests, many of the assessment procedures failed to meet international professional standards for the language test. Furthermore, the assessment policy is inadequate under ICAO SARPs. Kim (2018) suggests that the basis of language tests that only focus on oral proficiency is ineffective; the test should incorporate knowledge and behavioural elements.

Kim (2018) highlights that pilots and controllers found it challenging to master aviation language even after years of experience in the industry. Past research in aviation language (Park, 2012; Mekkaoui & Mouhad-

jer, 2019) shows challenges to improving language proficiency due to a lack of communication or language training in most non-native speaker countries. Most non-native speaker pilots and air traffic controllers face difficulty using plain English when standard phraseology is inadequate to communicate efficiently (Mitsutomi & O'Brien, 2003). These circumstances require standardising and in-depth communication training for non-native pilots and air traffic controllers. Most pilots and air traffic controllers struggle to master aviation English after ICAO implements ELPT. Mastering the language is imperative for them to meet the traffic demand efficiently. Twelve years have passed since the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) implemented English for aviation (ELTP) with a minimum requirement of level 4 (operational) for every non-native speaker pilot and air traffic controller who is set to work in an international setting (Alderson, 2009). Since then, the number of research on testing and materials development for testing in native speakers and non-native speakers' countries has increased significantly. However, this progress fell short regarding language training for air traffic controllers and pilots. Whilst native speakers' countries succeed in developing advanced language training for pilots and air traffic controllers, most non-native speakers' countries barely grasp the fundamentals of aviation language (Kim, 2018). Non-native speakers' countries consist of pilots and air traffic controllers who neither achieve a high English language proficiency nor acquire well-trained linguists or qualified English teachers with previous aviation communication experience.

Language training should be a replication or involve a real-life situation (Park, 2018; Vieira et al., 2014; Tripp, 2019; Mekkaoui & Mouhadjer, 2019). Standard phraseology shall be used throughout the training period, with plain English used only when the situation deems that standard phraseology is insufficient. Kovtun et al. (2014) suggest that non-routine or emergency communications should be rehearsed, and the language training should address all six language skills as specified by ICAO. Furthermore, (Tripp, 2019; Vieira et al., 2014) postulate that language training should be improved and viewed as a prerequisite for any pilot or air traffic controller before starting their aviation training and simulation to ensure they reach acceptable language competency. Mekkaoui and Mouhadjer (2019) and Bullock (2019) suggest that appropriate, well-trained, and experienced language trainers and teachers are imperative for non-native

speaker pilots and air traffic controllers to enhance their language ability. In reality, the day-to-day challenge for pilots and air traffic controllers requires them to be expeditious and flexible to meet traffic demand.

As suggested by Grigoryeva and Zakirova (2022) since language and culture are intertwined, English has emerged as a global leader in intercultural communication, with the majority of students choosing to study the language to integrate into society and acquire intercultural awareness successfully. Hazrati (2015) and Hamzah and Fei (2018) feel that since the majority of the pilot and air traffic controllers consist of non-native speakers, aviation communication has changed gradually to intercultural communication; hence intercultural communication competence should be included in aviation training as part of communication skills for pilot and controller to become 'intercultural speakers'. Houghton (2009) believed that misunderstandings in intercultural communication could be rectified with knowledge and skills in interpreting and relating across various cultures.

Tajima's (2004) findings revealed that for NNS, the need for proficiency in fundamental English is critical. He proposes that for NNS pilots or air traffic controllers to be competent in their tasks, they must have good English. The future training for pilots and air traffic controllers should be shifted towards competency in communication rather than passing the holistic descriptor scale set by ICAO.

Like other English for specific purposes, aviation language training should equip learners to use the targeted language efficiently and perform the task successfully. Language learning for a specific purpose starts with needs analysis, which will be the foundation of training (Dudley-Evans & Jones, 2013). According to Hutchison and Waters (1992), when it comes to a specific language, the developer needs to understand the 'target needs' divided into necessities, lacks, and wants.

Often, the lacks and necessities overlap; however, there are some cases where all three are not the same. Hutchinson and Water believed that the learning approach for ESP is categorised into three main course designs, language-centred, skill-centred, and learning-centred. Aviation language should adapt to these approaches to improve communication competence amongst pilots and air traffic controllers. It is important to note that for aviation communication, 'target needs' for each country or discourse community are never similar, even within the same specific language used.

Matthew (2017) postulates that one of the critical solutions in improving aviation communication safety is advanced and copious research in language training and development, including experts in aviation operational and human factors and linguists to help address the gaps in aviation communication safety.

#### 4. STUDY AND RESULTS

##### 4.1. Radiotelephony challenges in aviation communication

The study explores current challenges in radiotelephony and what respondents describe as a challenge for them. Overall, 62.7 % (n=69) reported that they do not feel radiotelephony has been a challenge for the past five years, while 37.3% (n=37.3) agree that there are challenges in aviation communication.

Table 3 and Table 4 report the response from the air traffic controllers and pilots according to the ELPT level, respectively. A total of 62.5% (n=20) of air traffic controllers responded that they do not feel any additional challenge in radiotelephony. In comparison, 37.5 % (n=12) responded otherwise. Amongst this result, 90% (n=18) responded 'No' from Level 4 ELPT (see Table 3). Table 4 shows that most pilots achieved levels 5 and 6 (95.6%); only three respondents were at level 4 ELPT. A total of 72.1% (n=49) of pilots' respondents believe there is no additional challenge in radiotelephony.

Table 3  
*Air traffic controller*

ELPT	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6	TOTAL
Yes	7	2	3	12 (37.5%)
No	18	1	1	20 (62.5%)
Total	25	3	4	32 (100%)



Table 4  
*Pilot*

ELPT	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6	TOTAL
Yes	2	9	8	19 (27.9%)
No	1	16	32	49 (72.1%)
Total	3	25	40	68 (100%)

In the comment section, respondents provide various feedback on current radiotelephony conditions. The responses were divided into themes. Although the respondents feel confident with their competency, they feel specific issues should be addressed.

**4.1.1. The use of standard phraseology**

Respondents suggest using standard phraseology at all times to avoid ambiguity in instructions or requests. The use of non-standard phraseology can differ from the actual meaning, and they find the proficiency of English within the NNS usually inadequate. Excerpts from some of respondents' responses are listed below.

Respondent 11: *RT communication in standard phraseology is easy to understand and avoid miscommunication.*

Respondent 30: *Use standard phraseology.*

Respondent 53: *Following a standard RTF is a real challenge.*

Respondent 61: *The fundamentals of RT communication are crucial. Recently I notice there has been an increase in non-standard and wrong RT phrases being used. Foreign English slang may be a little hard to understand, but that has nothing to do with fundamentals.*

**4.1.2. Proficiency in fundamental English language**

Another issue reported by respondents is the proficiency in fundamental English by pilots and air traffic controllers on duty. Respondents suggest that clearance and readback become intangible during bad weather conditions or other unprecedented situations due to poor construction of plain English and standard phraseology sentences. This condition similarly occurs during high-density traffic movements that require a spontaneous response by pilots or air traffic controllers due to traffic congestion. Excerpts from some of respondents' responses are listed below.

Respondent 10: *Once you work in the international airport, they are all kinds of countries inbound/outbound, and some are not fluent in English too.*

Respondent 23: *RT in Malaysia becomes a challenge, especially during bad en-route weather conditions. Too many pilots making weather deviation requests at once.*

Respondent 30: *Due to the increasing amount of air traffic.*

Respondent 61: *It's been the same, just the volume of traffic/flight has increased which causes radio congestion over the air.*

Respondent 95: *Language competency should improve from time to time, especially when considerably used in the working field with precise language attributes and appreciation.*

**4.1.3. Diverse language and cultural background**

For the past five years, the aviation industry has grown tremendously. The number of flights has increased worldwide. As a result, more NNS pilots participate in aviation communication. This condition creates intercultural communication settings requiring additional skills for pilots and air traffic controllers to facilitate successful interactions. Respondents reported that the different pronunciations and accents contribute to miscommunication in radiotelephony. Despite standard phraseology and aviation abbreviations used in radiotelephony, pilots and air traffic controllers face difficulties due to different backgrounds and cultures. Excerpts from some of respondents' responses are listed below.

Respondent 51: *Of course, especially international flights is a challenge with the different accent and culture I would say.*

Respondent 64: *Language barrier especially and different pronunciation.*

Respondent 66: *Local dialect and accent.*

Respondent 74: *There are some words that have almost the same pronunciation together with some countries having a deep accent.*

Respondent 81: *Level of accent and foreign pilot slang.*

*'Although more than half of respondents agree with this notion, they were aware the ELPT could be improved to simulate close to real-life radiotelephony. Respondents assert that the test should be conducted by experts who understand local procedures and linguists with aviation backgrounds'*

Respondent 86: *Different culture and accent from a different country.*

Respondent 83: *Management like to change small stuff that makes no difference and sweat too much on it. And other countries English is sometimes way too hard to understand.*

Respondent 109: *Message precision, annunciation, pronunciation, and grammatical understanding have to improve.*

Apart from the issues mentioned above, there are other reports regarding the level of ELPT, which respondents believe varies in standard within the NNS countries.

#### **4.2. ELPT Relevance to real-life radiotelephony**

Since 2008 ICAO mandated that every NNS pilots and air traffic controllers sit for ELPT as part of the prerequisite for licensing (Annex 1, Annex 10). Table 5 shows that 62.7% (n=69) respondents agree that the current ELPT is suitable or represents skills required for real-life communication, while 37.3% (n=41) respondents disagree.

Although more than half of respondents agree with this notion, they were aware the ELPT could be improved to simulate close to real-life radiotelephony. Respondents assert that the test should be conducted by experts who understand local procedures and linguists with aviation backgrounds. In addition, the test should focus on aviation subjects and standard phraseology.

Respondents believe that anyone can sit for the ELPT and pass without having any aviation background since the test solely evaluates general English language proficiencies. Excerpts from some of respondents' responses are listed below.

Respondent 1: *In my opinion, the ELPT tester should at least know some local procedures of the airport that the candidate comes from. Sometimes, the question is really hard to answer & not relevant because as we know every airport has its procedure.*

Respondent 4: *Should be conducted by Professionals and, not by ATC.*

Respondent 18: *Not that I remember since my last test in the year 2010, but the test had very little to do with aviation radiotelephony.*

Respondent 25: *It is good, but sometimes the ELPT questions expect a higher level than the required skill.*

Respondent 28: *Only graded a person on their English communication.*

Respondent 49: *With the standard RT in flying that we are used to communicating with, I would say it is not suitable.*

Respondent 53: *Provide the basics of what to expect in a real environment.*

Respondent 59: *Current ELPT emphasises the usage of the English language as a whole. Non-Pilot/ATC could take the test and pass as long as he/she is good in English. ELPT should have more inclination towards real-life tasks as Pilot/ATC.*

Respondent 63: *Need to be relevant with aviation.*

Respondent 84: *For standard day to day use I believe it's sufficient. But when it comes to abnormal, some people do have difficulty.*

Respondent 87: *ELPT and the real world is set in a very different environment and scenario. I have heard at times when there's a communication misunderstanding, e.g., similar sounding words, the Malay language was used. However, the message was delivered successfully.*

Table 5  
*Responses regarding ELPT suitability for aviation language testing*

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Yes (suitable)	69	62.7%
No (not suitable)	41	37.3%
Total	110	100%

### 4.3. Implementing aviation language training

Even though their perspectives in ELPT are relatively positive, most respondents agree that it is imperative to have language training in aviation communication to improve aviation safety. A total of 91% (n=101) respondents agree that aviation language training should be

implemented, while only 8.2% (n=9) responded otherwise (Figure 1). This result implies that the current language competency amongst pilots and air traffic controllers is still below operational standard. However, respondents believe that comprehension and efficiency are within the acceptable range.

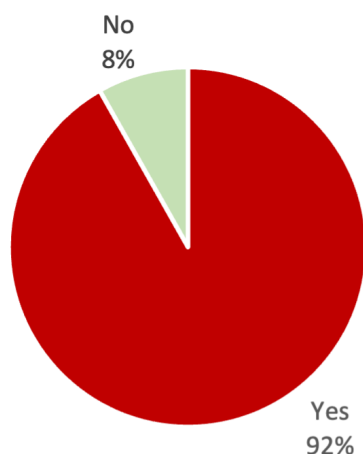


Figure 1. Respondents' feedback on implementing aviation language training to improve communication safety

Respondents implied some reasoning in implementing aviation language training, particularly in Malaysia. In the comment section, respondents feel that aviation language competency amongst pilots and air traffic controllers, especially for NNS, can be improved with a suitable syllabus and trainers. Furthermore, respondents believe language training might be the solution for aviation communication to be standardised through a systematic module implemented worldwide.

#### 4.3.1. Language skills and communication skills

Respondents feel that with higher competency, the communication skills amongst pilots and air traffic controllers will improve exponentially. Many respondents believe that lack of vocabulary, mispronouncing words, and inappropriate slang in radiotelephony create unnecessary miscommunications in radiotelephony. Excerpts from some of respondents' responses are listed below.

Respondent 7: *Need to learn how to explain the situation in short and precise.*

Respondent 11: *Improve on pronunciation to have better communication.*

Respondent 16: *Sometimes our request is misunderstood as I mentioned above. The accent makes it hard to get across your true intention.*

Respondent 33: *To improve communication skills.*

Respondent 39: *To set base standard from basic.*

Respondent 80: *For better pronunciation and rely upon message clearly.*

#### 4.3.2. Language training facilitate a standard language in aviation communication

Apart from improving current competency amongst pilot and air traffic controllers, respondents believed that the standard English use in aviation communication could be standardised, similar to standard phraseology with aviation language training. Practising language use during emergencies and unprecedented situations such as bad weather conditions and equipment failure could immensely benefit pilots and air traffic controllers, particularly for ab-initio and less experienced aviation personnel. Furthermore, language training could prepare pilots and air traffic controllers beyond routine aviation communications. Excerpts from some of respondents' responses are listed below.

Respondent 44: *Standardised.*

Respondent 46: *Should emphasise more on words during abnormalities, such as during an emergency, or whenever pilots or ATC requires quick attention and response.*

Respondent 49: *To ensure a common language and that can be used by all pilots and ATCs. It can avoid incidents and accidents from occurring.*

Respondent 53: *To standardise phraseology and etiquette of radio comms.*

Respondent 60: *Special class or manuals for pilots and ATCs. We know standard RT manual is available to us but not everyone is updated and willing to find out what's the correct RT communication.*

Respondent 62: *It is required since the term and way of pronouncing certain words is different from the layman. And the way a sentence is developed is also different. In the flying pilot and ATC need to follow standards phraseology which is adapted around the world.*

Respondent 63: *Yes, but I think it will be more on standardisation of RT to ATC and also among pilots.*

Respondent 68: *More of standardisation of RT practices. What is good, what is bad. As well as local aerodrome RT requirements.*

Respondent 72: *Aviation language must be taught and tested to ensure the highest level of safety is achieved. Miscommunication could lead to incidents or even accidents.*

Respondent 87: *Training will be good and not just testing. Having expiry dates for ELP doesn't make much sense. Does this mean, if one would get a Level 5 and require a retest a few years later and ends up in getting level 4, would this be an indication that his/her ELP has deteriorated? If yes, then it could happen to a level 6 too.*

Respondent 89: *A simple short course on communication safety will be a great help.*

Respondent 96: *Training must be something of an additional value or beyond the norms, e.g., psychological English where one must tackle language differently during work. A regular school-like English classroom should be deemed redundant as basic English is already a prerequisite for these professionals upon stepping into their respective career.*

Respondent 101: *So, the phraseology and the term used can be standardised.*

#### **4.3.3. Inadequate aviation language trainer and tester**

Since 2008, the role of trainers and testers for aviation language consists of either subject matter experts (frequently air traffic controllers or pilots with higher English competency) or academicians from institutions or universities. Respondents feel that both qualities do not qualify them as professional testers or trainers; they believe professionals should conduct testing and training with suitable qualifications and aviation experience.

Excerpts from some of respondents' responses are listed below.

Respondent 17: *Need to 3rd party if ever to be implemented.*

Respondent 56: *Bias, inconsistent and by non-aviator.*

Respondent 96: *ELPT test has unfortunately overlooked quite a few aspects of simple yet effective English. As it is aviation-centric, it may poorly rate an already proficient language user in a less favourable surrounding, or it can overrate an average language user with a collective work dialogue or script gained over the years.*

Respondent 110: *Aviation Language tutors, lecturers, or instructors must be qualified as well to conduct aviation language training. Courses should also be audited more often to constantly improve quality training for ATC's and pilots.*

#### **4.4. Type of language training in aviation communication**

Currently, most aviation language training focuses on passing ELPT rather than training on language proficiency to ensure aviation safety. When asked if any organisation or academy offers aviation language training that focuses on operational safety, a total of 85.5% (n=94) of the respondents responded: 'No', and only 14.5% (n=16) responded, 'Yes' (Figure 2).

This feedback implies that aviation language training for operational safety is still scarce; either the course is inaccessible or economically challenging.

The type of language learning plays a major role in aviation communication since the demand for learner's competency is highly critical. The respondents were given three choices. They can choose more than one answer for the type of language learning they feel is suitable or appropriate for aviation language: face-to-face learning, blended learning, and content integrated language learning. The total of 37.3% (n=79) responded for face-to-face learning, followed by 33.0% (n=70) responded for content integrated language learning and 29.0% (n=63) responded for blended learning. While per cent of cases are 71.8% for face-to-face learning, 63.6% for content integrated language learning and 57.3% for blended learning (Table 6).

This result indicated that face to face learning is still favourable for aviation language, and respondents were inclined to choose content integrated learning since they needed the syllabus to be more aviation subject related.

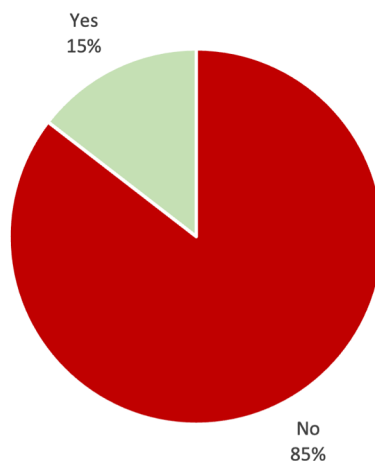


Figure 2. Respondents' input on organisation or academy that offers aviation language training that focuses on operational safety rather than testing

Table 6  
 Type of language learning responses

TYPE	TOTAL RESPONSES	PERCENT	PERCENT OF CASES
Face to face Learning	79	37.3%	71.8%
Content Integrated Language Learning	70	33.0%	63.6%
Blended Learning	63	29.0%	57.3%
Total	212	100.0%	192.7%

\*Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

#### 4.5. Aviation language development and training in Malaysia

Since the survey was set to explore current aviation language development and training, respondents were asked to give their perceptions and opinions on the aviation language future in Malaysia (this section is not compulsory for respondents to answer). The question yielded 82 responses, and the responses were divided into two major themes.

##### 4.5.1. Aviation language training

The majority of the respondents agreed that aviation language training should be the primary focus for authorities and organisations to improve aviation communication safety. Respondents believe that with suitable training facilities, qualified and experienced trainers and specific training modules, aviation language within non-native speakers' settings can be improved tremendously. Respondents added that aviation English

should be a fundamental requirement and prerequisite for ab-initio pilots and air traffic controllers. Furthermore, respondents suggested that collaboration training between pilots and air traffic controllers could be a catalyst in standardising aviation English used within Malaysian airspace. The respondents insisted that aviation language training should include radio communication during emergencies and unprecedented situations, consistent with past research (Park, 2018; Vieira et al., 2018; Trippe, 2019; Mekkaoui & Mouhadjer, 2019). Excerpts from some of respondents' responses are listed below.

Respondent 1: *More courses for both ATC and pilots.*

Respondent 3: *I believe, by having proper training, it will help the English proficiency of ATC and pilot in Malaysia.*

Respondent 11: *Need more classes to improve our English.*

Respondent 21: *Computer-based training for updated requirements and regulations.*

Respondent 25: *Attend English course/training/refresher frequently.*

Respondent 27: *Impose training requirements and set appropriate tests suitable to the degree required.*

Respondent 30: *Communication skill training is required at least once a year.*

Respondent 32: *Provide training about words or terms that are used during handling emergencies and focus on that topic only.*

Respondent 48: *Collaboration in training between ATC controllers and pilots so that the root cause of the error can be shared and learned by both parties.*

Respondent 61: *Enhanced learning during early stages of training.*

Respondent 73: *Ensure classroom training by Qualified ATC Controllers & Pilots. The classroom must consist of pilots and ATC controllers to promote dialogue and a better understanding of each other's work environment.*

Respondent 74: *A proper class or training is required, at the moment only English tests that are focusing on and there is no official or proper lesson.*

Respondent 94: *Classes based on the hour before attending the ELPT.*

Respondent 100: *Provide aviation English classes that emphasise standard phraseology and terminology used in aviation.*

#### **4.5.2. Adhere to standard phraseology and radio communication etiquette**

Past research (Tajima, 2004; Prinzo et al., 2010) highlights that standard phraseology in aviation communication is imperative to ensure comprehension amongst pilots and air traffic controllers can be established successfully. Respondents frequently asserted that pilots and air traffic controllers deviated from standard phraseology unnecessarily and replaced them with poorly constructed instructions or requests. As a result, communication will naturally become incoherent and inefficient. Respondents believe that courses or training in standard phraseology should be implemented diligently and periodically to maintain efficiency and safety. Excerpts from some of respondents' responses are listed below.

