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Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen
Department of English Studies

Издателство Асеневци

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PREFACE

The third issue of volume 11 of *Studies in Linguistics, Culture, and FLT* for 2023 consists of studies addressing different aspects of English Studies in general as well as FLT. The studies offer a plethora of research based on broad international experience.

The issue opens up with a paper in the field of methods of teaching English that deals with lesson observation and the challenges trainee-teachers face in grasping and using not only the terminology related with the process of lesson presentation, but also in recognizing the teaching techniques and interpreting teacher's gestures and behaviour in terms of ELT theory. The study also reports some problems encountered in perceiving the lesson as a coherent entity leading to a particular goal as well as in understanding the logic of its organisation. As concluded by Irina Ivanova, all these could be related on the one hand to insufficient theoretical knowledge, while on the other, to fossilized outdated teaching methods widely spread in Bulgarian state schools which hinder the understanding of more contemporary practices and lead to them being perceived as strange or inappropriate by trainee-teachers.

A paper by Anzela Nikolovska, Mira Bekar and Zorica Trajkova Strezovska with focus on the development of language competencies of trainee-teachers shares the results of a study conducted in a North Macedonian university. The criteria used to assess whether or not there was any progress as a result of formative feedback and assessment training were fluency, accuracy, interaction, stimulating the development of ideas, and addressing audiences. The scholars used two questionnaires to explore other aspects, such as: a) the effects of formative feedback on students' language competences and teaching skills; b) the effects of formative assessment training on students' peer- and self-assessment skills; and c) the professional and personal benefits of formative assessment training for students. The research showed that formative assessment has positive effect on trainee-teachers' language competences and teaching skills, especially in relation to their awareness of the complexity of ETP competences and the skills for tackling various classroom, assessment and material design challenges.

There are two more papers in the field of FLT that focus on online teaching and digital competences respectively. The former, "The present state of online teaching of general education courses in terms of instructors' and students' experiences, needs, and challenges" by Atipat Boonmoh and Thidaporn Jumpakate shares the experience of both teachers and students in Thailand. Using online questionnaires and interviews the scholars explore various aspects of online teaching and the challenges it poses from the perspective of both students and teachers. Some of the conclusions reached by the researchers show that both the instructors and students are familiar with online teaching and online learning and share positive attitudes towards online learning as it helps them to be time efficient and reduce the expenses related to transportation. Both students and instructors from the study agree that online communication and intercultural communication skills are essential in online learning with some students pointing out that they lacked these skills as well as the so-called netiquette. In some cases, proficiency in English is also reported as a challenge. The general conclusion reached is that there should be more workshops, seminars and general classes in improving digital competences and online presentation skills for both parties concerned.

In "A review of studies on digital competence in teaching English as a foreign language" Tuğba Yalçin and Elif Bozyiğit use a criteria-based review approach to study the research published in notable journals between 2017 and 2022 in order to analyse the way the integration of digital tools in the teaching and learning process was reflected in the pertinent research area. Thus, 24 publications have been analysed in terms of: a) article distribution into years and according to the contexts, b) target groups as participants in the studies, c) focal points of the relevant research, d) methodological tendencies in the studies and e) implications drawn from studies. It has been concluded that digital competence needs to be inspected from different perspectives relating it to psychological constraints.

A paper by Mozaffor Hossain and Rakib Al Hasan shares Bangladeshi experience in the use of educational technology (EdTech) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Applying a mixed-method approach the scholars interviewed and surveyed 100 undergraduate students from 19 different private and public universities and colleges of Bangladesh. The results show that almost all the participants have an idea of what EdTech is, however, as a result of insufficient support and improper environment, they cannot use it efficiently. Still, provided they are granted sufficient support, learners are interested in using EdTech in EFL.

The issue continues with a paper by Sreelakshmi K P in the field of literary food studies with focus on commensality, i.e. the act of eating together, and the way food and the rituals associated with its preparation and serving reflect the patriarchal structure of Igbo tribal community as presented in Chinua Achebe's *Things fall apart.* The author sets off with the claim that food is a mosaic system of signs symbolising diasporic, class, caste, racial, and gender relations. Thus, the author shows how different types of food and the order they are served reflect the male dominance in Igbo tribal community and the fact that the role and significance of women in society are not acknowledged; they are perceived simply as child bearers and servants looking after the needs of their husbands.

In "From Reel to Reality: Exploring the Notion of Objectivity and Media Ethics through the Film 'New Delhi Times'" Ravi Chaturvedi and Ashish Verma analyse the traditional construction of objectivity in news reporting and reflect on the "desensitization of media professionals towards tragedies" and "the role of a journalist as a detached observer or someone who bears the obligation of unravelling truth behind the incident". Various excerpts from the movie are used to substantiate the claims made by the two scholars and show the newspaper producing reality through the prism of this visual genre.

Using examples from the Arab version of the popular kid's movie *Shark Tale* Rozzan Yassin, Abdulazeez Jaradat and Ahmad S Haider analyse the way puns in the movie have been translated into Arabic. The authors refer to Aleksandrova's (2019) taxonomy, "which treats pun translation as a cognitive game in the translator's mind". Some of the findings in the study show that as a result of the cultural specificity of the puns in most of the cases, the translators in Arabic resorted to No Translation and thereby ignored the linguistic host of the pun, thus losing some of the ideas carried by it.

Karina Al Oteibi, Ahmad S Haider, and Hadeel Al Saed analyse the way *Al Jazeera* paratextually reframed the coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian war in *The Atlantic* and *Foreign Affairs*. The paper applies the narrative theory of Baker and analyses the parts of the articles in English which have been paratextually reframed by *Al Jazeera*. The analysis shows that the paratextual framing strategies utilized by *Al Jazeera* to reframe the Russian-Ukrainian War include titles, subheadings, introductions, and footnotes, thus creating sometimes different views of the same story through translation. These new versions of the event can naturally affect the way the target audience perceives the conflict.

"Mindsets and irreconcilable positions: A linguistic representation of Corona 19 social fractures" by Cristina Silvia Vâlcea looks into the discursive practices used to build the arguments surrounding the Covid-19 pandemics and the ideas, developed into versions of reality by the various groups involved in the debate whether or not Covid 19 was truly a phenomenon to be feared. The focus is on the persuasive strategies employed in the discourse of the supporters of each point of view along with the address formulas and other means used to prove one's point of view, while disproving the other's. The article postulates that "different interpretations of reality might at times be simply the result of a different reading of reality, starting from the same data, but relying on personal and group beliefs that build on previous conceptions and representations of authority, medicine, and trust".

In her analysis of the New Year's addresses of the presidents of Bulgaria, Austria and Türkiye, Silvia Dimitrova looks into the similarities and differences in the speeches of the three presidents in terms of topics and expressions used. Using cross-linguistic critical analysis, the author "attempts to reveal both how the political background of the presidents is reflected in their speeches and how the different scope of powers these presidents possess influences the choice of topics and their linguistic means of expression". The conclusions reached show that the political backgrounds do affect the choice of topics and the language used by each of the presidents when trying to convey their message to the members of the society they serve.

The issue ends with a book review by Desislava Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva. *Linguistic representations of contested identities in the media: The special case of South-Eastern Europeans as 'Others' in the British press* written by Mihaela Culea in 2016 dwells on the problematic areas of changing identities and perceptions of those who are different from us with the focus on (a) minority culture(s), i.e. Romanian, Greek, and partially Bulgarian. Thus, the book provides yet another research on the subject of the ethnic Other. However, the fact that the author has focused on the presentation of cultures that are less known in the Western world and such that are usually subjected to various, in most cases wrong, stereotypes, makes the research stand out. The book *Linguistic representations of contested identities in the media: The special case of South-Eastern Europeans as 'Others' in the British press* successively explores the issues of European identity, Otherness, the existing dichotomy Centre – Periphery, and the way these are presented in the media through the employment of various metaphors, stereotypes and by ways of specific reporting and subjectivity, among others. It is truly an interesting and recommendable read especially for people working in the fields of cultural studies as well as media studies as it provides the perspective of a minority culture being reported on by a majority one.

LESSON OBSERVATION: THE CHALLENGE OF SEEING BEYOND OBSERVABLE BEHAVIOURS

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Abstract: *The article focuses on the problems which trainee teachers face in reflecting on observed lessons taught by experienced teachers. Observing and discussing live and recorded lessons is part of a practical module in a Bulgarian state university run together with a course in ELT methodology, with the aim of helping trainee-teachers link theory to practice in preparation for their school-based internship. The discussion is based on the results of 74 BA and MA trainee-teachers' written assignments of a whole video lesson observation (with the task of identifying its stages, procedures, and the rationale behind them), and a follow-up collective feedback aimed at revealing the sources of identified problems. A checklist including targeted observation foci was used for collecting quantitative data related to the elements of the lesson which were identified and correctly interpreted by the participants. Data analysis revealed no significant differences between the results of BA and MA trainees, who experienced similar difficulties in recognizing teaching techniques and interpreting teacher's actions in terms of ELT theory, perceiving the lesson as a coherent entity, and understanding the logic of its organisation. The post observation feedback provided some insights into the problems, suggesting that they might stem from insufficient theoretical preparation and the lasting impact of trainees' native educational culture with its traditional models of teaching; factors which might lead to conscious rejection of practices perceived as strange or inappropriate for the local teaching context. The implications of the study are linked to possible measures for overcoming the challenges and enhancing trainees' development of professional expertise.*

Keywords: *lesson observation, trainees, challenges, interpretation, observed behaviours*

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Introduction

Professional expertise in the field of foreign language teaching can be acquired in different ways depending on a number of factors, such as the options for teacher training available to candidates, educational traditions in a country, culture-specific preferences, locally established or adopted theories and ideas about teaching and learning, identified learner needs, and personal preferences. Teacher learning, which is a prerequisite for developing expertise, is nowadays seen as a socialization into the professional thinking and practices of a community of practice (Tsui, 2009), people who share common concerns, problems, interests and goals. Unlike traditional models for acquiring professional expertise, the craft, applied science, and reflective models (Wallace, 1991), modern conceptualizations of professionalism are related to constructing new knowledge and theory through participating in specific social contexts and engaging in particular types of activities and processes (Burns & Richards, 2009). Becoming part of such contexts, integrating within them and understanding the principles they follow and the values they subscribe by, is of primary importance for novice teachers.

Traditionally, one of the activities which precede novice teachers' immersion into the context of their future work is lesson observation. Observing a dynamic phenomenon, such as a classroom at work led by an expert professional, and trying to decipher his or her actions, recognise ideas, approaches and techniques which are studied in the methodology course, is the first step to socialization into the profession. The need to observe teachers in action before attempting to teach arises from the nature of the teaching profession and the high risks and costs involved in it. It also stems from the need to bridge the gap between theory and practice in pre-service teacher education. At the beginning of the training process, observation of experienced teachers both on video recordings in real classrooms serves mainly as a source of discussion and visual support for the theoretical input. However, this presumably 'safe' stage of teacher training poses unexpected and often under-researched challenges, which if neglected can lead to serious problems and even failures in trainees' professional realization and further development. The present article seeks to contribute to the research on the role of lesson observation by focusing on trainees' ability to make sense of observed behaviours in best practices for teaching ELT captured in a video lesson. The study explores different challenges in observation related to identifying and interpreting lesson elements and aspects of teaching, and suggests possible reasons for their occurrence.

Literature review

There is abundant research on observation, especially on the types and purposes of observation. Hopkins (2002) differentiates four categories of observation:

open, focused, structured and systematic. According to Flick (1998), it can be structured and systematic, or unstructured and unsystematic; participant or non-participant; overt or covert; in natural settings or in unnatural settings; self-observation or observation of others. Irrespective of its type, however, lesson observation enables teacher trainees to gain data and learn directly from what they see – the here-and-now context of the lesson. It is a rich source of authentic information about the teacher's and learners' behaviour in class, the language they use, the activities and procedures, and the way they are organized to make the lesson a coherent and meaningful entity which provides conditions for student learning.

Traditionally, the purposes of lesson observation are conceived within the established frameworks for acquiring professional expertise, such as Wallace's (1991) *craft*, *applied science* and *reflective models*. In the *craft model*, in which trainees observe and imitate an experienced teacher under whose supervision they work, observation provides an option to see what the teacher does, without necessarily understanding the reason behind teachers' actions and decisions. Observing lessons within the frame of this model, trainees diligently describe what they see in terms of teacher and learners' behaviours and language, so that they can be later reproduced in a similar context. Unfortunately, this leads to uncritical repetition of teaching acts and behaviours, and eventually to reproducing traditional ways of teaching, thus cancelling any options for innovation and change. The *applied science model* in observation overcomes the craft model's disregard of research as natural source of language teaching and learning theories and practical ideas. In it trainees, while observing, have to recognise the ideas, techniques and behaviours from the theoretical research-based course and see the rationale for their use in the lesson, a task which is difficult without the help of an instructor. The *reflective model* requires observers to think back to what they have seen in class, and assess it through the prism of their received knowledge about teaching and their experience as language learners.

More recently, Diaz Maggioli (2012) identified four traditions in teachers' professional preparation, calling them *look-and-learn*, *read-and-learn*, *think-and-learn*, and *participate and learn*. The first three of them are not very different from Wallace's *craft*, *applied science* and *reflective* models. The fourth tradition, *participate and learn* has a lot in common with the sociocultural turn described by Tsui (2009), with its origin in the constructivist philosophy of *education through support* provided by more knowledgeable individuals while participating in social activities. This approach involves live lesson or video observations and discussion, learning about theories, key concepts and principles in language teaching and learning, micro-teaching, and feedback, all exercised as a cycle of activities rather than single experiences, so that learning can take place.

At the same time, Kumaravadivelu (2012) in his book *Language teacher education for a global society: a modular model for knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing and seeing*, proposed a new model of language teacher education which is "cyclical, process-based, transformation-oriented, and holistic, an alternative to current traditional linear, product-based, transmission-oriented, discrete courses" (ibid., pp. ix–x). His model is organized around teachers' strategic thinking, and is based on three main principles: particularity, practicality, and possibility, emphasizing local needs and lived experiences understood through observing teaching, reflection-on-action, and theorising teachers' own practice. Kumaravadivelu's modular approach to language teacher education integrates five modules: *knowing*, *analyzing*, *recognizing*, *doing*, and *seeing*. *Knowing* is the dynamic process of building professional, procedural and personal knowledge rather than mastery of previously accumulated, static knowledge. *Analyzing* is linked to teachers' understanding of learner needs, motivation, and autonomy in a globalized world. *Recognizing* focuses on the identities, beliefs, and value systems that form the 'teaching self' a teacher brings to the classroom which determines their teaching behavior and shapes learning outcomes. *Doing* is the process of becoming an effective language teacher who is open to the transformation from "traditional" language teacher to "critical" language teacher, one who can teach learners to communicate in a globalized world (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 78). The last module of the model, *seeing* bears particular relevance to the present discussion. It looks at classroom activities from the teachers', learners', and observers' points of view, but goes beyond the visible phenomena. The three types of seeing are: *seeing-in* – looking at what is already there; *seeing-as* – connecting and comparing past experiences, images, and actions with new ones, and *seeing-that* – applying relevant knowledge as a tool to understanding what is seen. This understanding is important for reducing the inherent subjectivity of observers' interpretation of what they see, as "we often observe what we want to see" (Wragg, 1999, p. vii).

As the overview of the major theories in teacher professional preparation shows, observation is part of any significant modern teacher education paradigm. In order to facilitate trainees in recognising and understanding processes in class, teacher trainers use what Lieberman (2009) calls "lesson study", involving learners in discussion and analysis of observed lessons. An important presumption, that trainees have to be aware of in lesson observation, is that "… classroom teaching is perhaps the most complex, most challenging, and most demanding, subtle, nuanced, and frightening activity that our species has ever invented" (Shulman, 2004, p. 258). Kincheloe (2004) suggested that a checklist approach to observation, which is typically used in competency-based models for assessing teacher effectiveness, would greatly reduce the complex holistic phenomenon of a lesson to a simple sequence of activities and techniques. Still, targeted training in perception is needed to help direct trainees' attention to the significant classroom events and situations that are relevant to the discussion and learning points (Santagata, 2009; Santagata & Angelici, 2010).

Blomberg et al. (2011) point out that one of the key aims of university-based teacher education should be to systematically foster the development of professional vision, which is a knowledge-guided process (Palmeri, Wong & Gauthier, 2004) that draws on both generic knowledge and domain-specific knowledge. Professional vision includes two main subprocesses: noticing and knowledge-based reasoning (Sherin, 2001, 2007; Sherin & Russ, 2015). Noticing refers to selective attention to the significant components of teaching and learning in the complex classroom environment which is knowledge-guided. Knowledge-based reasoning refers to the ability to process and interpret the noticed classroom events based on trainees' professional knowledge about teaching and learning (Borko, 2004). Sherin and van Es (2009) differentiate among three levels of knowledge-based reasoning: (1) description: the ability to identify, differentiate, and classify teaching and learning components; (2) explanation: the ability to link the observed classroom situation to professional knowledge; and (3) prediction: the ability to forecast learning-related consequences based on professional knowledge. The development of professional vision could be done through observing live and video lessons, or fragments of lessons, which have long been known to effectively activate observers' knowledge (Ellis, 1986; Ramani, 1987; Goldman, Pea, Barron & Denny, 2007).

More recently, a number of studies and research projects provided comprehensive reviews of different aspects of digital video use in the field of language teacher education (Cherrington & Loveridge, 2014; Calandra et al., 2018; Hockly, 2018; Major & Watson, 2018; Mann et al., 2019; Huttner, 2019). The reason for the increased integration of video resources in teacher education lies in the specific affordances they offer, such as the provision of a lasting record of teaching practice, allowing repeated viewing, selection of focus, and reduced demands of remembering the observed lesson (Huttner, 2019). In addition to this, "digital video is versatile: it allows more possibilities for context-sensitive noticing, reflection, editing, sharing, repackaging and tagging, especially in combination with screencapture software" (Mann et al., 2019, p. 7).

There are abundant videos for teacher training, such as *Shaping the Way We Teach English: Successful Practices Around the World*, or the DVDs, which are part of teacher training guides, e.g. Scrivener's *Learning Teaching* (2011), or Harmer's *The Practice of Teaching English* (2015), to mention just a few of these widely used resources. These video materials provide both subject specific and generic aspects of instruction and thus have the potential to activate knowledge of both these aspects. The digitalization of all spheres of education allowed for the creation of collections of good practices which demonstrate how video is currently used in language teacher education. An example of such collection is the *Video in Language Teacher Education* project, funded by the British Council ELT Research Partnership Awards Scheme, and its two outputs: the ViLTE Project website, which contains useful information, vignettes, transcripts of interviews, links, research team profiles, and the ViLTE Video case studies (see Mann et al., 2019).

While broadening trainees' horizons by exposing them to various teaching and learning contexts, such video materials can pose challenges due to the extent of their difference from trainees' native educational milieu, and thus potentially lead to misinterpretation of teachers' behaviours, intentions and decisions. In this line of argumentation, the best video materials would be the ones learners can recognise and identify with (Brophy, 2004). Moreover, exposure to video materials which reflect local contexts is easily provided by the ease with which lessons or fragments of teaching can be recorded even with a mobile phone, provided the ethical conditions of filming students are observed (Schuck & Kearney, 2006). These video materials, together with live lesson observation can easily trigger trainees' recall of their previous experience of teaching and learning, and activate their preliminary knowledge and expectations about the nature of teaching. This context-specific pre-training knowledge, in the form of existing conceptual schemata or mental constructs, serves as a foundation for developing trainees' professional vision. However, it can come into conflict with new ideas and practices seen in samples of teaching from different contexts, especially if they are misunderstood due to lack of experience. In outlining the differences between novice and expert teachers, Blomberg et al. (2014) mention that novice teachers' reflections on the observed are frequently overly judgmental and focus on descriptions, rather than abstractions and interpretations which integrate prior knowledge. One of the aims of the present study would be investigate if this trend is observed in our data.

The study

The study whose results are discussed in this article is based on a whole lesson observation which was assigned to the trainees as a final task in the course of lesson observation. Prior to this final assignment, trainees had been involved in observation sessions usually presented as structured and guided activities, divided into separate observation tasks with a clear goal and instructions for the observers. Video fragments and lessons were watched more than once when necessary, with the instructor helping trainees in their noticing and reflection on the targeted items. In pre-planned observation visits to schools, the focus of the observation is usually decided on in advance and negotiated with the teacher. In some sessions, however the choice of what to focus on was left to the trainees. Giving them freedom in what to observe can lead to important insights about the elements of teaching which they find salient and important. For their final assignment, all trainees had to watch the same lesson – a recording of Lindsay Warwick's lesson (from J. Scrivener's book *Learning Teaching* supplementary DVD). They had to identify and name the lesson stages, to describe the procedures and the rationale behind them, and to formulate the lesson's overall aims. In their work they had to demonstrate an ability to transfer the acquired theoretical knowledge and apply it to the concrete context of the observed lesson.

Participants

The study, which was held in the academic year 2021/22, included 74 university students (28 BA and 46 MA) enrolled in a teacher training module at a state Bulgarian university. The module is optional for BA students, but is traditionally chosen by most of them, due to the possibility of immediate employment as teachers of English upon their graduation. The optional module is the same for the MA students of English studies, and has exactly the same number of hours for each discipline. The MA students in the Pedagogy of foreign language teaching have more specialized subjects related to acquiring a teaching qualification, but the hours for observation are the same as in the optional module for the other participants. The exact number of trainees was divided into three groups as follows:

- 28 BA students of English studies and Applied linguistics studying for a teaching qualification. None of them had any previous teaching experience by the time of the study;
- 31 MA students (Pedagogy of foreign language teaching), 7 of which with previous teaching experience as teachers of English;
- 15 MA students (English studies – Linguistics and translation, and English for business and tourism) with an optional module in teaching qualification, 5 of which with previous teaching experience as teachers of English.

All 12 students who had already had some teaching experience by the time of the study worked as substitute teachers or were in temporary employment, usually in the villages or small towns they lived in.

Research questions

The analysis of students' assignments was meant to provide answers to the following research questions:

- Can trainees identify the main stages in the lesson, the transitions between the stages, and the reason behind organising the stages in a particular way?

• Can trainees identify and name specific activities and techniques (e.g. substitution drills, concept checking questions, controlled practice), studied in the methodology course and previously focused on in isolation?

• Can trainees see the lesson as a coherent whole consisting of a series of activities working towards achieving common aims?

• What are the main difficulties trainees experience in "seeing beyond" the surface of observable behaviours, and what might be the reason for them?

• Is previous teaching experience a factor in the particular tasks achievement?

Methodology

The obtained data, consisting of trainees' written observation records were processed for identifying trainees' challenges in recognizing and understanding key elements in the lesson, and the logic of the lesson development as a whole. The selected items present aspects of teaching which are explicitly observable in the video and which have been discussed in the lectures and seminars in methodology, as well as being studied in isolation as teaching techniques in both video clips and live lessons at school. For the purposes of clarity and establishing a quantitative dimension of student performance, a checklist was devised, which included the main foci of observation – the items which tap trainees' knowledge-based reasoning (Blomberg et al., 2011). The numbers were calculated depending on whether trainees have mentioned the respective item in their description of the lesson or not, and whether they have commented on it and interpreted it correctly, in line with the input they have received in the methodology course. The data indicate students' task achievement for each category in per cent (Table 1), as well as the mean and the standard deviation in the respondents' data (Table 2). The mean as an indicator of the typical value in each category of the assignment was used as a yardstick for all observations, and the standard deviation indicated how far trainees' individual responses deviated from the mean.

Results

Table 1 below presents the quantitative results of analyzing trainees' assignments in the format of the checklist used for their identification. The figures indicate the percentage of BA and MA respondents who identified and correctly interpreted the respective element of the lesson. For example, all 28 BA students managed to identify the introductory stage of the lesson and correctly interpret its main aim to introduce the topic of the lesson. However, the first pre-listening stage was identified by 61% of the trainees, and only 54% of them understood the role of the focus questions based on a picture.

Table 1.
BA and MA respondents' data from the checklist of lesson elements in per cent

Lesson elements identified and correctly interpreted by trainees	BA - identified	BA – correctly interpreted	MA - identified	MA – correctly interpreted
Lesson stages and their aims:				
Introduction – introducing the topic of the lesson	100%	100%	98%	98%
Pre-listening – activating background knowledge through focus questions based on a picture	61%	54%	65%	59%
Pre-listening – introducing key vocabulary (through realia, examples, personal anecdote), and checking understanding	89%	75%	87%	70%
Listening for gist – checked through the focus questions	96%	71%	91%	87%
Listening for detail – checked through True/False activity	100%	93%	96%	87%
Post-listening – comprehension questions; transition to the key grammar structure	89%	71%	91%	87%
Clarification of grammar – focus on meaning, form and use	82%	71%	87%	72%
Restricted practice 1 – focus on the form – Drilling with increasing level of difficulty	71%	68%	65%	57%
Restricted practice 2 – focus on the meaning – Choose the sentences that is true for you	79%	71%	76%	65%
Restricted practice 3 – gap filling	100%	89%	87%	65%
Restricted practice 4 – Change the sentences so they are true for you	96%	71%	80%	70%
Communicative activity – making difficult decisions	68%	54%	65%	54%
Feedback, homework and end of the lesson	100%	100%	98%	96%
Teaching techniques and their aims:				
Focus questions	54%	46%	54%	43%

Lesson elements identified and correctly interpreted by trainees	BA - identified	BA – correctly interpreted	MA - identified	MA – correctly interpreted
Modeling pronunciation, repetition	71%	61%	87%	78%
Substitution drills	57%	50%	87%	83%
Concept check questions	36%	36%	50%	48%
Monitoring	71%	68%	76%	72%
Gestures and finger use	96%	71%	87%	67%
Pair work check	61%	46%	70%	65%
Eliciting	43%	43%	63%	54%
Error correction	82%	71%	76%	65%
Feedback	54%	50%	61%	57%
Praise	36%	32%	50%	46%
Lesson as a coherent whole – the logic of sequencing stages and activities	43%	36%	43%	41%

Table 2.

Mean and standard deviation in the respondents' data

	Mean		Standard deviation	
	Identified items	Correctly interpreted items	Identified items	Correctly interpreted items
BA trainees				
Lesson stages and their aims	87	76	13.62	15.19
Teaching techniques and their aims	60.09	52.18	18.83	13.70
Overall BA	73.4	63.92	21.46	19.19
MA trainees				
Lesson stages and their aims	83.54	74.38	12.32	14.94
Teaching techniques and their aims	69.18	61.64	14.55	13.19
Overall MA	75.6	67.44	16.17	15.96

Discussion

The initial observation of the figures in Table 1 and Table 2 reveal three significant trends which are relatively consistent throughout all items in the checklist.

The first trend is that the percentages of correctly indentified and interpreted items are relatively uniform among BA and MA students, which is not surprising, bearing in mind that the theoretical course, the instruction practices and the academic hours allotted for observation in both BA and MA programmes are the same. The overall values for the mean and standard deviation in BA and MA data do not show significant differences. The same refers to the coefficient of variation which is consistently low for the different sets of data – 0.29 for identified items and 0.30 for their interpretation in BA group, and slightly lower at 0.21 for identified, and 0.24 for interpreted items in the MA group. This suggests that MA trainees have slightly better results, although the difference with BA trainees' achievement is not significant. The fact that 12 of the MA trainees had had some previous teaching experience prior to their studies at university, did not make any significant changes to the results. A possible reason for this is that trainees' teaching experience had taken place in contexts in which traditional models of teaching, such as Grammar translation, were prevalent, and they didn't have exposure to newer ideas and ways of teaching.

The second trend emerging from that data is the decreased percentage for the correct interpretation of the target items compared to their identification. This means that trainees could notice and identify observable phenomena, but found it more difficult to move beyond description and interpret the target items' significance in isolation, and as part of a whole entity that the lesson is. This finding is in line with Blomberg et al. (2014), who claim that novice teachers' reflections on the observed tend to focus on descriptions, rather than abstractions and interpretations which integrate prior knowledge. This also explains some trainees' failure to interpret teacher's actions in terms of the theory studied in the methodology course. Although the course in lesson observation ran simultaneously with the course in ELT methodology, trainees found it difficult to relate the theoretical ideas with their practical implementation, especially in contexts different from the ones they had previously experienced as language learners in Bulgaria. As Huttner points out, "background knowledge and experience create 'lenses' through which teaching performances are viewed, specific aspects noticed and interpreted" (Huttner, 2019, p. 479). Our data suggest that this happens even after different activities, techniques and teacher behaviours were observed and discussed in isolation in the training sessions, raising the question whether a single exposure to a teaching technique and its discussion is enough to make it part of trainees' received knowledge about teaching.

The third trend, which is clearly visible in Table 2 in the comparison of mean values for BA and MA trainees, is that both groups had more challenges in identifying and correctly interpreting the role of specific teaching techniques in comparison to identifying and interpreting the stages of the lesson. Thus, the means for BA trainees are 87 and 76 for identifying and interpreting stages vs. 60.09 and 52.18 for techniques. For MA trainees these values are 83.54 and 74.38 for stages, vs. 69.18, and 61.64 for techniques, respectively. As it was already mentioned, prior to the assignment teaching techniques were mainly focused on in isolation, both in theory and in practical examples provided through video clips from various contexts around the world, rather than through live demonstration in Bulgarian classrooms. In local context of teacher training, live school-based observations have more general aims, and instead of focusing on different elements or techniques in teaching, they "suggest a holistic view of the lesson and aim to develop trainees' ability to summarise and comment on the lesson as a coherent structure, paying attention not only to its integral parts, but also to its effectiveness as a whole" (Ivanova & Velikova, 2012, p. 247). This suggests that if trainees are deprived of the opportunity to observe the use of these techniques in their local context, they might not recognise them and correctly interpret their role in a different educational context, such as the small private language class in the UK observed for the assignment.

The main challenges identified through data analysis could also be grouped into three broad categories which are closely interrelated:

The first challenge is related to **interpreting teacher's actions in terms of the theory studied in the methodology course.** In addition to being an important tool for bridging the gap between theory and practice in teacher training courses, evidence from observation "has invariably been used to inform current conceptualisations of what makes for effective teaching and learning along with providing the basis on which judgements about the performance and competence of teachers are made" (O'Leary, 2012). Understanding this evidence, more specifically the logic behind teacher's and learners' observed behaviours, turned out to be a major challenge – the mean for trainees' overall achievement in this category is 63.92 for BA and 67.44 for MA respectively, both figures being lower than the ones for identifying lesson elements (73.4 for BA and 75.6 for MA). As it was already pointed out, trainees' inability to make conceptualizations and judgements is exacerbated when teacher and student observed behaviours in the lesson differ substantially from the common practices and the roles typically enacted by teachers and learners in Bulgarian educational contexts. This increases the importance of the theoretical input in which different lesson elements are discussed, leading to a deeper understanding of teaching as a purposeful activity aimed at achieving clear pre-planned learning outcomes. In supervised training sessions, such as seminars in lesson observation, trainees are constantly reminded of the need to reflect on what they see in terms of what they have already studied in the theoretical course. However, when they work on their own on assignments, some of them fail to make this back-reference, offering instead superficial, often naïve descriptions or commentaries, such as: "…the teacher tried to make the lesson more entertaining by using games and role plays", where the purpose of the activity was to use a variety of techniques to pre-teach key vocabulary; or "the teacher let students speak to see what they think about the topic", instead of the real purpose of the activity, which was personalisation – giving students the chance to use the new language to talk about themselves.

The second challenge is in **perceiving the lesson as a coherent entity consisting of logically sequenced stages.** As it was already pointed out, trainees' written accounts of the observed lesson were more descriptive than interpretive. Trainees tended to describe the sequence of activities in a great detail, often using general or vague language instead of special terminology. This preoccupation with detail did not allow trainees to penetrate beyond the surface of observed behaviours and see the lesson as a coherent whole with pre-defined teaching and learning aims. Reading some of their accounts created an impression of an incoherent compilation of random actions with no clear purpose. The failure to perceive the lesson coherence is closely related to difficulties in identifying the stages of the lesson and the logic of their sequencing, e.g. seeing how a stage or activity prepares for, or leads to the next one, going from simple to complex, grading activities in terms of difficulty, providing variety or a change of focus. The most challenging for the trainees turned out to be the grammar practice part of the lesson with its carefully staged activities, evolving from strictly controlled drilling to a personalized communicative activity. The data show that the overall score of BA and MA trainees for perceiving the lesson as a coherent entity is exactly the same – 43%, with MA trainees having slightly higher score for understanding the nature of lesson coherence – 41%, compared to 32% of BA. One possible reason for this could be that all 12 trainees with some previous teaching experience were from the MA group. However, the fact that less than half of all respondents commented of this aspect of the assignment shows that this area of professional knowledge needs further work based on reflection on practical examples of complete teaching events, such as whole lessons, rather than isolated segments which illustrate single activities and techniques.

Among the lesson stages which were easily identified and interpreted by both groups of trainees were the beginning and the closing stages of the lesson, the second listening – for detail, and the fill-in-the-gaps controlled practice sub-stage. However, in these stages too, in line with the pervasive trend for more problems in correctly interpreting the meaning of the observed actions, the trainees recognized the type of the activity, e.g. gap-filling, sentence completion, drill, etc, but not the logic of sequencing the stages. In the case of grammar practice, it was increasing the challenge of the activity by using simple substitution of the verb form before substitution with a tense change, or moving from a grammar exercise with a single focus – 'fill in the gap with the correct verb form', to the more complex one – 'fill in the gap and then change the sentence so that it is true for you'. Only a few students mentioned how the controlled practice activities build up to the freer communicative task with elements of personalization. The other activity, which caused problems to most trainees, in addition to the communicative one near the end, was the pre-listening at the beginning of the lesson, which aimed to activate students' background knowledge through focus questions based on a picture. In it, few trainees identified the true purpose of the focus questions, and even fewer noticed that the same questions were used later in the lesson to check the results of the gist listening.

The third type of difficulty consisted in **recognizing teaching techniques and the reasons for their use.** In the methodology course trainees were introduced to a number of teaching techniques and approaches which are not widely used in Bulgarian educational contexts. These involve: a variety of drills, concept checking questions, different ways of presenting the meaning of vocabulary or grammar items, skimming and scanning in reading, situational presentation, test-teach-test, personal anecdotes as a way of contextualising language items, timelines, using fingers and gestures, different ways of monitoring, use of pair work for checking answers prior to answering teacher's questions, etc. As indicated in the checklist in Table 1, a lot of these techniques were targeted in the assigned observation. However, data analysis showed that instead of using the correct terms for these items, trainees tended to use general words, such as *exercises* or *tasks*, *games*, *stories*, *examples*, etc. The failure to recognise the studied techniques in the teacher's behaviour almost always entailed misunderstanding of the rationale for their use. The data from the checklist show that trainees did not seem to have difficulties with identifying certain features, such as gestures and finger use, and error correction (96 and 82% for BA trainees), modeling pronunciation and substitution drills (87% for MA trainees for both). However, other feature posed more challenges: concept check questions and praise being the lowest in score (36% for both for BA trainees, 50% for both for MA trainees). Other challenging elements include eliciting techniques (43% for BA trainees), focus questions (with 50% for both groups), and feedback (54 and 61% for BA and MA respectively). Our data also suggest that a failure to recognise a technique results in a failure to interpret its meaning, e.g. the same values for both identification and correct interpretation for concept check questions and eliciting (36 and 43 for BA trainees respectively for recognizing the feature and for interpreting its role in the lesson). Describing teacher's behaviors some trainees failed to understand their intention, e.g. a trainee wrote: "The teacher uses a lot of gestures and even her fingers to attract students' attention and make the lesson more lively", while the purpose for using gestures really was to supplement verbal instructions, and to clarify time reference in explaining past simple tense used for hypothetical events in second conditional. Finger use for indicating the relevant element in a structure was also largely misunderstood by some trainees. Among other examples of misunderstanding is the use of focus questions to channel students' attention, activate their mental schemata and elicit predictions before the listening stage. Only 46% of BA trainees and 43% of MA mentioned some of these functions. Error correction also posed difficulties, when it was delayed rather than on-the-spot, the type of correction trainees typically observe in Bulgarian classrooms. Data suggest that if certain behaviours are perceived as strange or unusual, e.g.

excessive use of gestures, squatting while monitoring, pervasive pair and group work, students' drilling, etc., they are less likely to be identified and interpreted adequately. What is more, they are less likely to become part of trainee teachers' personal teaching repertoire.

Conclusion, implications and recommendation for supporting trainees

The present study aimed at revealing trainees' problems in observation which are not easily detectable in routine oral post-observation discussions. The study revealed that, when asked to describe the procedures in a lesson, trainees can produce detailed accounts which, however, are predominantly descriptive rather than being reflective, an observation which confirms previous research by Blomberg et al (2014).

The analysed data threw light on some context-specific trends, such as the similar results for BA and MA trainees when the course of tuition, instruction practices and the amount of exposure to observation are comparable. Our data also suggest that trainees have more difficulties in identifying and correctly interpreting specific teaching techniques than in identifying the stages of the lesson. However, correctly identified stages do not always mean that trainees perceive the lesson as a coherent entity consisting of logically sequenced stages.

Our findings imply that the reasons for the identified problems are multiple, and even an open discussion with the trainees cannot always shed light on the sources for the experienced challenges. Any attempt at addressing identified challenges and supporting trainees requires further research into the reasons for the difficulties. Among these reasons might be insufficient theoretical preparation – a lot of trainees rely only on the instruction received in lectures and seminars, avoiding or neglecting required readings from teacher training guides and research articles. Another reason could be the lasting impact of trainees' native educational culture with its traditional models of teaching, which might lead to conscious rejection of practices perceived as strange or inappropriate for our local teaching context.

One possible recommendation for teacher trainers would be to increase the exposure of trainees to good practices of English language teaching which extend beyond local contexts, supplemented by explicit discussion of their advantages over traditional, dated or unsupported by research local teaching practices. As Hennessy (2014) suggests, bringing videoed vignettes and interviews with teachers into training sessions can help break down the divide between 'foreign' and 'local'. This should be supported by suggestions for adapting and customising 'foreign' ways of teaching to local contexts as part of a consistent focus on the ways in which teaching ideas and models from internationally-accepted ELT courses can be adapted and used as sources for practical decisions in local contexts. University lecturers should work in close collaboration with local mentors who can demonstrate lesson models and techniques consistent with the ones promoted in the university methodology course.

Finally, one of the most important ways of supporting trainees in developing a professional vision and expertise is encouraging reflection on observed teaching, so that they find it easier to see beyond the surface of observable events and behaviours.

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THE IMPACT OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT ON DEVELOPING EFL STUDENT-TEACHERS' LANGUAGE COMPETENCES AS DOMAIN-SPECIFIC

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Abstract: *The paper reports on the outcomes of research carried out at a North Macedonian public university aimed at developing the language competences of prospective EFL teachers through formative assessment. For the study's purposes, a CEFR-based assessment tool was designed for teacher, peer and self-assessment of the ETP (English-for-teaching purposes) competences of fourth year student-teachers (n=15) micro-teaching lower year students. Fluency, accuracy, interaction, stimulating the development of ideas, and addressing audiences were the formative assessment criteria used to check if there was progress from the first to the third micro-teaching session as a result of formative feedback and assessment training. Additionally, two surveys for student-teachers and peer-assessors were used aimed at exploring: a) the effects of formative feedback on students' language competences and teaching skills; b) the effects of formative assessment training on students' peer- and self-assessment skills; and c) the professional and personal benefits of formative assessment training for students.*

Apart from many personal benefits from the project, findings revealed positive effects of formative assessment on students' language competences and teaching skills; specifically on the awareness of the complexity of ETP competences and the skills for tackling various classroom, assessment and material design challenges.

Keywords: *formative assessment, pre-service EFL teachers, language competences, English-for-teaching purposes, CEFR*

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Introduction

The trend for professionalization, standardization and quality assurance in English language teaching has been marked by a surge of interest in defining the knowledge base of English language teaching and the specifics that underlie the effective profiling of teacher expertise. Despite the fact that different components of teacher knowledge have been highlighted by different theoretical frameworks (Tsui, 2003), EFL teacher language proficiency has been widely recognized as a crucial component of teacher knowledge, especially for nonnative English-speaking teachers.

Notwithstanding the burgeoning interest in exploring and raising the level of language proficiency requisite for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), it has been noted that EFL learners worldwide fail to develop "a useable knowledge of English" (Wedell, 2011, as cited in Freeman et al., 2015, p. 129). The failure to ensure quality instruction has mainly been attributed to teachers' inadequate command of the target language (Freeman et al., 2015) which has been traced back to the fact that second language teacher education programs are not very successful at developing the language capacities of pre-service teachers necessary for effective teaching (Sešek, 2007; Ngyen & Hang, 2021). Therefore, awareness is increasingly being raised of the importance of improving the language development component of teacher education programs (Kahmi-Stein, 2009; Gu & Papageorgiu, 2016).

The relevance of this study is related to what Gallavan and Kottler (2009) emphasized, that if students have options and greater control over their own learning, then their motivation and commitment towards achieving success strengthens. Considering the potential of formative assessment to stimulate learning motivation and success, addressed in the next part of this paper, and in line with the findings of a needs-analysis study into the language needs of prospective and novice EFL teachers (Nikolovska, 2017), we designed the present study.

This small-scale research was carried out at a public university in the Republic of North Macedonia with the purpose of assessing and developing pre-service teachers' English-for-teaching purposes proficiency in an Assessment-for-Learning framework aligned with the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, 2018). This article explains the procedure of implementing a CEFR-informed assessment instrument which served as the basis for self-, peer- and teacher-assessment of pre-service English teachers' language competences needed for teaching English as a foreign language. Moreover, it casts light on the effects of formative assessment on student-teachers' classroom language proficiency (henceforth - English for-teaching-purposes - ETP) and teaching skills and on the effects of training the students in using the assessment scales.

Theoretical background

EFL teachers' language proficiency as domain-specific

English teacher language proficiency is a multifaceted construct which represents a crucial component of teacher expertise. Diverse conceptualizations of language proficiency which cast light on different aspects of this multidimensional construct have been proposed (Karas & Faez, 2020). According to a broadly accepted definition language proficiency is "what someone can do/knows in relation to the application of the subject in the real world" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 183).

Not only is the definition of language proficiency problematic, but the question of how teacher language proficiency should be developed and assessed has also been the grounds of debate among scholars. It has been argued that teachers need to reach a threshold level of proficiency in order to be able to teach effectively although this threshold level has not been clearly determined as it seems to be context-dependent.

Teachers' advanced general English proficiency has been perceived as an essential prerequisite for effective teaching and student learning (Cullen, 2002; Freeman et al., 2015; Richards et al., 2013). It has been found out that teachers' poor command of the target language is a serious obstacle to their ability to communicate content and manage classroom interaction (Sešek, 2007). In addition, teachers with lower language proficiency are more dependent on textbooks, less able to adapt teaching resources and to engage in improvisational teaching (Mitchell, 1988, as cited in Richards, 2017). Consequently, the insufficient target language proficiency largely undermines teachers' self-confidence and authority in the classroom (Cullen, 2002).

Another researched aspect is teacher preparedness in the domain of language proficiency reported as inadequate in a number of educational contexts (Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999; Peacock, 2009; Gu & Papageorgiu, 2016; Hadi, 2019). However, most studies do not mention the degree to which an advanced proficiency level is achieved. The inadequate language command of English language teachers may be attributed to the focus on general English proficiency and the lack of training in classroom English in pre-service teacher education (Sešek, 2007; Freeman et al., 2015; Richards, 2017).

It has been suggested that in order to be able to teach effectively, language teachers need to develop a range of specialist language skills in addition to their general or global language proficiency (Elder, 2001; Freeman et al., 2015). While general language proficiency entails what "normal language users might be expected to be able to do in the context of both formal and informal communication" (Elder, 2001, p. 152), the specialist language skills refer to specific metalinguistic terminology and discourse competences for effective delivery of classroom content such as command of directives, questioning techniques, rhetorical signaling devices and simplification strategies which are essential in communicating content and establishing classroom procedures (ibid.).

The present study contributes to the small body of research (Sešek, 2005, 2007; Richards, 2017; Freeman et al., 2015; Wang, 2021; Rütti-Joy, 2022) that takes an English for specific purposes (ESP) approach to researching EFL teacher language competences by conceptualizing them as domain-specific, i.e. in keeping with the specificity of the discourse pertinent to the teaching profession. The specific features of classroom English that distinguish it from the discourse of other professional domains comprise: distinct uses of prosody, the ability to use and adapt metalanguage appropriately, the need to achieve proficiency in speaking as more important than proficiency in the other language skills whereas lexis is less context-specific (Sešek, 2005).

The role of formative assessment in developing EFL learners' language competences

Teaching is undoubtedly a complex activity, and without some clarification and framing of the target competences it is difficult to assess future teachers' quality and identify the professional development they may need. Teacher and student assessment is an inevitable segment of any educational process. It is a multiplex skill, especially when it is done among students who are trained to become future teachers, due to the different student individual development, different levels of motivation and aptitude as well as the complex interactions they are involved in.

From the various assessment methods, in this paper we focus on the formative assessment or Assessment-for-learning since it is related to a continuous monitoring of student development which is an inevitable part of teacher preparation. Formative assessment, although not a magic formula that can solve all educational challenges, offers tools for developing high performance teacher skills and for providing students with knowledge and opportunities for lifelong learning (Black & William, 1998). Specifically, in the ELT field, teachers provide students with formative assessment feedback in order to help them in the process of developing their language competences. Simultaneously, teachers improve and adapt their teaching and their material preparation. Feedback, an essential aspect of formative assessment, should be timely, positive and specific with suggestions for students on how to improve future performance. Effective feedback is closely related to clear criteria regarding expectations for student performance, to transparent learning process, and to modelling "learning to learn" skills for students (OECD, 2003).

Formative assessment promotes lifelong learning, higher levels of student achievement and greater equity of student outcomes. The two major types of formative assessment are peer-assessment and self-assessment. According to McMillan and Hearn (2008), self-assessment provides the learners with the skill to evaluate their efforts invested into the task in order to fulfill it successfully. In both peer- and self-assessment learners are trained to evaluate their achievement in an objective manner and determine whether they succeeded in meeting the requirements and criteria. To strengthen this claim we can add Black and William's original definition of formative assessment that it encompasses "all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged" (Black & William, 1998, p. 2). Although these two assessment types allow flexibility, the final decision concerning the final grade ultimately belongs to the teacher. However, the positive side is that during the formative assessment students are autonomous learners, involved in learning how to be equal participants in the assessment of their own learning.

Previous research also points out the fact that self-assessment allows learners to evaluate the effort they have invested in the learning process on the basis of specified goals they need to reach in order to be successful (McMillian & Hearn, 2008). Another important aspect is objectivity, and as Johnson and Gelfand (2013) state, formative assessment, particularly self-assessment prepares learners to be able to objectively evaluate their achievements by striving to meet the requirements and be prepared for real life challenges. Ross (2006) claims that teachers should be encouraged to use self-assessment because of the increased student engagement and because self-assessment offers additional information related to the readiness of the learner to complete the assigned tasks during class time. Moreover, self-assessment gives teachers a greater sense of the value of self-assessment, of the student and teacher involvement in the evaluation process and in subsequent decisions about the areas of their work teachers need to improve (Borgmeier, Loman & Hara, 2016).

Regarding the connection between self-assessment and learning outcomes, review studies reveal that self-assessment improves the quality of students' learning and their academic performance across subjects and grade levels (e.g. Yan et al., 2021) increasing their self-confidence. It also has a positive impact on their self-regulated learning strategies and motivational variables such as self-efficacy (Panadero et al., 2017). Other researchers acknowledge that self-assessment may contribute to student learning by involving students in monitoring the learning process, facilitating reflection on the learning outcomes and experiencing successful performance (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013; Yan, 2020).