Respondent 16: *Use standard phraseology and sometimes other request requires non-standard phraseology, maybe that's where the English understanding is important.*

Respondent 19: *As long we follow the standard phraseology of RT, everything will be safe.*

Respondent 20: *Pilots and ATC should learn each other's standard/non-standard phraseology. Pilots should learn more RT etiquette.*

Respondent 23: *Pilots and ATC should learn each other's standard/non-standard phraseology. Pilots should learn more RT etiquette.*

Respondent 37: *Introduce standard exam every 6 months.*

Respondent 47: *Make sure pilots and ATC are tested on the clarity and the use of standardised terms in controller-pilot communication.*

Respondent 51: *Standardisation with both ATC Malaysia and to all Malaysian company airlines. And standardise also to the international standard such as ICAO and all the international aviation board as it will reflect us as Malaysian to a higher standard.*

Respondent 62: *Follow strictly on the standard phraseology. And listen out.*

Respondent 72: *Emphasise more on standards worldwide of pronouncing and minimise the need to talk unnecessarily over the air. Just because u speak fluently in English Does not mean you are level 6 proficient in aviation.*

The findings show that pilots and air traffic controllers should use standard phraseology and limit the use of non-standard phraseology or plain English to avoid communication errors. Code-switching between standard phraseology and plain English should be done appropriately and without distorting messages and creating ambiguity. The findings also show that standard English should be considered to be used in radiotelephony to improve comprehension among pilots and air traffic controllers. Furthermore, the study believes radio etiquette should be emphasised in communication to reduce the non-standard phraseology practice in radiotelephony. The concept of cooperative principles could benefit aviation communications by following maxi principles in interactions.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

Although years have passed since ICAO implemented ELPT for non-native speakers' pilots and air traffic controllers, the problems in aviation communication remained the same. The lack of aviation language training, non-standard phraseology, and unqualified trainers and testers is still a constant issue within non-native countries. English language proficiency amongst pilots and air traffic controllers fluctuates from one country to



another. The main aim of this study was to investigate the perspective of pilots and air traffic controllers who currently operate within the Malaysia airspace on the development and training of aviation language. This will help propose efficient aviation language training modules to improve communication safety.

The majority of participants, regardless of pilots or air traffic controllers, agree that aviation language training is essential and implemented in aviation training. The lack of suitable materials and courses representing actual communication in aviation is a recurrent problem for NNS countries (Park, 2018; Vieira et al., 2018; Trippe, 2019; Mekkaoui & Mouhadjer, 2019). This study's overall result supports that NNS still face difficulty in mastering fundamental aviation language, especially during abnormal situations. Although, respondents did not appear to have significant challenges in understanding each other's instructions or requests. However, the practice of non-standard phraseology is still a critical issue. Most pilots and air traffic controllers suggest that a course or training in communication

standards should be implemented and checked periodically. Furthermore, the study indicates that aviation language training is crucial for communication. Despite ICAO implementing ELPT in 2008, NNS pilots and air traffic controllers still suffer from the lack of available training and courses to improve language competency. The difficulties in finding qualified testers and trainers and reliable materials and modules further complicate the progress. Nevertheless, this circumstance cannot be held solely on the organisation, authorities, and institutions involved.

The present study does shed some light on aviation communication challenges and training development; further details or in-depth studies regarding communication problems could be explored in the future. The outcome of this study could guide researchers and linguists to construct frameworks that are more relatable to pilot-controller communications that are realistically effective for non-native speakers. Figure 3 illustrates a workable aviation language training model for non-native speakers.

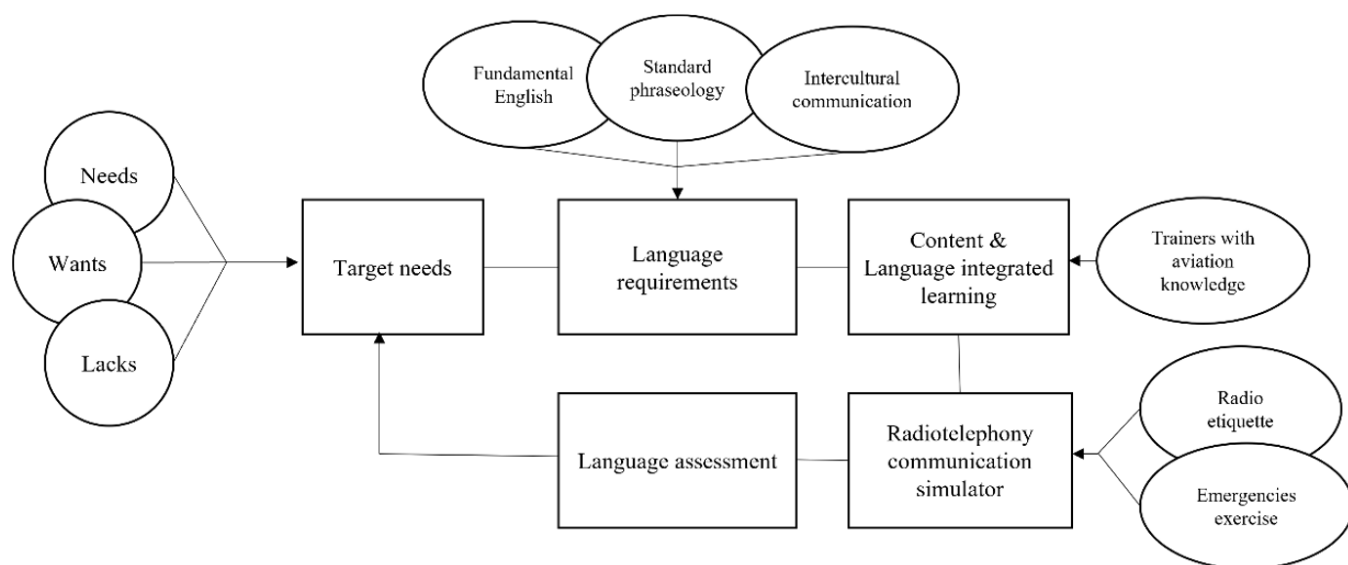


Figure 3. Aviation communication training model

Aviation language training begins by understanding the target needs of the learners, consisting of needs, wants and lacks. Language requirements for aviation communication are naturally different from one another. However, the essential needs for aviation communication can be narrowed down into three areas: fundamental English, standard phraseology and intercultural communication knowledge and skills. Once learners are equipped with essential requirements, they can proceed with aviation content-specific learning

conducted by trainers with aviation knowledge and experience. Simulator training can only be conducted when learners have the competency for aviation language and sufficient aviation knowledge. Radio etiquette and emergencies exercise shall be implemented in simulation training to improve learners' radiotelephony skills. Language assessment is essential to ensure learners' competency, and standard phraseology is used at all times unless plain English is deemed necessary. In the event of unsatisfactory performance by learners, the

trainer can refine the target needs to suit the learners' specific target needs. In summary, the study suggests that the development and aviation language training can be achieved through diligent monitoring and evaluation of current needs (need analysis) amongst pilots and air traffic controllers, primarily focusing on their specific needs. Laborda (2011) also believed that language and content knowledge desired by learners to be integrated with language learning for professional development.

Furthermore, Borowska (2017) and Estival (2019) agree that language awareness among native speakers and NNS pilots and controllers is crucial and be implemented in aviation training. Other than the issues mentioned above, other factors such as the variety of Englishes, cultural differences, and task difficulty play essential roles in aviation communication (Douglas, 2014).

## 6. CONCLUSION

The results of this study support the notion that aviation language training and development are still critical in non-native speakers' settings. Most pilots and air

traffic controllers possess high comprehension in interactions due to shared context and past experiences. However, threats in aviation communication frequently occur during unexpected situations, especially during an emergency procedure and harsh weather conditions. The findings suggest that general or academic English does not fit aviation communication needs. Pilots and air traffic controllers should be trained as closely to real-life communication as possible to prepare them for communication demands. Actual needs should be the main consideration for aviation language training to be more suitable and effective.

Future research should also include native-speaker pilots and air traffic controllers, and the result could be compared and analysed for better aviation language training and development.

Furthermore, amidst the pandemic, most aviation language training, including simulation training, entirely shifted to online learning, which becomes conveniently accessible for learners to participate and interact globally. This shift marks a new paradigm in aviation language learning and should be explored and improved rigorously.

## References

- Alderson, J. C. (2009). Air safety, language assessment policy, and policy implementation: The case of aviation English. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 29, 168-187. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0267190509090138>
- Alderson, J. C. (2010). A survey of aviation English tests. *Language Testing*, 27(1), 51-72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265532209347196>
- Borowska, A. P. (2017). *Avialinguistics: The study of language for aviation purpose*. Peter Lang.
- Bullock, N. (2019). Validating new perspectives and methodologies for learning and teacher training in English for aeronautical communications. In S. Papadima-Sophocleous, E. K. Constantinou, & C. N. Giannikas (Eds.), *ESP teaching and teacher education: Current theories and practices* (pp. 79-93). Research Publishing. <https://dx.doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2019.33.927>
- Cookson, S. (2009). Zagreb and Tenerife: Airline accidents involving linguistic factors. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 32(3), 221-224. <https://doi.org/10.2104/ara10922>
- Douglas, D. (2000). *Assessing languages for specific purposes*. Cambridge University Press.
- Douglas, D. (2004). English language testing in the context of Aviation English. *ICAO Journal*, 59(3), 17-18.
- Douglas, D. (2014). Nobody seems to speak English here today: Enhancing assessment and training in aviation English. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 2(2), 1-12.
- Dudley-Evans, T., & Johnes, M. J. (2013). *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. CUP.
- Emery, H. J. (2014). Developments in LSP testing 30 years on? The case of aviation English. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 11(2), 198-215. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15434303.2014.894516>
- Estival, D. (2019). *Aviation English training for native English speakers: Challenges and suggestions*. In *ICAEA Conference Proceedings* (pp. 23-44). International Civil Aviation English Association Publishing Office.
- Fan, J., & Jin, Y. (2013). A survey of English language testing practice in China: The case of six examination boards. *Language Testing in Asia*, 3(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2229-0443-3-7>

- Grigoryeva, L. L., & Zakirova, R. R. (2022). The role of English in intercultural communication: Past, modernity and future global perspectives. *Training, Language and Culture*, 6(2), 45-55. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2022-6-2-45-55>
- Hamzah, H., & Fei, W. F. (2018). Miscommunication in pilot controller interaction. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 24(4), 199-213.
- Hazrati, A. (2015). Intercultural communication and discourse analysis: The case of aviation English. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 192, 244-251. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.06.035>
- Houghton, S. (2009). The role of intercultural communicative competence in the development of world Englishes and lingua francas. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 15, 69-95.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1992). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- ICAO. (2010). *Manual on the implementation of ICAO language proficiency requirements* (2nd ed.). International Civil Aviation Organization.
- Kim, H. (2013). Exploring the construct of radiotelephony communication: A critique of the ICAO English testing policy from the perspective of Korean aviation experts. *Papers in Language Testing and Assessment*, 2(2), 103-110.
- Kim, H. (2018). What constitutes professional communication in aviation: Is language proficiency enough for testing purposes? *Language Testing*, 35(3), 403-426.
- Kovtun, O., Gudmanian, A., & Mikhaylov, A. (2014, September 23-25). Requirements to pilots and air traffic controllers' proficiency in aeronautical communication. In *Proceedings of the 6th World Congress Aviation in the 21st Century: Safety in Aviation and Space Technologies* (pp. 91-94). AeroLingva.
- Laborda, J. G. (2011). Revisiting materials for teaching languages for specific purposes. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 17(1), 102-112.
- Mekkaoui, G., & Mouhadjer, N. (2019). Addressing air traffic controllers' English language proficiency needs: Case of Zenata airport. *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 9(3), 167-183.
- Mitsutomi, M., & O'Brien, K. (2003). The critical components of aviation English. *International Journal of Applied Aviation Studies*, 3(1), 117-129.
- Moder, C. L., & Halleck, G. B. (2009). Planes, politics and oral proficiency. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 32(3), 251-256.
- Molesworth, B. R. C., & Estival, D. (2015). Miscommunication in general aviation: The influence of external factors on communication errors. *Safety Science*, 73, 73-79.
- Park, P. (2012). An analysis of military ATCs' perceptions on English proficiency test for aviation. *English Teaching*, 67(4), 110-123.
- Park, M. (2018). Innovative assessment of aviation English in a virtual world: Windows into cognitive and metacognitive strategies. *ReCALL*, 30(2), 196-213.
- Prinzo, O. V., Campbell, A., Hendrix, A. M., & Hendrix, R. (2010). *US airline transport pilot international flight language experiences. Report 4: Non-native English-speaking controllers communicating with native English-speaking pilots*. Federal Aviation Administration.
- Tajima, A. (2004). Fatal miscommunication: English in aviation safety. *World Englishes*, 23(3), 451-470.
- Trippe, J. (2019). Aviation English listening and repeating task for native English speaker and non-native English speaker pilots. *Psychology*, 5, 235-240.
- Vieira, A. M., Santos, I. C., & Morais, P. R. (2014). Poor communication skills mean high risk for aviation safety. *Gestão & Regionalidade*, 30(88), 123-137.

HARYANI HAMZAH

National University of Malaysia, Malaysia [yaniamzah@gmail.com](mailto:yaniamzah@gmail.com)

PRAMELA KRISH

National University of Malaysia, Malaysia [pramela@ukm.edu.my](mailto:pramela@ukm.edu.my)

AFENDI HAMAT

National University of Malaysia, Malaysia [fendi@ukm.edu.my](mailto:fendi@ukm.edu.my)

# Original Research

## Digital politeness in online translator and interpreter training: The lessons of the pandemic

by Irina V. Tivyaeva and Diana R. Abdulmianova

**Irina V. Tivyaeva** Moscow City University, Russia [tivyaeva@yandex.ru](mailto:tivyaeva@yandex.ru)

**Diana R. Abdulmianova** Moscow City University, Russia [diana-gazieva@mail.ru](mailto:diana-gazieva@mail.ru)

**Article history** Received October 13, 2022 | Revised February 25, 2023 | Accepted March 6, 2023

**Conflicts of interest** The authors declared no conflicts of interest

**Research funding** No funding was reported for this research

**doi** 10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1-101-115

**For citation** Tivyaeva, I. V., & Abdulmianova, D. R. (2023). Digital politeness in online translator and interpreter training: The lessons of the pandemic. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(1), 101-115.

*The paper focuses on the concept of digital politeness as a component of a language services provider competence framework aimed at preparing undergraduate and graduate students of Linguistics and Translation Studies for effective performance in a digital professional environment. The study attempts to define the concept of digital politeness as applied to translator and interpreter training, make an inventory of digital politeness skills relevant to translator and interpreter competence, monitor students' progress in digital politeness during the online and hybrid training periods and assess the professional outcome of introducing relevant training into undergraduate and graduate programmes in Linguistics and Translation studies. Data for this study were collected using student surveys, the number of respondents totalling 80 individuals aged between 19 and 25. The respondents were offered questionnaires on their digital behaviour covering three periods: the unplanned transition to distance learning in 2020, the pre-planned delivery of all courses in online mode in 2021, and the return to in-class training in 2022. The accumulated data were processed using a single analysis algorithm, which allowed identifying dominant trends in the dynamics of student perception of digital politeness over the three periods under consideration. The findings yield results suggestive of increased student awareness of the need to improve their online academic interaction experience and maintain best digital interaction practices when delivering university degree programmes in distance mode. The survey also demonstrated that students see the digital politeness competence as a way to benefit professionally in their future career.*

**KEYWORDS:** Covid-19, distance learning, digital politeness, translator and interpreter training, experiment



This is an open access article distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0), which allows its unrestricted use for non-commercial purposes, subject to attribution. The material can be shared/adapted for non-commercial purposes if you give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As digital practices keep penetrating all spheres of professional, social and personal activities, educators around the globe do their best to be part of the digital transformation trend, bringing latest technologies and methods to their classrooms. In different education levels and training programmes these changes were implemented at an uneven pace, technology and science

classes generally showing more technologically advanced teaching techniques and approaches. The Covid-19 pandemic followed by strict lockdowns and restrictions in many countries caused a great number of academic events and activities to shift to online mode. This change could not but affect the system of education that faced unprecedented challenges involving an emergency transfer of courses to online mode.



In most countries, the education system already was on its way to virtualisation and digitalisation before the outbreak of Covid-19, so the shift to online learning was not exactly out of the blue. However, the transfer to distance mode, in most cases urgent and unexpected, while remaining a technical, methodological, psychological and emotional challenge to both students and educators, brought to light and provided practical basis for new didactic ideas, concepts and approaches that might have been conceptualised in earlier research but until recently lacked empirical grounding.

At present, there is extensive research on e-learning practices and methods. A number of scholars discuss general issues, such as student motivation and adaptation, course design, active learning techniques, gamification, learning environments, and teacher performance (see, e.g., Buckley & Doyle, 2016; Harandi, 2015; Lumpkin, 2003; Costa et al., 2020; Richardson & Mishra, 2018; Urh et al., 2015; Gama, 2020; Makarova et al., 2017; Suleimanova et al., 2020; Tareva & Tarev, 2018), while others focus on area-specific problems related to teaching foreign languages and translator training in online mode (see, e.g., Gavriyuk et al., 2019; Tareva & Polushkina, 2021; Akimova et al., 2015; Ivanova & Tivyaeva, 2015; Berdichevskiy et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020; Vieira, 2015; Tivyaeva & Vodyanitskaya, 2021; Tivyaeva, 2021).

A constantly growing body of literature is currently emerging that investigates effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the education system both globally and locally, in general perspective and in application to specific disciplines (see, e.g., Jomezai et al., 2021; Engelhardt et al., 2021; Mishra et al., 2020; Qazi et al., 2021; Abuhammad, 2020). Scholars explore a variety of effects the pandemic produced on education and parties to the education process. Most researchers admit that the emergency shift to online teaching did not go smoothly in all cases, but despite all challenges it also brought about a number of positive changes. Technical difficulties experienced by many tutors and students as well as social and psychological inconveniences were compensated with unprecedented learning and self-development opportunities for students and more freedom in managing one's time, resources and learning style.

Research has consistently shown that much time and teaching effort are invested in developing students' digital skills, which involves training them for working in a digital professional environment, mastering digital devices, online tools, services, and software. However, while digital literacy is of high importance in any indus-

try, in translation and interpreting a perfect command of digital devices and technologies is not enough for successful interaction with employers and colleagues. Effective communication in a professional virtual environment depends not only on how well a translator- or interpreter-in-training knows basic principles of working online, organising work on different devices, and applying innovative technologies and tools. Whether language workers are involved in translation or interpreting projects, in the course of their work they interact with dozens of people – clients, managers, speakers, authors, editors, revisers, reviewers, proofreaders, etc. As the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in social restrictions and transformed the regular workflow affecting all branches of the language services industry, professional communication accompanying translation and interpreting has moved to online mode along with most events and projects. Language-service providers' exodus to virtual workspace gathering momentum, the relevance of successful interpersonal communication in digital environments could hardly be underestimated.

It should be mentioned that the need to develop a language worker's digital competence required for providing professional services at the highest standard has already been voiced by the translation studies research community, at that, most studies focus on the technological and data processing potential of digital environments as a factor increasing overall quality and performance (see, e.g., Suleimanova et al., 2019; Suleimanova et al., 2020; Malakhova & Bokova, 2020).

Those ideas were also supported by language industry regulations used in different parts of the globe. For instance, the European Master's in Translation Competence Framework, aimed at specifying a common set of learning outcomes for graduates of master's degree programmes in translation studies, includes the Technology competence that covers all the knowledge and skills used to implement present and future translation technologies within the translation process (EMT, 2022). The Russian occupational profile for translators also lists technological skills as obligatory components of translator competence required for performing different language-related services (Translation Service Provider, 2021).

However, post-Covid industry and training cases demonstrate that the application scope of digital technologies among language workers is wider than the regular workflow process. Specialised computer software and CAT-tools are commonly used by individual translators and interpreters, translation companies and in-

house translation departments to produce target language content and control the translation process. The online work mode imposed by pandemic realities also digitalised all associated activities, increasing their role in the overall project success. The ability to communicate effectively in a digital professional environment turned out to be of crucial importance both to translators and interpreters, the latter having to adapt to new work formats – distance interpreting via cloud-based and hybrid remote simultaneous interpreting platforms and video conferencing applications, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex, etc.

Effective interpersonal skills are recognised as a key factor contributing to professional success. European Master's in Translation Competence Framework also lists the Personal and Interpersonal competence as part of the basic translator and interpreter training standard, defining this competence area as all the generic skills, often referred to as 'soft skills' that enhance graduate adaptability and employability (EMT, 2022). However, the coronavirus-driven emergency shift to distance mode of working and teaching makes it difficult to rely on the conventional manner of applying soft skills, as both the translation workflow and associated interpersonal communications have also moved to virtual workspace. New digital realities require for a new professional interaction protocol. This paper reports on an attempt to delineate digital politeness skills relevant to translator and interpreter competence and introduce relevant training into undergraduate and graduate programmes in Linguistics and Translation Studies delivered online in the course of 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years; in hybrid /offline mode in the course of 2021-2022 academic year.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

### 2.1. Student body and course delivery method

The article reports on a case study involving students at Moscow City University enrolled in the Linguistics undergraduate programme and the Translation Studies and Intercultural Communication graduate programme initially designed to be delivered offline but transferred to distance and hybrid modes due to restrictions imposed by the Russian authorities as part of measures against the spread of Covid-19.