In contrast to self-assessment, peer-assessment offers a higher degree of social interaction, due to the fact that students need to cooperate and help one another. However, peer-assessment, as observation and research showed, causes unease in some learners. Even when it is structured and guided, some students being aware of their proficiency level and comparing themselves to the proficiency levels of their peers feel uncomfortable to comment on better students' tasks and achievements. Topping et al. (2017, p. 122) explain peer-assessment as "an assessment tool which allows learners to think about and determine the level of quality of their peers' work, and thus to expand their own knowledge by providing detailed and comprehensive comments and notes." The way in which feedback is provided is very important because the process has negative washback for some students, causing them to feel anxiety and embarrassment. To avoid this, it is essential for teachers to train students in giving constructive feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

All types of PA have positive cognitive and affective benefits related to student performance, professional competences, critical thinking and reflection (see Double, McGrane & Hopfenbeck, 2020). Among the most prominent affective benefits are: group work interest, engagement and motivation, and attitude building. In previous research it was found that students perceive PA as a valuable learning experience and feel as equal members of the learning community; then, PA is associated with positive effects on student attitude, responsibility and ownership of the learning process.

Also, peer-assessment holds benefits for teachers such as decrease in workload, more efficient evaluation processes and better managing of administrative tasks.

Overall, peer-assessment helps to expand the learners' social skills, which they will need in life outside the academic contexts. Assessment depends on self-confidence. The more self-confident students are to give feedback to peers, the more efficient the whole learning process is for both, the assessor and the assessed. Research revealed that students become more able to gain confidence in peer assessment with practice and become more efficient when exchanging and discussing observations (Spiller, 2009). The importance of training for improvement of peer assessment skills before engaging in assessment activities has been explored by Liu and Li (2014), who conclude that if students are trained in peer assessment, then there is greater alignment between students' and teacher's grading and the quality of observations of peer's work is improved. In the same vein, Thomas, Martin and Pleasants (2011) prove that teachers should minimize their authority in the assessment process and lead students to assess themselves after having prepared standards for the peer assessment, standards which guide students to think carefully about the activity for which they will be assessed.

The study

Study aims, design and methodology

As mentioned earlier, the primary aim of the current research was to enhance student-teachers' ETP by creating and implementing a formative CEFR-based assessment tool, as curricula and syllabuses in the Republic of North Macedonia are designed in harmony with the CEFR. Taking into account that the exit proficiency level for high school graduates in the Republic of North Macedonia is B2 (Council of Europe, 2001) and that the benchmark for English teacher graduates in Europe (Cardenas & Chaves, 2013) is C1 level (Council of Europe, 2001), C1 was set as the threshold exit level necessary for effective teaching at primary and secondary schools. Furthermore, the research planned as a semester-long project sought to provide student-teachers with experience in teaching adult learners in addition to teaching primary and high school students as a part of the Teaching Practicum.

The research was performed at a public university in the Republic of North Macedonia, at the Department of English language and literature, in March - December 2019. The participants were four professors of English as a Foreign Language and Applied Linguistics and one professor of ELT Methodology as well as 40 fourth-year pre-service teachers who volunteered to participate in the project.

The project consisted of four stages. In the **first stage** the five professors of EFL designed an assessment instrument aligned with the CEFR (2001 and 2018) which was used for teacher, peer and self-assessment of student-teachers' ETP competences. The instrument was revised after being previously piloted for a semester in 2017.

A starting point in developing the assessment was conceptualizing classroom English as performing three functions: *instructional and regulative* (Bernstein, 1990, as cited in Richards, 2017), and *dialogic* (Alexander, 2008, ibid.), each of which is realized through specific classroom acts related to specific language functions. These functions of teacher talk were operationalized through the following assessment criteria: *accuracy, fluency, interaction, stimulating the development of ideas and addressing audiences.*

The assessment was based on a three-level rating method (only B2, C1 and C2 proficiency levels were included) with level C1 as the threshold level necessary for effective teaching. Can-do descriptors were developed by the project team describing performance at each of the three levels for each of the five criteria (see the assessment instrument in the Appendix). The scales were customized from the CEFR (2001) and the CEFR Companion Volume (2018). It is worth noting that the assessment tool was created as a result of revising and modifying an earlier version we piloted in 2017.

In the **second stage**, each of the five professors mentored three student-teachers and five student-assessors while carrying out three mentoring cycles. The mentoring process involved training the mentees in using the assessment criteria designed for teacher assessment, self- and peer-assessment as well as organizing three micro-teaching/ mentoring cycles.

The third stage consisted of carrying out three mentoring cycles. In each micro-teaching cycle the mentor and the five student-assessors observed and assessed each of the three student-teachers' micro-teaching a 15-20 minute segment of a Modern English lesson to lower year students or an ELT Methodology lesson to their peers. Each student-teacher chose three aspects of language competence (*interaction*, *stimulating the development of ideas* or *addressing audiences*) to work on in addition to *accuracy* and *fluency* and they planned each of their classes focusing on those aspects. Next, both the mentor and the peer-assessors gave the student-teachers oral and written feedback on their performance regarding the selected assessment criteria and improved performance was documented. After each lesson segment, the student-teachers used the assessment instrument for self-assessment. At the post-observation conferences the mentors encouraged the student-teachers to self-analyze the weaknesses and strengths of their language and teaching competences based on the feedback they had received. Furthermore, the student-teachers were guided to reflect on their problematic areas and suggestions were made on how to improve them in their next teaching session. The same procedure was applied for all the three class segments, and the results were then compared and contrasted.

In the **fourth stage**, two surveys were distributed, one for student-teachers and another one for student-assessors for the purpose of collecting data regarding several research questions and evaluating the project results. The following two research questions will be discussed here:

RQ 1: What are the effects of formative assessment (teacher, peer and self-assessment) on pre-service teachers' language competences and teaching skills?

RQ 2: What are the professional and personal benefits of formative assessment training for pre-service teachers?

Then, the data were analyzed by means of descriptive statistical methods and interpreted. The same assessment checklists were used for self-, peer and teacher assessment.

Data analysis, results and discussion

Analysis of the data and discussion of the findings related to RQ1

The first research question explored the effects of formative assessment (teacher, peer and self-assessment feedback) on pre-service teachers' language competences and teaching skills. Data was collected by observing and assessing three separate class performances to determine whether students' language competences and teaching skills progressed from the first to the last class as a result of formative assessment regarding the five assessment criteria. The students earned the grades B2, C1 or C2 according to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001; 2018). Supplementary sources of data were two surveys – one for the student-teachers and another one for the student-assessors aimed at evaluating the project results.

Regarding the first criterion, *accuracy*, the analysis showed that almost half of the student-teachers were at C1 level of proficiency and they maintained that level throughout the three classes. This seemed expected, as student-teachers were in year 4 (final year) of their studies and the curriculum had been adapted to that level. In addition, two students accomplished a C2 level and one a B2 level, which they sustained throughout the three classes.

Generally, the level of accuracy was expected to remain stable during the three class performances, especially because the time span between them was relatively short (about two-three weeks). According to Pasternak and Bailey (2004) pronunciation, as a segment of language competence, is stable and cannot change easily, while vocabulary is easier to enrich.

The analysis, however, showed that there are still some factors which may have influenced the performance in terms of accuracy, as two student-teachers progressed from C1 to C2 level and three from B2 to C1 level from the first to the third teaching session[1]. According to the self-reported data, the feedback the trainees received from their mentors and the student-assessors seems to have helped them put under control some of the factors that affected their performance during the first class, such as: the stress and anxiety as a result of the challenge they were facing, the unfamiliarity with the students as well as the fact that they were closely observed and assessed by their colleagues and mentors. It is a well-known fact that language mistakes often result from psychological factors, such as stress and lack of self-confidence.

In regards to the second criterion, *fluency*, the analysis generally confirmed our expectations for 4th year students' level of language competence. One third of the student-teachers (5 out of 15) were at C1 level, while three of them repeatedly

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1. It needs to be pointed out that all assessment of students' competences was based on the descriptors in the instrument designed for this study.

accomplished a C2 level of proficiency. However, the analysis did indicate progress in a few students' performances: from B2 to C1 (4 students) and from C1 to C2 (2 students). Again, as the self-reported survey data revealed, they were influenced by certain inhibiting factors during the first class, which they managed to put under control in the next micro-teaching sessions owing to practice, feedback and possibly to students' perceptions of micro-teaching as an authentic task relevant to their future profession.

Concerning the third criterion, *interaction*, the focus was on how the student-teachers managed to initiate and facilitate student-student and teacher-student interaction. The results showed that two students (out of 5) maintained the same proficiency level throughout the three classes (the first C1 and the other one C2 level). One student demonstrated a C1 level during the first class, then B2 during the second one and then again a C1 level during the third class assessment, while two students managed to improve their level from C1 to C2 from the first to the third class performance. It transpired from the survey results that the feedback students received impacted and improved their performance.

The fourth criterion, *stimulating the development of ideas* emphasizes the memory, understanding, application, analysis, evaluation and creation skills and is based on Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive learning objectives (Bloom, 1956), revised in 2001 (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The student-teachers mainly attempted to develop learners' ideas and critical thinking skills by asking the learners questions which stimulate thinking and reasoning and then giving feedback. Student-teachers' language proficiency regarding this criterion improved the most. Four out of five students raised their level from B2 to C1 or C2, and only one maintained the same level (C1) throughout the three classes. Understandably, the training they received during the Methodology classes as well as their critical self-analysis and the feedback from the assessors and the mentor had a positive effect on their performance.

Finally, the analysis of the student-teachers' performance with respect to the last criterion, *addressing audiences*, revealed that two out of five students kept the same level throughout the three classes (C1 and C2), while three students improved their performance (from B2 to C1 and from C1 to C2 level). The fact that the student-teachers got acquainted with the class they taught (which, as a result, made them more relaxed in consequent classes), as well as the feedback received from the assessors and the mentor, must have had a positive effect on their performance. Their age and high level of language competence should not be ignored as well, as they were an asset in introducing and presenting complex topics, and giving instructions by adapting the metalanguage to students' needs.

On the whole, the overall results obtained by summing up student-teachers' language proficiency grades throughout their three class performances showed that they generally maintained their level of *fluency* and *accuracy* (at C1 level mostly) during the three classes, but most of them improved their performance with respect to the other three criteria: *interaction* (increased from C1 to C2 level), *stimulating the development of ideas* (increased from B2 to C1 level), and *addressing audiences* (remained C1).

In the next part of this section attention is drawn to the role of formative feedback in developing student-teachers' language competences and teaching skills based on the self-reported data from a survey in which the 15 student-teachers and 19 (of the 25) student-assessors participated. The survey was distributed online and it consisted of open-ended questions. It indicated that most of the student-teachers (13) considered the feedback very helpful as it made them more aware and self-critical concerning the complexity and accuracy of the language they use:

> (1) *The feedback had a positive effect on my English proficiency for teaching purposes – it made me more critical of how I phrased my explanations and spurred me to think of exactly how I wanted to set up my questions, which also impacted my overall proficiency.*

Nevertheless, there was a small number of students (2) who considered the feedback comments irrelevant, subjective, and with a negative psychological impact on their self-confidence. In spite of the handful of critical comments on the effects of feedback which was not tactful, it still indicates that students' should systematically be trained on how they should give constructive feedback.

In terms of the influence of peer-feedback on the improvement of their teaching skills, most student-teachers regarded it as very useful (43%) or useful (53%). In addition, they stated that their mentors' feedback gave them better directions in terms of the teaching aspects they needed to improve. Generally, they felt they were becoming better professionals with each class, more aware of the use of various teaching strategies, more focused on giving constructive feedback and on active listening; better at asking questions, introducing discussions and more aware of their body language.

Students' comments were in alignment with what previous research had already confirmed, i.e. that feedback is essential for the learning process as well as for achieving success because it directs and motivates students in their path to self-development (Brinko, 1993; Butler & Winne, 1995).

Furthermore, we asked student-teachers to reflect on the impact of self-assessment on their development as future teachers. They stated that initially they were rather skeptical and afraid to be honest with themselves about their weaknesses and doubted their abilities to assess themselves correctly which resonates with the findings of previous studies (Andrade & Du, 2007):

(2) *At first glance I was overwhelmed by the idea to assess my own teaching. I thought that I will not have the guts to be completely honest with myself on how well or how bad I was during the process, not even to mention how stressful it was for me to note where I could improve my own teaching...*

However, with time their experience with self-assessment improved and they became more objective, their motivation, responsibility and teaching skills developed, which resulted in heightened awareness of their strengths and weaknesses:

(3) *Self-assessment increased our motivation and interest level for better academic performance. It helped us to be more critical and we learnt how to be more responsible for our own learning.*

(4) *Self-assessing requires a fair amount of self-awareness which helps you realize your strengths and weaknesses, and is extremely helpful in every aspect of life, and that translates to teaching as well.*

Judging from their responses, it can be concluded that student-teachers' experience with self-assessment was exceptionally positive, which was expected following previous studies (Andrade & Boulay, 2003; Andrade, Du & Wang, 2008). The benefits they mentioned, such as: identifying the strengths and weaknesses in the learning process, increased metacognitive awareness and motivation for learning, development of critical thinking skills and taking responsibility for their own learning as well as improved learning outcomes and confidence have already been confirmed by other authors (Double, McGrane & Hopfenbeck, 2020; Panadero & Alonso Tapia, 2013) and are key for developing students' autonomy (Skillings & Ferrell, 2000). The results also showed that, in order for students to become more confident in self-assessment, it needs to be embedded in regular classroom activities and students should be trained in how to do it properly (Goodrich, 1996).

One of the most significant parameters which define the success of formative assessment is the clarity of the criteria, i.e. descriptors and students' training, before they use them (Wanner & Palmer, 2018; Weaver, 1995). Studies have also shown that the more experience the students gain with assessment tools, the more positive their disposition is towards them (Wanner & Palmer, 2018).

Analysis of the data and discussion of the findings related to RQ2

The second research question delved into the professional and personal benefits of formative assessment training for pre-service teachers based on classroom observation and on the self-reported data from the surveys. Firstly, the student-teachers listed multiple advantages related to the enhancement of their teaching skills, among which the realization that: assessment is an essential component of teaching; teaching is a complex process entailing different aspects which need to be considered; there are different ways a class could be organized and planned; teachers should try to use a variety of language expressions in class embodied in the assessed criteria; and, the project experience enabled them to connect theoretical with practical knowledge of ELT Methodology.

Regarding the impact of being trained in how to use the assessment criteria on their assessment skills development, the student-assessors mentioned honing their assessment skills as the chief benefit which encompassed: learning to assess more clearly and objectively and becoming more appreciative of their role as future assessors. Additionally, they highlighted the following benefits from formative assessment training: increasing their understanding of different dimensions of teaching; improving their listening and reflection skills; awareness of positive and negative feedback; developing empathy with students-teachers; refining their perception and use of ETP, as well as developing greater love for their profession by realizing that their opinion is valued.

Being aware of the importance of precise and on-time information regarding the project aims, assessment criteria and tasks, at the beginning of the project we informed all participants about these issues. In response to the question if this influenced their teaching, almost all student-teachers (13 out of 15) answered positively. In general, knowing what the focus of the assessment was, helped them prepare better for the class which resulted in feeling more successful and confident. As previous research has pointed out (McMillan & Hearn, 2008), students' familiarity with the assessment criteria improves their understanding of the specified goals to be reached and the desired outcomes, leading to greater investment in the learning process and better success.

As formative assessment training also implies instructing students how to give constructive feedback, the need to train students in giving constructive feedback is paramount, as asserted by earlier studies (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and by our research.

In the end, the students emphasized the experience they gained, both **professional**, like: development of their language competences necessary for effective teaching as reflected in the assessment criteria; better classroom management and communication skills, improved material design and lesson planning skills and **personal,** such as: self-confidence, persistence, self-awareness, awareness of what the students learnt, tolerance, empathy and creativity.

Through both research questions, our study proved that language teachers need to develop a range of specialist language skills of ETP in addition to their general language proficiency, which aligns with the studies by Elder (2001) and Freeman et al. (2015).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings of the present study corroborate with the findings of related research on the effects of formative assessment on EFL learners' language competences. The analysis of the results revealed that teacher, peer and self-assessment feedback provided students with a valuable insight into the strengths and weaknesses regarding their language competences and teaching skills, mapping the pathways of their self-development. Further, the students viewed timely, constructive feedback as indispensable for promoting learning, which mirrors the findings of prior research. Engaging in reflecting on their own performance and acting on teacher and peer feedback fostered future teachers' critical thinking and self-reflection skills, which are vital for their continuing professional development. Students' active involvement in the assessment process as well as in planning the lesson segments and designing the teaching materials increased their ability to take ownership of the learning process which is key to raising motivation and attaining success. Also, apart from the professional gains from participating in the ETP project, a range of personal benefits were identified such as becoming more confident, empathetic, persistent and creative.

Training the student-teachers and student-assessors in applying the assessment criteria heightened their understanding of the intricacies of the assessment process and the complexity of teacher competences and skills. The focus on the domain-specific side of student-teachers' language competences, specifically on their ability to facilitate interaction, address audiences and stimulate critical thinking, as indicated in the relevant assessment criteria, raised students' awareness of their language competences from the perspective of their future profession.

The findings, though not generalizable due to the small number of participants, the short training period and the short time span of the study, may be taken into account in planning the language component of teacher training programs and in designing CEFR-related assessment instruments for monitoring, assessing and developing student-teachers' language competences.

Finally, the potential of formative assessment to promote learning and personal growth can briefly be summed up by the realization that, as a participant in our study put it, the improvement which traces the path to students' overall professional development is of greater importance than the assessment itself.

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Appendix

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING PRE-SERVICE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS' LANGUAGE COMPETENCES

CRITERION 1: ACCURACY

C2

Maintains consistent control of complex language (grammatical, lexical and phonological), even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in monitoring others' reactions to the content presented). Intelligibility is not affected in any way by features of accent that may be retained from other language(s).

C1

Consistently maintains a high degree of accuracy (grammatical, lexical and phonological); errors are rare, difficult to spot and generally corrected when they do occur. Some features of accent retained from other language(s) may be noticeable, but they do not affect intelligibility most of the time.

B2

Shows a relatively high degree of language control (grammatical, lexical and phonological). Occasionally makes errors which may cause misunderstanding, and can correct most of their mistakes. Some features of accent retained from other language(s) may be noticeable, which occasionally affect intelligibility.

CRITERION 2: FLUENCY

C2

Can express themselves spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.

C1

Can express themselves fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult (unfamiliar) subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.

B2

Can produce stretches of language fairly smoothly; although they can be hesitant as they search for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses.

CRITERION 3: INTERACTION

C2

Can initiate and facilitate interaction with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intonational cues effortlessly.

Can take on different roles to support student-student and student-teacher interaction (resource person, mediator, supervisor, etc.) and provide appropriate individualized support.

Can recognize undercurrents (digression) in interaction and can intervene diplomatically in order to redirect talk, prevent one person dominating or to confront disruptive behavior.

C1

Can initiate and facilitate interaction almost effortlessly.

Can take on different roles to support student-student and student-teacher interaction (resource person, mediator, supervisor, etc.) most of the time.

Can recognize undercurrents (digression) in interaction and can intervene tactfully most of the time in order to redirect talk if necessary.

B2

Can manage interaction with certain effort.

Can help the discussion along on familiar ground confirming comprehension, inviting others in etc.

Can intervene with occasional lack of tact in order to focus people's attention on the task.

CRITERION 4: STIMULATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS

C2

Can effectively stimulate critical and creative thinking by asking targeting questions.

Can stimulate students to ask challenging questions.

Can give appropriate feedback that encourages speakers to expand on their thinking and elaborate on their reasoning (e.g. hypothesizing, inferring, analyzing, justifying, and predicting).

C1

Can stimulate critical and creative thinking by asking targeting questions.

Can give feedback that encourages speakers to expand on their thinking and support their ideas with facts.

B2

Can formulate questions which not always stimulate critical and creative thinking.

Can give feedback that ***not*** always encourages speakers to expand on their thinking and justify their opinions.

CRITERION 5: ADDRESSING AUDIENCES

C2

Can present complex topics and concepts confidently and articulately, fully adapting metalanguage to meet learners' needs.

Can introduce lesson topics, task instructions and transitions effortlessly.

C1

Can mainly successfully present complex topics and concepts adapting metalanguage to meet learners' needs.

Can introduce lesson topics, task instructions and transitions almost effortlessly.

B2

Can present complex topics and concepts with relative ease.

Can adapt metalanguage to meet learners' needs most of the time.

Can introduce lesson topics, task instructions and transitions not always clearly.

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THE PRESENT STATE OF ONLINE TEACHING OF GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES IN TERMS OF INSTRUCTORS' AND STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES, NEEDS, AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: *This study explores both teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the teaching and learning of general education (GE) courses in an online environment, where activities such as pair work, group work, and discussion frequently feature. These activities typically necessitate a high level of interaction during class time. This presents an intriguing environment for studying both teachers' and learners' experiences due to the abrupt switch to online education in recent years. The participants included 10 Thai teachers of GE courses and 431 Thai and international undergraduates enrolled in the GE courses and taught via an online platform. Online questionnaires and interviews were used to obtain participants' perceptions of both instructors' and students' experiences regarding online learning, particularly in terms of communication difficulties and potential intercultural communication difficulties. The data obtained from the online questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The frequency count and the percentage were used for calculating and thematizing the numeric data. Interview data was transcribed, analyzed, and reported based on themes. Key quotes from the participants' responses were collated and presented in a narrative. The findings revealed the students' and the lecturers' perceptions of the benefits of online teaching, challenges, and their future needs.*

Keywords: *Online communication, Online communication skills, Intercultural communication, Instructors' and students' experiences, Online teaching*

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Introduction

Communicating with students and encouraging their interaction with one another in an online environment can present challenges for instructors, particularly during the first few years of online teaching and learning implementation. The inability to see students during online classes because they have their cameras turned off is one of the many obstacles instructors face when teaching online classes around the world (Dişlen Dağgöl & İşpınar 2023; Castelli & Sarvary, 2021). With the camera turned off in an online setting, instructors see nothing but only hear when students speak, whereas in a face-to-face setting, teachers have the advantage of connecting with and communicating with their students through the use of body language and facial expressions (Alawamleh et al., 2020).

Several studies (Dişlen Dağgöl & İşpınar, 2023; Pansa et al., 2022; Boonmoh et al., 2021; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020) indicate that the primary problem with online learning is a lack of student participation and minimal or no interaction between teachers and students. This problem, along with the issue of students not turning on cameras presents a further problem as body language aids students in communicating with one another and in the interpretation of other people's moods and emotions. Furthermore, body language may help students feel more at ease, develop trust, and connect with others. Apart from the common communication issues that might emerge in an online learning setting, a classroom with students from many nations and cultural backgrounds can pose an additional problem. Language difficulties, nonverbal misinterpretations, and a lack of intercultural awareness can all contribute to difficulties (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020).

Intercultural communication is concerned with cultural sensitivity, knowledge, and comprehension of cultural differences (Deardorff, 2004). To develop intercultural competency in students, it should be prioritized and taught, particularly in online learning environments where students come from a variety of nations. Ultimately, assisting students in developing intercultural competence will enable them to engage and communicate successfully in diverse cultural and linguistic environments. Previous research (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020; Banjongjit & Boonmoh 2018; Cheewasukthaworn & Suwanarak, 2017; Grobella 2015) has addressed the importance of teachers integrating the concept of intercultural communication into EFL classrooms and the importance of (Thai) students developing a positive attitude toward linguistic and cultural diversity in order to develop the necessary intercultural knowledge and skills for interacting appropriately and effectively with students from both similar and diverse cultures.

A major factor in shifting education online has been COVID-19. Outside of China, Thailand was the first country to report a COVID-19 infection, in

Bangkok on January 13, 2020 (Intawong et al., 2021). In Thailand, the need for education reform skyrocketed in response to the outbreak. In July 2020, Blended Learning (BL), which consists of online and on-site learning, was promoted to meet the technology integration needs of Thailand (SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development [SEAMEO RIHED], 2021). Subsequently, COVID-19 cases rose rapidly in Thailand (Charoensuthipan, 2021). Hence, students had no choice but to study at home. Online learning has had an enormous impact on both instructors and students and frequently featured in discussions of the direction of education during the pandemic (Boonmoh et al., 2022). In the wider context, online learning was implemented in many other countries, such as Indonesia (Laksana, 2020), Jordan (Al-Salman & Haider, 2021), and Japan (Nae, 2020). The pandemic was an abrupt change for higher education in diverse regions of the world, including Asia. Jiang et al. (2021) reported that both students and instructors in the Asia Pacific region had no choice but to follow the national policies to implement online teaching. Jiang et al. (2021) investigated students' depression, anxiety, and stress levels in four countries: Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and China. Due to the abrupt change, students in those four Asia Pacific countries reported heightened anxiety, depression, and stress when studying online. Focusing on Thailand, many universities rigorously implemented online teaching and learning from 2019 to 2021 (Boonmoh et al., 2021); however, some Thai institutions decided to shift from online teaching and learning to onsite teaching and learning when the COVID-19 situation was less severe. Consequently, during the post-COVID-19 era, there have been continuous changes toward onsite, online, or hybrid classrooms in Thailand (Poungjinda & Pathak, 2022).

Communication between teachers and students has the potential to enhance the learning experience and foster a healthy learning environment (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020; Banjongjit & Boonmoh, 2018; Cheewasukthaworn & Suwanarak, 2017; Grobella, 2015). Shifting from traditional teaching to online classrooms demands students and lecturers to communicate online (Renu, 2021). However, teachers and students still face challenges with online communication when studying and teaching online during and following the COVID-19 pandemic, such as lack of interaction, engagement, nonverbal language, communication, and intercultural awareness (Pansa et al., 2022; Boonmoh et al., 2021; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). Thus, it is critical to conduct this research study to avoid potential problems vis-à-vis online communication skills and intercultural communication and to ensure that online teaching runs smoothly.

Understanding the communication difficulties associated with online contexts will help teachers in determining the most successful methods for creating timely and appropriate communication and for interacting with their students (Alawamleh et al., 2020). This research focuses on examining the present state of online teaching and learning, instructors' and students' experiences, together with problems when teaching and learning online. The results obtained can be used to design a training program for undergraduate students to improve their online communication abilities for future use in careers.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following research questions: 1. What are instructors' and students' perceptions of online teaching in online general education courses? and 2. What are instructors' and students' needs for further workshops and training for online communication skills for studying online?

Literature Review

To understand how students and instructors performed in online general courses, a literature review including previous empirical studies was performed.

Students' and instructors' perceptions of online learning

There is a growing interest in optimizing online learning to best deliver knowledge to learners during and immediately after the COVID-19 crisis (Renu, 2021). In education, during the pandemic, most schools and universities worldwide changed from conventional face-to-face instruction to emergency online learning. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments all over the world, including in Thailand, mandated the conversion of schools into virtual schools and online education (Jiang et al., 2021; Onyema et al., 2020). As a result, students and teachers have been forced to study and teach from home.

Teaching in an online environment will require a change in the mode of communication delivery. Many universities and colleges start online courses by using online meeting platforms such as Google or Zoom in order to ensure that pandemic quarantine measures did not disrupt education (Renu, 2021). Undoubtedly, online learning is changing the way in which instructors and students communicate in the 'new normal'.

Empirical studies

Several empirical studies have reviewed stakeholders' perceptions, including those of students and instructors, regarding teaching and learning online. Laksana (2020) surveyed 97 Indonesian students' perceptions of online learning. This study's findings indicate that students' varied perceptions of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic covered infrastructure, interaction quality, and student benefits. Most students voiced their sentiments about online learning infrastructure, including gadgets, internet access, ICT, and lecture materials, indicating that the infrastructure for online learning in their context was not well-equipped. They also reported not yet being skilled in online learning. However, they reported that online learning provided benefits regarding the learning process, the time for learning time, and the costs involved. The challenges faced by 42% of students related to internet access, their ability to use technology, and a lack of responsiveness from faculty and staff. The study found five major factors supporting online learning, namely government policies, online learning practices, technical infrastructure support, local information and communications, and low-cost technological equipment.

Similarly, Lo (2023) reviewed 70 articles about online learning published during the first two years of the pandemic, i.e. 2020-2021. During the 2020-2021 period, the challenges faced by students include student-related challenges, e.g. being unfamiliar with flipped learning; faculty challenges, e.g., demanding considerable preparation time; and operational challenges, e.g., issues with the infrastructure and information technology support. To cope with the challenges, Lo proposed strategies for implementing online learning consisting of various types of support, such as resources-related support, e.g. providing instructional videos; activities-related support, e.g., highlighting the application of knowledge and skills; and institutional facilitation-related support, e.g., allocating budgets for educational technology.

Gumede and Badriparsad (2022) reported students' perceptions of online teaching and learning in South Africa. Fourteen university students reported their perceptions through interviews that they were concerned about the transition from face-to-face lectures to online lectures. The students felt they were required to adjust without adequate preparation, on matters such as devices and data availability. Li and Che (2022) investigated the challenges and coping strategies of online learning for college students in the context of COVID-19 in Chinese universities. The results from an online questionnaire indicate that online learning results in a deficient learning environment, as well as physical health problems, e.g., eye strain, anxiety, and cervical stiffness. Coping strategies included a well-arranged online learning program and a peer-learning environment.

Turning to the Thai context, Boonmoh et al.'s (2021) study revealed that 126 Thai secondary teachers who completed the questionnaires encountered difficulties in online teaching. The same study reported that one main barrier to technology integration in classrooms was deficient facilities, such as computers and internet access. Furthermore, Boonmon et al., (2022) investigated the perceptions of six EFL teachers from universities across Thailand about technology integration in online teaching. The participants revealed that they encountered a lack of interaction and engagement in online classes, and they required future training, especially with regard to skills for online language teachers to teach effectively, online classroom etiquette introduction for students, and online communication for students.

Changing from physical face-to-face classes to online classrooms necessitates a shift in the communication medium. Many educational institutions started offering online classes using online platforms such as Google or Zoom to ensure that the quarantine measures did not disrupt education (Renu, 2021). However, online learning will unavoidably change the way teachers and students communicate in the 'new normal'. Previous studies have identified serious impacts and problems regarding education, such as inadequate learning infrastructure, low levels of classroom engagement and interaction, lack of nonverbal and intercultural awareness, insufficient proficiency in online learning, insufficient institutional support, absence of effective strategies for implementing online instruction (Laksana, 2020; Lo, 2023; Gumede & Badriparsad, 2022; Boonmoh et al., 2021; Boonmon et al., 2022). Thus, it is essential to research the current state of online learning and teaching in order to ascertain whether or not the problems still exist at this current state. This research, therefore, aims at investigating the present state of online learning in terms of instructors' experiences, needs, and challenges in the Thai context, specifically at one of the Thai universities that still offer online courses, KMUTT.

Skills needed to be a successful learner in online classes

Previous studies (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020; Banjongjit & Boonmoh 2018; Cheewasukthaworn & Suwanarak, 2017; Grobella 2015; Pewnil, 2021) regarding communication skills for online learning suggest that certain skillsets are required for students to be successful when studying online, namely intercultural communication competence and netiquette. To assess this, Deardoff (2004) and Byram (1997) proposed the Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). In Byram's (1997) study, the ICC model comprises five primary components. Korol (2020) provided a concise summary of Byram's (1997) model, indicating that these five components comprise the following: "intercultural attitudes, which refers to curiosity and openness, the readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and beliefs about one's own; knowledge, which refers to the knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction; skills of interpreting and relating, in other words the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own; the skills of discovery and interaction, i.e., the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction; and critical cultural awareness, which is the ability to evaluate, critically and based on explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Korol, 2020, p. 30). Similar to Byram (1997), Deardoff (2004) proposed the Model of Intercultural Competence comprises attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, and skills. Apart from ICC, netiquette has also been mentioned, in Pewnil's (2021) guide. Netiquette is a digital etiquette or online communication rule for Thai digital citizens or Thai students to communicate effectively via online tools.

From the studies reviewed above, the present study may be useful for teaching online general education (GE) courses and learning from them as the related literature mentioning a diverse body of students from different nationalities studying and learning online in the same classroom is limited. Most previous studies focus on homogeneous classrooms where only Thai or non-Thais are studying in class. The context of the classrooms and participants of this study are international, comprising both Thai and international students. Hence, the findings may be generalized to other international contexts around the world.

Methodology

This section presents the sample, participants in this study, the data collection process, and further analysis of the data.

Sample

This research study took place at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), an autonomous university in Thailand that was founded in 1960. Its mission, presented in the KMUTT Roadmap 2021, is that it "creates values and leads to changes for a strong and sustainable global society via the development of education innovation, research, creativity, and entrepreneurship" (KMUTT, 2021). With over 60 international programs and over 400 foreign students, KMUT is a genuinely international university. It is also one of the universities in Thailand that still offers courses online (KMUTT, n.d.). KMUTT's mission extends to equipping graduates with the knowledge and skills necessary for future careers.

To this end, KMUTT uses the KMUTT Student Qualification Framework (KMUTT Student QF) as a guide to reflect KMUTT's distinct goals and visions for the competencies that KMUTT graduates will require to succeed in the future. The framework addresses the development of soft skills, such as communication skills, diversity, intercultural competence, adaptation, and flexibility.

Participants

The participants from this study were selected based on a purposeful sampling method as all of them experienced online teaching and learning in the context of general education (GE) courses at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), Bangkok, Thailand. The researchers used this sampling technique because it provides in-depth and detailed information about the participants' online learning and teaching in this particular education context in Thailand (Suri, 2011).

The participants were divided into two major groups: instructors and students. Students were surveyed using a 5-point Likert scale, while instructors were interviewed using a semi-structured interview. The interview period was from December 2022 to February 2023. The combination of data obtained from the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview assisted with validating through triangulation the assertions made by both groups of participants. Information sheets and consent documents were provided to the participants prior to the survey and interview time. All participants consented to data collection by researchers. The research project has been approved by the KMUTT IRB (Institutional Review Board) with a certificate number, KMUTT-IRB-COE-2022-189.

Instructors' profiles

The 10 instructors were GE instructors at KMUTT, a science and technology university in Bangkok, Thailand. They have experience teaching one subject of GE to international program students via the online medium. All the instructors have experience in encountering difficulties in teaching online, specifically regarding online communication skills. Their years of teaching experience, gender, teaching groups, and education qualifications vary. The instructors' background is confidential, and their names are presented in pseudonyms, fictitious names.

Table 1. Instructors' profiles with pseudonyms

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Education qualification	Experience in teaching	Experience in online teaching
1	Nita	Female	Master's degree	10	3
2	Ploy	Female	Doctoral degree	4	3
3	Wibool	Male	Master's degree	6	3
4	Jirada	Female	Master's degree	15	3
5	Pailin	Female	Master's degree	3	1
6	Patchara	Male	Master's degree	10	3
7	Chin	Male	Doctoral degree	2	2
8	Noon	Female	Master's degree	8	2
9	Bow	Female	Master's degree	6	3
10	Arm	Male	Doctoral degree	18	3

Student participants

The 431 students were from different faculties' international programs at KMUTT. All the students were enrolled in online GE courses and instructed in semester 1 of the academic year 2022 from August to December 2022 via online platforms at the university during one term of GE. The students included both Thai and non-Thai nationals. Their age, gender, faculty, year of study, and studying sections varied, as shown in the Table below.

Table 2. Students' demographic data for the questionnaire

Aspects	Details	n	%
Gender	Male	241	55.92
	Female	180	41.76
	Prefer not to say	10	2.32
Age	18 – 21	401	93.04
	> 21	27	6.26
	< 18	3	0.70
Nationality	Thai	394	91.42
	Myanmar	31	7.19
	Indonesian	2	0.46
	Hong Kong Chinese	1	0.23
	Nigerian	1	0.23
	Filipino	1	0.23
	Cambodian	1	0.23
Faculty	Engineering	238	55.22
	Information Technology	73	16.94
	Industrial Education and Technology	70	16.24
	Science	44	10.21
	Architecture and Design	6	1.39

Research instrument

Online questionnaires and interviews were used to elicit the participants' perceptions of both instructors' and students' experiences regarding online learning, particularly in terms of communication difficulties and potential intercultural communication difficulties.

Online questionnaire

The researchers developed an online questionnaire for students covering their experience and challenges in online learning. The content validity of all the questions was evaluated by three experts to measure the appropriate sampling of the content validity of items in a questionnaire. It was also piloted and finally distributed to the participants. The bilingual Thai/English online questionnaire was sent to students via Google Forms. The questionnaire was used to acquire information about students' experiences with, and their perception of obstacles associated with, online learning, particularly in terms of communication difficulties and potential intercultural communication difficulties. The questionnaire comprised six sections, covering demographic information, experience with online learning, experience with online learning in GE, challenges with online learning in GE courses, challenges with intercultural differences, and their future needs for future training or workshops to enhance students' skills for studying online.

Interview

All 10 instructors were asked to answer 10 interview questions regarding their views on online communication and intercultural communication skills in online learning and teaching, as well as their experiences with, and their perception of obstacles associated with, online teaching, particularly in terms of communication difficulties and potential intercultural communication difficulties. Each interview took 30-45 minutes.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the online questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The frequency count and the percentage were used for calculating and thematizing the numeric data.

The data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data from the interview was transcribed, analyzed, and reported based on themes. Key quotes from participants' responses were collated and presented in a narrative.

Findings

The data from both instructors and students were divided into two main parts, namely students' experience of online learning challenges and needs and instructors' experience of online learning challenges and needs. The perceptions of both students and instructors include their experience with online learning, their experience with online learning in GE courses, their challenges with online learning in GE courses, the challenges they experienced with intercultural differences and ways to cope with challenges, and their future needs for online training on online communication and intercultural communication.

Students' experience of online learning, challenges, and needs

According to Table 3, the majority of students (n = 218, 50.58%) studied online for one semester, while 153 students or 35.50 percent studied for three semesters. For the online learning platforms used in previous semesters and the semester in which the research was conducted, most students stated that they used Zoom (n = 422, 97.91%) and Microsoft Teams (n = 396, 91.88%). Most students stated their preferred platforms for studying were Zoom (n = 213, 49.42%) and Microsoft Teams (n = 198, 45.94%). In terms of the device used to access the online teaching platforms for the semester in which the research occurred, interestingly, most students mentioned that they used a laptop (n = 315, 73.09%) and an iPad (n = 264, 61.25%) the most. In addition, 214 students or 49.65 percent of all students mentioned that they used a mobile phone for studying online. For the WIFI internet package, almost all students had no problems with this, as 371 of 431 students or 86.08 percent mentioned that they have a WIFI package for studying. It can be concluded that the majority of students already experienced studying online via technological devices. They also had adequate internet access, reflected in the high number of students who had internet packages and devices. The report on the students' experience with online learning is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Experience with online learning reported by students

	Details	n	%	
Length of studying online at university	1 semester	218	50.58	N = 431
	3 semesters	153	35.50	
	2 semesters	56	12.99	
	4 semesters	3	0.70	
	More than 4 semesters	1	0.23	
Online learning platforms used in the	Zoom	422	97.91	N = 431
past and in the semester	Microsoft Teams	396	91.88	
in which the research occurred	Google Meet	131	30.39	
	Line Video Call	92	21.35	
	Facebook Live	72	16.71	
	Messenger Video Call	9	2.09	
Preferred platforms	Zoom	313	72.62	N = 431
	Microsoft Teams	178	41.30	
	Google Meet	15	3.48	
	Messenger Video Call	1	0.23	
Devices used to access online teaching	Laptop	315	73.09	N = 431
platform in the semester	iPad	264	61.25	
in which the research occurred	Mobile phone	214	49.65	

	Details	n	%	
	PC computer	96	22.27	
	Tablet	4	0.93	
WiFi internet package	Yes	371	86.08	N = 431
	No	60	13.92	

In Table 4, the majority of the 431 students agreed that their GE courses were lecture-based learning (n = 351, 81.44 %). In contrast, the instructors reported that the GE courses were activity-based courses, providing problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and analytical skills. Even though students reported that the courses are lecture-based, they agreed that the General Education courses provided a variety of activities, including group discussion, pair work activity, individual work, and other collaborative work. Interestingly, many students (n = 305, 70.77%) reported that their classes were diverse in terms of faculties and nationalities (n = 322, 74.71%). Taken together, these results suggest that students viewed GE courses as lecture-based learning with encouragement from their instructors to interact in class; however, many students decided to turn on their cameras only when they were asked to do so by their instructors. Details of experience with online learning reported by the students are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Experience with online learning in GE courses reported by students

	Details	n	%	
Type of learning of the courses	Lecture-based learning	351	81.44	N = 431
	Activity-based learning	80	18.56	
Experience of type of learning in the GEN121 class	Group discussion	388	90.02	N = 431
	Whole class presentation	357	82.83	
	Pair work activity	345	80.05	
	Doing collaborative work on shared boards	323	74.94	
	Individual work	318	73.78	
	Listening to lecture	284	65.89	
Encouragement from lecturers to activate webcam	Yes	337	78.19	N = 431
	No	94	21.81	
Frequency of opening webcam while studying in GEN121	I only turn on the webcam when the teacher instructs me to.	298	69.14	N = 431
	I only use 20-30% of the webcam.	47	10.90	
	I turn on the webcam about half the time.	24	5.57	
	I never turn on the webcam.	24	5.57	
	I use the webcam 70-80% of the time.	17	3.94	
	My device does not have a webcam.	15	3.48	
	I always have the webcam on.	6	1.39	

	Details	n	%	
Classmates from different departments or faculties	Yes	305	70.77	N = 431
	No	126	29.23	
Classmates from different countries	Yes	322	74.71	N = 431
	No	109	25.29	

Table 5 reveals the challenges encountered by students. The major challenges reported by the students include online communication including netiquette in the classroom, whole-class interactions, activities and assignments, pair work, and group work collaboration. Furthermore, students mentioned challenges regarding technical problems, the learning environment, and English proficiency.

Concerning online communication-related challenges, particularly in terms of netiquette in the classroom, most students reported that they do not feel confident turning on the webcam (n = 209). For whole-class interactions, most students (n = 126) reported that not knowing how to interact with classmates from different departments and/or faculties was their main problem. For activities and assignments, 147 students mentioned that they had too much homework. In pair work and group work collaboration, most students mentioned that not communicating with one another when in a group was a major problem (n = 95). The GE classes are foundation classes, which means that they are compulsory classes for students. Thus, the students definitely are diverse across different aspects, including majors, faculties, nationalities, and ages. So, these students may not be able to immediately become familiar with each other so as to immediately have conversations comfortably. So, the lack of familiarity with peers from different backgrounds can lead students to encounter difficulties when studying online, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Challenges with online learning in GE courses reported by students

Categories		Details	n	%	
In terms of online communication	Netiquette in classroom	Not feeling confident enough to turn on the webcam.	229	53.13	N = 431
		Not knowing when the turn is to talk with friends and lecturers.	134	31.09	
		Not feeling confident enough to unmute the microphone.	133	30.86	
		Feeling it's difficult to keep the conversation/text/message concise.	98	22.74	
		No problem with the above issues at all.	85	19.72	
		Not knowing how to end/pause the conversation with friends.	56	12.99	
		Not knowing how to reply to lecturers'/friends' messages.	51	11.83	

Categories		Details	n	%	
In terms of online communication	Whole class Interactions	Not knowing how to interact with classmates from different departments/faculties.	126	29.23	N = 431
		Feeling it's hard to see friends' and lecturers' body language through the online program.	113	26.22	
		Not feeling confident enough to speak in front of the class.	103	23.90	
		Too shy to express my own opinion.	100	23.20	
		Not being close to the classmate with whom I am working.	96	22.27	
		Being afraid that my idea will be rejected or ignored.	88	20.42	
		No problem with the above issues at all.	80	18.56	
	Activities and assignments	No problem with the above issues at all.	148	34.34	N = 431
		Having too much homework.	147	34.11	
		Having too much work during class time.	140	32.48	
		Having too many group work activities.	74	17.17	
		Having too many group assignments.	57	13.23	
		Not being able to decide who to work with.	55	12.76	
	Pairwork and group work collaboration	Not communicating with one another when in a group.	154	35.73	N = 431
		Once in a group, members just write and do not speak.	121	28.07	
		Having difficulty allocating work to each member.	108	25.06	
		No problem with the above issues at all.	95	22.04	
		Having difficulty contacting a friend to work together.	85	19.72	
		Having no one to lead the group work.	83	19.26	
		Not being able to choose who to work with.	58	13.46	
		Working frequently with the same people.	48	11.14	
		Turning off the webcam during group work.	37	8.58	
In terms of technical problems		No problem with the above issues at all.	209	48.49	N = 431
		Having a low internet connection	152	35.27	
		When used repeatedly, the computer/laptop/iPad/other devices for learning become overheated.	93	21.58	
		Some functions are inaccessible due to the use of a mobile phone.	42	9.74	
		The microphone is broken.	35	8.12	
		Having only one laptop for studying.	29	6.73	
		Some mobile phone functions are inoperable.	26	6.03	

Categories	Details	n	%	
In terms of Environment	No problem with the above issues at all.	189	43.85	N= 431
	Home study makes me feel lazy and sleepy.	147	34.11	
	There are noises from friends/neighbours/ family members during conversations between friends and lecturers.	126	29.23	
	I cannot concentrate since I live among roommates or family.	66	15.31	
	I cannot find a private place to study.	47	10.90	
In terms of English proficiency	No problem with the above issues at all.	203	47.10	N= 431
	Not feeling confident enough to use English.	129	29.93	
	Not having enough vocabulary in English to communicate with friends.	121	28.07	
	Not having enough knowledge of English grammar to communicate.	108	25.06	
	Lack of English vocabulary, sentence structure/grammar knowledge to discuss/communicate with friends or lecturers.	107	24.83	

Table 6 suggests that challenges exist regarding intercultural differences between students. The findings indicate four aspects of intercultural difference, namely knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness, which students find challenging when studying online. The mentioned problems are related to working in groups, especially communicating with peers and sharing ideas with peers in groups. However, students reported one very serious main problem was that their peers do not share ideas with them in a group (n = 87, 20.19 %). Students also concluded that their most serious problems were mainly related to not knowing peers' backgrounds/departments (n = 57 students, 13.23 %), having problems working in a group with friends who have different ideas (n = 29 students, 6.73 %), and having no ideas/opinions to share with friends (n = 28 students, 6.50 %).

As mentioned earlier in the section on Table 5, students are diverse and varied in various aspects, e.g., age, nationality, and faculties. It can be inferred that the students did not have prior background knowledge about each other. So, it can be inferred that the GE classes are one of the most challenging classes for students in terms of getting to know their peers as well as in terms of communicating. This is because it is hard for those students to build relationships and develop connections in order to work together. Specifically, when students have to perform public speaking or deliver presentations online, it is difficult for them to be able to perform the tasks and assignments professionally since they are not used to turning on cameras and interacting in classes. Hence, those students who are not familiar with communicating in classes may not be familiar with netiquette in online classrooms either. Consequently, they will not have enough awareness of conducting adequate online communication and developing online interaction skills in classrooms. Some students are passive learners who are familiar with lecture-based classes, so they are not familiar with GE classes that require them to have a higher level of interaction. Unavoidably, those students may lack intercultural communication skills and online communication skills, as shown in Table 6 in the next section.