During the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years training was provided according to the following schedule: fall semester 2019-2020 – courses delivered in class; spring semester 2019-2020 and fall semester of 2020-2021 – courses delivered online, spring semester

2020-2021 – courses delivered in hybrid mode, theoretical instruction remaining in the virtual learning space, practical classes taught offline; fall semester of 2021-2022 – courses delivered in hybrid mode, spring semester of 2021-2022 – courses delivered offline. Three courses were examined: 'General Translation Theory', 'Translation of Political Texts' (both delivered to second-year bachelor's degree students, n=38) and 'Theoretical Aspects of Translation' (first-year master's degree students, n=13).

The technical basis for e-learning was provided by the Microsoft Teams platform which allowed engagement in academic communication under conditions similar to offline face-to-face interaction. Classes were held in accordance with the regular schedule, synchronous participation in all activities being supported by the Microsoft Teams platform.

As the concept of digital politeness in its application to translators and interpreters is largely under-researched and no consistent approach has yet been proposed to explore the area, in this work our primary goals were as follows: 1) define the concept of digital politeness and describe its main parameters related to translator and interpreter training, 2) identify key components of digital politeness as applied to translation and interpreting services, 3) observe students' progress in digital politeness during the online and hybrid training period, 4) interpret obtained observation records in light of the student progress in different periods; 5) plan and conduct an experimental research aimed at identifying the principles of digital politeness.

As this study is one of the first steps in exploring professional discourse politeness in hybrid communication, its main focus is on designating a new problematic research area and raising both theoretical and practical questions. Professional community and student observation seems to be an adequate method for achieving the goal at this stage (and also in line with related research as described in Tivyaeva and Vodyanitskaya (2021) that is based on discussions with interviewees and survey data), while future research paradigm embracing issues related to effective professional communication in digital workspace will also need to elaborate a transparent research procedure relying on a consistent algorithm.

### 2.2. Research design

To address the goals set out in this paper, experimental research was performed, its focus being on identifying the principles of digital politeness that have



mostly been formed within distance learning framework during the Covid-19 pandemic as well as their development after the gradual transition to a blended learning format (a combination of offline and online formats where students interact with a professor through both a physical classroom and an online platform). The research relies on data obtained in the course of student surveys. Further, the experimental data were processed by statistical methods which allowed us to come up with additional arguments supporting our conclusions.

The crucial objective of the research was to assess the validity of the results obtained. The validity and quality of the results were ensured by the adequacy of the selected methods to the goals and objectives of the research, the representativeness of the sample as well as the advantages of statistical methods of data analysis as described in Gazieva (2013).

We maintain that it is essential to conduct an experiment to verify the specified principles of digital politeness as experimental data provide solid foundation for reliable conclusions.

### 2.3. Working group

80 respondents aged from 19 to 25 years voluntarily took part in the experiment. The respondents were students working towards their bachelor's and master's degrees at the Department of Linguistics and Translation Studies, Institute of Foreign Languages, Moscow City University. The respondents were selected arbitrarily. The study involved 2nd to 4th year bachelor's degree students as well as 1st to 2nd year master's degree students. The principal parameter for the selection of respondents was direct involvement in distance learning in the course of the Covid-19 pandemic.

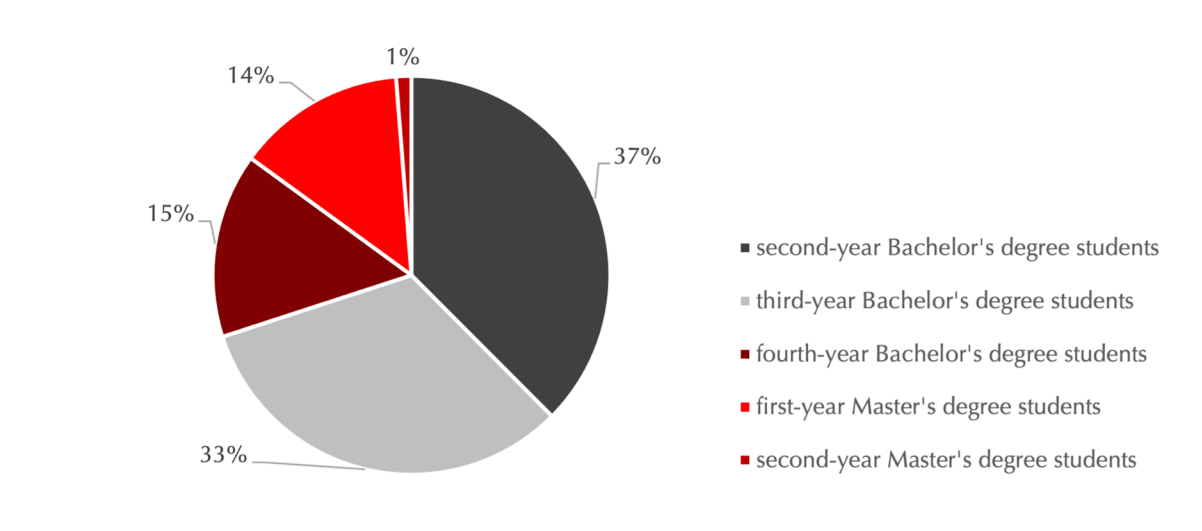


Figure 1. Number of respondents in the experimental group

### 2.4. Data collection

The experiment involved questionnaires with relevant data about the respondents and their studies during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods. The questionnaires offered to the students included assignments formulated in their native language. Respondents had to describe their 'digital' behaviour when collaborating with professors and classmates by choosing the most appropriate option for their actions from the proposed list. The questionnaire covered three periods: year 2020 – the period of a sharp transition to the distance learning format, year 2021 – the planned transition to the distance learning format and year 2022 – the exit from the distance learning format.

### 2.5. Experimental process

The experiment was performed with Russian-speaking students both individually and in class. The survey was conducted online; potential survey participants were sent Google Forms links to the questionnaires. The respondents were asked to tick an appropriate answer option for each year. In addition, the respondents were asked to make a comment in the special 'Other' field if none of the presented options met their needs. The time to complete the questionnaire was not limited. The 'Answer' field had to be filled in. The respondents were asked to point out the course of the study in a separate column to identify the balance of the sample by age and social parameters.

### 3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this study we draw on professional discourse, digital communication and politeness theories to explore how the post-Covid context shapes interpersonal communication in digital work environments and how relevant digital politeness skills can be developed in undergraduate and graduate students majoring in Linguistics and Translation Studies and Intercultural Communication respectively.

At present, the concept of digital politeness has not yet entered the discourse of the translation studies research community mainly because the preconditions for its emergence were not so obvious before the breakout of the coronavirus pandemic that caused a major transfer of all professional activities to online mode. In this study digital politeness is defined as a set of guidelines regulating the choice of language forms and communication strategies that are appropriate for a specific professional situation within the virtual work environment. It may be regarded as close to netiquette referring to *'the rules for the proper and appropriate way to communicate using an electronic device or activities online'* (Brusco, 2011, p. 279), being different in (1) the scope covering only professional contexts, (2) competence required to be able to abide by some regulations, (3) digitalisation of all associated processes, (4) strategic relevance to successful professional performance.

Delong (2014) reveals that digital politeness skills are part of professional digital competence and do not deal with general issues related to online communication such as choice of the medium, response time, privacy, etc.

Digital politeness is a property of professional interaction taking place in virtual workspace. It is different from daily communication and netiquette in terms of communication goals related strictly to professional tasks and contextual factors conditioned by digital work environments.

As Hu and Ran (2021) note, politeness in professional contexts is a research avenue that arouses much academic interest but is currently underexplored. Various aspects of applying politeness in professional settings have been under scrutiny in a number of recent studies (see, e.g., Mapson, 2020; Lauricella et al., 2020; Aase, 2010; Siddoo et al., 2019). Politeness among interpreters has been analysed in terms of approaches to its representation in interpreting and translation, however, what rules interpreters and translators should abide by for successful interaction in a digital workspace remains to be investigated. Politeness in digital

contexts was approached by Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez (2018), but the research scope was limited to WhatsApp discourse and did not extend to include professional settings.

In this paper, we will rely on community discussions and student observation results to formulate basic principles of digital politeness for language services providers and students majoring in interpreting and translation studies. As in contemporary literature, the understanding of politeness goes beyond language use, the following parameters will be taken into consideration in addition to verbal means of expressing politeness and relevant discourse strategies: visual and audio effects, timing, technology competence, and digital behaviour.

### 4. STUDY AND RESULTS

The experimental data accumulated at all stages of the experiment were processed employing a single analysis algorithm with the systematisation of the responses, statistical data processing and interpretation of the identified dominant trends. To represent the possibilities of applying this algorithm to the analysis of the experimental data obtained, a detailed analysis of all experimental situations is given below. The empirical plan of the research reflects the communication features in the digital space of students at the Institute of Foreign Languages of Moscow City University.

The analysis of experimental data on the first question (Figure 2) regarding an online meeting connection revealed that 58% of students joined an online meeting in advance in 2020, 63% of students – in 2021 and 78% of students – in 2022. In 2020, 18% of students connected minute by minute, 33% of students – in 2021 and 2022 reflectively. According to the analysis of experimental data obtained, only a small number of respondents, namely, 4% of students – in 2020, 5% of students – in 2021 and 9% of them in 2022 connected to an online meeting within 5 minutes after the start. This fact is likely to indicate a positive trend of digital politeness in relation to timely connection to an online meeting which undoubtedly has a positive effect on the learning process and ensures effective learning. We should take into account the fact that about 2% – 5% of students tended not to join a meeting at the time prescribed by their class schedule which apparently highlighted the lack of 'digital' etiquette patterns.

A survey of students about camera operation during their response (Figure 3) yielded positive results. It was noted that the vast majority of respondents had

their camera on exceptionally for tests and exams – 64% (2020), 74% (2021) and 73% (2022) accordingly which was probably due to both unwillingness to connect and lack of technical possibility or slow Internet connection and weak Wi-Fi signals. Some students in the ‘Other’ field associated having their camera on at their professor’s request and initiative. According to the survey results, 29% (2020), 21% (2021) and 23% (2022) of students turned their camera on while answering their task. The figures prove that camera-on mode indicates the desire of students to get involved in the learning process as well as polite ‘digital’ behaviour.

The results of the experimental data obtained on the third question (Figure 4) regarding compliance with the rules of etiquette during an online meeting highlighted a high degree of digital politeness across differ-

ent periods of distance learning. The vast majority of respondents tended to greet the professor and classmates when they joined a meeting as well as saying goodbye when disconnected. This percentage of students averaged 63% – 64%. Almost half as many, particularly, 31% (2020), 35% (2021) and 33% (2022) of students welcomed the professor teaching the class and their classmates only after someone else had done it. This behaviour pattern emphasises a low level of etiquette used to establish and terminate contact and maintain good relations with interlocutors. A small percentage of students (2% – 3%) did not welcome either the professor or classmates because of coming late to an online meeting. Statistics showed that the same small percentage of respondents (2% – 5%) did not say goodbye when disconnected.

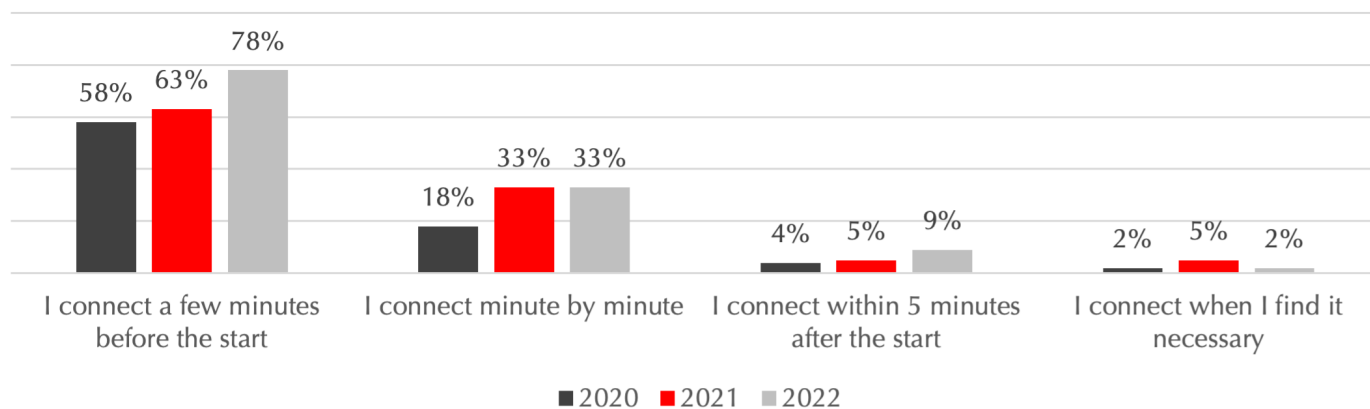


Figure 2. Statistical processing of the respondents’ responses on online meeting connection (Question 1)

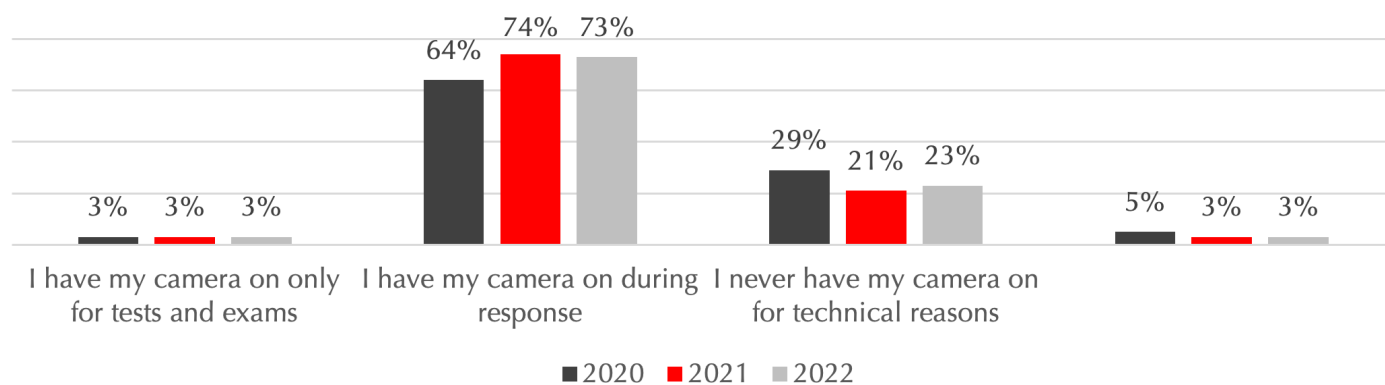


Figure 3. Statistical processing of the respondents’ responses on camera operation during response (Question 2)

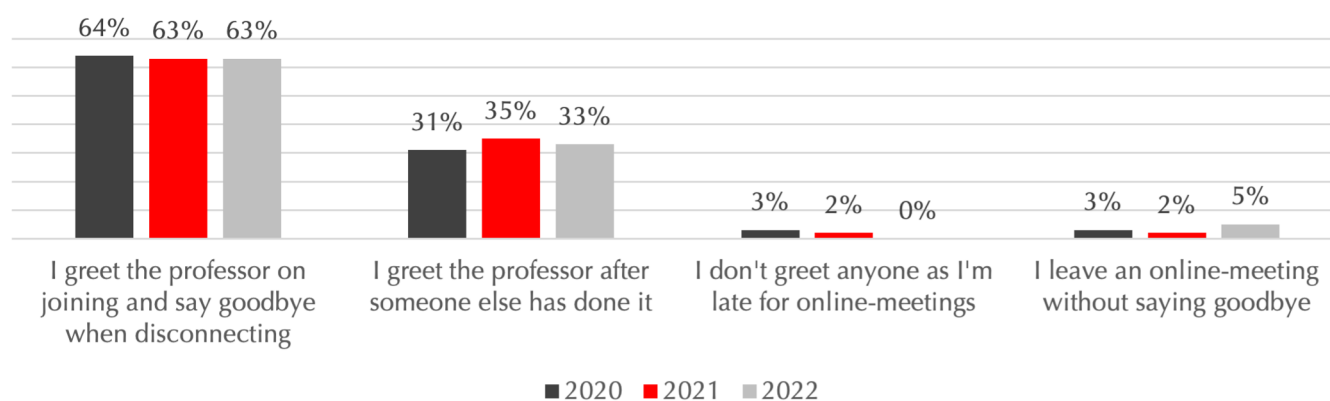


Figure 4. Statistical processing of the respondents' responses on etiquette rules compliance (Question 3)

The results of experimental data on Question 4 (Figure 5) concerning profile design within the academic format revealed that most of the respondents, mainly over time 69% (2020), 79% (2021, 2022) students, created a profile in line with the academic style which, evidentially, determined a high level of 'digital' etiquette. In case it was not possible to have their camera on, the profile photo was no less important. As for signing up their names – undoubtedly, it should be a full name, not a nickname in educational discourse. So, the image of a participant in the educational process is one of the most relevant aspects in the distance education space.

The results related to external sounds or people in the frame during an online meeting (Figure 6) showed that 89% – 91% of students adhered to the patterns of politeness in the digital communication framework since they turned notifications off in the phone and chose the most suitable (e.g., quiet) room. Only 9% – 11% of respondents noted background noise nearby. It apparently displays the concept of 'digital politeness'. The online meeting participants kept their camera and microphone turned off and had them on during the discussion in order not to disturb and visually distract their colleagues.

The results of experimental data (Figure 7) outlined a favourable trend in the context of materials presentation within the university corporate style, specifically, in 2020 – 55%, in 2021 – 61%, in 2022 – 64% of students felt very positive about their university corporate image and submitted reporting materials in the given format which is likely to reflect 'digital politeness' in the educational discourse framework. The third part of the respondents did not fully demonstrate 'digital' etiquette since they did not present all the materials de-

signed in the university corporate style. It should be noted that the corporate style when designed study deliverables emphasises the team spirit of professors and students. The corporate style is supposed to be an integral part of the corporate culture due to which the positive image of the university is formed, therefore its role in the life of the university remains significant.

The analysis of experimental data (Figure 8) about duplication the materials (presentation, report, etc.) in case of any technical malfunctions during an online-meeting revealed a proportional division of respondents' responses between all the proposed options. A significant number of respondents (26% – 30% – 34%) always had backup copies of the submitted materials, others (26% – 28% – 25%) selectively duplicated their materials. Some of them (19% – 21% – 21%) duplicated only at their professor's request, and others (29% – 21% – 20%) did not actually think about it. This indicates that the respondents do not fully understand the 'digital' etiquette patterns since a smaller part of them make backups and, thus, cannot protect themselves and their colleagues from the loss of necessary data.

The research results (Figure 9) related to adherence to the time limit during response uncovered that the number of students who kept track of the time limit and answered briefly and to the point rocketed upward with each subsequent year (70% – 76% – 80%). Indeed, this fact testifies 'digital politeness' towards professors and colleagues. Still, there was a small group of respondents (16% – 14% – 11%) who stopped after a remark had been made to them. It should also be outlined that there was an upward march among respondents (14% – 10% – 9%) who noted the fact of 'blurring' the lines during online learning.