Table 6. Challenges with intercultural differences reported by students

Categories	Aspects	Details	n	%	
In terms of intercultural differences	Knowledge	Having no knowledge about friends' backgrounds/departments.	172	39.91	N = 431
		Having problems understanding texts/chat from friends.	135	31.32	
		Having problems sharing ideas that are different from my friends' ideas.	110	25.52	
		Having problems understanding friends' ideas.	75	17.40	
		Having no ideas/opinions to share with my friends.	69	16.01	
	Skills	Having problems understanding friends' speaking/conversation.	135	31.32	N = 431
		Having problems asking friends from different departments to work together.	97	22.51	
		Being unable to talk to friends from different departments.	80	18.56	
		Having problems working in groups with friends who have different ideas.	78	18.10	
		Being unable to relate my own ideas and my friends' ideas.	63	14.62	
		Being unable to blend/adjust/change myself in a group that has friends from different departments.	42	9.74	
	Attitudes	Feeling it's hard to understand friends who are from different departments.	160	37.12	N = 431
		Not wanting to deal with my own emotions and frustration when working in teams/groups.	94	21.81	
		Having problems accepting opinions from friends who are from different departments.	92	21.35	
		Not wanting to talk/share ideas with friends in teams/groups.	60	13.92	
		Not wanting to blend/adjust/change myself in the group that has friends from different departments.	36	8.35	

In terms of intercultural differences	Awareness	No problem with the above issues at all.	239	55.45	N = 431
		Friends do not share ideas with me in groups.	127	29.47	
		Friends in groups cannot communicate/talk/work together.	47	10.90	
		Friends from different departments have too different ideas from me.	46	10.67	
		Friends in groups do not listen to each other.	34	7.89	
Top ten most serious online communication problems		Friends do not share ideas with me in groups.	87	20.19	N = 431
		Having no knowledge about friends' backgrounds/departments.	57	13.23	
		Having problems working in groups with friends who have different ideas.	29	6.73	
		Having no ideas/opinions to share with my friends.	28	6.50	
		Having problems understanding texts/chat from friends.	26	6.03	
		Friends in group cannot communicate/talk/work together.	22	5.10	
		Having problems understanding friends' speaking/conversation.	20	4.64	
		Having problems asking friends from different departments to work together.	20	4.64	
		Friends in group do not listen to each other.	17	3.94	
		Bing unable to talk to friends from different departments.	12	2.78	

According to Tables 3 – 7, students encountered challenges when studying online, so they require online training to cope with the challenges. Table 7 illustrates preferences for future online training reported by students. With regard to preferences for future online training in online communication and intercultural communication, most students demonstrated experience with using social media. Table 7 displays the most-used social media, the kind of media students like to watch, and the kind of media that could be useful for further online training materials about online communication and intercultural communication skills. Most students reported the most-used social media to be Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. They also reported the kind of media they liked to watch was Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. Further, most students reported their needs and their perceived future training/workshops to be a series of short videos of 5-7 minutes per video, and a series of short videos of 10-15 minutes, consisting of video and multimedia. The results in Table 7 reveal that students would like to cope with the challenges they were facing; however, they did not want to spend too much time on the training. This is why the students reported that they preferred short training sessions in the form of a series of short videos. The results aligned with the kinds of media that the students like to watch, which are Instagram posts, which consist only of short videos. Table 7 follows.

Table 7. Preferences on future online training reported by students

Aspects	Detail	n	%	
Experience with using social media	YouTube	426	98.38	N = 431
	Facebook	419	97.22	
	Instagram	406	94.20	
	Twitter	317	73.55	
	Tiktok	302	70.07	
	Pinterest	301	69.68	
Most-used social media (the social media platforms that students reported using the most)	Instagram	268	62.18	N = 431
	YouTube	219	50.81	
	Facebook	109	25.29	
	Tiktok	78	18.10	
	Twitter	48	11.14	
Kind of media students like to watch	Instagram: Stories	298	69.14	N = 431
	YouTube: Videos	297	68.91	
	TikTok: Short videos	215	49.88	
	Facebook: Short Videos	190	44.08	
	Instagram: Photos/Quotes	159	36.89	
	Facebook: Photos	157	36.43	
	Twitter: News, blog posts	149	34.57	
	YouTube: Short videos	138	32.02	
	Pinterest: Infographics and step-by-step photo guides	115	26.68	
	Facebook: Captions	92	21.35	
	YouTube: Live videos	62	14.39	
	Instagram: Live stories	58	13.46	
	Facebook: Live Videos	33	7.66	
Kind of media for further online training	Series of short videos: 5-7 minutes/video	247	57.31	N = 431
	Photos/infographics, texts, and blog posts	153	35.50	
	Series of short videos: 10-15 minutes/video	139	32.25	
	Multimedia	127	29.47	
	Lectures videos: 20-30 minutes/video	80	18.56	
	Live videos	32	7.42	

Instructors' experience of online learning, challenges, and needs

All 10 instructors were asked to answer 10 interview questions regarding their views on online communication and intercultural communication skills in online learning and teaching. In terms of the instructors' views of the courses content, there is a mismatch between the students' perceptions and the instructors' perceptions as the majority of 431 students agreed that their GE courses were lecture-based learning (n = 351, 81.44 %). In contrast, the instructors reported that the GE courses were activity-based courses providing problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and analytical skills. Other views mentioned by lecturers regarding the course content are presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Perceptions of the course content reported by instructors

	Detail	Participant										n
		T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	
The courses content characteristics	Having a focus on thinking skills, such as analytical and critical thinking skills.	/	/		/	/	/	/	/	/	/	9
	Having group work/group activity.			/					/		/	3
	Having group discussion/classroom discussion/brainstorming.			/		/	/			/		4
	Focusing on learning skills, such as how to be a good learner.	/			/		/	/				4
	Being activity-based.		/			/	/	/	/	/		6
	Having students share ideas/experiences/knowledge in class.								/	/		2
	Focusing on problem-solving skills.									/	/	2

Note. T = Teacher/Instructor, The symbol "/" (a tick) indicates that the item has been mentioned by instructor(s).

Most lecturers mentioned that these General Education (GE) courses have multiple modules. They strongly suggested that GE courses are related to different layers of thinking skills. Nita, or instructor 1, began her teaching career while pursuing her master's degree. She had taught at two major universities, covering one general education course at the current university and instructing three courses, with a focus on general education, at another university. Nita had accumulated 10 years of teaching experience, involving both in-person and online instruction. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, she had been exclusively teaching online for three years or approximately six to seven terms. Nita stated that:

> I understand that normally GE courses have been divided into three modules, and in each module, it has learning outcomes. There are different pathways (learning outcomes) for all modules, and all pathways are connected. In brief, I think the first is related to analytical skills that allow students to analyze and synthesize the content of the lessons. For the second pathway, students will have a critical skill, which is expanded from analytical skills; they can find arguments and reasons through debating activities. I think students can make use of these thinking skills a lot in their real life.

Similar to Nita, Ploy (instructor 2) stated that GE courses are related to thinking skills and are activity-based. Ploy held a Ph.D. and worked as a research associate at the target university. She began her teaching career as a teaching assistant during her master's degree and had four years of teaching experience, with a focus on general education courses. Ploy transitioned to online teaching due to COVID-19, accumulating three years of online teaching experience, with only one to two years of prior offline teaching. Ploy clearly suggested that:

> I would say that the content of this course is not too much, but focuses more on activity. For example, in the very first couple of classes, students will get opportunities to practice thinking, abstract thinking vs concrete thinking. The lecturers will lead the students to the lessons by activity. So, the class is activity-based.

Table 9 shows the 10 instructors' perceptions of their overall online experience. Instructors presented their views about the overall teaching online experience mostly by mentioning that they had no problems as a lecturer with teaching online because of their adjusting themselves to the change and their ability, together with new program learning skills (n = 7). Also in Table 9, the instructors reported the benefits of online teaching. Five instructors mentioned that online teaching was convenient, practical, and flexible for students. Last, most instructors mentioned that they used Zoom (n = 8) and GoogleJamboard/ other shared boards (n = 6) for online teaching. The overall results are different from the students' survey results as the students reported challenges with online studying, while the instructors reported minor problems regarding online teaching.

Table 9. Instructors' perceptions of the overall teaching online experience

Aspects	Categories	Participant										n
		T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	
Overall Experience	Having no problems or few problems as a lecturer in teaching online because of their adjusting themselves to the change/ability and new program learning skills.	/	/		/	/		/		/	/	7
	Students did not turn on camera/unmute microphone		/			/					/	3
Advantages of teaching online	Having two-way communication when teaching online for almost 24 hours (e.g., texting, chatting, Mentimeter, chatting).	/	/							/		3
	Saving students' and lecturers' time for traveling to university and changing the classroom.		/		/							2
	Being convenient, practical, and flexible for students to manage time for study, study anywhere, and save money for transportation.			/	/	/		/			/	5
	Being convenient for teachers in terms of preparing materials, resources, and locations for teaching.								/	/		2
	Allowing students to approach the lecturers easily in both in-class and out-of-class settings.						/			/		2
Teaching platforms	Microsoft Teams	/			/	/						3
	Zoom	/	/	/	/		/	/		/	/	8
	Line (for communication)	/			/							2
	Miro: Shared board		/					/		/		3
	GoogleJamboard/other shared board		/	/		/		/	/	/		6
	Google slides							/			/	2
	The central platform provided by the university	/						/				2

Note. The symbol "/" (a tick) indicates that the item has been mentioned by instructor(s)

Zoom has been acknowledged as the best tool for teaching online by most instructors. Wibool, instructor 3, began teaching as a lecturer in 2017 and had six years of experience. He specialized in teaching general education courses, primarily for first- and second-year undergraduate students. Wibool taught on-site for three years and then transitioned to online teaching for the subsequent three years. He mentioned that Zoom is his main teaching platform as follows: "Usually, I use Zoom because students are more familiar with it. Additionally, I use Jamboard to assist. Currently, I prepare information and provide opportunities for consultation."

In terms of challenges with online learning in the GE courses, similar to students, the instructors mainly reported challenges regarding online communication, including netiquette in the classroom, technical errors, English proficiency, and cultural differences, as shown in Table 10 below. Table 10 reveals that, similar to students' perceptions, instructors also perceived that students had problems with interactions in classes, since six instructors mentioned this.

In terms of technical problems, most instructors mentioned that they experienced problems regarding internet connection (n = 6 out of 10 instructors). Similarly, the majority of students (n = 209, 48.49 %) agreed that they do not have technical problems when studying online (see Table 5).

It can be inferred that both instructors and students were familiar with technology usage because they were experienced with using technology in their studying and teaching during COVID-19 onward. Table 10 below shows details of the instructors' perceptions of challenges and difficulties.

Table 10. Instructors' perceptions of challenges and difficulties in online teaching

Aspects	Categories	Participant										n
		T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	
Challenges/problems found regarding on-line communication	Having little /no interactions/participation when students joined the breakout room/studied in class (e.g., be silent or turn off cameras/microphones).	/	/	/	/			/			/	6
	Having difficulty tracking students for work/assignment/attendance/learning pace/attention.		/	/				/		/	/	5
	Taking a long time to work on group work/ manage class (e.g., managing group work, finishing group work, talking to students, grouping students).		/	/	/				/		/	5

Aspects	Categories	Participant										n
		T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	
Challenges/problems found regarding online communication	Having difficulty encouraging students to be in a suitable learning environment, such as studying in a noisy place, studying at home leaving Zoom on, and disturbances from students' surroundings: parents, noises near home, studying in bed.	/	/		/		/		/			5
Challenges/problems found regarding technology errors	Having difficulties with technological devices/programs (out-of-date programs, files, email verification problem).	/					/	/				3
	Having low/no/unstable internet connection.		/	/	/	/	/	/				6
	Receiving problems reported by students: not having good quality technological devices to study with/having limited access to technological devices/overheated devices.				/						/	2
Problems from students in terms of English proficiency	Having no problems with the English language in classes.	/					/					2
	Having students with limited English knowledge who are not confident to share/write ideas with friends.		/								/	2
	Having students who were not confident to express their ideas in English.		/								/	2
	Having students who did not understand the questions in English/problems or the meaning of English technical terms/texts.		/	/	/							3
	Some students were not ready to study English/couldn't catch up because they didn't have enough English proficiency.				/				/			2

Aspects	Categories	Participant										n
		T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	
Problems from students in terms of cultural differences	Different learning styles of students from different faculties.	/	/						/			3
	Experiencing students from different departments/years of study/faculties did not share ideas or did not work well in group.		/				/					2
	Experiencing that some students in the group did not work/did not communicate/disappeared.			/	/						/	3
	Having students who didn't want to work with friends from different faculties/departments.				/			/				2

Note. The symbol "/" (a tick) indicates that the item has been mentioned by instructor(s)

For this table, one of the most outstanding challenges in teaching online is related to little interactions produced by students. Instructor 7, Chin, initially started as a lecturer teaching online general education courses and was familiar with online teaching, having done so for the past two years. Chin suggested that:

> The difficulties that I encountered are students turning off their cameras; they also turn off their microphones. So, it is difficult for me to know whether they understand the lessons or not. I couldn't see their facial expressions, and they are silent as well sometimes.

Apart from little interactions, most instructors also reported that students experienced low/no/unstable internet connections when studying online. Instructor 6, Patchara, had 10 years of teaching experience, specializing in electrical engineering and general engineering at both the target university and another institution. He had been teaching general education courses for about three years at both universities, with only one year of experience in online teaching. He was typically more accustomed to onsite teaching from his previous university and Patchara addressed this:

> Students are not ready to learn in online solely. There are both advantages and disadvantages of studying online. The disadvantage is that students may say that they have unstable internet. They may also state that being in a loud university environment might be their problems, from my perspective these problems are not related to the subject or lesson. So, I try to use breakout rooms to visit each room.

Instructors' strategies to cope with the problems

Table 11 presents the strategies that the instructors used to solve the problems regarding online studying. The instructors identified different strategies to cope with the problems and challenges. The instructors partly converged on coping with English proficiency problems, as five employed subtitles when using videos in English, translating the materials from Thai to English, and summarising the content and materials in English. Three reported attempting to encourage students to summarize or recap the lessons themselves. Also, when the students experienced problems, the instructors focused on using different online platforms, as well as online applications and programs, to help them. Thus, the instructors were aware of the challenges and difficulties faced by students and attempted to cope with these problems with diverse strategies.

Table 11. Perceptions of ways to cope with problems and challenges in online teaching reported by instructors

Categories	Participant										n
	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	
Using different online platforms to communicate with students (e.g. Zoom, Line).	/			/							2
Translating English materials to Thai or using Thai subtitles.	/			/	/		/	/			5
Ask students to answer the questions and express ideas.		/	/								2
Asking students to summarize the lessons or recap the lessons.			/	/			/				3
Using programs/applications (e.g. sticky notes, online timer) to monitor students when working in group.		/						/			2
Using transliteration strategy to teach.						/		/			2
Tracking down students to study and submit work.		/							/		2
Ask students to turn on cameras and microphones when interacting.				/						/	2

Note. The symbol "/" (a tick) indicates that the item has been mentioned by instructor(s)

Most-mentioned way to cope with problems is translating English materials to Thai or using Thai subtitles. Instructor 8, or Noon, had been teaching for approximately eight years. She began teaching general education courses around two years ago during the outbreak. Noon started her teaching career as an online teacher right from the beginning at the target university. However, she also gained experience in teaching before as a learning facilitator, assisting with teaching and learning activities when she was a student at the target university.

She suggested that the way to accommodate students with difficulties related to English materials is through translation.

> Sometimes, when I teach students, I find that some students do not have a strong English proficiency background. I would like to help them because I know that not all students are good at English. So, I decided to translate English videos into Thai, and sometimes I even put Thai subtitles in English videos.

Table 12 details the instructors' needs regarding future training. Similar to their students, most instructors would like to have future workshops which are short workshops or training sessions, especially ones that occur only one or two days before the beginning of the courses. In addition, the instructors described the desired content of the future training sessions and workshops, in that they should teach some required skill sets to their students, such as presentation skills, public speaking skills, and technological device usage skills. These findings illustrate how instructors and students are familiar with online short training courses and workshops in the modern world. With regard to instructors, their current stated needs may only be short training sessions or workshops that are tailored to students' problems. The instructors also stated that the desired inputs for the training courses and workshops should be those best aligned with the skills the students most lacked, as reported by both students themselves and lecturers, such as online communication skills, presentation skills, intercultural skills, public speaking skills, and group work strategies.

Table 12. Instructors' perceptions of needs and future training course, workshops, and materials

Aspects	Categories	Participant										n
		T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	
When to conduct the training	Before the courses.	/			/	/	/	/		/	/	8
	During the courses.		/	/					/			3
	After the courses.		/			/						2
Inputs for future training/ workshops	Basic learning skills (learning environment, time management).	/								/		2
	How to perform public speaking.	/							/			2
	How to be open-minded to interact in class when studying online.			/			/					2
	How to use social media/ technological devices/programs for studying.				/		/					2
	How to present work/assignments.					/		/				2

Inputs for future training/ workshops	How to work in a group and share ideas with friends or with the class.					/			/			2
	Manner/demeanor/netiquette in class including when to speak.						/				/	2
	How to share ideas and reflect on shared ideas.							/			/	2
	English verbal and non-verbal communication.									/	/	2
Kinds of training for students	On-site.	/		/								2
	Online.	/									/	2
	Short training workshop.		/		/	/	/	/	/		/	7

Note. The symbol "/" (a tick) indicates that the item has been mentioned by instructor(s)

Most instructors suggested their needs regarding students' training programs. Eight instructors stated that they would like students to prepare themselves before the course starts by joining the training. Seven out of 10 lecturers mentioned that they would prefer students to participate only in short training workshops. Instructor 4, Jirada, was the most experienced among all the lecturers. She had 15 years of teaching experience at another university and had been at the target university for eight to nine years, totaling approximately 24 years. Jirada started teaching online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Jirada suggested that:

> I would prefer students to have the training before studying. I think it would be more useful if the workshop is launched before classes. I would recommend students to learn how to use LINE for communication and use Zoom for studying. I think just a one or two-day workshop is okay.

Discussion and conclusion

The results were diverse and varied according to the teachers' and students' perceptions of their experiences, challenges, and needs. There are similarities and differences between the instructors' and students' perceptions. Overall, both the instructors and students in this study were familiar with online teaching and online learning. They shared positive attitudes towards online learning as it helps them to be time efficient and reduce the expenses related to transportation. Also, the instructors and students reported that online teaching allows students to be flexible and to study anywhere and at any time. Overall, students' and lecturers' perceptions are related to intercultural communication models proposed by Deardoff (2004) and Byram (1997) regarding intercultural attitudes, intercultural skills, intercultural awareness, and intercultural knowledge and comprehension.

The findings reveal a similarity in both students' and lecturers' perceptions of the challenges of online learning. The results are partly aligned with the previous empirical studies (Laksana, 2020; Lo, 2023; Gumede & Badriparsad, 2022; Boonmoh et al., 2021; Boonmon et al., 2022) vis-à-vis students and lecturers' challenges include a lack of interaction, a deficient learning environment and challenges in interacting online. Different from other empirical studies, both students and instructors from this study agreed that online communication and intercultural communication skills were essential in online learning, aligned with the Intercultural Communication Competence models proposed by Deardoff (2004) and Byram (1997). Also, some students agreed that they lacked the ability to communicate with their peers online, especially when working in a group. The instructors also reported that students scarcely interacted in classes and rarely turned on their cameras to show facial expressions and body language. These results suggest that online communication skills including netiquette (Pewnil, 2021) are essential for online learning, especially general education courses that require interactions. In Pewnil's (2021) study, digital etiquette includes communication etiquette to enable Thai students to communicate online effectively, such as knowing their turn to talk, knowing how to hone the tone when sending messages, and knowing how to share ideas with other people online. For future needs, both students and lecturers would like to have short workshops and training sessions. However, there exists a mismatch over the perception of severity of problems, as the instructors generally stated that there were no or only minor problems when teaching online, while students reported difficulties regarding intercultural differences, intercultural communication skills, and online communication skills. Interestingly, the instructors revealed concern over students' public speaking and presentation performances, as well as over the learning environments. The instructors also viewed students as sometimes not being confident in speaking in English.

There are also similarities in terms of the challenges and difficulties reported by the students and instructors. Students mainly reported challenges regarding online communication including netiquette in the classroom, which aligns with Pewnil's (2021) study and which covers whole class interactions, activities and assignments, pair work, and group work collaboration. Slightly different from the students' perceptions, the instructors mainly reported challenges regarding online communication, primarily netiquette in the classroom, technical errors, English proficiency, and cultural differences. These results are aligned with Jhaiyanuntana and Nomnian's (2020) study, as language difficulties and a lack of intercultural awareness can contribute to difficulties in online learning settings.

To cope with the aforementioned challenges and difficulties, instructors require the training to have speaking skills, such as presentation in English, discussion in English, and public English speaking, while students focus more on sharing ideas and communicating in groups. With regard to preferences on future training sessions and workshops on online communication and intercultural communication, both instructors and students agreed on short training sessions and workshops on online communication and intercultural communication skills. Both instructors and students that communication skills and intercultural communication skills should be included in future workshops and training. Thus, it is valuable to integrate the concept of intercultural communication into classrooms (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020; Banjongjit & Boonmoh, 2018; Cheewasukthaworn & Suwanarak, 2017; Grobella, 2015). Hence, the instructors stated that for students to study effectively for online courses, they should have adequate technological device usage skills, basically knowing how to use technological devices, as well as knowing how to use technological applications and online platforms.

In terms of challenges, both instructors and students reported challenges with intercultural differences, including the four aspects of problems, including knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness, aligning with the Model of Intercultural Communication Competence proposed by Deardoff (2004) and Byram (1997). The aforementioned problems concern working in groups, especially communicating with peers, and sharing ideas with peers in groups. The results are concordant with previous studies (Pansa et al., 2022; Boonmoh et al., 2021; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020) which found that the crucial issue with online learning is a lack of student involvement and very little or no interaction between teachers and students. Regarding ways to cope with the problems and challenges, instructors mentioned different ways of dealing with the problems and challenges. The instructors mainly shared their own views on coping with English proficiency problems as they used the different teaching techniques in classes.

In terms of pedagogical implications, since students are not particularly familiar with turning on cameras and unmuting microphones to interact in classes, instructors should find ways or teaching approaches to encourage students to interact more by turning on cameras and unmuting their microphones. Instructors may find some question-answering sessions for students to answer questions, engage in stimulation activities, engage in role-play activities, and deliver more presentation sessions. By doing so, students will have more chances to interact via their cameras and microphones. To create a good atmosphere for students to speak up, the instructors may highlight that students can speak without fear of making mistakes. Instructors can also focus on content rather than language when allocating scores to students. Also, instructors can tell students that their voice is being heard so that the students can be confident about speaking up. Furthermore, instructors might take it for granted that students know about the basic skills of technological devices and programs. However, students should be trained prior to attending online courses in how to make use of these technological devices and programs. If the students learn how to use the technological devices and programs' functions, they will be able to submit work on time and work with their peers more proficiently. The findings also suggest that instructors may be able to help students to develop intercultural communication skills and online communication skills by including some ice-breaking activities for students in the very first class. By doing so, students will be aware of how to interact with peers from different backgrounds. Then students will be more familiar with classmates and find it easier to start talking to new ones. Finally, students will be able to communicate with classmates from different backgrounds more easily in future classes.

As further research, we will attempt to design an introductory training session or workshop for students according to the findings of this research project. Initially, we aim to respond to the program-learning outcomes (PLOs) from the results of the interview and survey, then we will design the lesson plans and invite course and curriculum design experts to validate and check our course design. Lastly, we will produce an introductory training workshop for students based on desired inputs for the training courses from this study. Hence, the results of this research project will be transformed from a research article into effective workshops in order for students to enhance their online communication and intercultural skills.

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A REVIEW OF STUDIES ON DIGITAL COMPETENCE IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract: *This review aims to highlight how digital competence and English as a foreign language were addressed in research and how the integration of digital tools in the teaching and learning process was reflected in the pertinent research area. For that purpose, it examines the studies published in notable journals between 2017 and 2022. Criteria-based review approach was used to search the relevant articles. Following this approach, review of 24 articles was categorized under five main themes; a) article distribution into years, and according to the contexts, b) target groups as participants in the studies, c) focal points of the relevant research, d) methodological tendencies in the studies and e) implications drawn from studies. As a result of the analysis of the papers, the review suggests that digital competence needs being inspected from different perspectives relating it to psychological constraints. Further, longitudinal studies and action research can yield more fruitful results to understand the dimensions of teacher digital competence.*

Keywords: *Criteria-based review approach, digital competence, EFL, language teaching, teachers*

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Introduction[1]

As technology has significant impacts on all walks of life, so does it on education. It evolves day by day, and teachers are supposed to integrate cutting-edge tools into their teaching practice to keep up with the digital era.

Digital competence has been approached from different aspects as a notion so far. To this end, some concepts have been put forward as "media literacy, digital literacy, technology literacy, ICT skills, information literacy, digital competence" to refer to the ability of a person to use computer and technology when reviewing the literature (Ala-Mutka, 2011; Engen et al., 2014; Ilomäki, Paavola, Lakkala & Kantosalo, 2016; Iskandar, Sumarni, Dewanti & Asnur, 2022). However, it appears that there is a consensus on referring to the skills related to technology as 'digital competence' in the literature. This term will be used in the review, aligning with its common usage. It was observed that digital competence originally emerged in papers and documents as a notion pertaining to policy, as well as in more contemporary policy papers (Ilomäki et al., 2016). Some of the researchers asserted that it was hard to define the concept of *digital competence* as it was closely linked with an issue that was evolving in its nature: technology (Ala-Mutka, 2011; Chabert, 2021; Ilomäki et al., 2016). Digital competence was recognized by the European Union as one of the eight important competences for lifelong learning with the 2006 European Recommendation on Key Competences. The use of ICT to accomplish objectives relating to employment, employability, learning, leisure, inclusion, and/or involvement in society could be broadly characterized as digital competence (Ferrari, 2012). In a similar vein, Redecker (2017, p. 90) makes a definition as follows: " The confident, critical, and creative use of ICT to accomplish objectives relating to employment, employability, learning, leisure, inclusion, and/or participation in society is referred to as digital competence".

Digital competence is a novel concept which is composed of a diversity of abilities and knowledge and is made up of several disciplines ranging from media and communication, technology and computing, to literacy and information science. It pertains to political goals that aim to be compatible with technological developments on the part of citizens (Ilomäki, Kantosola & Lakkala, 2011).

Society is increasingly becoming digital as technology advances. As noted earlier, the concepts related to digital competence first appeared in policy-related papers. Intending to raise more digitally competent or literate citizens, The European Union attempted to present several frameworks, including various competencies related to lifelong learning (Lee, Thayer & Madyun, 2008). In

1. Acknowledgements: The authors would like to express their gratitude for Sakarya University's library services as the access to a wide range of scholarly resources and databases was instrumental in conducting a thorough and comprehensive review of the literature.

one of the most pioneering frameworks, Ferrari (2012) laid an emphasis on the necessity of classifying the competence levels according to age of target groups, the breadth or depth of the application-related material, and the level of cognitive complexity. For this purpose, she divided the definition of digital competence into multiple constituent parts as follows:

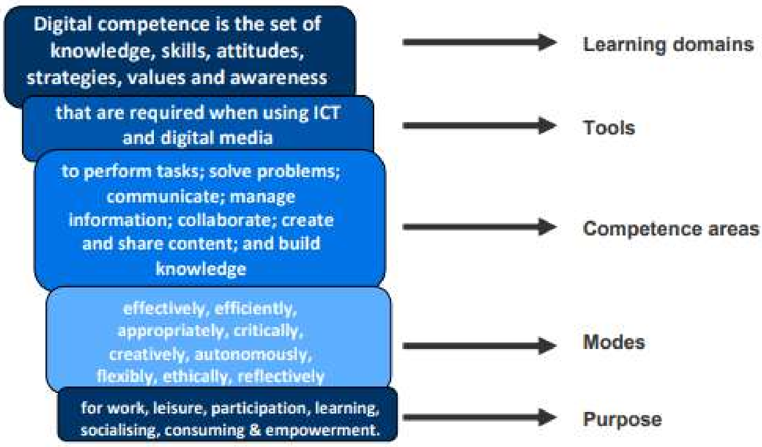

Figure 1. Parts of the definition of digital competence (Ferrari, 2012, p. 30)

Later on, Redecker (2017) presented a framework, especially for teachers in association with the European Union. DigCompEdu framework offers enlightening guidelines for educators to follow in order to guide policy throughout the European context. With a total of 22 competencies, the DigCompEdu framework separates educators' digital competency into six distinct domains (see Figure 2).

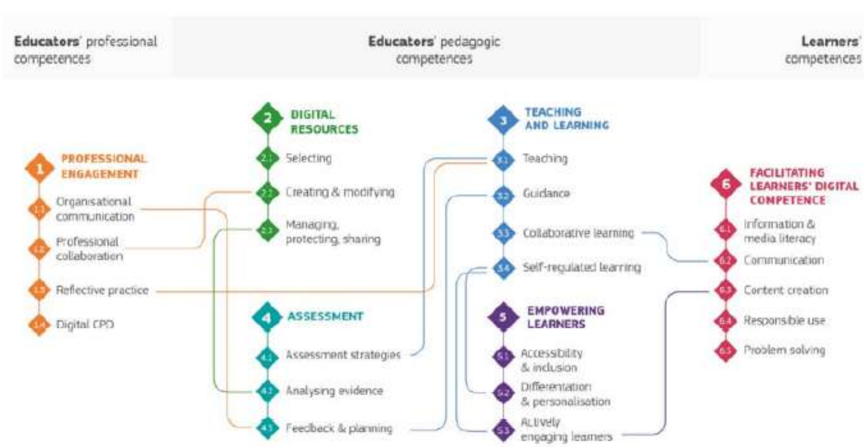

Figure 2. DigCompEdu Competences and Their Connections (Redecker, 2017, p.16)

According to this framework, a teacher's digital competence is identified by areas 2-5 as these areas not only demonstrate his or her digital pedagogic competence, but they also help them realize to what extent they require to stimulate efficient, innovative teaching and learning strategies.

As noted earlier, teachers must keep up with the most recent developments in technology and education in order to maintain their professional development. As they serve as mentors for the younger generation as well as educators of the students, Redecker (2017) emphasizes the significance of teachers having digital competence. Over the past 20 years, a great deal of research has been conducted on the subject. Most of these studies have used the DigCompEdu framework, which offers educators a clear overview, as a research tool or as a guide (Al Khateeb, 2017; Benali, Kaddouri & Azzimani, 2018; Chabert, 2021; Del-Moral-Pérez, Villalustre-Martínez & Neira-Piñeiro, 2019; Maiier & Koval, 2021; Smagulova, Sarzhanova & Tleuzhanova, 2021; Solomakha & Kosharna, 2020; Wong & Moorhouse, 2021). The literature is not only composed of empirical and theoretical research on digital competence, but a vast number of review studies are also evident (Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos, Matarranz, Casado-Aranda & Otto, 2022; Hidalgo, Parra & Abril, 2020; Røkenes & Krumsvik, 2014). The current study addresses the target groups in the studies, the distribution of articles according to their contexts and year of publishing. Along with that it also examines the implications drawn from those studies and the factors mentioned above which have been the focus of previous research.

This review aims to present how digital competence and English as a foreign language were addressed in research and how the integration of digital tools in the teaching and learning process was reflected in the pertinent research area. For that purpose, the following research questions are listed:

RQ1. What is the article distribution relating to digital competence and language teaching

a) by years?

b) according to contexts?

RQ2. In which demographic was the research conducted?

RQ3. Which research methodologies were used in the studies?

RQ4. What are the emerging key themes regarding digital competence in the reviewed studies?

RQ5. What are the implications drawn from the relevant studies

Methodology

The primary objective of this study was to review the existing digital competence study respecting the research distribution by years and based on their contexts, the target groups in the research, focused research topics, research methodology, and implications drawn from the relevant research. To this end, a criteria-based review approach, which was defined as a research approach underlining the most appropriate codes in the scope of the research questions (Aufschnaiter & Rogge, 2012) was employed.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The criteria for selecting the articles can be listed as follows in Figure 3:

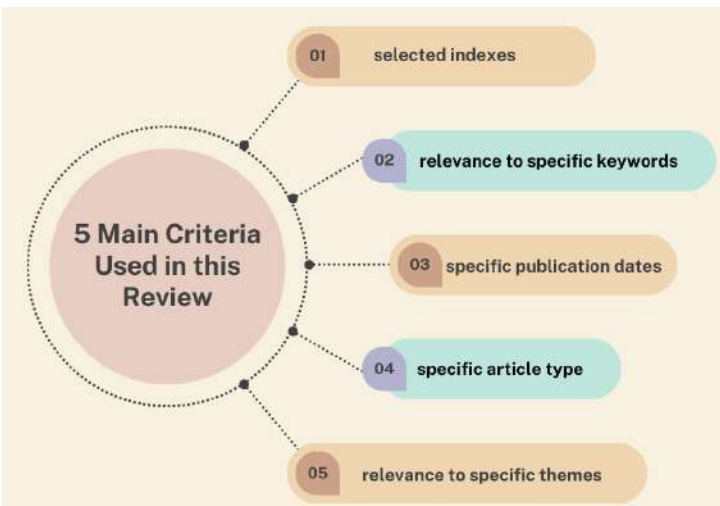

Figure 3. Criteria used in search of articles in this study

The following procedure was used to determine the studies to be examined. To reach the eligible journals, the database of VETIS was utilized. Initially, the search was limited to Eric, SSCI, DOAJ, and Science Direct journals by clicking on the index. For the second criteria, “digital competence”, “language” and “teachers” were used as keywords to find relevant papers. Thirdly, to find out more recent studies, the publication date was limited between 2017 and 2022. Fourthly, only research papers were included in the review. As a consequence of the initial search, 36 articles were found related to digital competence and language teaching. However, as the digital competence in English language study was of major interest in this review, research studies and only the ones focusing on the English language and ICT in education were included in this study. Therefore, irrelevant themes covered in the papers were excluded, and 24 articles made up of the scope of this review.

The list of the names of the journals which published the articles in the study was shown in detail in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

A grounded method was used for the analysis and synthesis of the selected studies. Grounded theory can be best characterized as a research technique aimed at deriving theory from data (Punch, 1998, p. 163, as cited in Khan, 2014) and this review followed open coding, axial coding and selective coding respectively (Williams & Moser, 2019). Each study's pertinent topic, methodology, and conclusions were taken out and given respective codes in open coding. In axial coding, similar themes and categories were identified. As for the final step of analysis, namely selective coding, the themes elicited through axial coding were refined to form a theme.

Findings and Discussion

Article Distribution: Yearly Trends

The articles which were reviewed in this study were published between 2017 and 2022 as noted earlier. The databases were also restricted to four, namely DOAJ, SSCI, Eric, and ScienceDirect; as a result, the scope of this review included twenty-four articles. The same number of articles was published in 2017 and 2018, and in 2021 and 2022 with the number of 1 and 7 respectively. As for the other publications, 3 out of 24 articles (12,5% per year) were published in 2019, and 5 out of 24 articles (18,5%) were published in 2020.

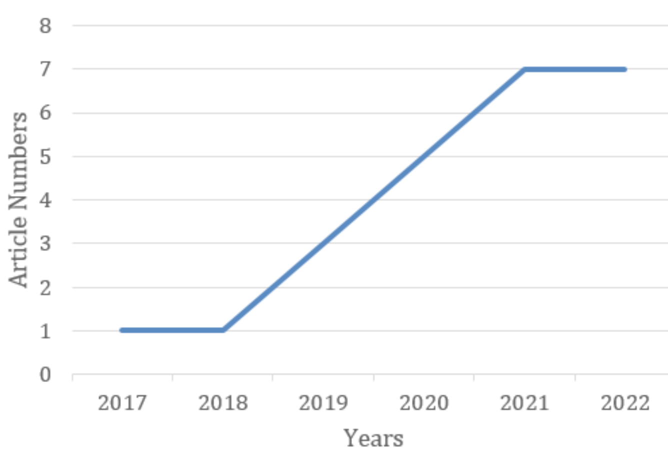

Chart 1. Article distribution into years

Chart 1 above demonstrates the number of studies according to the years. It can be implied from this data that much research was not conducted in 2017 as integrating digital technologies into teaching might be in its crawling period. Digital competence and the integration of technology into classes appeared to have garnered much attention from researchers in recent years, especially after 2019. In this regard, some authors pinpointed the influence of the development of the European Framework for Digital Competence and the outbreak of COVID-19 as a milestone of the research trend on digital competence. There were controversial views concerning this. The amount of research on the digital competence of university teachers increased in the years 2012, 2014, and 2017, however 2017 was the year in which the majority of the research was carried out because the most fundamental TDC document - the European Framework for Teachers Digital Competence, was published in that year by Redecker (Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos, Matarranz, Casado-Aranda & Otto, 2022). To Kassymova, Tulepova and Bekturova (2023), the publication of DIGCOMP by the European Union in 2013 marked the beginning of the first discussions on the concept of digital competence, and this theme has gained much interest since then. On the other hand, Yılmaz-Ergül and Taşar (2022) assert that digital competence has garnered much attention since the beginning of 2020 with the outbreak of COVID-19 in the whole world. Nonetheless, the scope of this review was restricted to much recent years, a considerable amount of research highlighted that the COVID-19 outbreak caused a significant shift from traditional to online teaching (Fauzi, 2021; Meirovitz, Russak & Zur 2022; Nugrohoa, Trianab & Zulaiha, 2022; Scanni, 2022; Tomczyk et al., 2021; Wong & Moorhouse, 2021). That's why the integration of technology in teaching and learning process, and digital competence seem to appeal to the interests of researchers during and after the pandemic. Additionally, COVID-19 outbreak was regarded as a call for training in-service or pre-service teachers according to the demands of current digital era and for being equipped with the requisite knowledge to keep up with the tech-savvy learners (Meirovitz, Russak & Zur, 2022; Nugrohoa, Trianab & Zulaiha, 2022; Wong & Moorhouse, 2021)

Article Distribution: Contextual Trends

When reviewing the literature, it was noticed that the majority of the studies was conducted in Spain and Indonesia, based on the research articles obtained for this study. The distribution of the articles in relation to the settings in which they were conducted is shown in Chart 2 below:

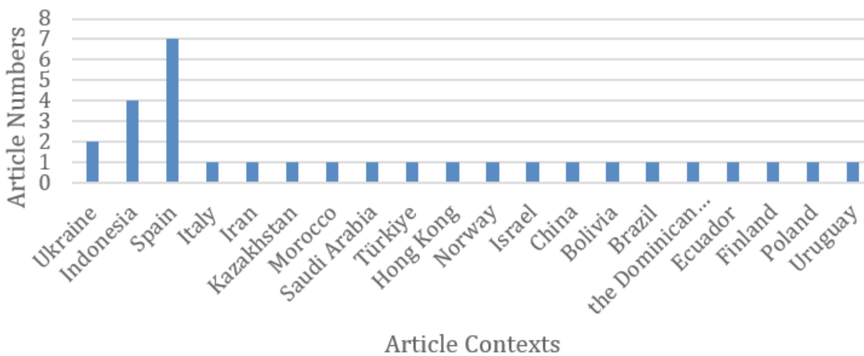

Chart 2. Article distribution according to the contexts

Considering the relation between context and the foci of the studies regarding the Spanish context, the foci of the studies could be categorized as in the following. Forty-two percent of the studies (3 out of 7) was conducted to scrutinize how effectively teacher training programs prepare pre-service teachers to implement digital tools into their future teaching practices (Guillén-Gámez, Lugones & Mayorga-Fernández, 2019; Kopinska, 2020; Rahimi & Tafazoli, 2022), whereas forty-two percent of them (3 out of 7) was carried out to examine teachers' perceptions and practices (Chabert, 2021; Del-Moral-Pérez et al., 2019). The rest was looking for a link between students' foreign language development and the incorporation of digital genres into the teaching process (Pascual, 2019).

Taking the number of studies based on their settings into account, Indonesia followed Spain in terms of the core of the research, which aimed to inspect digital competence. It was apparent that perceptions and practices of teachers were of major interest to the research in the Indonesian context. In this regard, two out of four research were in an attempt to reveal the digital competence of teachers (Laeli, Setiawan & Anam, 2020; Nugrohoa, Trianab & Zulaiha, 2022). One of them sought the relation among autonomy level, writing performance, and digital competence of EFL learners (Andina, Cahyono & Widiati, 2020), while the other focused on finding out the impacts of online learning during COVID-19 pandemic on both teachers and learners (Fauzi, 2021).

In Ukrainian context, there were two studies conducted and both of them concentrated on pre-service readiness to utilize digital tools in their teaching practice (Maiier & Koval, 2021; Solomakha & Kosharna, 2020).

Tomczyk et al. (2021) conducted a cross-cultural study to measure perceptions of teachers about the key components of new digital tools from various countries working in Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean regarding the use of the aforementioned tools in learning and teaching process. Teachers from Bolivia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Finland, Poland, Türkiye, and Uruguay were involved in this study.

There was no further research conducted in the same setting; however, surprisingly, there was only one study carried out in Italy, and it was acclaimed as the first study on distance education during the pandemic period (Scanni, 2022). While Italy was among the countries most affected by the lockdown (Natilli et al., 2022), research regarding digital competence and the constraints teachers and learners encountered during online teaching was limited.

Population of Interest: Inclusion in the Studies

When the population of interest included in the studies was reviewed, it was observed that the target groups in the studies were listed as *in-service teachers*, *pre-service teachers*, *language learners*, and *both learners and teachers* in general. The number of the studies according to the population of interest is illustrated in a table below:

Table 1. Population of Interest

Population of Interest	n	%
In-service teachers	10	41,66%
Pre-service teachers	7	29,16%
Language learners	5	20,83%
Both language learners and teachers	2	8,33%

When closely examining research articles, the primary themes in the studies typically revolved around the attitudes, knowledge, and practices of EFL teachers. These themes were followed by discussions on the constraints of using digital tools in education, digital awareness, digital competence, and self-efficacy. Thirty percent of the studies including teachers as participants concentrated on examining experiences of English language teachers during remote teaching (Laeli et al., 2020; Meirovitz et al., 2022; Tomczyk et al., 2021; Wong & Moorhouse, 2021). Twenty percent of the studies focused on the obstacles teachers encountered during distance education (Chabert, 2021; Scanni, 2022). The key themes of the rest of the studies were based on digital competence of teachers and their readiness of implementing digital tools into teaching (Al Khateeb, 2017), the relation of digital competence of teachers to self-efficacy and their years of teaching experience (Benali et al., 2017).

A considerable amount of the relevant studies recruited pre-service teachers as participants, and they dealt with the readiness of future teachers about teaching English digitally competent enough in general (Smagulova, 2019; Solomakha & Kosharna, 2020). Examining perceptions, attitudes and motivation of pre-service teachers was a popular theme in the relevant papers, as well. Gudmundsdottir et al. (2020) examined student teachers' perceptions of privacy, cyberbullying and evaluation of the digital content in line with their professional digital competence. Maiier and Koval (2021) investigated pre-service teachers' willingness to use digital resources for foreign language instruction, as well as their views toward developing their digital competence and the methods for doing so. In another study, the integration of digital tools in education by pre-service teachers was investigated to determine whether the factors such as age, gender, motivation had an impact on their use (Guillén-Gámez et al., 2019). Çebi and Reisoğlu (2022) intended to shed light on the connections between the metaphors pre-service teachers developed for a technology-savvy teacher and the motivations behind them, as well as to make it easier to come up with meaningful metaphors in the study they carried out in a Turkish context. Belda-Medina and Calvo-Ferrer (2022) aimed to evaluate pre-service teachers' attitudes and digital competence in order to integrate augmented reality (AR) into the teaching of foreign languages.

On the other hand, few studies looked into the factors influencing digital competence of language learners. The effectiveness of implementing digital genres into EFL learning was investigated in an experimental study (Pascual, 2019). In a similar study by Andina et al. (2020), it was concluded that as the level of learner autonomy increased, so did the writing performance. It was assumed that the learners who made use of technology in their writing were likely to accomplish greater writing performance. The relationship between their digital competence and approaches to learning was examined in order to provide insights about learners by evaluating language learners' academic scores (Niu et al., 2022).

Research including both teachers and learners as participants was relatively rare, there were only two studies when reviewing the studies on digital competence and language teaching. One of the studies gauged the perceptions of teachers about digital storytelling, and its impact on digital competence of learners (Del-Moral-Pérez et al., 2019). The other study by Fauzi (2021) aimed to determine the relationship among students' learning outcomes and their perceptions, knowledge, attitudes, and motivations when learning English utilizing an online learning system based on WhatsApp during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Methodological Tendencies

Upon examining 24 articles to determine the prevailing research methodology in digital competence studies, it was found that quantitative studies outnumbered other research methodologies, comprising 12 papers. Eight of the studies used a qualitative approach, whereas the remaining 4 studies had a mixed-method research design. It could be inferred from this result that there was a tendency to utilize quantitative and qualitative research methodologies rather than mixed-method research.

Regarding research designs, correlational study, descriptive quantitative method, and non-experimental method designs were utilized most in quantitative studies. Grounded theory, case study and narrative inquiry designs were utilized in qualitative studies. In the studies adopting a mixed-method approach, experimental designs were used mostly.

As for the data collection, surveys and questionnaires were mostly employed in quantitative studies and students' scores, students' GPAs, and checklists made up the other data collection tools in these studies, while open and close-ended surveys, interviews, observations, document analysis, and students' scores were used as data tools in qualitative studies. Surveys, open and closed-ended questionnaires, practical observations, pre-tests and post-tests, and group discussions were utilized as data collection tools in the mixed-method studies.

An illustration for methodological tendencies is shown below (see Figure 4).

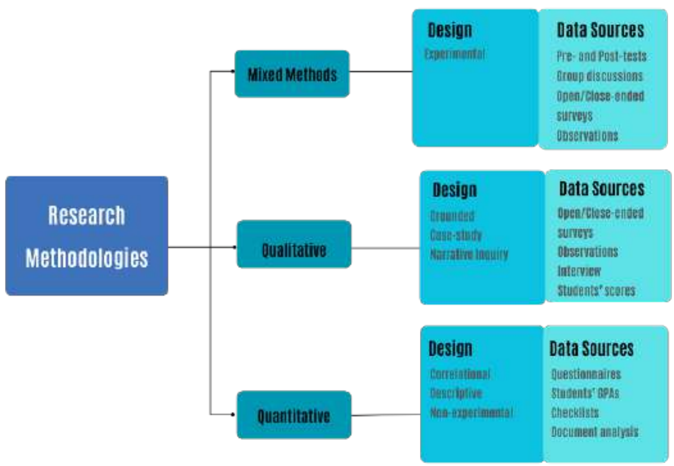

Figure 4. Research Methodology Illustration

Key Themes of the Reviewed Studies

The findings of the analysis pointed to six main themes in this regard:

- the importance and impact of digital competence,
- teachers' approach and perceptions of digital technology,
- digital competence and language learning performance of learners,
- teacher education and digital competence development,
- the role and future of digital technology in education, and
- digital inequality and digital divide.

A graph to demonstrate the statistical distribution of the articles into key themes is shown below (see Chart 3), and then the key themes are discussed in detail.

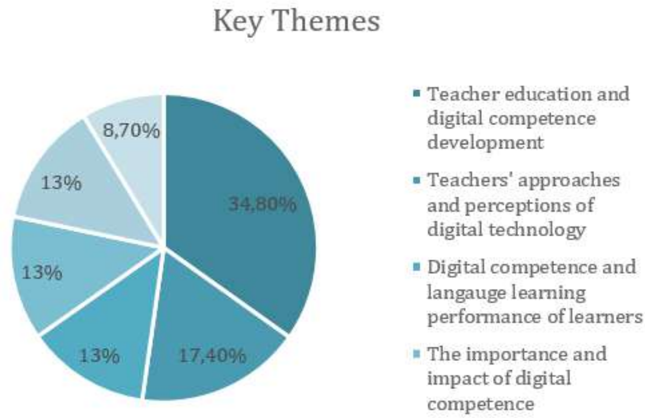

Chart 3. Statistical distribution of key themes into articles

Belda-Medina and Calvo-Ferrer (2022), Wong and Moorhouse (2021), and Scanni (2022) highlighted the importance of teachers' and learners' digital competences in educational processes and noted that teachers' confidence levels increased as they gained more experience with digital tools. They also emphasized the need of teachers' digital competences being enhanced, particularly for emerging crises, and the significance of positive attitudes and high digital competences in language education. All of this research demonstrates the need for teachers to become more digitally competent in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of educational processes.