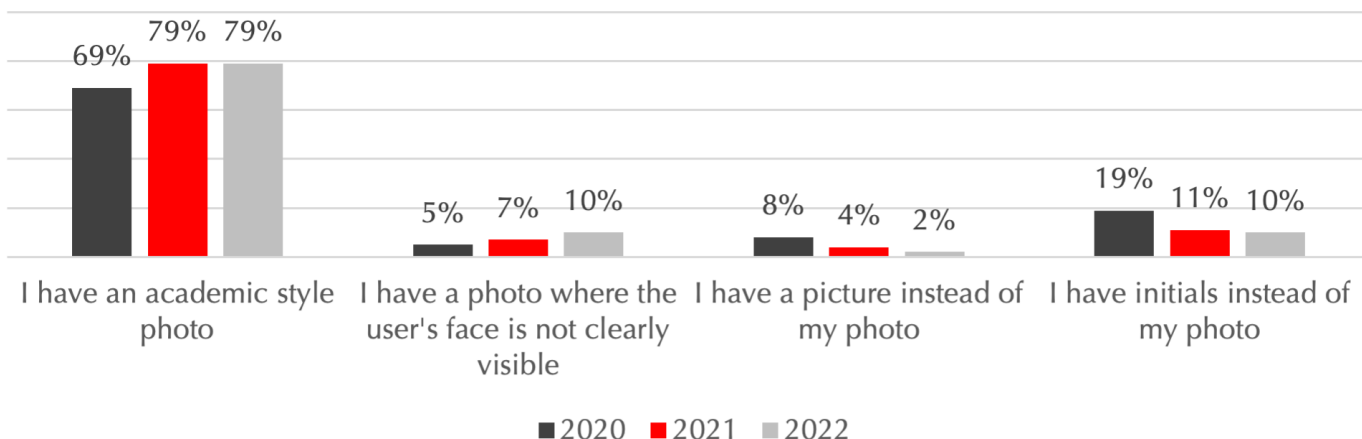


Figure 5. Statistical processing of the respondents' responses on profile design within the academic format (Question 4)

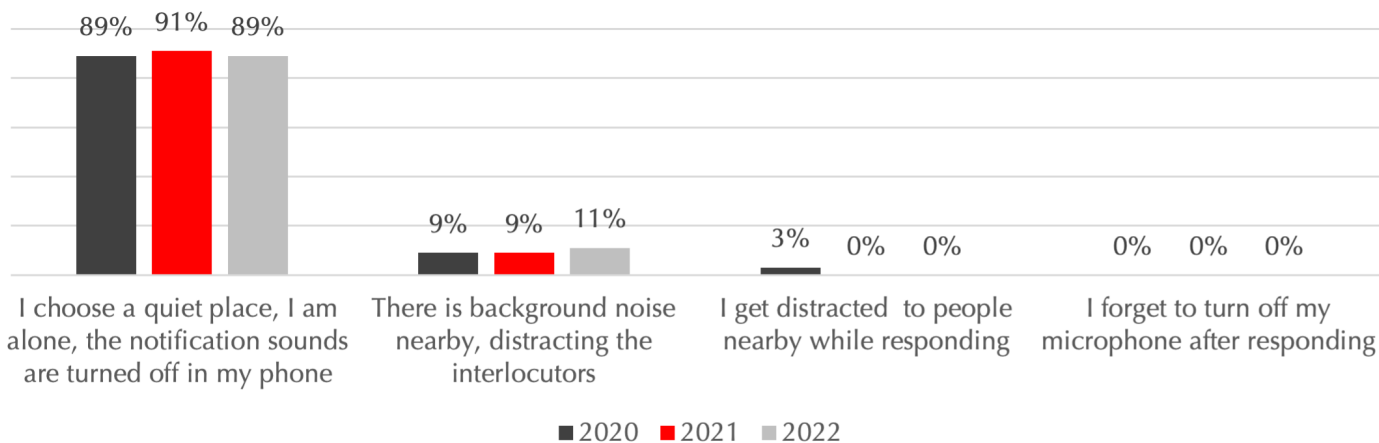


Figure 6. Statistical processing of the respondents' responses on extraneous sounds (people) in the frame (Question 5)

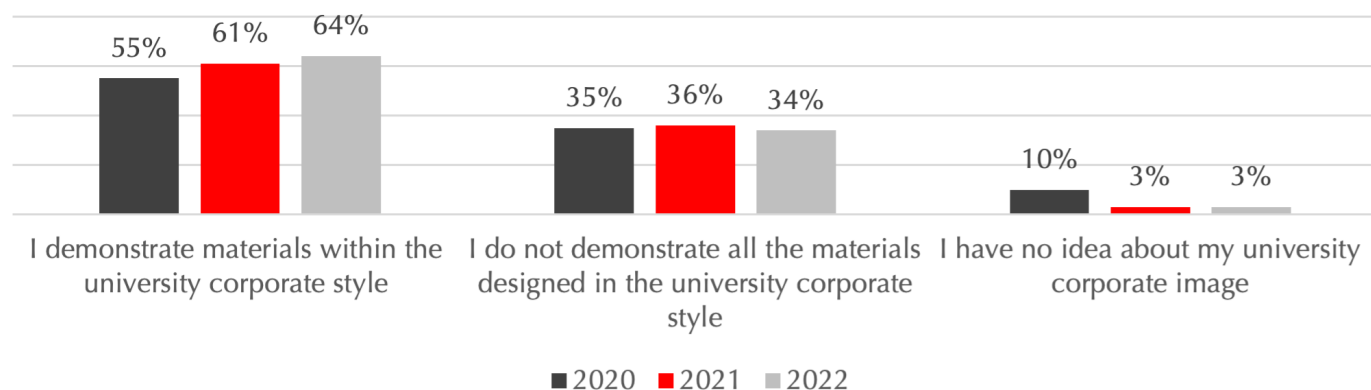


Figure 7. Statistical processing of the respondents' responses on presentation materials within the university corporate style (Question 6)



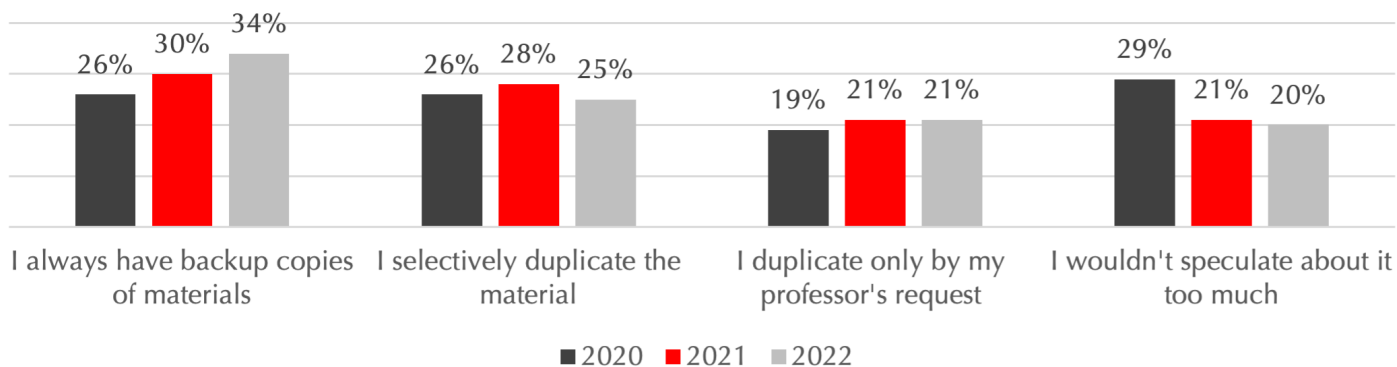


Figure 8. Statistical processing of the respondents' responses on duplication of the materials (presentation, report) in case of any technical malfunctions during an online meeting (Question 7)

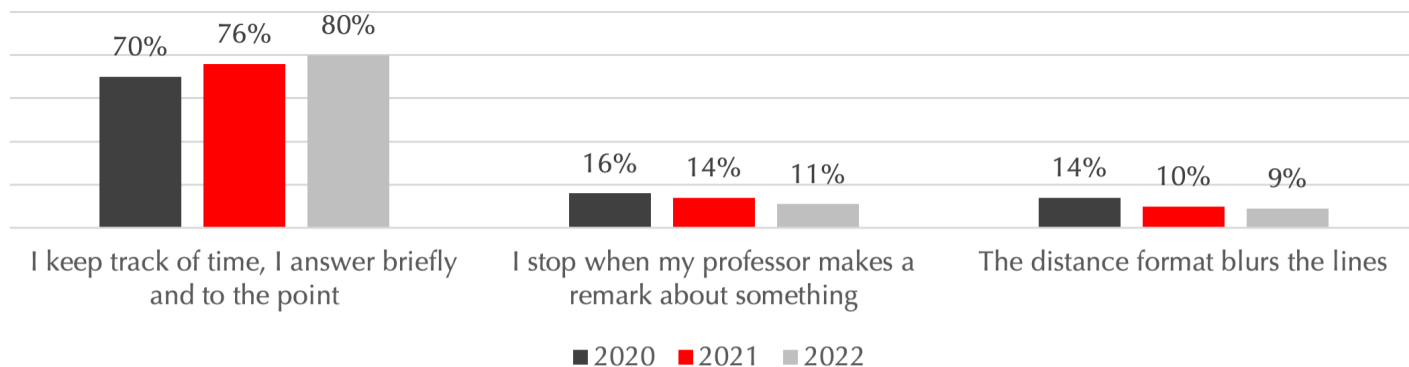


Figure 9. Statistical processing of the respondents' responses on adherence to the time limit during response (Question 8)

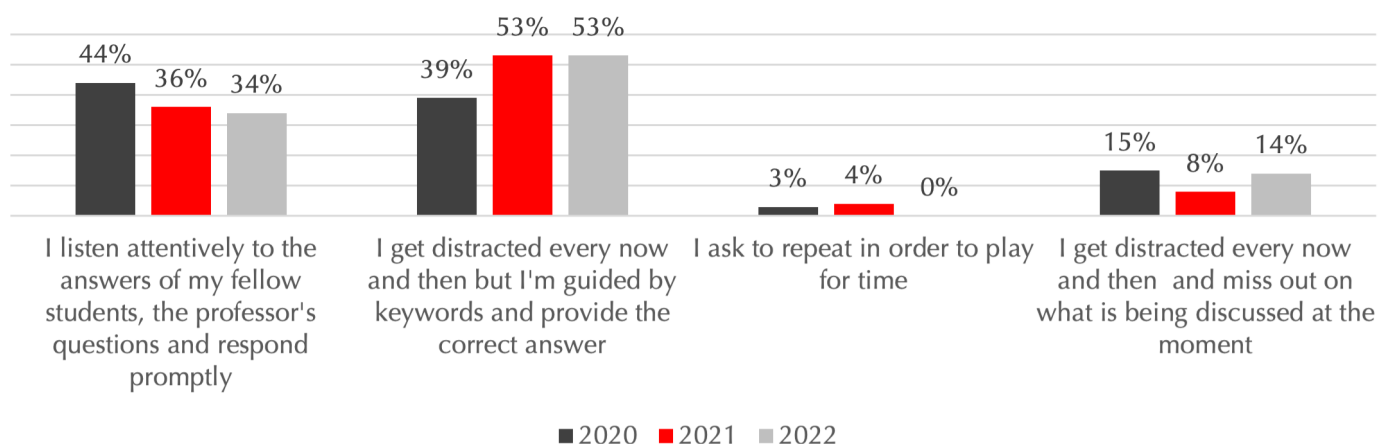


Figure 10. Statistical processing of the respondents' responses on submission of required information (Question 9)

In the statistics (Figure 10) concerning submission the requested information without a repeated question showed that slightly less than half of the respondents (44% – 36% – 34%) listened attentively to the answers of their classmates and the professor’s questions and responded promptly. Some students (39% – 53% – 53%) admitted that they got periodically distracted and at the same time declared that they were easily guided by keywords and provided the correct answer within the given timeframe. 15% – 8% – 14% of respondents noted that they tended to get distracted and ‘fall out’ of what was being discussed at that moment due to their individual characteristics linked with concentration of attention. A small percentage of respondents (3% – 4% – 0%) asked for the requested information in order to play for time, which contradicted the ethical communication patterns.

The analysis of the data obtained (Figure 11) in terms of the dialogue in a distance format and the rules of etiquette found that the vast majority of respondents (63% – 64% – 68%) with each subsequent year initiated a dialogue after completing the previous one employing the functions provided by the platforms, for instance, ‘raising hands’ which made it possible for anyone present at an online meeting to express their desire to speak out observing communication rules. Fewer respondents (38% – 35% – 33%) were active listeners rather than active interlocutors. 2% of them admitted the fact that they were constantly interrupting the speaker, which is obviously inconsistent with ethical standards both in real and virtual communication.

The results of the experimental data obtained (Figure 12) related to the issue of digital literacy, namely, compliance with the norms of spelling and punctuation during an online meeting disclosed that the majority of

students (94% – 93% – 94%) recognised the fact of adherence to all norms and rules of spelling and punctuation (spelling of names with capital letters, absence of abbreviations, use of reduced forms of words, etc.). A small number of students (2% – 5%) indicated that on an occasional basis they wrote names with a lowercase letter and shortened words for a quick information transfer. They also declared that they abided by all of the norms if the meeting was recorded or did not attach any importance to online communication rules.

The data obtained (Figure 13) concerning the behaviour in the frame during an online meeting revealed that half of the respondents (48% – 41% – 41%) did not move with their camera on, thereby providing high-quality video image and sound transmission. 31% – 34% – 36% of students with each subsequent year altered their attitude to ‘digital’ behaviour during an online meeting and did not leave the frame if the camera was on. A small number of respondents (15% – 19% – 14%) tried to keep other people out of the frame during an online meeting. 6% – 6% – 9% of students tried to make visual contact and not to lose sight. The above-described ‘digital’ behaviour indicates an average level of ‘digital politeness’.

The results of the experimental research (Figure 14) referring to the background and appearance choice showed that the majority of students (44% – 43% – 45%) preferred the most neutral background, 24% – 25% – 25% of students chose clothes that would correspond both to the meeting place and the number of participants. 21% – 19% – 18% of students did not attach importance to the background and appearance, 11% – 14% – 13% of students chose a virtual background within the university corporate style.

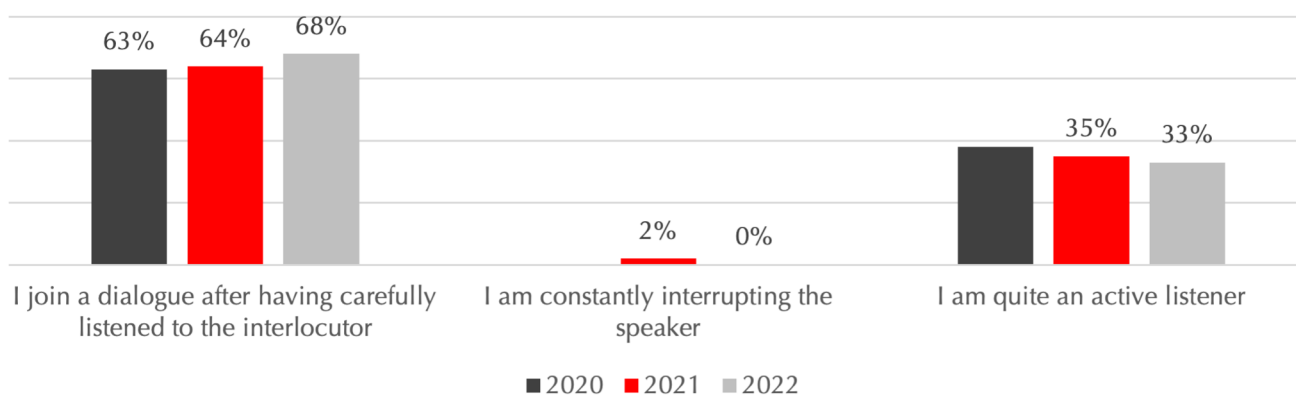


Figure 11. Statistical processing of the respondents’ responses on dialogue initiation after completing the previous one (Question 10)

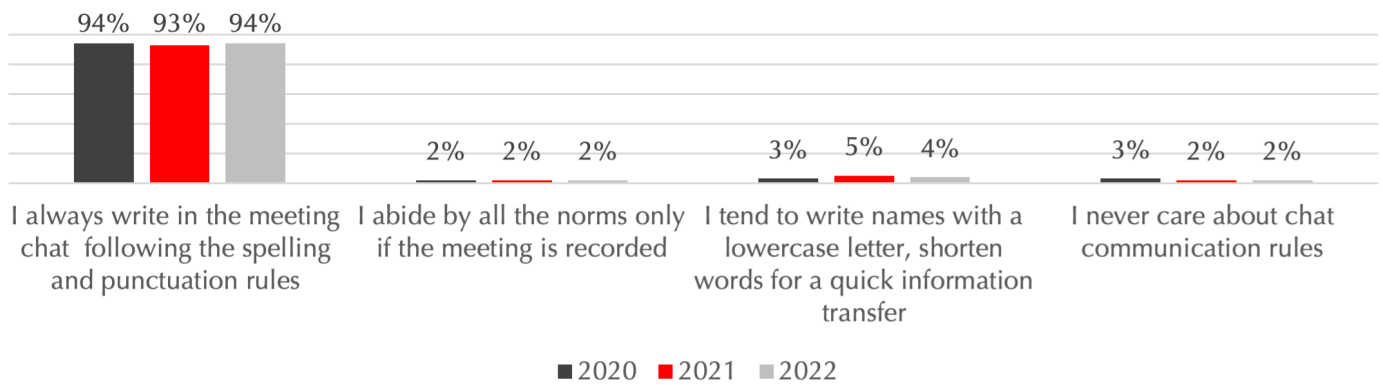


Figure 12. Statistical processing of the respondents' responses on spelling and punctuation rules compliance, i.e., spelling of names with capital letters, absence of acronyms, etc. (Question 11)

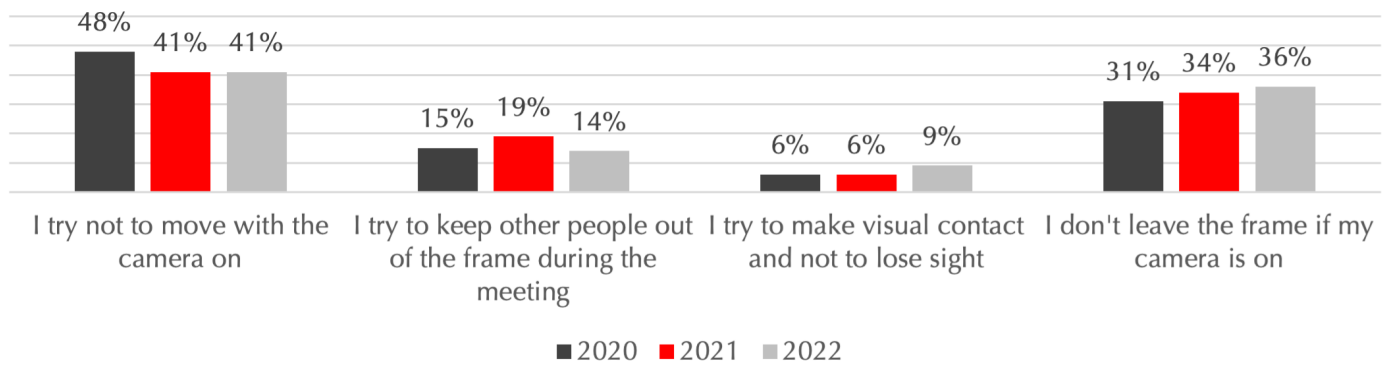


Figure 13. Statistical processing of the respondents' responses on behaviour in the frame (Question 12)

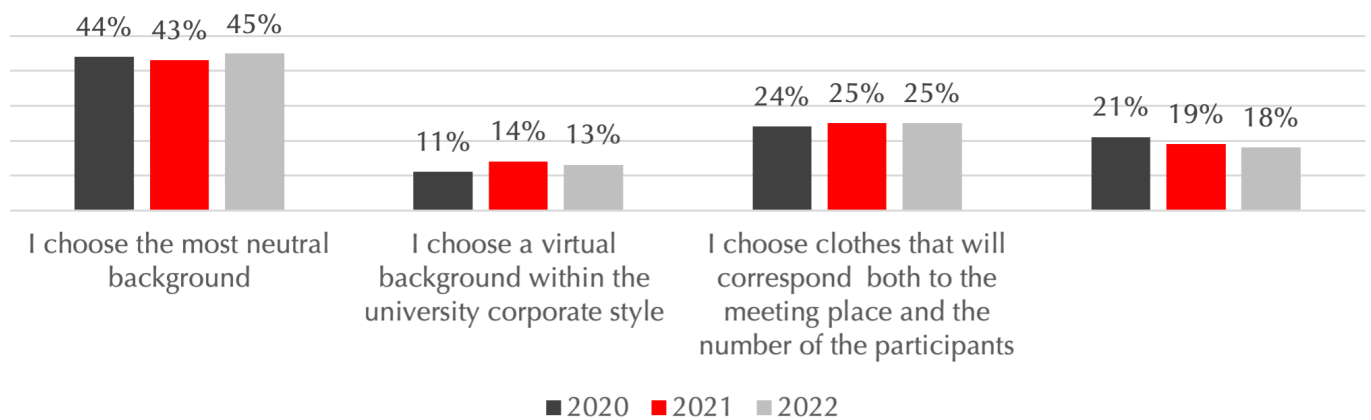


Figure 14. Statistical processing of the respondents' responses on background appearance choice (Question 13)

## 5. DISCUSSION

In accordance with the goals of this research, which, as it has already been mentioned, should be considered an initial step in the direction of digital professionalism studies which will undoubtedly be gaining ground in the near future as the new Covid-driven realities of the labour market are unlikely to recede, our focus is on defining the digital politeness construct and identifying its key constituents while trying to apply its basic principles to teaching practice.

The concept of digital politeness, new to today's research agenda but related to highly relevant notions of netiquette and e-professionalism, determines professional skills exhibited by employees in appropriate professional contexts and applied to facilitate interpersonal communication with clients and colleagues for better professional outcomes. One of the key issues pertaining to digital politeness is distinguishing between universal skills that rely on professional interaction guidelines regulating both language use and communication strategies and field-specific skills required for effective and adequate communication in specific professional settings.

Universal skills are primarily related to general discretion issues, such as privacy, security, and data processing speed while field-specific skills are unique to the industry under examination. As regards language services, the following skills seem to be of high relevance: digital representation (visual, audio, and discursive self-representation), digital time management, equipment operating skills and situational awareness.

Digital representation is a digital reflection of a participant in the work process. It is multimodal in nature and includes visual, audio, and discursive constituents. Visual representation accounts for avatars, photos and any other images associated with a person in the professional digital environment. For instance, Zoom or Microsoft Teams profile images as well as virtual backgrounds are informative not only as far as the user's appearance is concerned, but go much further beyond physical characteristics. Voice tone is no less important in digital communication as sometimes it serves as a means of recognition. From a discursive point of view, the digital work environment in the language industry is characterised by a moderate use of hybrid language generally typical of informal online interaction as well as the avoidance of unnecessary emoticons and emojis as a means of reinforcing one's communicative actions.

Digital time management is crucial in providing translation and interpreting services as online events run

on strict schedules. Breaking the digital punctuality rule would do serious harm to professional reputation. Time management in digital work environments is also related to information processing speed, that is, prompt replies to emails, messages, client inquiries, etc. As any action leaves a digital trace, bad time management skills cannot be veiled in the virtual workspace.

Equipment operating skills help navigate through possible technical troubles often occurring during digital interaction while situational awareness is irreplaceable when the situation requires an immediate decision and instant action.

At a first glance, the skills on the list may not seem as directly pertaining to politeness. However, as it was stated in the Introduction, in this study, digital politeness is understood as a set of guidelines regulating verbal and non-verbal behaviour in professional contexts within the virtual work environment.

The suggested inventory of digital politeness skills is by no means limited to the items listed. It was compiled on the basis of empirical data obtained in the course of attending various virtual events over the period of the last two years, specifically, informal meetings and discussions with colleagues organised by the Russian Translation Teachers' Association and Russia's Union of Translators, webinars held by language industry representatives from across the globe, international conferences and other online events providing simultaneous and consecutive interpreting via videoconferencing applications. However, while digitalisation of the workspace keeps penetrating language services, it is only natural that the list will be expanded as new items gain relevance.

Data obtained in the course of class observation and student surveys suggest that interpreters- and translators-in-training keep records of changes affecting work processes in the language industry and realise the relevance of digital politeness as part of their professional competence. Awareness and realisation did not always result in successful outcomes, so some students (mostly enrolled in the bachelor's degree programme) needed guidance in constructing their digital representations while others made independent professionally relevant decisions affecting their digital personas.

Some of the specific results could be briefly described as follows.

1. By the end of the spring semester of 2019-2020, fall semester of 2020-2021, spring semester of 2020-2021 and fall semester of 2021-2022 most students had academic style images in their Microsoft

Teams profiles. More than half of the student body were using corporate background images when working with their camera on.

2. The camera-on-when-speaking rule was introduced into the learning process and students no longer had to be reminded when their camera and microphone had to be active.

3. Chat rules were worked out for classes and any other online events, a specific protocol prescribing that the audience should be greeted, and all speakers should be thanked for their contributions. Also, appropriate address forms and academic titles were to be preserved.

4. No late joining could be excused. Attendance was to be registered without any reminders.

5. Class documents, folders, portfolios, presentations, etc. were to conform to uniform style.

6. Presentations, posters, documents, etc. were to have backup copies that could be immediately accessed by any project member in case the presenter was experiencing a technical problem.

The list above illustrates practical application of the digital politeness concept in translator training. It could be significantly extended to include all relevant rules and conventions introduced during distance learning. However, this is not the goal of the present research. What is important is that language workers were to a great degree affected by migration to virtual workspaces as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, so university programmes should be very flexible in responding to this change. Undergraduate and graduate students are increasingly aware of new professional realities and ready to adapt to new digital environments.

## References

- Aase, S. (2010). Toward E-professionalism: Thinking through the implications of navigating the digital world. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 110(10), 1442-1449. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jada.2010.08.020>
- Abuhammad, S. (2020). Barriers to distance learning during the COVID-19 outbreak: A qualitative review from parents' perspective. *Heliyon*, 6(11), e05482. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e05482>
- Akimova, O., Bobyreva, N., Palutina, O., & Pomortseva, N. (2015). Distance language education. *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 199, 348-356.
- Berdichevskiy, A., Giniatullin, I., & Tareva, E. (2019). *Methods of intercultural foreign language education at the university*. Flinta.
- Brusco, J. N. (2011). Know your netiquette. *AORN Journal*, 94(3), 279-286. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.aorn.2011.07.003>
- Buckley, P., & Doyle, E. (2016). Gamification and student motivation. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 24(6), 1162-1175. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2014.964263>
- Costa, R. D., Souza, G. F., Valentim, R. A. M., & Castro, T. B. (2020). The theory of learning styles applied to distance learning. *Cognitive Systems Research*, 64(2), 134-145.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The paper aimed to contribute to the limited but exponentially growing body of research into professional digital competence in post-Covid professional environments by examining how the virtual workspace affected professional interpersonal communication conventions in the language industry, how digitalisation trends are perceived by university students training to join the translation services providers community and what teaching methods can enhance the student's acquisition of relevant digital skills. It provided a preliminary exploration of digital politeness and related issues with a special emphasis on the language industry which was one of the most Covid-affected ones in terms of migration to digital work environments. The findings suggest that digital politeness is not intuitive. It should be analysed in relation to professional factors and addressed by educators providing professional training. Both universal and field-specific components are important as far as a successful communication outcome is expected. Language workers' familiarity with digital technologies and digital politeness rules regulating professional interaction in digital work environments offers numerous benefits to both service providers and their clients as it saves time, helps enhance the accuracy of the information exchange and maintains the high standard of interpreting and translation services. University students enrolled in Linguistics and Translation Studies programmes are increasingly aware of the impact digital politeness skills may have on their career and are willing to engage in academic activities, including extracurricular events, contributing to their professional development.



- DeJong, S. M. (2014). Netiquette. In S. M. DeJong (Ed.), *Blogs and tweets, texting and friending: Social media and online professionalism in health care* (pp.115-124). Academic Press.
- Engelhardt, B., Johnson, M., & Meder, M. E. (2021). Learning in the time of Covid-19: Some preliminary findings. *International Review of Economics Education*, 37(4), 100215. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iree.2021.100215>
- EMT. (2022). European Master's in Translation competence framework. <https://goo-gl.ink/YdxMK>
- Flores-Salgado, E., & Castineira-Benitez, T. A. (2018). The use of politeness in WhatsApp discourse and move 'requests'. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 133, 79-92. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2018.06.009>
- Gazieva, D. R. (2013). Experiment as a basis for modeling communication in the Internet space. In *Proceedings of Topical Issues of Linguistics, Literary Studies and Linguodidactics* (pp. 203-216). Moscow City University Press.
- Gama, S. P. (2020). Gamification mechanisms for online learning. *Edição*, 8, 1-5. <https://dx.doi.org/10.31112/kriativ-tech-2020-06-32>
- Gavrilyuk, O., Tareva, E., & Lakhno, A. (2019). Investigating the association between university teachers' professional autonomy and their innovation performance. *Pedagogika*, 133(1), 128-148. <https://dx.doi.org/10.15823/p.2019.133.7>
- Harandi, S. F. (2015). Effects of e-learning on students' motivation. *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 181, 423-430. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.905>
- Hu, J., & Ran, Y. (2021). Politeness in professional contexts. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 180, 118-120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.04.035>
- Ivanova, V., & Tivyaeva, I. (2015). Teaching foreign languages in Soviet and present-day Russia: A comparison of two systems. *Zbornik Instituta za Pedagoska Istrazivanja*, 47(2), 305-324. <https://doi.org/10.2298/ZIP115023051>
- Jogezai, N. A., Baloch, F. A., Jaffar, M., Shah, T., Khilji, G. K., & Bashir, S. (2021). Teachers' attitudes towards social media (SM) use in online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic: The effects of SM use by teachers and religious scholars during physical distancing. *Heliyon*, 7(4), e06781. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e06781>
- Lauricella, A. R., Herdzina, J., & Robb, M. (2020). Early childhood educators' teaching of digital citizenship competences. *Computers & Education*, 158, 103989. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2020.103989>
- Li, Ch., Cao, Ch., & Wang, Y. (2020, October 23-26). Exploring digital literacy awareness in English learning among Chinese tertiary EFL learners. In *Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Education Technology and Computers* (pp. 62-68). Association for Computing Machinery. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1145/3436756.3437022>
- Lumpkin, A. (2003). Student perceptions of active learning. *College Student Journal*, 49(1), 121-133.
- Malakhova, V. G., & Bokova, T. N. (2020). Philosophical ideas of postmodernism and their impact on the education system in Russia and the USA. *Education and Self Development*, 15(1), 93-103. <https://doi.org/10.26907/esd15.1.08>
- Makarova, T. S., Matveeva, E. E., Molchanova, M. A., Morozova, E. A., & Burenina, N. V. (2017). Project work management addressing the needs of BVI learners of EFL. *Integration of Education*, 21(4), 609-622.
- Mapson, R. (2020). Intercultural (im)politeness: Influences on the way professional British Sign Language/English interpreters mediate im/polite language. In D. Archer, K. Grainger, & P. Jagodziński (Eds.), *Politeness in professional contexts* (pp. 151-178). John Benjamins.
- Mishra, L., Gupta, T., & Shree, A. (2020). Online teaching-learning in higher education during lockdown period of Covid-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 1, 100012. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2020.100012>
- Qazi, A., Qazi, J., Naseer, K., Zeeshan, M., Qazi, Sh., Abayomi-Alli, O., ... & Haruna, Kh. (2021). Adaption of distance learning to continue the academic year amid Covid-19 lockdown. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 126, 106038. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2021.106038>
- Richardson, C., & Mishra, P. (2018). Learning environments that support student creativity: Developing the SCALE. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 27, 45-54. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2017.11.004>



- Siddoo, V., Sawattawee, J., Janchai, W., & Thinnukool, O. (2019). An exploratory study of digital workforce competency in Thailand. *Heliyon*, 5(5), e01723.
- Suleimanova, O. A., Beklemesheva, N. N., & Golubeva, T. Yu. (2020). On the issue of optimizing the model of training a modern translator. *MCU Journal of Philology. Theory of Linguistics. Linguistic Education*, 1(37), 114-122.
- Suleimanova, O. A., Guseinova, I. A., & Vodyanitskaya, A. A. (2020). The learning and educational potential of digital tools in humanities and social science. In *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference Society. Integration. Education* (pp. 657-669). Rezeknes Tehnologiju Akademija. <https://dx.doi.org/10.17770/sie2020vol4.4851>
- Suleimanova, O. A., Nersesova, E. V., & Vishnevskaja, E. M. (2019). Technological aspect of training a modern translator. *Philology. Theory & Practice*, 12(7), 313-317. <https://doi.org/10.30853/filnauki.2019.7.67>
- Tareva, E. G., & Tarev, B. V. (2018). The assessment of students' professional communicative competence: New challenges and possible solutions. *xLinguae*, 11(2), 758-767.
- Tareva, E., & Polushkina, T. (2021). Developing L2 prosodic competence online: Implications of the emergency remote teaching. *xLinguae*, 14(1), 38-48. <https://dx.doi.org/10.18355/xl.2021.14.01.03>
- Tivyaeva, I. (2021). Exploring new ways in translator and interpreter training: A student adaptation perspective. *New Voices in Translation Studies*, 24, 104-117. [https://www.iatis.org/images/stories/publications/new-voices/Issue\\_24-2021/7\\_Tivyaeva\\_Research\\_Letter.pdf](https://www.iatis.org/images/stories/publications/new-voices/Issue_24-2021/7_Tivyaeva_Research_Letter.pdf)
- Tivyaeva, I., & Vodyanitskaya, A. (2021). English-to-Russian interpreting course in distance mode: Methodological issues and curriculum implementation challenges. *xLinguae*, 14(1), 100-109. <https://dx.doi.org/10.18355/xl.2021.14.01.09>
- Tivyaeva, I., & Vodyanitskaya, A. (2021). Distance teaching of consecutive and simultaneous interpreting to graduate students: A case study. *Foreign Language Teaching*, 48(2), 143-154. <https://doi.org/10.53656/for21.23opit>
- Translation Service Provider. (2021). Translation Service Provider occupational profile. <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202104210026>
- Urh, M., Vukovic, G., Jereb, E., & Pintar, R. (2015). The model for introduction of gamification into e-learning in higher education. *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 197, 388-397. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.154>
- Vieira, N. G. (2015). E-learning practices in translation and interpretation: Corpora as training platforms. *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 198, 157-164. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.432>

IRINA V. TIVYAEVA

Moscow City University, Russia [tivyaeva@yandex.ru](mailto:tivyaeva@yandex.ru)

DIANA R. ABDULMIANOVA

Moscow City University, Russia [diana-gazieva@mail.ru](mailto:diana-gazieva@mail.ru)

# Original Research

## Mitigation tools and politeness strategies in invitation refusals: American and Russian communicative cultures

by Angela V. Litvinova and Tatiana V. Larina

**Angela V. Litvinova** Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Russia [litvinova-av@rudn.ru](mailto:litvinova-av@rudn.ru)

**Tatiana V. Larina** Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Russia [larina-tv@rudn.ru](mailto:larina-tv@rudn.ru)

**Article history** Received December 14, 2022 | Revised February 12, 2023 | Accepted March 6, 2023

**Conflicts of interest** The authors declared no conflicts of interest

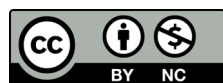
**Research funding** This publication has been supported by the RUDN University Scientific Projects Grant System, Project No. 050734-2-000

**doi** 10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1-116-130

**For citation** Litvinova, A. V., & Larina, T. V. (2023). Mitigation tools and politeness strategies in invitation refusals: American and Russian communicative cultures. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(1), 116-130.

*The performance of speech acts varies widely across cultures due to differences in values, communicative norms and traditions as well as politeness strategies. This can cause problems in communication and lead to sociopragmatic failures. This paper aims to discover potential linguistic and sociocultural differences in refusal to invitations performed by Americans and Russians in interpersonal interaction. It explores the variations in the performance of refusal in terms of form (direct vs. indirect), length, face-saving moves/semantic formulas and politeness strategies in the contexts differed in social and power distance. The data were obtained through a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) with 120 participants (50 Americans and 70 Russians) and analysed drawing on Cross-Cultural Pragmatics, Speech Act Theory, Theory of Politeness and Cultural Studies with the implementation of contrastive qualitative and quantitative analysis. The findings revealed some differences in the role of social factors in the realisation of refusals, while the most salient factor appears to be that of cultural context. Despite some obvious similarities in the performance of refusal in its form, mitigation moves and politeness strategies, American refusal demonstrated a tendency to be more indirect and verbose, conventionally accompanied by a positive emotive adjunct aimed at enhancing the positive face of interlocutors. The findings showed that Americans use Positive and Negative politeness strategies with more regularity and thus do more facework aimed at mitigating the possible negative effect of this dispreferred act. The Russians, by contrast, used politeness strategies with less regularity, in some cases resorted to directness and were more focused on the clarity of their response to invitation rather than considerations of face. The findings are consistent with communicative values and politeness in the two cultures. They can contribute to the systematisation of culture-specific features of interpersonal interaction in American and Russian contexts and the description of communicative ethno-styles.*

**KEYWORDS:** *speech act, refusal, mitigation, politeness strategies, communicative ethno-style, American communicative culture, Russian communicative culture*



This is an open access article distributed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (CC BY-NC 4.0), which allows its unrestricted use for non-commercial purposes, subject to attribution. The material can be shared/adapted for non-commercial purposes if you give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Though in general speakers of different languages perform the same acts during interaction, the way they perform them varies widely across societies (see Alemi

et al., 2021; Bilá & Ivanova, 2020; Kotorova, 2017; Trosborg, 2010; Wierzbicka, 1985, 2003). As Kecskes (2014) rightly states, 'it is important to emphasise the difference between *what we do* and *how we do it*.

*'Since refusals are typically formulated by leveraging indirect strategies, their conversational instrumentation obviously calls for an advanced pragmatic competence (Chen, 1995; Martínez-Flor et al., 2003). To refuse appropriately and in a socially and culturally acceptable manner, lingua-cultural, sociopragmatic and sociocultural competences are also required'*

What we do may have more universal features than how we do' (Kecskes, 2014, p. 5). This sociocultural variation creates problems in intercultural communication, causes misunderstandings and leads to socio-pragmatic failures (Thomas, 1983). This is especially true for face-threatening acts, where inappropriate performance or interpretation can be perceived as impoliteness or even rudeness and negatively affect interpersonal relationships.

The speech act (SA) of refusal is face-threatening by nature. Refusals are dispreferred and undesired responses to request, invitation, offer and suggestion (Gass & Houck, 1999). Therefore, they are considered as face-threatening acts, which can damage the interlocutors' positive or/and negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). To mitigate the negative effect of the refusal and soften it, speakers use various strategies and linguistic devices. Since refusals are typically formulated by leveraging indirect strategies, their conversational instrumentation obviously calls for an advanced pragmatic competence (Chen, 1995; Martínez-Flor et al., 2003). To refuse appropriately and in a socially and culturally acceptable manner, lingua-cultural, sociopragmatic and sociocultural competences are also required (Chang & Ren, 2020; Dubrovskaya & Yuskaeva, 2022; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Malyuga et al., 2018; Yelenevskaya & Protassova, 2021).

Similar to other speech acts, refusal varies across cultures due to differences in such categories as face, threat, imposition and im/politeness, which has been shown in numerous studies (see Al-Kahtani, 2005; Bella, 2011; Chang, 2009; Chang & Ren, 2020; Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Gass & Houck, 1999; Iliadi & Larina, 2017; Kwon, 2004; Malyuga & McCarthy, 2021; Nelson et al., 2002; Stevens, 1993; Popova, 2018). Thus, for non-native speakers this speech act can be particularly challenging. Failing to formulate a discernable yet

polite refusal, non-native speakers may end up inflicting damage to the flow of the conversation and even offending their conversational partners (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987, p. 133). Hence, the study of cross-linguistic differences in the speech act of refusal is of theoretical and practical relevance.

As some studies show (see Richmond, 2009), members of Anglo-Saxon cultures tend to avoid a straightforward 'no', which often causes misunderstanding among their Russian interlocutors who tend to express a clearer, unambiguous refusal. In this study we aim to test this hypothesis by exploring the refusals to invitations in everyday interaction from representatives of American and Russian cultures. We aim to answer the following research questions.

1. How do representatives of American and Russian culture mitigate their refusal to an invitation?
2. Are there any culture-specific differences in the performance of refusal?
3. How do social and cultural characteristics of the context effect the performance of refusal?

To address the research questions, the study first briefly discusses related work on the SA of refusal, its nature and variations in its performance across cultures. In section 3, we will introduce the dataset in question and outline our methodological approach to its analysis. Then in section 4, we report on our comparative analysis of the performance of refusal to invitation by American and Russian respondents, followed by the discussion of the results obtained. Finally, the results of the work are summarised in the conclusion.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The literature on refusals is quite extensive and diffuse, as Bella (2011) states, ranging from cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics to education and psychology. Most of the relevant studies focus on refusal strategies, politeness, face and facework (see Al-Eyrani, 2007; Chang, 2009; Johnson et al., 2004; Turnbull & Saxton, 1997; Sattar et al., 2011; Félix-Brasdefer, 2006), and the learning of refusals by second language learners (see Bella, 2014; Eslami, 2010; Sadler & Eröz, 2002). The broadest definition of refusal interprets it as a SA by which the speaker withdraws from participating in an action initiated/suggested by their conversational partner (Chen et al., 1998, p. 121). The initiating act of request, invitation or suggestion is thus being denied via the SA of refusal that functions as a follow-up to the proposal (Gass & Houck, 1999, p. 28). Refusal is viewed as an antipode to confirmation and acceptance

*‘Thus, refusal is a dispreferred act which threatens the positive and negative face of both interlocutors – the one who initiates an act and the one who does not accept it. Bearing an inherently face-threatening implication, refusals tend to be performed indirectly and include various means of mitigation. In fact, they may involve a long-negotiated sequence of face-saving moves which are also viewed as strategies’*

(Searle & Vanderveken, 1985, p. 195). However, in contrast to acceptance, refusal is a face threatening act by nature, which has been emphasised by many scholars, though there are some inconsistencies in the question of whose face this act threatens. Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan (2011) note that, since positive response to such speech acts as request, invitation, offer, or suggestion is usually expected and preferred, saying ‘no’ can mean *‘disapproval of the interlocutor’s intentions and consequently, a threat to the interlocutor’s face’* (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2011, p. 56). Chen (1995) states that refusal is face-threatening to both interlocutors and points out that *‘refusals are considered to be a face threatening act (FTA) in that either the speaker’s or listener’s positive or negative face is risked when a refusal is called for or carried out’* (Chen, 1995, p. 6). Salazar-Campillo et al. (2009) claim that *‘refusals threaten the addressee’s negative face, that is, the desire that his/her future choice of actions or words be uninhibited’* (Salazar-Campillo et al., 2009, p. 140). Johnson et al. (2004) are more specific and argue that in refusal to request face needs of interlocutors may vary. When requests are refused, threats to the negative face needs of the requester are more prevalent than threats to the negative face of the refuser, and there are differences in type of threat present to the requester’s positive face and the refuser’s face needs.

As refusal presents threat to the positive and negative face of interlocutors, both positive and/or negative politeness strategies are engaged in its performance. Their combination mitigates its negative effect and minimises the mutual loss of face. Positive politeness is oriented toward the positive face of the recipient, the positive self-image that they claim for themselves, it *‘anoints the face of the recipient by indicating that in some respects, the speaker wants the recipient’s wants’* (Brown

& Levinson, 1987, p. 70) and thus minimises the potential face threat of an act. By using positive politeness strategies (e.g., attend to the addressee, their interests, wants, needs; exaggerate interest, approval; express sympathy; give reasons, etc.), a speaker can minimise the face-threatening aspects of an act of refusal by assuring the addressee that they like them, and want their wants. Negative politeness strategies are also inherent in refusal, e.g., be conventionally indirect, apologise, be pessimistic (*I don’t think I can*).