In their investigations of teachers' approaches and perceptions toward digital technology, Meirovitz et al. (2022), Nugrohoa et al. (2022), Çebi and Reisoğlu (2022), and Maiier and Koval (2020) collectively highlighted the crucial role of these factors in the ongoing digital transformation within education. They stressed the importance of developing teachers' digital competences and ensuring the effective utilization of educational technologies.

On the other hand, the significance of digital competence was not only linked with teachers' effective educational processes; students were also added to the equation in the reviewed studies. Kopinska (2020), Niu et al. (2022), and Solomakha and Kosharna (2020) reported how the level of digital competence influenced language learners in terms of the learners' psychological wellbeings and language learning performance.

Naturally, in-service and pre-service teachers were the subject of the calls for digital competence development. Meirovitz et al. (2022), Nugrohoa et al. (2022), Solomakha and Kosharna (2020), Al Khateeb (2017), Gudmundsdottir et al. (2020), Rahimi and Tafazoli (2022), and Wong and Moorhouse (2021) addressed the need for optimizing teacher education programs in terms of digital competence development and ensuring teachers' integration of digital tools into their teaching. Thus, a support mechanism was recommended for the development of teachers and the enrichment of the language education process.

Discussing the role and future of digital technology in education, Tomczyk et al. (2021) suggested the positive impact of digital technologies on increasing student achievement by providing interactive learning opportunities, fostering independent and authentic learning, and making the learning process more effective and enjoyable. Smagulova et al. (2021), on the other hand, discussed the evolving role of digital technologies in future education systems, which would provide customized learning processes, flexible and diversified learning experiences, and data-based decision-making. It was at this point that the digital inequality and digital divide theme came to the fore. The studies by Chabert (2021) and Simões (2021) excavated this issue by pointing out insufficient infrastructure, limited internet access, and the absence of appropriate devices that contributed to students disengaging from education and widening the digital divide. The impact of residence context was also reported to exacerbate the inequality and divide among educators.

Implications from the Studies: Practical and Theoretical Considerations

As far as the relevant studies on digital competence and English language teaching were reviewed, the researchers appeared to suggest pedagogical implications mostly in addition to research-oriented implications. Most of the authors suggested that teachers should be trained according to the demands of the current era, and there was a call for revising teacher training programs accordingly. While training student-teachers, underpinning the importance of ICT was crucial to improve their professional digital competence (Gudmmundsdottir et al., 2020). Further, they suggested not only integrating ICT into teacher training programs but they also proposed providing student-teachers with ample opportunities of seminars, courses and activities. Apart from the pedagogical implications suggested, they addressed the gap in investigating the responsible use of ICT and how it emerged in different contexts of different teacher education programs. Khateeb (2017) proposed that along with providing instructors and teacher educators with access to various technology tools, the relevant departments should also provide learners with enough training, knowledge, and skills. Regarding keeping up with the latest technological developments in education, Nugrohoa et al. (2022) also informed the stakeholders about the necessity to equip teachers of the twenty-first century with requisite knowledge and skills of technology integration in teaching practice. Similarly, Solomakha and Kosharna (2020) suggested that the use of digital technologies in education would satisfy the needs of the child of the twenty-first century, so university programs that prepare students for pedagogical specialties must be updated. Digital tools must be used extensively throughout the learning process in order to increase students' communicative ability in a foreign language and their willingness to employ them in future pedagogical activities.

Several papers suggested that the challenges encountered during online and remote teaching should be taken into account. In this respect, Wong and Moorhouse (2021) put forward that teacher training programs and additional training should be offered to the teachers so as to improve their digital competence based on the challenges and constraints they encountered during remote teaching during Covid-19. Some of them proposed that future research was required. Regarding this, Scanni (2022) suggested that future research on distance education and COVID-19 could utilize these findings to assess methodologies and approaches employed in different countries. This could enhance our understanding of the context surrounding the progress of distance education during and after the pandemic. Meirovitz et al. (2022) also stated that further research was needed as the technology itself was an ever-growing area constantly, as a result, they suggested that it would be crucial to identify constraints and opportunities arisen in online education. Chabert (2021) addressed the problems that arose during online teaching as a call for an up-to-date integration of technology.

With respect to further research, Tomczyk et al. (2021) pose the following questions in their study to be investigated in future research: what is the backdrop of the differences among countries, is it related to their cultural differences or the availability of the technological facilities? Laeli et al. (2020) asserted that the examples of instruction for the literacy of finding and critically evaluating information had to be addressed in future studies. Conducting a study in Kyiv, Maiier and Koval (2021) suggested that novel research needed conducting in different contexts to gain insights into the professional development of pre-service teachers.

Conclusion and future directions

In the current study, 24 publications on digital competence and English language education that were published in reputable journals between 2017 and 2022 were examined in order to determine how the articles were distributed by years and contexts, their focal points, research methodologies, and implications. As a consequence of the current review, these implications are suggested:

- Highlighting the Significance of Teacher Training

Numerous authors (Al Khateeb, 2017; Gudmonsdottir et al., 2020; Meirovitz et al., 2022; Rahimi & Tafazolli, 2022; Wong & Moorhouse, 2021) expressed similar views on the importance of enhancing the digital skills of teachers and providing them with ample opportunities through both pre-service and in-service training programs. Based on their findings, these authors concluded that current teacher training programs did not effectively support future teachers in improving their digital competence and keeping pace with the ongoing technological advances in education.

- Exploring Multidimensional Aspects of Digital Competence

To begin with, the relevant studies examined the digital competence from one aspect generally, that is to say, the digital competence level of teachers and learners tended to be investigated through tools rather than relating it to other factors which may have a significant impact on their digital competence or actual classroom practices. There were few studies comparing competence levels and actual practices. In addition, this issue was generally examined from only one perspective, as digital competence; however, it needs being inspected from different perspectives relating it to other possible factors contributing to or inhibiting development of digital competence. For instance, the degree to which the level of teachers' autonomy and their efficacy determine their digital competence can be investigated to gain a deeper insight. In this regard, psychological constraints can be included in further research.

- Broadening the Sampling Frame

Moreover, the participants tended to be teachers, and there were fewer studies including both learners and teachers as participants. Conducting empirical studies with both groups as control and experimental groups could provide a fruitful insight into education so that the challenges and advances of integration of digital tools into learning process could be detected. Further, digital competence of teacher educators can be investigated in order to gain a better understanding about teachers.

- Expanding Research methodology tendencies

Benali et al. (2018) suggested that that DigCompEdu CheckIn tool could be utilized to investigate the current needs of teacher training professionally. Additionally, longitudinal studies were more likely to highlight thorough results about the learning process; however, they were rarely found when reviewing the literature. Although employing a longitudinal study is harder, it is better in terms of providing comprehensive outcomes.

As some of the relevant studies suggested (Gudmundsdottir et al., 2020; Maiier & Koval, 2021), cross cultural studies can be conducted. Examining different groups from different contexts could give an understanding about professional development of teaching.

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APPENDIX A

Table 2. List of Reviewed Journals

Name of Journal	Number of Articles
System	1
Computers & Education	1
Heliyon	1
Journal of Computer Assisted Learning	1
Computer Assisted Language Learning	1
Education and Information Technologies	2
Issues Teach.	1
International Education Studies	1
International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology	1
Eternal (English, Teaching, Learning & Research Journal)	1
Modern Languages Open	1
The Education and Science Journal	1
ELT Echo: The Journal of English Language Teaching in Foreign Language Context	1
Advanced Education	1
Cogent Education	1
Tadris: Jurnal Keguruan dan Ilmu Tarbiyah	1
Educological Discourse	1
LET: Linguistics, Literature and English Teaching Journal	1
Journal of Language & Education Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education Hungarian Education Research Journal European Journal of Education The JALT CALL Journal	1 1 1 1 1
Total	24

EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY (EDTECH) IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) IN BANGLADESH: NECESSITIES, INNOVATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract: *The use of educational technology (EdTech) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in Bangladesh has already been accepted due to its amenities. This paper aims to explore the EdTech tools and devices currently used in EFL context in Bangladesh. Concurrently, it unearths the pragmatism of the EdTech resources along with what consequences they come with. The study applied a mixed-method approach consisting of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. 100 undergraduate students from 19 different private and public universities and colleges of Bangladesh were the sample population, and they were interviewed over the phone and provided with a semi-structured survey questionnaire using a Google Form sent via email and social networking sites. The findings reveal that almost all the participants have an idea of what EdTech includes, but they do not get the required support and environment to utilize them properly. Institutions offering EdTech support are quite a few in number whereas many have access to the latest EdTech inventions and innovations at their personal initiatives. Nevertheless, the learners encounter a number of crucial obstacles while exploiting EdTech scopes and arrangements, which are essential to address. Finally, the findings assert that learners are interested in utilizing EdTech in EFL learning with proper logistical support.*

Keywords: *Educational Technology, EdTech, EdTech support, Institutions, EFL, Bangladesh*

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Introduction

English is globally recognized as one of the most widely spoken languages in the world (Suna & Durmuşçelebi, 2013). Rao (2019) and Seidlhofer (2001) claim that it is also commonly used as a second language or a lingua franca in global communication, education, business, travel, etc. According to Rao (2019), "English has an official or special status in almost 70 countries." As a result, learning EFL has become increasingly important in today's globalized world, and there is a significant demand for the English language around the world (Vonkova et al., 2021). English is the most commonly used of the approximately 5,000 living languages (Broughton et al., 2003). Moreover, it is the second language that is learned the most frequently. Demont-Heinrich (2008) gives estimated data in which it is said that 400 million individuals use English as a native language and a further 2 billion people use it as a second or foreign language.

Many educators believe that using computer technology to deliver high-quality education is essential (Ahmadi, 2018). Bull and Ma (2001) state that technology offers language learners an endless number of resources. In addition, multimedia technology provides a sense of realism and works excellently, which considerably boosts students' interest and motivation for studying and their engagement in class activities (Prayudi et al., 2021). Mahrooqi and Troudi (2014) think that the use of computer technologies in language training creates a learning environment that is focused on the student. It gives teachers and course administrators the ability to present lessons in a variety of ways to engage students with different interests. It offers opportunities to learn outside the classroom and is seen as better accommodating individual variations. Gençlter (2015) asserts that online sources stimulate students to learn more, and computer-based activities offer students quick access to relevant information. Over 90% students are more engaged and passionate when utilizing modern technology to learn English (Mofareh, 2019).

Another important aspect is that the use of educational technology (EdTech) has increased significantly worldwide in recent years to ensure efficient teaching and learning (Alam, 2016). To keep up with global trends and demands, Bangladesh, a developing nation, is also striving to integrate modern technologies like information and communication technologies (ICT) into the country's key industries (Rahman et al., 2012). Based on the data analysis of Fatema and Sultana (2020), although Bangladesh is using more technology on a daily basis, the amount is still quite low and the classroom technologies are insufficient. Besides, they assert that EFL learning using technology has become highly necessary in Bangladesh because of the rapid development of technology and the requirement for English proficiency for higher education and jobs. Rao (2019) states that "most job providers ask for language skills, especially communication skills in English." Furthermore, he believes that English is necessary for those who want to work abroad or for a multinational company.

However, despite its possible benefits, the effective use of EdTech in EFL classrooms remains a challenge due to various factors, such as a lack of solid infrastructure and computer and e-learning expertise (Pirani, 2003). It also includes insufficient teacher training, rapid Internet connections, secured structures, and limited access to technology (Pirani, 2003; Baylor & Ritchie, 2002). The goal of this research is to examine the current situation of EFL education in Bangladesh, the innovations used, and the effects of such innovations. It will then explore the various forms of EdTech used in EFL learning, such as digital textbooks, language learning apps, video tutorials, online learning platforms, mobile apps, language learning management systems (LLMS), artificial intelligence (AI), and online resources. The paper will also discuss the advantages and disadvantages of these technologies and how they impact EFL teaching and learning in Bangladesh. The research will also examine the effectiveness of these innovations and their ability to improve EFL learning outcomes in Bangladesh, including how they affect teachers' roles and responsibilities, and how classroom dynamics change. The overall goal of this research paper is to provide information about the situation of EFL learning in Bangladesh nowadays, as well as the innovations used and their effects. The findings of this study can contribute to the development of more effective EFL teaching practices and policies in Bangladesh and other similar contexts.

Literature review

English has become the common medium of communication in the modern world. As a result, the world has become smaller, easier to access, shareable, and comfortable for everyone (Rao, 2019). He also asserts that English is used as a common language to maintain relationships between two nations and to expand science, education, business, trade, and commerce internationally. Supporting Rao (2019), Broughton et al. (2003) say that along with serving as a key forum for discussion at the UN and its associated organizations, OPEC, EFTA, ASEAN, BRICS, INTERPOL, and the NATO command language, it also serves as the official language of international aviation as well as the unofficial first language of international sport. Widdowson (1997), Modiano (1999), and Jenkins (2000) used the phrase "English as an International Language" for the very first time. In non-English-speaking nations, learning English is essential because it is the only tool through which communication is possible in the modern developed world (Begum, 2011).

Likewise, Bangladesh is among the countries with a high number of English learners in the world, which makes sense to Bangladeshi students considering that English is the most important language in the world (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). This is why the nation is currently placing a high priority on maintaining the growth of English teaching and learning (Rahman et al., 2019). To achieve this objective, several changes have been brought to the English curriculum by the National Education Policy in 2010, emphasizing English as a language of communication so that students can be more skilled and able to use it for multiple purposes, such as acquiring knowledge, higher education, and getting access to national and international jobs (National Curriculum, 2012, p. 2). As a part of Digital Bangladesh: Vision 2021, Bangladesh is putting effort into reducing conventional teaching techniques and joining the online community where education is provided with maximum accessibility (Hossain, Salam & Shilpi, 2016). Mallick et al. (2020) find that both teachers and students in Bangladesh think that the use of technology is not a luxury but rather an essential tool to enhance the teaching-learning environment at the secondary level of education, because the needs of Bangladesh in education are also changing along with those of the developed world. Likewise, Ahmadi (2018) also states that using technology has grown to be an essential part of learning both inside and outside of the classroom, and language learning has benefited from the integration of technology, which also enables teachers to adjust classroom activities to boost language acquisition.

On the other hand, Begum (2011) thinks that in developing nations like Bangladesh, creating innovative technological infrastructure for efficient English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning is a crucial challenge. Yet, the Government of Bangladesh is trying to ensure the best quality in education through modern technology, on its own initiative, and with the help of NGOs and international organizations. In 2009, the Ministry of Education of Bangladesh launched an educational program for learning English using a mobile phone titled "BBC Janala" in collaboration with BBC World Service Trust to provide three-minute mobile English courses to large numbers of adult learners in order to help them change their lives and the nation's economic growth (Begum, 2011; Ahmed & Kabir, 2018). According to Shohel et al. (2010), it has been proven that the use of new mobile technologies enhances the standard of teacher education and training and makes learning more accessible.

The use of mobile phones has increased in Bangladesh to a great extent. Begum (2011) states that due to the low call rates and SMS service, even a day laborer can afford a mobile phone. She also states that students from both urban and rural areas use mobile phones frequently, and so they can be comprehensively applied as an English language teaching and learning tool in Bangladesh, a view also supported by Walsh et al. (2013). Furthermore, based on their experience in a Bangladeshi educational institution, Alam and Islam (2008) state that SMS technology is one of the most promising ways to set up an interactive online teaching environment for remote learning. Banks (2011) explores the fact that more than 12,500 teachers and over one million students from primary and secondary schools in Bangladesh have been given training in English teaching through mobile phones as a part of the BBC Janala project. However, Stockwell (2007) shows that students have the experience of using their personal computers or mobile devices to learn vocabulary, and they enjoy and perform better on computers than on mobile devices to learn vocabulary.

Becker (2000) states that computers are considered an essential tool for teaching languages where teachers can choose their own methods and curriculum, and a lot of teachers think that they are a medium for providing high-quality education to students. Moreover, Eaton (2010) says that communication with computer technology is an effective feature of language learning and that more equitable participation is possible with computer-based discussion than with physical discussion. Zhao (2013) also supports the statement. Likewise, computer technology makes teachers and learners improve and cooperate in language learning (Bennett et al., 2000). In contrast with developed countries a decade ago, Bangladesh was not able to use technologies like e-learning and m-learning because of a lack of skilled teachers, electricity, and computers in the education sector (Begum, 2011). Although Bangladesh has traditionally utilized the conventional ELT strategy, it is not adequate in this modern technological era (Mallick et al., 2020).

However, in order to keep pace with the developed world, the scenario has changed with the demands of the Bangladeshi people. Haque and Akter (2014) assert that the need for technology-mediated education is increasing daily in Bangladesh since it helps to grab students' attention by displaying instructive videos or animations. To keep up with the demands, the 2010 National Education Policy of the country recommended using audiovisual resources in language classrooms. In line with the National Curriculum, Save the Children plays an active role in developing software for teaching English in the classroom to complement government policy and has been placed in 18 government primary schools in a district of Bangladesh (Parvin & Salam, 2015). To achieve the vision of a "Digital Bangladesh," the government of Bangladesh reinforces the use of technology in all aspects of daily life, and later in 2014, the government of Bangladesh began supplying laptops and multimedia projectors to every government high school to ensure quality education (Fatema & Sultana, 2020). In addition to this, adding multimedia to university education has already been remarkable, and it is also thought that this technology will enhance the conventional pedagogy at the secondary and higher secondary levels in Bangladesh (Mallick et al., 2020).

Thao (2003) believes that in the current era of technological development, it is impossible to disregard the value of multimedia materials for the teaching of the English language. Moreover, teaching English as a second language has greatly benefited from the use of multimedia technologies, particularly for nonnative English speakers (Chapelle, 2001). Using multimedia instruction with an audio-visual system in the classroom has more benefits, such as giving learners stimuli to help them understand a certain subject topic better (Canning-Wilson, 2000). It also encourages students to wonder, evaluate, and feel interested (Koksal, 2004) and helps both students and teachers learn and apply English grammar in practical contexts (Koehler, 2009). Furthermore, it helps lecturers achieve the goals of efficient foreign language instruction, particularly English in the modern era (Saglam & Sert, 2012), enabling students to absorb the subject with excitement. Additionally, it boosts their thinking skills and increases their knowledge by playing films in the classroom (Arifah, 2014) and assists learners in understanding the immediate meaning of the language by showing cartoons in the classroom (Islam, 2020).

Mallick et al. (2020) conducted a survey in which the majority of survey participants acknowledged that multimedia technology not only boosted students' creativity but also helped teachers use innovative methods of instruction (see also Huang & Liu, 2000). Huang and Liu (2000) also found that most of the students do think they can learn more effectively when multimedia technology is integrated with traditional methods rather than just talking and writing on the board. Also, their analysis points out that younger teachers showed greater interest than older teachers in using multimedia technology to teach English in the classroom. Many educational institutions in Bangladesh are gradually integrating multimedia because of its advantages. Likewise, Mahmuda (2016) asserts that multimedia projectors are frequently used in Bangladeshi English-language classrooms. It shows that the significance of including technology in English teaching and learning has been acknowledged. Fatema and Sultana (2020) surveyed both English and Bangla versions of colleges, and they found that about 40 out of 100 institutions are conducting language classes using multimedia regularly. Not only that, but the government of Bangladesh and the Ministry of Education are also putting much effort into conducting classes using multimedia projectors, which is essential for ensuring a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach in English language classes.

According to Afrin (2014), who conducted a study in three private universities in Bangladesh, "the lesson is more interesting if a teacher uses electronic tools," and this is highly acknowledged by 72% of students; "they prefer learning from a teacher who uses various e-tools while teaching," which is also strongly acknowledged by 78% of students. Eleven of the twelve teachers involved in the study use computers in the classroom mainly to conduct multimedia classes. The findings actually indicate that the use of the latest digital devices is now in high demand among modern learners. Young and Bush (2004) think that it is essential to use technology widely in the classroom to teach English because it improves instruction quality by encouraging student participation. On the contrary, too much reliance on multimedia-based learning can also increase the distance between teachers and learners, damaging teacher-student relationships and society as a whole (Chen & Liu, 2012). In addition, UNESCO (2012) reported that students sometimes prefer to deal with traditional lessons over digital ones, so by combining information and communication technology (ICT) with traditional education, the teachers need to pay special attention to the students' reactions to the use of ICT in the classroom.

Bangladesh has been considerably digitized, and many researchers highlight the importance of incorporating technological teaching methods into its educational programs, particularly for higher education (Mahmuda, 2016). ICT can be an effective tool for learning English as an EFL student in Bangladesh. With the help of the internet, students can access a wide range of online resources, including interactive language learning websites, audio and video materials, online dictionaries, and language learning apps. These resources can provide students with additional opportunities to practice their language skills and to learn at their own pace. Multiple research investigations have found that ICT is vital for teaching EFL, and introducing new ICT tools into educational services, such as laptops, interactive whiteboards, LCD projectors, the internet, and social networks, promises to help students utilize English in a very stress-free, real-life, and communicative atmosphere (Çakici, 2016). Furthermore, ICTs have several advantages, such as the fact that students can play an enthusiastic role, have a discussion involving adequate information, process new educational materials assigned to them, and improve their language learning abilities (Costley, 2014).

Different types of modern technological tools and apps are being used to make teaching and learning accessible throughout the world. Modern English language learners can use smartphone apps as a reliable foundation (Zilber, 2012). There are so many modern EFL video learning and gaming apps through which one can acquire the English language and improve their visual, auditory, reading, writing, and kinesthetic skills by watching videos and playing games. Altun (2015) says that in order to increase students' motivation and linguistic awareness, teachers use technology such as computers, the internet, smart boards, mobile phones, video games, and music players during the target language learning process. Likewise, Acapela, E-book, Google Classroom, Zoom Cloud (Prayudi et al., 2021), WhatsApp (Alsaleem, 2014), Wiki technology (Lin & Yang, 2011), and several social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype, YouTube, and LinkedIn (Fatema & Sultana, 2020; Prayudi et al., 2021), as well as podcasting (Prayudi et al., 2021) are the most prominent easy and free platforms that can be used for teaching and learning activities by both teachers and students. Fatema and Sultana (2020) claim that although these online platforms are mostly used for entertainment, they are also used for learning purposes, and these online platforms support students in keeping in touch with the teachers even outside of class. Hossain (2018) also says that in Bangladesh, EFL students at the university level are making the best possible use of these technological facilities both inside and outside of the classroom.

In Bangladesh, educational technology is increasingly being used in various ways to enhance the quality of education and make it more accessible to students. Islam (2014) states that due to the government's reform of regulations and policies, ICTs have spread quickly in Bangladesh. E-learning platforms, digital textbooks, educational apps, online assessments, and virtual labs are being used to make education easier. Hossain (2018) finds that in Bangladesh, students who want to learn English have plenty of access to smartphones and other cutting-edge technology, as well as software (apps); in learning English, 76.47% of EFL learners use smartphones for using English language learning apps. Moreover, he says that it is fun, cost, and time efficient to study the English language with the support of smartphones and applications, and practicing and learning may occur in a variety of settings like standing, sitting, and lying down. In relation to this, Cano (2014) says smartphones and other portable digital gadgets have tremendous teaching capacity. Due to the low price of smartphones in Bangladesh, one can buy an Android smartphone for under USD 27.04 (PhoneListBD.com). Hence, almost every student can purchase it. This is why the use of these technologies has become the standard teaching method for EFL students nowadays. Amidst the Corona pandemic, the use of these technologies in education has increased around the world.

Hossain (2021) argues that during the pandemic, with a great deal of excitement and disagreement, English language instructors from a variety of Bangladeshi institutions, including secondary, higher secondary, and university institutions, gradually offered online sessions. In his study, teachers think that there is no need to have a large place or infrastructure for online teaching, and it is possible to conduct and upload a video class from anywhere, and it is also time-saving. On the other hand, students think that they can attend online classes in their own free time, and it is also safe from various forms of transport problems, pollution, safety, and social isolation. Likewise, Raheem and Khan (2020) think that because of the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic across the globe, including Bangladesh, e-learning can be considered a secure, efficient, individualized, and accessible instrument in order to improve students' English language proficiency. But, in order to attain these technological amenities in education, there are lots of challenges and barriers for a developing nation like Bangladesh.