Thus, refusal is a dispreferred act which threatens the positive and negative face of both interlocutors – the one who initiates an act and the one who does not accept it. Bearing an inherently face-threatening implication, refusals tend to be performed indirectly and include various means of mitigation. In fact, they may involve a long-negotiated sequence of face-saving moves which are also viewed as strategies. There have been many attempts to classify the realisation of refusals (see Beebe et al., 1990; Rubin, 1983; Salazar-Campillo et al., 2009; Turnbull & Saxton, 1997; Ueda, 1972). Ueda (1972) defined 16 ways of saying ‘no’ in Japanese aimed at avoiding a flat ‘no’, such as silence, vague ‘no’, delaying answers, counter question, lateral responses, conditional ‘no’, criticising the question itself, etc. Later, Rubin (1983) listed 9 ways of refusal: be silent, hesitate, show a lack of enthusiasm, offer an alternative, put the blame on a third party or something over which you have no control; distract the addressee; say what is offered is inappropriate, etc. These classifications served as the basis for Beebe et al.’s (1990) taxonomy. The authors studied how Japanese learners of English refused requests, invitations, offers and suggestions. They included in their classification semantic formulas (expressions used to perform a refusal) and adjuncts, expressions which accompany a refusal but by themselves do not perform it (e.g., gratitude). They also distinguished between direct and indirect semantic formulas. Direct formulas include performative statements (*I refuse*) and non-performative statements (*No* or *I can’t*). By using the means of indirect performance of refusal (regret, excuse, explanation, alternative, promise of future acceptance, etc.), the speaker mitigates this face-threatening act. Adjuncts to refusal that served the same purpose include statement of positive opinion/feeling, statement of empathy, pause fillers and gratitude/appreciation. This taxonomy has been further used to explore refusals in numerous studies (see Félix-Brasdefer, 2003, 2006; Kwon, 2004; Sadler & Eröz, 2002; Turnbull & Saxton, 1997).

Salazar-Campillo et al. (2009) presented a classification of refusals which also relied on Beebe et al.'s (1990) taxonomy but was further modified to incorporate the discursive perspective (Salazar-Campillo et al., 2009, p. 144). They also divided the semantic formulas into direct and indirect and considered a category of adjuncts to refusal, i.e., expressions utilised as part of a refusal, yet incapable of performing a denial independently (Salazar-Campillo et al., 2009, p. 141). Their findings grouped direct strategies into (1) straightforward, whereby the performative verb *refuse* or a flat 'no' are being used, and (2) negation of proposition (e.g., *I can't, I don't think so*). According to the authors, indirect strategies can be grouped into the following: (1) plain-spoken (*It seems I can't*); (2) stating the reason for refusal (*I can't. I have a doctor's appointment*); (3) apologetic, incorporating the expression of regret for refusal (*Sorry, I'm so sorry, I can't*); (4) suggesting an option/alternative (*I would join you if you choose another restaurant*), or a postponement (*I can't go now, but I could go tomorrow*); (5) criticism (*Under the current economic circumstances, you should not be asking for a rise right now*); (6) statement of principle/philosophy (*I can't. It goes against my beliefs!*); and (7) non-verbal (silence, etc.) and verbal (hedging, topic switch, making a joke) evasion (*Well, I'll see if I can*) (Salazar-Campillo et al., 2009, p. 145).

Adjuncts include in this taxonomy five subtypes: (1) positive opinion (*That's a good idea, but...*); (2) willingness, (*I'd love to go, but...*); (3) gratitude (*Thank you, but ...*); (4) agreement (*Yes, but...; Ok, but...*); and (5) solidarity or empathy (*I'm sure you'll understand*) (Salazar-Campillo et al., 2009, p. 146).

The authors of this taxonomy point out that *'there are no clear-cut boundaries between strategies and that in some cases contextual variables will determine whether a given refusal strategy exemplifies a specific subtype'* (Salazar-Campillo et al., 2009, p. 146). Moreover, they emphasise that contextual variables determine linguistic behaviour, and should thus be considered in interpreting refusal behaviour. Besides such contextual variables as social distance, power and degree of imposition, cultural context should be also taken into consideration as it impacts the choice of strategies and determines the appropriateness of a refusal.

Despite some differences in taxonomies of refusal discussed above they all show that refusal is a highly complex speech act. It is rarely performed by one utterance, but it is mostly a set of two, three or more utterances which express gratitude, apology, regret, give

positive evaluation, offer an alternative, etc. However, the literature on refusal highlights some terminological inconsistencies. As was shown most authors use the term *semantic formulas* referring to gratitude, apology, regret etc. and at the same time name them *refusal strategies*. In our study we will be using the term *move*, defined by scholars as *'a text segment made up of a bundle of linguistic features (lexical meaning, propositional meanings, illocutionary forces, etc.) which give the segment a uniform orientation and signal the content of discourse in it'* (Nwogu, 1997, p. 122); or *'semantic and functional units of texts that have specific communicative purposes'* (Kanoksilapatham, 2007, p. 24). Though their semantics may differ, they function in our context as mitigators of the refusal and thus perform the same communicative strategy. In other words, we will consider refusal as a complex speech act which may consist of face-saving verbal gestures (face-saving moves) for its performance.

Numerous studies on refusal have been conducted in the framework of cross-cultural pragmatics and intercultural pragmatics (see Bella, 2011; Deveci & Midraj, 2021; Chang, 2009; Chen et al., 1998; Gass & Houck, 1999; Iliadi & Larina, 2017; Kwon, 2004; Liao & Bresnahan, 1996; Nelson et al., 2002; Stevens, 1993). They have shown that due to differences in values concerning the concept of face and understanding of politeness, the performance of refusal varies across languages and cultures. Beebe et al. (1990) compared refusals between Japanese native speakers and English native speakers and found that Americans employed an indirect form of refusals while Japanese employed indirect strategies when refusing a person of higher status, and direct when refusing a person of lower status. This is not surprising, considering the well-known hierarchical nature of Japanese society.

Analysing refusals cross-culturally, scholars highlight differences in the level of directness vs indirectness, preferences in refusal strategies and politeness strategies used to soften their face-threatening effect, as well as their conventionality (see Bella, 2011; Félix-Brasdefer, 2003, 2006; Ghazanfari et al., 2012). Wierzbicka (2003) presents a rich variety of differences in the performance of refusal in American English, Hebrew, and Japanese. She cites Blum-Kulka (1982), who noted that *'it is not common in English to express refusal by saying 'no' as one does in Hebrew'* (Blum-Kulka 1982, p. 30-31), and continues *'in English, when someone indicates that they want something from us we are free to say 'no' but not to say just 'no'... Bluntness in*



*'In this study, we limited ourselves to the most conventional face-saving moves for both cultures, leaving some optional ones out of our analysis. Thus, we focused on Reason, Apology, Gratitude, Positive Evaluation/Feel-ing, Regret, which appeared to be most conventional as well as Well-Wishing and Alternative, though these were used less frequently'*

saying 'no' is viewed positively in Israeli culture but not in Anglo-American culture' (Wierzbicka, 2003, p. 92). Referring to Japanese culture, she points out that 'the norm seems to be to avoid saying 'no' altogether (in particular, to refuse an offer or a request, to express disagreement and so on)' (Wierzbicka, 2003, p. 93). To explain this norm, she cites Nakane (1970) who notes that 'one would prefer to be silent than utter such words as 'no' or 'I disagree'. The avoidance of such open and bald negative expressions is rooted in the fear that it might disrupt the harmony and order of the group' (Nakane, 1970, p. 35). Using Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), Wierzbicka (2003) represents these norms in the form of cultural scripts for refusal in each culture:

*Israeli culture:* I say, no. I think I don't have to say anything more about it.

*Anglo-American culture:* I say, no. I don't want you to feel something bad because of this. I will say something more about it because of this.

*Japanese culture:* I can't say, no. I will say something else because of this (Wierzbicka, 2003, p. 92-93).

Thus, such statements as 'No is far rarer than Yes, and direct refusal is avoided' (Leech, 2014, p. 177), seem to be a bit overgeneralised and relative and need a specification of the cultural context. As Eslami (2010) notes, 'the negotiation of a refusal may entail frequent attempts at directness or indirectness and various degrees of politeness that are appropriate to the situation' (Eslami, 2010, p. 218).

In this paper, we explore refusal to invitation performed by Americans and Russians in interpersonal interaction and aim to discover potential linguistic and sociocultural differences in its realisation.

### 3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Research data were gathered via a discourse completion task (DCT), which contained four situations. We suggested that the respondents refuse an invitation in

the situations with linear relations as well as those which differed in vertical (Power Distance – PD) and/or horizontal distance (Social Distance – SD). The respondents were supposed to turn down: (1) a friend's invitation to her birthday party (linear relations with a short social distance, PD-SD-); (2) a neighbour's invitation to her housewarming party (linear relations with some social distance, PD-SD+); (3) a director's invitation to her anniversary party (relations with both social distance and power distance, namely bottom-up relations PD↑); (4) a trainee's invitation to a party after her internship (top-down relations with PD↓). The DCT was completed by 70 Russian and 50 American respondents and provided us with 480 performances of the speech act of refusal (200 American and 280 Russian).

In our analysis we had a few objectives. Our first objective was to discover the most typical length of refusal in the two cultural contexts in the situations discussed. Analysing this, we assume that the longer the refusal is, the more polite it is, as the speaker makes special efforts to mitigate the refusal and save their face and that of the addressee. We then focused on the form of refusal (direct vs indirect). In the first category, we included utterances with flat 'no' and explicit negation of the invitation which mostly expressed inability to come (*I can't come that day*). In the category of indirect refusal, we included utterances which did not contain an explicit negation. We did not follow the traditional distinction between 'expressions which perform refusal' or 'semantic formulas' and 'adjuncts to refusal' (see Beebe et al., 1990; Salazar-Campillo et al., 2009), as sometimes it was rather difficult to see boundaries between them. We analysed them together as components of the SA of refusal and viewed them as face-saving moves. In this study, we limited ourselves to the most conventional face-saving moves for both cultures, leaving some optional ones out of our analysis. Thus, we focused on Reason, Apology, Gratitude, Positive Evaluation/Feel-ing, Regret, which appeared to be most conventional as well as Well-Wishing and Alternative, though these were used less frequently. Since in English *I'm sorry* can express apology or regret we had difficulty in distinguishing between these two categories. For the purpose of our comparative analysis, we have included in the category of regret the utterances with *unfortunately*, *I wish I could*, *It's a pity* which are close to the Russian *sozhaleniyu*, *zhal'*.

We explored the frequency of these moves and their combination, trying to identify the most conventional patterns of refusal in the contexts under the



study. The results of our quantitative analysis are presented in tables, where percentage data are indicated. Since more than one move was used to perform refusal, their sum does not add up to 100%.

We conducted sociopragmatic analysis of the data drawing on cross-cultural pragmatics, speech act theory, theory of politeness and cultural studies and aimed (1) to explore how representatives of American and Russian culture mitigate their refusal to invitation, (2) to reveal the impact of social characteristics of the context on the performance of refusal, and (3) to identify culture-specific differences in the performance of refusal.

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND MAIN RESULTS

##### 4.1. The length of the refusal

Contrastive analysis of the number of moves showed that neither Russian nor American informants

limited themselves to a brief one-move response when turning down an invitation. In all the situations discussed, they mostly used two and even three moves. However, some differences were revealed (see Table 1).

In situations 1 (refusal to a friend) and 3 (refusal to a director) Americans used 2 and 3 moves almost equally (46% in situation 1 and 42% and 44% in situation 3), while Russians gave preference to a shorter refusal with two moves (58.5% in situation 1 and 52.8% in situation 3). In situation 2 (refusal to a neighbour) and situation 4 (refusal to a trainee) both Americans and Russians gave preference to a refusal with two moves (74% and 62.8% consequently in situation 2 and 60% and 64.2% in situation 4). The longest refusal, with four moves, was observed in the American context, mostly in situation 3, in the refusal to a director (14%), and in the Russian context in situation 2, in the refusal to a neighbour (7.1%).

Table 1  
Number of moves

NUMBER OF MOVES	SITUATION 1 (PD-SD-)		SITUATION 2 (PD-SD+)		SITUATION 3 (PD↑+SD+)		SITUATION 4 (PD↓+SD+)	
	AM %	RU %	AM %	RU %	AM %	RU %	AM %	RU %
1	8	4.2	8	5.7	0	7.1	14	5.7
2	46	58.5	74	62.8	42	52.8	60	64.2
3	46	31.4	12	24.2	44	38.5	26	25.7
4	0	5.7	6	7.1	14	1.4	0	4.2

##### 4.2. Mitigation strategies and their combination

###### 4.2.1 Refusal to a friend (situation 1)

Turning down a friend's invitation, Russian and American respondents used both direct and indirect refusals with a salient preference for indirect ones (see Table 2). However, Russians used direct refusal twice as often as Americans (34.3% to 15.1%). In the Russian context, flat 'no' was not found among American responses and inability to come was observed in both cultural contexts. Direct refusal was always followed by some mitigating expressions, and never consisted of a single utterance.

(1) *I am not sure if I can, my son has a baseball game on Saturday.*

(2) *Нет, я не смогу. Я занята. (No, I can't. I am busy.)*

In case of a 1-move refusal, this was constituted by a reason for not accepting an invitation.

(3) *I have a really important meeting on Saturday.*

(4) *Я уже что-то запланировала на этот день. (I have already made some plans for that day.)*

As far as mitigation tools are concerned, the dominant move in the American material was the reason for refusal (70%), while Russians gave preference to apology (60%), though they also explained the reason for refusal quite frequently (55.7%). Another significant difference concerned a quite frequent expression of positive evaluation/feeling by American respondents (*That would be great/I'd love to/That's very nice/That sounds lovely*) (44%) which was hardly noticed in our Russian material (1.5%).

Table 2  
 Components of refusal in situation 1 (PD-SD-)

COMPONENTS OF REFUSAL	AMERICAN RESPONDENTS %	RUSSIAN RESPONDENTS %
<b>Direct refusal</b>	<b>15.1</b>	<b>34.3</b>
Flat refusal (No)	0	14.2
Inability to come	36	65.7
<b>Indirect refusal</b>	<b>84.9</b>	<b>65.7</b>
Reason	70	55.7
Positive evaluation/feeling	44	1.4
Apology	34	60
Gratitude	22	10
Well-wishing	16	0
Regret	8	10
Alternative	0	14.2

Most conventional models of the refusal to a friend consisted of 2 and 3 moves in both cultures, with some preference to a 2-move refusal among Russians (see Table 1). In the American context the most frequent combinations were Gratitude + Reason (5), as well as by positive evaluation/feeling in 3-move refusals (6):

(5) *Thank you for the invitation, but my friends from Europe are coming over this weekend.*

(6) *Thanks for the invite. I'd love to but I am leaving on Friday.*

The most frequent patterns of Russian refusals were presented by the combinations of Apology + Reason (7) alongside Statement of inability to come (8):

(7) *Извини, пожалуйста, но у меня уже планы. (I am so sorry, but I have other plans.)*

(8) *Прости, но я не могу. У меня рабочий день. (Sorry, but I can't. I work that day.)*

#### 4.2.2. Refusal to a neighbour (situation 2)

Refusals to a neighbour gave us quite similar results. Again, in both contexts refusals were mostly indirect and the number of direct responses was higher among Russians (27.2% compared to 17% for Americans). However, in contrast to the previous situation, we found 10% of flat 'no' among American refusals (*No, unfortunately I cannot*) which was almost two times less than in the Russian material (see Table 3).

Among indirect refusals, reason and apology were still the most conventional moves in both contexts. The difference concerned a positive evaluation /emotion, which was quite common in the refusals of Americans (32%) and amounted to only a few cases in the Russian material (2.8%). At the same time, the Russians accompanied their refusal with an offer of alternative (15.7%) and regret (18.5%), which were not found in the refusals of the Americans.

Most common refusal models in situation 2 (refusal to a neighbour) consisted of 2 moves in both cultures. In the American context the most frequent combination was Apology + Reason, while Russians gave preference to Flat refusal + Reason:

(9) *Sorry, I have some duties to do.*

(10) *Нет, слишком поздно. (No, it's too late.)*

As a third move, a positive evaluation was added to apology and reason in American refusals, and Russians suggested an alternative showing their desire to continue relations.

(11) *That would be great, but I am going to be out of town, I'm sorry.*

(12) *Извините, я занята. Может поужинаем в другой день? (Sorry, I am busy. Can we have dinner another day?)*

Gratitude as another mitigation move was used almost equally by American (24%) and Russian (20%) respondents:

(13) *Thank you but I am not sure that I am free that day.*

(14) *Спасибо, но я не могу. У меня другие планы на вечер. (Thank you, but I can't. I have other plans for evening.)*

#### 4.2.3. Refusal to the director (situation 3)

In the refusal to the director indirect refusals continued to prevail in both cultural contexts, with some

predominance among the Americans (see Table 4). In this situation, characterised by some power distance (bottom-up relations), the most frequent mitigation moves appeared to be reason and gratitude, while apology moved to a lower position. However, regret increased its ranking (*Such a pity I cannot make it / I wish I could, but I have other plans / Mne tak zhal' no I ne smogu*).

Table 3

*Components of refusal in situation 2 (PD- SD+)*

COMPONENTS OF REFUSAL	AMERICAN RESPONDENTS %	RUSSIAN RESPONDENTS %
<b>Direct refusal</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>27.2</b>
Flat refusal (No)	10	18.5
Inability to come	26	45.7
<b>Indirect refusal</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>72.3</b>
Reason	70	72.8
Apology	40	37.5
Positive evaluation/feeling	32	2.8
Gratitude	24	20
Well-wishing	10	2.8
Regret	0	18.5
Alternative	0	15.7

Table 4

*Components of refusal in situation 3 (PD+↑ SD+)*

COMPONENTS OF REFUSAL	AMERICAN RESPONDENTS %	RUSSIAN RESPONDENTS %
<b>Direct refusal</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>32.4</b>
Flat refusal (No)	4	11.4
Inability to come	38	57.1
<b>Indirect refusal</b>	<b>79.5</b>	<b>67.6</b>
Reason	54	52.8
Gratitude	38	30
Apology	24	18.5
Well-wishing	18	5.7
Positive evaluation/feeling	14	10
Regret	14	21.4
Alternative	0	1.4

The most conventional models of the refusal to the director consisted of 2 and 3 moves in both cultures, with some preference for a 2-move refusal by Russians (see Table 1).

The most frequent refusal patterns by Americans were Gratitude + Reason, while Russians preferred to accompany gratitude with a clear statement of inability to come:

(15) *Thank you for the invite, but I already have other plans.*

(16) *Спасибо, но я не смогу в этот день. (Thank you for the invitation but I can't come that day.)*

In a 3-move refusal, Americans also expressed inability to come quite frequently, and representatives of both cultures expressed regret:

(17) *I am sorry; but I can't come as I am too busy this weekend.*

(18) *Спасибо за приглашение. Но, к сожалению, меня не будет в городе в эти выходные. (Thank you for the invitation but, unfortunately, I will be out of town this weekend.)*

In this situation 14% of American refusals consisted of 4 moves, and no instances of a 1-move refusal were observed. They mostly contained Reason + Regret+ Inability to come + Well-wishing:

(19) *. Such a pity I cannot come as I have a really important meeting on Saturday. Enjoy!*

In Russian data such long refusals were hardly observed (1.4%), however 7.1% of Russian respondents limited responses to a 1-move refusal giving reason.

(20) *У меня у ребенка день рождения. (My child's birthday is on that day.)*

**4.2.4. Refusal to a trainee (situation 4)**

The final situation, characterised by some power distance and asymmetry of relations (top-down), showed a greater difference in direct refusals between Russians and Americans (9.4% to 25.9%). Russian respondents expressed their inability to accept an invitation significantly more often than Americans did (44.2% to 12%). Nevertheless, indirect refusals prevailed in both contexts with reason (74%) and apology (52%) being the most conventional mitigation moves by Americans, and reason (44.2%) and alternative (45.7%) occupying almost the same position in the Russian material. Apology was also used by Russians, though less frequently (34.2%), which was to some extent compensated by gratitude (15%) and regret (5.7%), which were not observed in the American data.

(21) *Большое спасибо. Простите, мне очень жаль, но у моей бабушки день рождения в субботу. (Thank you very much. Forgive me, I am so sorry, but my granny has her birthday this Saturday.)*

Table 5  
Components of refusal in situation 4 (PD+↓SD+)

COMPONENTS OF REFUSAL	AMERICAN RESPONDENTS %	RUSSIAN RESPONDENTS %
<b>Direct refusal</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>25.9</b>
Flat refusal (No)	8	14.2
Inability to come	12	44.2
<b>Indirect refusal</b>	<b>90.6</b>	<b>74.1</b>
Reason	74	44.2
Apology	52	34.2
Alternative	46	45.7
Positive evaluation/feeling	14	12
Well-wishing	8	4.2
Gratitude	0	15
Regret	0	5.7

In this situation, refusal patterns consisted mostly of 2 moves in both American (60%) and Russian contexts (64.2%). Americans preferred Apology + Reason (25), while Russians most frequently accompanied apology with a clear statement of inability to come (21), though other combinations of moves were not uncommon.

(22) *I have some urgent stuff to do right now, sorry.*

(23) *Извини, но я не могу в этот день. (I am sorry, but I can't come that day).*

Patterns consisting of 3 moves were less frequent in this situation (26% in the American material and 25.7% in Russian). Besides the moves mentioned above, they would also contain an alternative (24-25), as well as positive evaluation of the invitation, which was frequently used by Americans (24):

(24) *I'd be happy to, but I am really busy. How about a cup of coffee tomorrow?*

(25) *Прости, в этот раз не могу. Давай на следующей неделе. (I am sorry I can't today. Let's meet next week.)*

Interestingly, when limiting themselves to a brief one-move refusal, the Americans preferred to explain their reasons, while the Russians offered an alternative:

(26) *I have got too many reports to finish today.*

(27) *Может, в другой день? (Maybe another day?)*

## 5. DISCUSSION

Despite the common judgement that Russians feel quite free to say *No* (Richmond, 2009), the findings showed that in the refusal to an invitation both American and Russian respondents gave preference to indirect refusals and used various mitigation tools.

Nevertheless, flat 'no' was observed in our Russian material more often (25.8%) than in American (2.3%). Most of the American informants (97.7%) turned down an invitation without saying *No*. This suggests that they do more face-work than Russians, who to some extent do seem to feel free to say flat *No*, which correlates to previous studies (see Iliadi & Larina, 2017). However, as our findings showed, this is not a dominant strategy in the Russian data (Figure 1).

Concerning the length of refusals, the findings showed that in both cultures the preference was given to 2 and 3-move refusals, while 1-move and 4-move refusals were on the periphery. Flat 'no' always went with some mitigation tools (or face-saving moves) such as apology, gratitude, positive evaluation of an invitation, alternative and others in both cultures. In one-move refusal neither Americans nor Russians limited their answers to a flat 'no'. They mostly used reasons instead:

(28) *I'm not in town on that day.*

(29) *Я уже договорилась о встрече в это воскресенье. (I've already made an appointment for this Saturday.)*

We could not find any particular differences in the length of refusal in the situations discussed, except for the situations which differed in Power Distance (3 and 4) in the American material. The refusals to the director appeared to be longer than the refusals to the trainee. In the bottom-up context, none of the American respondents used a 1-move refusal while 14 % performed their refusal with 4 moves. In top-down interaction we found the opposite: there were 14% of 1-move refusals, the

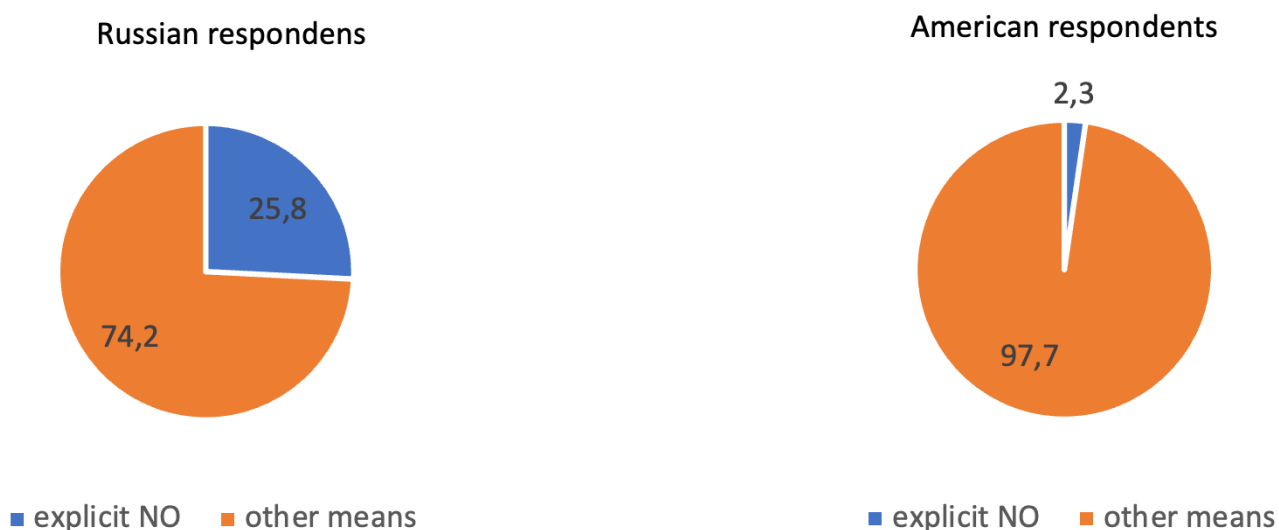


Figure 1. The use of flat 'no' to refuse an invitation by Russian and American respondents



predominance of refusals with two moves over three moves and the absence of refusals with 4 moves. These findings unexpectedly suggest the role of Power Distance in the length of refusal in the American context, and some sensitivity to status. However, more detailed research is needed to draw definitive conclusions.

As far as mitigation tools are concerned, there are both similarities and differences. Both American and Russian respondents most frequently resorted to Reason and Apology. Giving reasons for not accepting the invitation appeared to be the predominant move in both cultural contexts, which is unsurprising. Brown and Levinson (1987), in fact, consider 'give overwhelming reasons' as a way to communicate regret to perform an FTA, along with 'admit the impingement', 'indicate reluctance' and 'beg forgiveness', which they view as components of the negative politeness strategy 'apologies' (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 187-189). Though the examples they give mostly refer to the refusal of a request, the same might also be applied to refusal to an invitation. Stating the reason for rejection, the speaker assures the addressee that the refusal is due to some external factors which are beyond them rather than their unwillingness to accept the invitation. Thus, they attempt to save theirs and the inviter's positive face.

Another common strategy is gratitude (*Thank you. Thank you so much / Spasibo. Bolshoe spasibo*). However, in our American material positive evaluation/feeling (*That would be great / I'd love to*) turned out to be more frequent than gratitude. This was observed in all situations but most frequently in the linear context, i.e., refusal to a friend (44%) and neighbour (32%).

(30) *That sounds great, thank you but I really have to finish my report.*

(31) *I would be happy to, but I am super busy this weekend. Sorry.*

Such enthusiastic expressions of positive attitude to an invitation are positive politeness markers used to realise the strategy 'exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with the recipient)' (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 104). They can be called 'positive emotive adjuncts to refusal', aimed at enhancing the positive face of interlocutors and making the other person feel good, which correlates to Wierzbicka's (1999, p. 254) idea that in Anglo culture 'one should try to make the other person feel something good'. In the Russian context they were hardly used in these situations, with some increase in more formal contexts. It was observed that

Russians, by contrast, tend to accompany refusal with regret, which was expressed more often in situations where there is some distance between the interlocutors, either horizontal as in the refusal to a new neighbour (14.7%) or vertical as in the refusal to the director (15.7%).

(32) *Мне очень жаль, но я не смогу. (I am so sorry, but I can't.)*

(33) *Спасибо за приглашение, но я уезжаю на выходные. Так жаль, что пропущу твой праздник! (Thank you for the invitation, but I am leaving this weekend. Such a pity I miss your party.)*

Thus, Russian refusals appear to be more focused on expressing the negative feelings of the refuser and their regrets, rather than evoking the positive feelings of the inviter by exaggerating their positive attitude to the invitation. These findings might be explained with reference to the Russians' general dislike for exaggeration and the value of sincerity (see Larina, 2015; Wierzbicka, 2002). It is interesting to note some correspondence with findings of studies on the style of rejection in blind peer review (Larina & Ponton, 2020, 2022), where English-language reviewers conventionally used positive framing for their negative verdicts while Russian reviewers were more focused on their own emotions and were mostly content rather than face-oriented.

Another interesting finding concerns 'alternative', which was used by American respondents as a mitigation move only in the refusal to a person with lower power distance (46%). Though the Russian respondents in this situation offered an alternative with almost the same frequency (45.7%), it was also observed in the refusal to a friend (14.2%) and neighbour (15.7%), with only a few instances in the refusal to the director (1.4%). These findings might suggest that by offering an alternative, Russian speakers not only perform a strategy of mitigation of their refusal but place a special emphasis on showing their desire for further contacts, the maintenance of which is coherent with their cultural background (Larina et al., 2017).

To summarise the discussions above, we can state that there are many similarities in the performance of refusal to invitation by Americans and Russians. Representatives of both communicative cultures prefer indirect refusal to direct, they do not limit themselves to a short one-move refusal but use a number of similar mitigation face-saving moves and politeness strategies, both positive and negative, aimed at mitigating the

negative effect of their refusal. However, some differences/variations have been observed in the preference of the moves as well as their combination and the length of the refusal. The findings show that Americans, on the whole, do more face-work when compared to Russians, they use politeness strategies more conventionally and tend to perform refusal in a more verbose and indirect way. In some contexts, Russians appear to be more direct and explicit, which correlates with their communicative values and the dominant features of their communicative style, which seems to be more direct and content rather than form-oriented (Larina, 2015).

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify culture-specific features of refusal to invitation performed by American and Russian speakers. It explored the variations in the performance of refusal in contexts with different social and power distance between interlocutors. The findings revealed some differences in the role of the social factors in the realisation of refusals. However, the impact of cultural contexts appeared to be more salient. Despite the obvious similarities in the performance of refusal in terms of form (direct vs indirect), the semantics of acts and mitigation strategies used by the studied communicative cultures, Americans demonstrated a tendency to be more indirect and verbose. They did more 'supportive facework' (Watts, 2003, p.

132-133) and aimed to mitigate the possible negative effects of refusal, making regular use of negative and positive politeness strategies. The Russians, by contrast, used politeness strategies with less regularity, in some cases resorted to directness, and were more focused on the clarity of their responses to invitations than the inviter's feelings. These findings are consistent with what is known about communication values and politeness in the two cultures.

The limitations of the current study, which was conducted on a rather limited data set must be acknowledged, as well as the fact that data elicited with a DCT can hardly be seen as representing a reliable picture of actual communication. As Félix-Brasdefer (2003) rightly points out, oral interaction may allow for lengthy negotiations which, in the end, turn a refusal into an acceptance. Nevertheless, our analysis has made it possible to identify a number of differences that can contribute to the systematisation of culture specific features of interaction in American and Russian contexts and the description of communicative ethno-styles. They can also be used in second language teaching to favour the development of students' pragmatic, discursive and socio-cultural competence.

## Acknowledgements

This publication has been supported by the RUDN University Scientific Projects Grant System, Project No. 050734-2-000.

## References

- Al-Eyrani, A. A. (2007). Refusal strategies by Yemeni EFL learners. *The Asian EFL Journal*, 9(2) 19-34.
- Alemi, M., Pazoki Moakhar, N., & Rezaejad, A. (2021). A cross-cultural study of condolence strategies in a computer-mediated social network. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 25(2), 417-442. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-2021-25-2-417-442>
- Al-Kahtani, S. A. W. (2005). Refusals realizations in three different cultures: A speech act theoretically-based cross-cultural study. *Journal of King Saud University*, 18(1), 35-37.
- Beebe, L. M., Takahashi, T., & Uliss-Weltz, R. (1990). Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals. In R. Scarcella, E. S. Anderson, & S. Krashen (Eds.), *Developing communicative competence in second language* (pp. 55-73). Newbury House.
- Bella, S. (2011). Mitigation and politeness in Greek invitation refusals: Effects of length of residence in the target community and intensity of interaction on non-native speakers' performance. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(6), 1718-1740. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.11.005>
- Bella, S. (2014). Developing the ability to refuse: A cross-sectional study of Greek FL refusals. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 61, 35-62. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.11.015>
- Bilá, M., & Ivanova, S. V. (2020). Language, culture and ideology in discursive practices. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 24(2), 219-252. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-2020-24-2-219-252>
- Blum-Kulka, S. (1982). Learning to say what you mean in a second language: A study of the speech

- act performance of learners of Hebrew as a second language. *Applied Linguistics*, 3(1), 29-59. <https://doi.org/10.1093/APPLIN/III.1.29>
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. *Studies in interactional sociolinguistics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chang, Y. F. (2009). How to say no: An analysis of cross-cultural difference and pragmatic transfer. *Language Sciences*, 31(4), 477-493. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2008.01.002>
- Chang, Y. F., & Ren, W. (2020). Sociopragmatic competence in American and Chinese children's realization of apology and refusal. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 164(4), 27-39. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2020.04.013>
- Chen, H. J. (1995). Metapragmatic judgement on refusals: Its reliability and consistency. In *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED391381.pdf>
- Chen, X., Ye, L., & Zhang, Y. (1998). Refusing in Chinese. In G. Kasper (Ed.), *Pragmatics of Chinese as native and target language* (pp. 119-163). University of Hawaii Press. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lan.1998.0221>
- Deveci, T., & Midraj, J. (2021). 'Can we take a picture with you?' The realization of the refusal speech act with tourists by Emirati speakers. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 25(1), 68-88. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-2021-25-1-68-88>
- Dubrovskaya, T. V., & Yuskaeva, E. I. (2022). Language aggression in virtual professional communities. *Training, Language and Culture*, 6(4), 62-72. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2022-6-4-62-72>
- Eslami, Z. R. (2010). Refusals: How to develop appropriate refusal strategies. In A. Martínez-Flor & E. Usó-Juan (Eds.), *Speech act performance: Theoretical, empirical and methodological issues* (pp. 217-236). John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1075/llt.26.13esl>
- Félix-Brasdefer, J. C. (2003). Declining an invitation: A cross-cultural study of pragmatic strategies in American English and Latin American Spanish. *Multilingua*, 22(3), 225-255. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1515/mult.2003.012>
- Félix-Brasdefer, J. C. (2006). Linguistic politeness in Mexico: Refusal strategies among male speakers of Mexican Spanish. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38(12), 2158-2187. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2006.05.004>
- Gass, S., & Houck, N. (1999). *Interlanguage refusals: A cross-cultural study of Japanese-English*. Mouton de Gruyter. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9783110809879>
- Ghazanfari, M., Bonyadi, A., & Malekzadeh, S. (2012). Investigating cross-linguistic differences in refusal speech act among native Persian and English speakers. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 2(4), 49-63. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5861/ijrsl.2012.214>
- Iliadi, P. L., & Larina, T. (2017). Refusal strategies in English and Russian. *RUDN Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics*, 8(3), 531-542. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22363/2313-2299-2017-8-3-531-542>
- Johnson, D. I., Roloff, M. E., & Riffée, M. A. (2004). Politeness theory and refusals of requests: Face threat as a function of expressed obstacles. *Communication Studies*, 55(2), 227-238. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10510970409388616>
- Kanoksilapatham, B. (2007) Introduction to move analysis. In D. Biber, U. Connor, & T. A. Upton (Eds.), *Discourse on the move using corpus analysis to describe discourse structure* (pp. 23-41). John Benjamins.
- Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2002). *Pragmatic development in a second language*. Blackwell.
- Kecskes, I. (2014). *Intercultural pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.
- Kotorova, E. G. (2017). 'Promise' as speech behavior pattern: Method of contrastive analysis (based on Russian and German languages). *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 21(2), 405-423. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22363/2312-9182-2017-21-2-405-423>
- Kwon, J. (2004). Expressing refusals in Korean and American English. *Multilingua*, 23(4), 339-364. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1515/mult.2004.23.4.339>
- Larina, T. (2015). Culture-specific communicative styles as a framework for interpreting linguistic and cultural idiosyncrasies. *International Review of Pragmatics*, 7(5), 195-215. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/18773109-00702003>

- Larina, T. V., Ozyumenko, V. I., & Kurteš, S. (2017). I-identity vs we-identity in language and discourse: Anglo-Slavonic perspectives. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, 13(1), 109-128. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1515/lpp-2017-0006>
- Larina, T., Ponton, D. M. (2020). Tact or frankness in English and Russian blind peer reviews. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 17(4), 471-496. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ip-2020-4004>
- Larina, T., Ponton, D. M. (2022). I wanted to honour your journal, and you spat in my face: Emotive (im)politeness and face in the English and Russian blind peer review. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 18(1), 201-226. <https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2019-0035>
- Leech, G. (2014). *The pragmatics of politeness*. Oxford University Press.
- Liao, C., & Bresnahan, M. I. (1996). A contrastive pragmatic study on American English and Mandarin refusal strategies. *Language Sciences*, 18(3-4), 703-727. [https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0388-0001\(96\)00043-5](https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0388-0001(96)00043-5)
- Malyuga, E. N., Krouglov, A., & Tomalin, B. (2018). Linguo-cultural competence as a cornerstone of translators' performance in the domain of intercultural business communication. *XLinguae*, 11(2), 566-582. <https://doi.org/10.18355/XL.2018.11.02.46>
- Malyuga E. N., & McCarthy, M. (2021). 'No' and 'net' as response tokens in English and Russian business discourse: In search of a functional equivalence. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 25(2), 391-416. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-2021-25-2-391-416>
- Martínez-Flor, A., Usó-Juan, E., & Fernández-Guerra, A. (2003). *Pragmatic competence and foreign language teaching*. Universitat Jaume I.
- Martínez-Flor, A., & Usó-Juan, E. (2011). Research methodologies in pragmatics: Eliciting refusals to requests. *Estudios de Lingüística Inglesa Aplicada*, 11, 47-88. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=3913955>
- Nakane, Ch. (1970). *Japanese society: A practical guide to understanding the Japanese mindset and culture*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Nelson, G. L., Carson, J., Batal, M. A., & Bakary, W. E. (2002). Cross-cultural pragmatics: Strategy use in Egyptian Arabic and American English refusals. *Applied Linguistics*, 23(2), 163-189. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/23.2.163>
- Nwogu, K. N. (1997). The medical research paper: Structure and functions. *English for Specific Purposes* 16(2), 119-138. [https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906\(97\)85388-4](https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(97)85388-4)
- Popova, K. V. (2018). Persuasion strategy in online social advertising. *Training, Language and Culture*, 2(2), 55-65. <https://dx.doi.org/10.29366/2018tlc.2.2.4>
- Richmond, Y. (2009). *From nyet to da: Understanding a new Russia* (40th ed.). Intercultural Press.
- Rubin, J. (1983). How to tell when someone is saying 'no' revisited. In N. Wolfson & E. Judd (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language acquisition* (pp. 10-17). Newbury House.
- Sadler, R. W., & Eröz, B. (2002). 'I refuse you!' An examination of English refusals by native speakers of English, Lao, and Turkish. *Journal of Second Language Acquisition and Teaching*, 9, 53-80.
- Salazar-Campillo, P., Safont-Jordà, M. P., & Codina-Esperuz, V. (2009). Refusal strategies: A proposal from a sociopragmatic approach. *Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada*, 8, 139-150. <https://rael.aesla.org.es/index.php/RAEL/article/view/154>
- Sattar, H. Q. A., Lah, S. C., & Suleiman, R. R. R. (2011). Refusal strategies in English by Malay university students. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 11(3), 69-81.
- Searle, J., & Vanderveken, D. (1985). *Foundations of illocutionary logic*. Cambridge University Press.
- Stevens, P. (1993). The pragmatics of 'No!': Some strategies in English and Arabic. *Ideal*, 6, 87-112.
- Takahashi, T., & Beebe, L. M. (1987). The development of pragmatic competence by Japanese learners of English. *JALT Journal*, 8(2), 131-155. <https://jalt-publications.org/sites/default/files/pdf-article/jj-8.2-art3.pdf>
- Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 91-112. <https://doi.org/10.1093/APPLIN/4.2.91>
- Trosborg, A. (2010). *Pragmatics across languages and cultures*. Mouton de Gruyter. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9783110214444>
- Turnbull, W., & Saxton, K. L. (1997). Modal expressions as facework in refusals to comply with requests: 'I think I should say 'no' right now'. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 27(2), 145-181. [https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(96\)00034-3](https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(96)00034-3)

- Ueda, K. (1972). Sixteen ways to avoid saying 'no' in Japan. In J. Condon & S. Mitsuko (Eds.), *Intercultural encounters with Japan: Communication, contact and conflict* (pp. 185-192). The Simul Press.
- Watts, R. J. (2003). *Politeness*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1985). Different cultures, different languages, different speech acts. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 9(2), 145-178.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1999). *Emotions across Languages and Cultures: Diversity and Universals*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wierzbicka, A. (2002). Russian cultural scripts: The theory of cultural scripts and its applications. *Ethos*, 3(4), 401-432. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1525/eth.2002.30.4.401>
- Wierzbicka, A. (2003). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction* (2nd ed.). Mouton de Gruyter. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9783110220964>
- Yelenevskaya, M., & Protassova, E. (2021). Teaching languages in multicultural surroundings: New tendencies. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 25(2), 546-568. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-2021-25-2-546-568>

ANGELA V. LITVINOVA

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Russia [litvinova-av@rudn.ru](mailto:litvinova-av@rudn.ru)

TATIANA V. LARINA

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Russia [larina-tv@rudn.ru](mailto:larina-tv@rudn.ru)



# Book Reviews

## Teaching English for Tourism: Bridging research and praxis (a review)

Original work by Michael J. Ennis and Gina M. Petrie (Eds.) published by Routledge, 2019

Reviewed by Wei Xu and Angelina Maria Ferreira Martins Cheang

**Wei Xu** City University of Macau, Macau, China [weixu@cityu.mo](mailto:weixu@cityu.mo)

**Angelina Maria Ferreira Martins Cheang** King's College London, UK [anjuchegang@gmail.com](mailto:anjuchegang@gmail.com)

**Article history** Received October 6, 2022 | Revised December 25, 2022 | Accepted March 6, 2023

**Conflicts of interest** The authors declared no conflicts of interest

**Research funding** No funding was reported for this research

**doi** 10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1-131-133

**For citation** Xu, W., & Ferreira Martins Cheang, A. M. (2023). Teaching English for Tourism: Bridging research and praxis (a review). *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(1), 131-133.



This is an open access article distributed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (CC BY-NC 4.0), which allows its unrestricted use for non-commercial purposes, subject to attribution. The material can be shared/adapted for non-commercial purposes if you give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

It is universally recognised that international tourism is an important economic sector of the global economy as well as most national economies. The less developed countries have focused on tapping into the international tourism market as a key economic development strategy. More developed countries, such as those with strong tourism industries for decades, have also sought to attract international tourists. It is no secret that English has emerged as the language of worldwide travel. Most forms of international tourism involve interactions in English, and many of those interactions take place between people who speak other languages as their first language.

Consequently, this means that the practice of teaching and learning English for Tourism (Eft) – i.e., the practice of teaching English to current and future professionals involved in the tourism industry – constitutes a form of English for specific purposes (ESP). In Eft, English is taught and learned to current and future tourism professionals with the aim of developing a specific form of English for tourism-related purposes. International tourism occupies a significant position in both the global and national economies. For those who wish to work in the service industry or international

tourism as a second language speaker, as well as those who wish to learn Eft, it is imperative that they consider the language they use and the context in which they are located carefully.

As a result, a comprehensive and complete curriculum of practical courses should be beneficial and helpful to them. There is a need for careful design and creation of a curriculum related to English for the international tourism and service industry. The curriculum should adapt to the interests and needs of learners. In these courses, learners are provided with a specific and definite level or situation in which the language will be utilised. Methods and contents must be tailored to suit the specific needs of learners.

The authors have compiled this collection of recent findings in Eft contexts to provide practitioners and scholars with support in their pedagogical endeavours. There are nine chapters in this book which are divided into two parts: theories and concepts and from theory to practice. The first part of the book has three chapters, and Eft is defined at a semantic, conceptual, theoretical, and methodological level in Chapter 1. Two broad categories of textbooks are defined in the article, those that are geared toward the domestic market



*'It appears that less research and scholarship has been conducted on the teaching and learning of EfT, despite the fact that a growing body of research has been disseminated via academic journals and major publishing houses. According to the authors, the research and scholarship that exists do not seem to be consolidated into one place and appear to be scattered across the vast field of English language teaching'*

and those that are geared for the global market. Additionally, there are two broad areas of research and scholarship in this paper. These areas are devoted to the study of English in tourism and the study of English teaching and learning. Chapter 2 discusses the language preferences of stakeholders in EFT, while Chapter 3 discusses the politics behind it. As a whole, the first three chapters provide a critical overview of current issues within EfT research and teaching, particularly in relation to the existing research tradition, the role of needs analysis, and the status of Englishes around the globe.

On the other hand, the other part of this book contains six chapters that discuss EfT classrooms and identify approaches and methods for preparing students with the necessary English language skills for employment in tourism. Throughout these chapters, there has been a focus on the importance of emerging technologies, efforts to deepen students' cultural understandings, and pedagogies that support the development of writing skills in EfT instruction as well. A major concern discussed in Chapter 4 concerns the impact of changing communication channels for sharing information regarding tourism destinations on the discourse that students of EfT must learn. As discussed in Chapter 5 of the book, new technologies are becoming increasingly useful in translation and concordance, and this has implications for students who are learning to translate tourism texts into English as a foreign language. Chapter 6 examines the potential of using cultural language in the classroom to help prepare students for the realities of communication in tourism, and Chapter 7 looks at activities outside the traditional classroom environment, analyses the impact of international experiences on EfT students' cultural development. In the last two chapters, the results of an international telecollaboration project

are presented, culminating in a reflection on the perpetual pursuit of best practices in teaching writing skills to students in tourism studies. Both studies draw attention to sociocultural barriers that can emerge and that may require instructor intervention in EfT classrooms. These six chapters highlight the importance of emerging new technologies, approaches to deepening students' cultural understanding, and strategies to support writing development in EfT instruction.

In response to the rise of middle-class tourism during the twentieth century and as one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world, ESP's oldest and largest branch responded to the development of middle-class tourism. ESP courses and English for occupational purposes (EOP) courses have been developed by universities, high schools, and private language schools for students, workers, and managers in the tourism industry. The majority of major publishers of English language teaching (ELT) resources also market course books for tourism studies and various tourism careers. It appears that less research and scholarship has been conducted on the teaching and learning of EfT, despite the fact that a growing body of research has been disseminated via academic journals and major publishing houses. According to the authors, the research and scholarship that exists do not seem to be consolidated into one place and appear to be scattered across the vast field of English language teaching.

A large part of the reason for the gap in research and scholarship in ESP is the nature of the field in general. In most cases, EfT pedagogy research is conducted informally and is used to develop and evaluate custom courses and learning materials that are tailored to the specific needs of a specific group of students in an individual learning environment. Although this research is clearly relevant to practitioners in other contexts as well, only a small amount of such research is ever published or shared with a broader community of researchers. Especially in the West, best practice in education for transformation remains the responsibility of individual teachers and small communities of practice that work independently of each other. Teachers of English as a second language lack access to a wealth of information and experience that can serve as a guide for their own teaching approaches if there is no discourse across institutions, regions, and nations. In light of this background, this book aims to share the perspectives of teachers and researchers of EfT from a wide variety of national and institutional contexts, and to initiate a sustained discussion on how English for tourism

can be taught and learned. As a result, it touches upon a wide range of themes related to EfT, including theoretical concepts, needs analyses, teaching methods, teaching approaches, and methodology frameworks.

This book seeks to eliminate the desperation caused by a multitude of circumstances that might lead a person to deny the uniqueness of EfT teaching and learning. Furthermore, the authors hope that this book will serve as a catalyst for other related initiatives in the future. As a whole, it is primarily about the findings and experiences of EfT centres around the world, such as Italy, Jordan, Nicaragua, Poland, Spain, and the United States. However, these are just a small sampling of all the many EfT centers around the world. In addition to these limitations, the sample also reflects that the EfT learning reported in this book is disproportionately associated with contexts of higher education in which students are studying or preparing to study tourism, as compared to those employees who are learning English to be used immediately in their tourism occupations, a situation which is likely to be prevalent around the world. Even with these limitations, however, the purpose of this book is to contribute to the conversation rather than to limit it in regard to EfT teaching. Due to this reason, the authors encourage readers to continue where this book may have left off, to go beyond the

limitations outlined in it, and to demonstrate and explain why teaching English as a foreign language for tourism is an exceptional form of English used for a specific purpose.

There is no doubt that sustainable tourism plays an important part in global communication and cultural exchange, however, with the sudden outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, one of the most heavily affected industries is the tourism industry. At a time like this when things are so turbulent and uncertain, it is rather important to maintain and build people's confidence and to encourage students' interest in learning English for tourism purposes.

It is expected that the findings presented in this book will provide scholars with a comprehensive understanding of the current status and issues related to the EfT field and may provide readers with clues as to how and where to focus our efforts further.

Additionally, the EfT learning reported in this book primarily reflects higher education contexts where students are currently studying or preparing to study tourism, whereas in most countries, employees are more likely to learn English for immediate use in their tourism occupations. The authors' intent with this book is not to limit the conversations surrounding EfT teaching, but rather to add to them.

WEI XU

City University of Macau, Macau, China [weixu@cityu.mo](mailto:weixu@cityu.mo)

ANGELINA MARIA FERREIRA MARTINS CHEANG  
King's College London, UK [anjucheang@gmail.com](mailto:anjucheang@gmail.com)

# Book Reviews

## Reconceptualising English for International Business Contexts: A BELF approach and its educational implications (a review)

Original work by Elma Dedovic-Atilla and Vildana Dubravac, published by Multilingual Matters, 2022

Reviewed by Barry Tomalin

**Barry Tomalin** Glasgow Caledonian University London, UK [barrytomalin@aol.com](mailto:barrytomalin@aol.com)

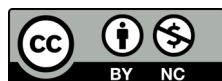
**Article history** Received January 12, 2023 | Revised February 2, 2023 | Accepted March 6, 2023

**Conflicts of interest** The author declared no conflicts of interest

**Research funding** No funding was reported for this research

**doi** 10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1-134-136

**For citation** Tomalin, B. (2023). Reconceptualising English for International Business Contexts: A BELF approach and its educational implications (a review). *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(1), 134-136.



This is an open access article distributed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (CC BY-NC 4.0), which allows its unrestricted use for non-commercial purposes, subject to attribution. The material can be shared/adapted for non-commercial purposes if you give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

*Reconceptualising English for international business contexts: A BELF approach and its educational implications* by Elma Dedovic-Atilla and Vildana Dubravac is an excellent piece of research into the use of Business English as it is used internationally with recommendations for changes in how the language is used and should be taught, with suggestions for further research. Well-structured and narrated in an easy-to-follow style, it includes a research project carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina in southern Europe, what the authors describe as the 'Global South'. The research examines the need for Business English, what future professionals need and where problems in communication arise in the workplace where English is the international language. The use of English has dramatically increased in the last few years with globalisation and massive increases in the migration of labour stressing the need for a common language in the multicultural workplace. The lessons of the research as related to curriculum, classroom activity and the workplace apply not just to international business English but also to other widely spoken languages and are useful not just to English language teachers and researchers but specialists in other languages doing research into the use of their language in business in a multicultural environment.

The book has five chapters dealing with the role of English in the international community, an explanation of BELF (Business English as the Lingua Franca) and its role in building communicative competence, a field study of the role of English in Bosnia and Herzegovina followed by a discussion of the research project and finally, a conclusion discussing the implications of English as an international business language of communication for business practitioners and for educators. The end matter contains an appendix with the survey questionnaire used in Bosnia, references, and an index. The list of abbreviations at the beginning of the book is also very helpful.

So, what exactly is BELF? English as a foreign language or ESP (English for Special Purposes) are the most widely used terms to describe the use of business English. But Business English as the Lingua Franca offers a crucial view of how the English language is used in a professional environment. The term was coined in 2005 and is used to describe the shared communication code between and within businesses dealing with multinational workforces or clients. English is used as a functional tool to do business between different nationalities and is no longer the preserve of British or North-American English speakers or other users of English as a first

*'In most industries the mastery of English is a key ingredient in ensuring successful promotion. It is surprising that the survey revealed that in three industries, administration, finance and manufacturing, English is considered less important than the native language but, generally speaking, BELF is generally considered a more important skill in international business than 'native speaker' ability'*

language. One of the consequences of this is that the stress is on mastering international business terminology in English with a less important focus on perfect grammar or general vocabulary. Clarity is important, meaning that you avoid long complicated sentences, complicated phrases and explain idioms. A further stress is placed on the importance of relationship-building language, aimed at creating a positive link between people in business through the language used.

The authors point out that most studies of BELF and its usage have mainly been in companies in the northern part of Europe and in North America. This is why they extended the study and usage of BELF to the 'global south', focusing on the use of BELF in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an independent nation state and part of the former Yugoslavia. In a copybook research presentation, of value to any masters or doctoral student undertaking a research project, they used a variety of approaches to the Bosnian approach to English and how it is used in business contexts. The authors used a comprehensive range of approaches ranging from questionnaires (in English and Bosnian), telephone conversations and face-to-face meetings and interviews. They also offered an elaborate and thorough study of the use of BELF in business meetings, phone calls and WhatsApp and email messaging. Their findings offer suggestions for curriculum, teaching methodology and materials reform as well as teacher training courses. For those involved in training in English to optimise future employment opportunities, especially in international corporations and in the multicultural workplace, as mentioned above, respondents to the questionnaire and face-to-face interviewees were less concerned with grammatical correctness but with the correct use of business English in meetings, negotiation, and correspondence. Of interest to teachers of business English are the examples

of relevant grammatical features, including the use of tenses, the mismatch between subjects and verbs, vocabulary, English usage in a business context and the use of the definite and indefinite articles. The issue is not the use of 'incorrect' English forms but the misuse of language leading to possible misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication.

In summing up, the authors make clear that in most industries the mastery of English is a key ingredient in ensuring successful promotion. It is surprising that the survey revealed that in three industries, administration, finance and manufacturing, English is considered less important than the native language but, generally speaking, BELF is generally considered a more important skill in international business than 'native speaker' ability. It also found that younger managers and employees were generally considered better at the use of English internationally than many of their old and more experienced colleagues. They also found that older employees wanting to improve their English were inclined to use language tutoring face-to-face or online whereas managers under 50 were much more likely to rely on self-management learning.

The authors identify two types of language education for international business; first, where English is the official language of communication and secondly, where it is the working language. In practical terms, in the workplace grammar and vocabulary are important but maybe less so than developing strategies to understand and resolve possible miscommunication, knowing how to be polite and build rapport, and understand the different genres of language relevant to the language user's job and the workplace.

Regarding the use of the five language skills, speaking, listening, reading, writing and intercultural and intercommunication skills, all were seen to be important with speaking skills as the most important to develop for workplace communication. Although in the Bosnian research project intercultural and intercommunication skills seemed to be limited to learning a few words and phrases of other employees' and clients' native languages, the authors make it clear that intercultural and intercommunication skills are crucial in learning to communicate effectively in international business, resulting in better relations, more effective business collaboration and eventual positive business results.

The implication for language educators is to balance the focus on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation with repetitive drills with conversation-based activities involving workshops, debates and simulations

and a cross-curricular approach. Making the subject content the priority as opposed to limiting it to linguistic correctness will achieve better long-term results in assuring effective communication skills in the workplace. Allowing more time in the curriculum and in the classroom for speech-based activities such as TED-talks, debates, podcasts, auctions, and a wide range of other activities will help learners improve their communication skills and their confidence in using the language they are learning and help them relate it to their own interests. In addition, the adoption of a more informal and supportive learning environment which allows students to make mistakes and learn from them and a selection of subjects which helps them prepare for working in operations where an international language, such as English, is the means of communication.

Finally, the authors offer tips for researchers. The reach and applicability of BELF should be researched as well as how it is taught and employed in hitherto under-researched regions. The hypothesis of which types of business prioritise the use of BELF and which remain based in the native language of the country they are based in also needs further research. Also, the statement that managers and employees over the age of 50 are less likely to master or use English as the business lingua franca deserves deeper investigation as does the development of teaching situations and aids to encourage learning. As the authors conclude, in an age of multiculturalism and multilingualism the study of how international languages are used in both our personal and professional lives is an important part of our future teaching and learning success.

BARRY TOMALIN

Glasgow Caledonian University London, UK [barrytomalin@aol.com](mailto:barrytomalin@aol.com)



# News & Events

## RUDN University News

### Ambassadors of Russian Education and Science

February 15, Russian Ministry of Education and Science signed the Agreement on the Consortium of Universities and Scientific Organisations designed to implement the Ambassadors of Russian Education and Science programme. Vladimir Filippov, President of RUDN University, Chairman of the Higher Attestation Commission, was elected head of the consortium. The Consortium of Universities includes Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow State Institute of International Relations, St. Petersburg State University. St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, Tomsk State University; Kurchatov Institute R&D, and Peoples' Friendship University of Russia. The meeting was attended by Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council Konstantin Kosachev, President of RUDN University Vladimir Filippov, Rector of Lomonosov Moscow State University Viktor Sadovnichy, as well as representatives of the Ministry of Education, Rossotrudnichestvo, and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ambassadors of Russian higher education and science are successful students, employees and graduates of Russian and Soviet universities, statesmen and public figures. Their mission is to promote Russian education and science at leading international and publicly significant platforms. As Valery Falkov noted, despite the pandemic and the changing geopolitical situation, the number of students entering Russian universities is only increasing. Today, more than 350 thousand foreign students study in Russia. The involvement of Russian researchers in major international research and technological projects also remains consistent.

*'The development of international cooperation in the field of science and higher education has always been relevant for us, and it has acquired particular significance in recent years. Today we are launching a project designed to promote Russian educational practices, brands organisations in the global arena. The programme will diversify the mechanisms for finding and*

*attracting talented foreign students and young researchers to our country,'* said the head of the Russian Ministry of Education and Science. According to the Minister, in recent decades, international academic relations have witnessed an active uprise in the country. Tens of thousands of graduates from all over the world have been educated at Russian universities, many of whom have achieved significant success in business, politics, and social affairs. *'Hopefully, this programme will become a link between those who have received education in Russia and those who today promote their achievements, their universities and scientific organisations in different regions of the world,'* he said.

At the same time, the institution of ambassadors extends not only to higher, but also to general and secondary vocational education. The corresponding decision was previously taken by the Interdepartmental Working Group. Konstantin Kosachev drew attention to the fact that educational diplomacy should have its own extraordinary and plenipotentiary representatives. Therefore, the created institute will act as an instrument of humanitarian relations with foreign countries.

Viktor Sadovnichy stressed that in modern conditions it is necessary to look for new forms of interaction with foreign countries, students, and applicants. *'We understand the importance of developing international cooperation in all areas. I fully support the establishment of the Consortium,'* said the rector of Lomonosov Moscow State University.

The title of Ambassador of Russian Education and Science will be assigned by the Council of the Consortium in agreement with the Russian Ministry of Education and Science and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The appointed ambassadors will participate in large-scale events dedicated to Russian education and science, as well as assist in shaping positive attitudes towards Russia among the target audience.

### Students of Rwanda Spoke About Nuclear Projects

RUDN University and National Research Nuclear University MEPhI held HakAtom Rwanda for students of the University of Rwanda and a quiz on nuclear

technology for schoolchildren. Eight teams took part in the event. They shared ideas for promoting nuclear and radiation technologies in their country and presented their findings in presentations, websites, and applications. The winners and prize-winners received gifts from RUDN University. All participants received personalised certificates from Rosatom Rosatom. The hackathon was held on February 20-21 in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda.

Teams of HackAtom participants needed to develop a software application that would allow the user to interactively (by answering questions, solving simple problems, etc.) compare different energy sources and draw conclusions about the benefits of using nuclear energy. The participants proposed topics on the impact of nuclear technologies on agriculture in Rwanda, the role of primary energy sources in the global energy balance, the preparation of nuclear power plants for the production of pure hydrogen, and the advantages of nuclear energy over other energy sources.

High schoolers of Lycée de Kigali were excited to participate in a special quiz designed to test their knowledge on nuclear and radiation technologies with several teams competing for the win and for the prizes. The participants may in the future become students of the flagship Russian universities of the Rosatom state atomic energy corporation. The quiz was held on February 22 with the support of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia.

### **Profession-Oriented Communication and Translation: Scientific and Methodological Aspects**

The Department of Foreign Languages at the Faculty of Economics held a regular international scientific seminar for graduate and undergraduate students *Profession-oriented communication and translation: scientific and methodological aspects*. Discussion topic: *Cross-cultural competence in Business English communication skills: perspectives and challenges*.

The invited speaker was the Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Alpha BC University (Belgrade, Serbia), Professor, Doctor of Science Valentina Budinic. During the event, the participants discussed the issues, prospects, and difficulties of intercultural communication as a business communication skill in English. Following the seminar, students' reports and articles will become part of collected papers. Three articles selected by the organising committee will have the opportunity to be published in Issues of Applied Linguistics included in the Higher Attestation Commission List.

## **TLC News**

### **Training, Language and Culture Science Index**

The editorial team is proud to announce that Training, Language and Culture has gone up in the Science Index with recent ratings for 2021 published on eLibrary. The overall ranking now places TLC 884 among all journals indexed in the Russian Index of Science Citation. The journal is now ranked 16th in Education, and 32nd in Language Studies subject areas.

Russian Index of Science Citation is a national citation database commonly abbreviated as RISC and launched back in 2005. It includes hundreds of titles and uses modern-day scientometric methods to rate journals of various subject areas.

On behalf of the editorial team, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Scientific Management Department and the Centre for Scientometrics and Journal Development of RUDN University for their ongoing support and hard work, as well as to all our contributors and readers for their unabated interest in TLC as a platform for quality scientific discussion.

### **TLC on Social Media**

Training, Language and Culture invites contributors and readers to join our social media platforms posting journal news, content reviews and valuable information to keep you up-to-date on the various aspects of journal operations and research publication. For content in Russian, subscribe to our Dzen channel at <https://dzen.ru/tlcjournal>. For content in English, subscribe to our Telegram channel at <https://t.me/tlcjournal>.

### **TLC Licensing Terms**

TLC would like to remind its contributors that content published up to and including Issue no. 2 2022 is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which allows unrestricted use of works, including for commercial purposes, subject to attribution. This means that people can share the material (copy and redistribute in any medium or format), as well as adapt it (remix, transform, and build upon the material) for any purpose, even commercially, as long as they give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as the license terms are being followed. For more information please read the [summary of the CC BY license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) at Creative Commons.

TRAINING, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Published by  
Federal State Autonomous Educational Institution of Higher Education  
Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University)  
17923, GSP117198, Moscow, Russia, 6 Miklukho-Maklay Str.  
[tlcjournal@rudn.ru](mailto:tlcjournal@rudn.ru)  
<https://rudn.tlcjournal.org>





March 2023

ISSN 2520-2073 (Print)

ISSN 2521-442X (Online)

Volume 7 Issue 1

doi: [10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1](https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-1)

Quarterly journal published by

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University)