Although ICT has the ability to significantly enhance the educational system, developing nations are still far from obtaining these advantages since they face numerous challenges (Khan, 2014). Many people in Bangladesh do not have access to the necessary technological infrastructure, such as computers and the Internet, to learn and use technology effectively. There is a lack of digital literacy and awareness in Bangladesh, which means that many people do not understand how to use technology effectively or safely. As a result, this limits their ability to engage with and learn from technological advancements. Hossain (2021) examines Covid-19 and finds that in online education in Bangladesh, teachers face a lack of sufficient logistical aid from the institution, internet supply, and technological devices, and students face an inability to afford internet connections and show disinterest. Lack of training of teachers for technological use are also among the problems. Afrin (2020) shares the same opinion, arguing that most of the universities in Bangladesh do not have online learning environments or continuous internet connections with adequate speed, and students, especially from public universities, are not able to afford the technologies and internet facilities. She also sees technophobia in both teachers and students.

Parvin and Salam (2015) indicate that the majority of schools need the necessary infrastructure to utilize the CLT methodology successfully. In order to implement that, Bangladesh's 2010 National Education Policy strongly encourages teachers to make use of audiovisual tools for English classroom teaching. In addition, there needs to be more digital literacy and awareness in Bangladesh, which means that people need to understand how to use technology effectively and safely. This can be a barrier to technological learning, as people may be hesitant to engage with new technology without proper guidance. In fact, for teaching language skills, it is essential that teachers are well acquainted with these technological devices (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2014). Simultaneously, researchers indicate that in Bangladesh, EFL teachers need proper training on multimedia and other EdTechs so that they can improve their technical skills to operate the EFL classes effectively through technological devices (Afrin, 2014; Parvin & Salam, 2015; Mallick et al., 2020). Accordingly, Parvin and Salam (2015) conducted a study and noticed that teachers who perform well during teacher training also do better in classroom facilitation.

Therefore, an effective e-content-based lesson depends on the teacher. However, it is also seen that teachers often utilize the material as a tool without adequate preparation. Khan (2014) asserts that "most of the teacher training programs in Bangladesh were criticized as poorly constructed because they failed to focus on teachers' actual needs, such as the teachers' inability to integrate ICT into their real teaching-learning situation." In addition, the use of ICT in the classroom can have certain drawbacks, such as teachers' challenges in relating and applying the technologies to the course syllabus and curriculum (Çakici, 2016). Even though we are in the "age of technology," many teachers are still hesitant to use technology with students on a regular basis. Hence, in EFL learning, there is a gap between the technologies and their effective use in Bangladesh. Additionally, the review of literature on the topic reveals that the use of technology is vital for acquiring language, and at the same time, it implies that using digital resources cannot ensure both teachers' teaching and students' learning (Ahmadi, 2018).

This study will reveal the actual scenario for both students and teachers, how much they utilize EdTech to acquire its advantages, and to what extent they face barriers or challenges in terms of using it in their real lives.

Research Objectives

The study intends to accomplish the following aims:

- To assess the actual state of using EdTech in EFL learning, and their suitability in Bangladesh.
- To determine the benefits and drawbacks of using EdTech in EFL learning in Bangladesh.
- To explain to what extent the EFL teachers and learners are acquainted with modern educational technologies and their features, and how much they are able to achieve their possible benefits in terms of Bangladeshi perspective.

Research Questions

To understand the context of EdTech in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in Bangladesh, the study aims to find answers to the questions below:

- What is the current actual state of EdTech use (To what extent EdTech is being used, how they are used, and if their use is appropriate) in EFL learning in Bangladesh?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of the use of EdTech in EFL learning in Bangladesh?
- To what extent are the Bangladeshi EFL teachers and students acquainted with modern EdTech?
- How much are Bangladeshi EFL teachers and students able to achieve the possible benefits of EdTech?

Methodology

Both subjective and objective perceptions were needed for this study to attain the best outcomes for its objectives. This study applied mixed methods with a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions, and both primary and secondary data were utilized for the study. According to Enosh et al. (2014), using mixed methods, researchers can provide comprehensive and in-depth answers to their research questions. The qualitative approach is capable of evaluating psychological points of view, and quantitative information may provide a clear indication and percentage of the facts the researchers will be focusing on. Aorny et al. (2022) point out that "the key features of the quantitative method are a reliable outcome, measurable variants, a systematic survey, and precision. It is quite easy to predict the hypothesis of the study using this method. It provides the graphical pictures and calculative equation" (p. 415). Likewise, a researcher can generalize the results to a larger population by collecting data from a large number of individuals using the quantitative approach, and the qualitative approach, which values the opinions of its participants, offers greater knowledge of the problem under investigation (Dawadi et al., 2021).

For this purpose, the researchers conducted surveys and a small number of interviews to collect samples from students at different public and private universities and several colleges in Bangladesh. The researchers set eight open-ended and eight closed-ended questions for respondents, for a total of 16 questions. Open-ended questions help respondents give their own opinion broadly based on their personal experiences. Allen (2017) cited in Hossain (2021), clarifies that "Open-ended questions do not let the participants choose from a prearranged bunch of answer options; rather, they allow them to present replies in their own language" (p. 48). On the other hand, closed-ended questions draw a line to keep the respondents in a specific genre. It restricts the respondents to the limited number of options that are provided (Foddy, 1993).

Research Setting

In Bangladesh, higher education institutions play a crucial role in shaping the future of the nation's youth. So, the researchers decided to conduct a survey among undergraduate students from English and other departments at 19 different public and private universities and several colleges in Bangladesh. As the research is based on different institutions and places, it will give a possible picture of the current use and condition of EdTech in the country.

The study seeks to provide valuable insights by collecting data from the University of Dhaka, Jahangirnagar University, Jagannath University, Daffodil International University, Gov.t Sarada Sundari Mohila College, University of Rajshahi, Pundra University of Science & Technology, Govt. Azizul Haque College, Rajshahi College, Begum Rokeya University, Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science & Technology University, Gov.t Alimuddin College, Khulna University, Islamic University, Bangladesh, Jashore University of Science & Technology, Noakhali Science & Technology University, University of Chittagong, Sylhet Agricultre University, and Shahjalal Science & Technology University.

Population Sampling

The sample population of this study has been chosen by using stratified sampling to select 100 undergraduate students from English and other departments who are continuing their studies at 19 different private and public universities and colleges in Bangladesh. These selected population samples and the selection approach help the study find the actual insights of educational institutions, especially private and public universities, and colleges, in the country. Parsons (2017) stated that "stratification is used to increase the efficiency of a sample design with respect to cost and estimator precision" (p. 1).

Data Collection

The survey was conducted through a semi-structured questionnaire for students in formal and informal ways. Since this study was conducted in different institutions, which are situated in different parts of the country, and no funds were given for the study to be conducted, it was not possible to reach every institution physically at the researchers' own expense. So, from May 27, 2023 to June 8, 2023, the researchers distributed the survey questionnaires using both hard copies (5) and Google Forms as a soft copy (90), and very few of the respondents were interviewed (5) for collecting the qualitative and quantitative data. The data were collected in the same time span. Most of the questionnaires were provided through WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Instagram Messenger, and Email. Sometimes, the researchers needed to talk over the phone to make the participants understand and agree to participate in the study. Besides, they needed to remind the participants on social media sites to complete their participation by filling out the Google Forms. And several students had been interviewed over the phone to get to know them and their institution's level of EdTech use. Some targeted participants did not take part in the survey, even though they agreed to participate at their own convenience. Then the researchers had to get in touch with more students to reach the targeted number of students. Most of the students were chosen from the English department and fewer from various other departments to illustrate the research's objectives.

The following chart shows the distribution of 100 participants from different institutions in Bangladesh:

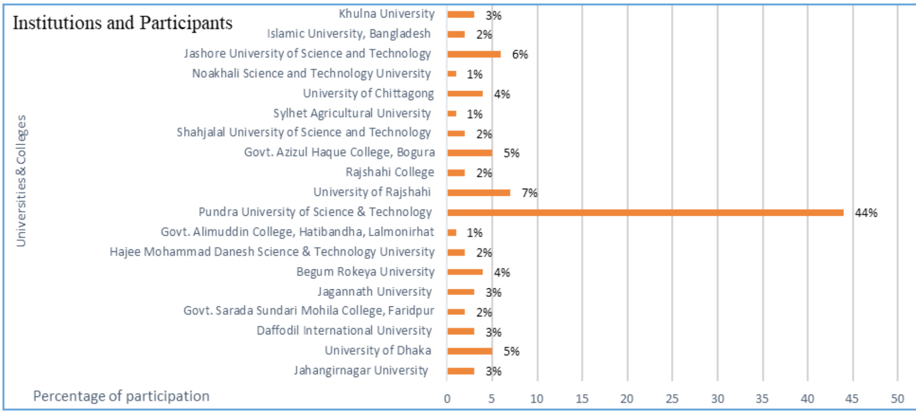

Chart 1. Number of participants and names of home institutions

Data Analysis & Findings

The collected responses and interviews are analyzed using a mixed method with a combination of qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods to get more reliable and accurate results. Furthermore, the collected responses from the close-ended questions are analyzed using the quantitative data analysis method, and then the findings are converted into numerical values and percentages represented by means of pie charts, infographics, tables, etc., using Microsoft Excel, Live Gap Charts, and other tools. Answers to the open-ended questions are analyzed using the qualitative data analysis method.

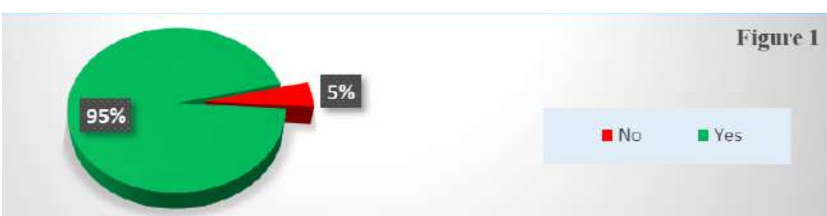

Figure 1. Familiarity of students with educational technology

The pie chart shows that most (95%) of the students who participated in this survey are familiar with educational technology. They know what EdTechs are. Only 5% of the participants do not have any idea of what EdTechs are.

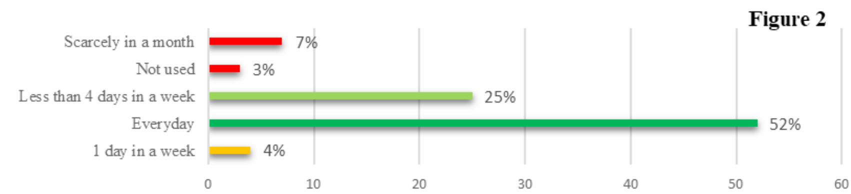

Figure 2. The frequency of using educational technology for learning English as foreign language

In figure 2, 52% of the participants say that their institutions use EdTechs almost every day for learning English as a foreign language. 25% of institutions use the EdTechs less than 4 days out of 7 days, 4% use it only one day a week, and 7% hardly use it once a month. Moreover, there is no use of EdTech in 3% of the institutions of the participants.

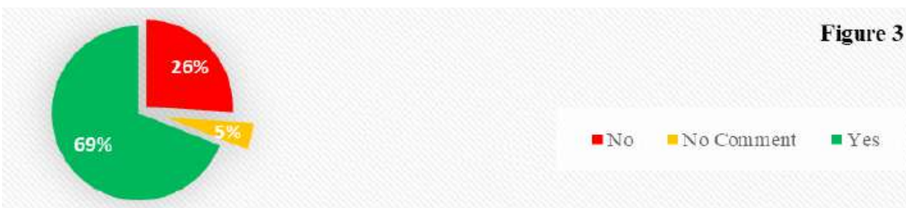

Figure 3. Having adequate infrastructure for utilizing EdTech in institutions

Figure 3 shows that, 69% of participants agree with the statement that they have adequate infrastructure for utilizing EdTech in a proper way. In addition, 26% of participants do not have adequate infrastructure, and 5% of participants have not shared their opinions in this case.

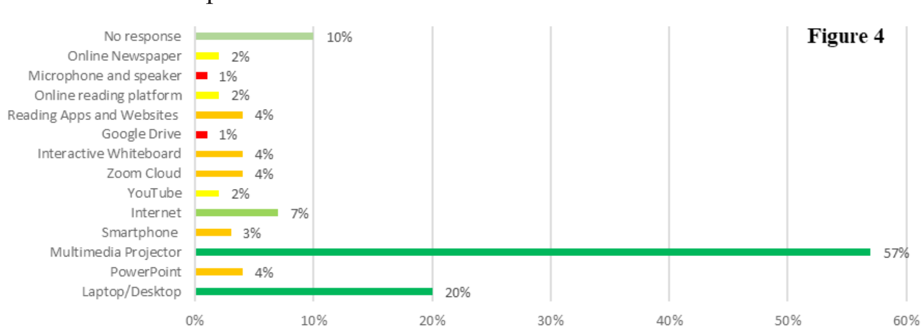

Figure 4. Various educational technologies used by institutions for teaching reading in English

Most of the instructors use a multimedia projector to teach reading in Bangladesh. The survey finds that 57% of institutions utilize multimedia projectors, along with 20% laptops or desktops and 4% PowerPoint. There is also 7% use of the internet, 3% use of smartphones, 2% use of YouTube, and separately, 4% use of both Zoom Cloud and interactive whiteboard. Furthermore, there are different types of reading apps and websites (4%) that are used for teaching reading. Also, online reading platforms (2%), microphones and speakers (1%), and online newspapers (2%) are merely used in teaching reading. 10% of participants in the survey preferred not to share their opinions on this matter.

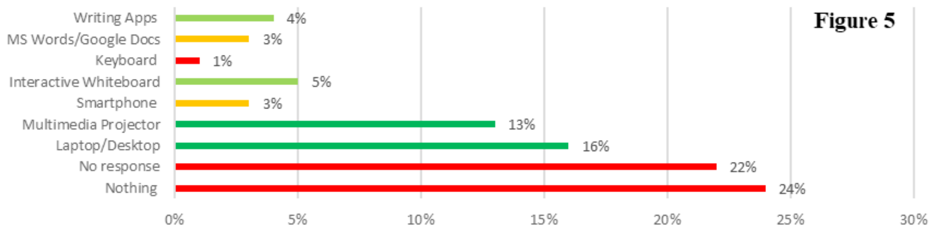

Figure 5. Various educational technologies used by institutions for teaching writing in English

According to 16% of participants, laptops or desktops are used to teach writing in their institutions. More than 10% of students who have participated in this survey said that multimedia projectors are used in their institutions. Moreover, they said that smartphones (3%), keyboards (1%), MS Word/Google Docs (3%), and different sorts of writing apps (4%) are also used by their institutions for teaching writing in English. But most of the participants (24%) say that their institutions use no technological devices for teaching writing in English. In addition, a large number (22%) of participants did not respond to the question.

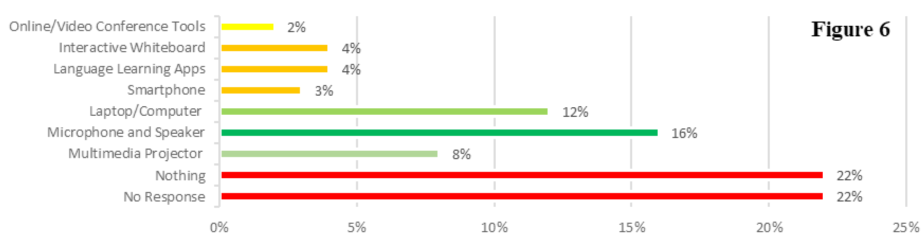

Figure 6. Various educational technologies used by institutions for teaching speaking in English

Figure 6 shows that 16% of participants use a microphone and speaker; 8% use a multimedia projector; 12% use a laptop or computer; 3% use smartphones; 4% use an interactive whiteboard; 4% use different types of learning apps; and only 2% use online or video conference tools to teach speaking in English in their institutions, while 22% do not use any kind of educational device. Interestingly, around 22% of participants showed no interest in answering the question.

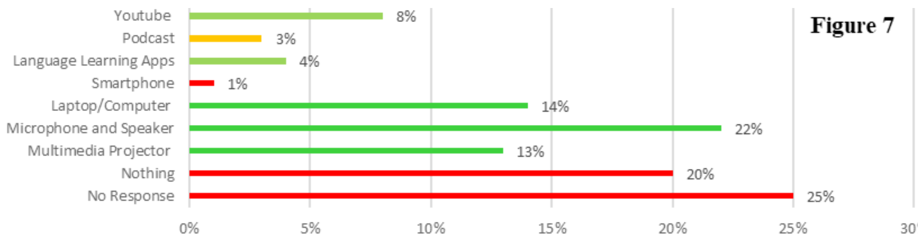

Figure 7. Various educational technologies used by institutions for teaching listening in English

About 22% of participants have a microphone and speaker in their institutions for teaching the listening part in English, while 13% have multimedia protectors. Besides, 14% laptops or computers, 8% YouTube, 4% different kinds of language learning apps, 3% podcasts, and only 1% smartphones are used for teaching listening in English in participants' institutions. Additionally, according to 20% of participants in the survey, there are no such technological devices in their institutions that are used for teaching listening in English. And one-fourth (25%) of all participants abstained from sharing their opinions on this matter.

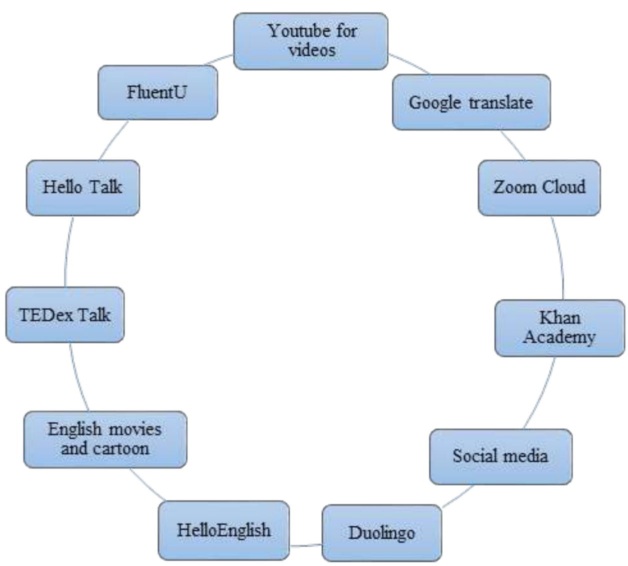

Figure 8. Students' personal use of EdTech

In addition to using educational technologies aided or provided by institutions, students personally use different types of platforms and apps to learn English as a foreign language. The participants shared several platforms and app names that they use for their own purposes. They use the video sharing platform "YouTube" for watching the tutorials on their assigned English topics. On YouTube, they regularly watch the channel named "TED Talk" to learn English pronunciation, language patterns, and how to make a sentence. Likewise, participants also talk about the education company "Khan Academy". As listening to the English language helps learners improve their language listening skills, this is why they watch "English movies and cartoons." Furthermore, they translate Bangla into English using "Google Translate" to check if their language-making pattern is right or not. Also, participants use several free and paid English learning apps like "Hello Talk, FluentU, Hello English, and Duolingo" to learn the English language. Besides, several participants mention "Zoom Cloud" as they use it to attend English learning classes. In addition to these, there are also so many Facebook and Instagram Pages that aim to teach the English language using these "Social Media" platforms, as the participants say.

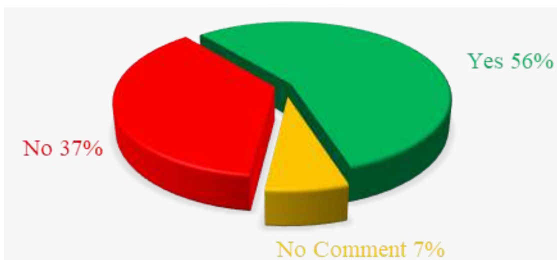

Figure 9. Use of latest educational technology by institutions

In this questionnaire, it was asked if respondents use the latest EdTech or not. The pie chart of the result shows that 56% of the participants' institutions use the latest version of technology to ensure better learning, while 37% do not have the latest EdTech. Also, 7% of participants made no comment on this question.

Things/persons that inspire learners to utilize EdTech in EFL learning		
Parents	Friends	Seniors
Teachers	Duolingo	Necessity
Inspired by own	Current needs	Social media
Family members	Social influencer	Modern Technology
YouTube channels	Hollywood movies	Easy access to the platforms

Figure 10. Things/persons that inspire learners to utilize EdTech in EFL learning

Surroundings and circumstances influence learners to use educational technology for better learning English as a foreign language. In this regard, family members, parents, teachers, friends, social influencers, and seniors inspire learners to utilize EdTech by letting them know its advantages. In addition to these, sometimes learners realize its advantages for their own interests. Moreover, there are several apps like Duolingo, video sharing platforms such as YouTube, and Social Media (Facebook, Instagram) through which learners may learn English easily, as indicated in their responses. Also, as it is an era of modern technology and learners get easy access to it, they utilize EdTech for better learning English as a foreign language. The participants also mention English movies, which inspire them to utilize EdTech for EFL learning.

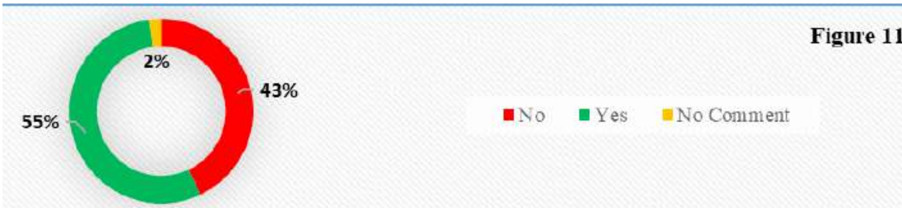

Figure 11. Availability of adequate training for using technological devices

More than half (55%) of respondents mentioned that their teachers are given enough training on running the educational technology or device by their institutions for better learning. But, at the same time about half (43%) of respondents gave a negative answer while only 2% of respondents did not share their opinions about the matter.

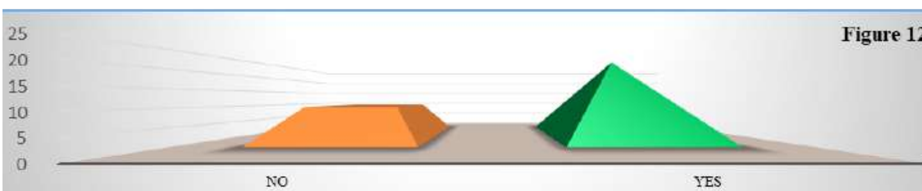

Figure 12: Whether the students are used to technological devices or not

In this figure, the two pyramids show a different scenario. The full pyramid on the right side stands for "yes," meaning that the students are used to technological devices and different types of apps. More than 60% of participants acknowledge that fact. On the other hand, almost 40% of participants convey that they are not used to those devices.

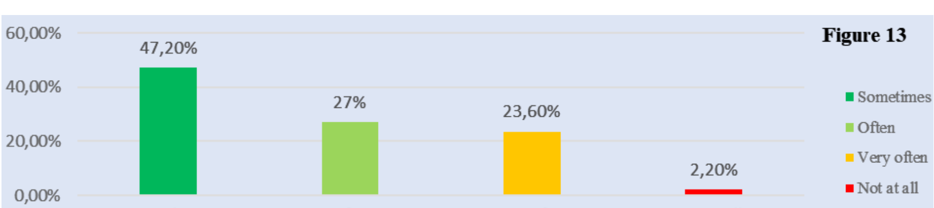

Figure 13. How often students use EdTech

Regarding the utilization of educational technology (EdTech) in their learning endeavors, a substantial proportion of participants, specifically 47.20%, expressed occasional engagement, whereas 27% reported frequent utilization. Notably, 23.60% of respondents indicated very frequent usage of EdTech for learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), while a mere 2.20% affirmed the non-utilization of such technological tools in their educational pursuits.

In Bangladesh, there are a number of problems with utilizing EdTech which are mentioned by the participants, such as poor internet connection, inadequate infrastructure, uncomfortable classrooms, uninterrupted electricity electricity, a lack of training, and unskilled IT officers in institutions. Also, participants mention several user problems, like a lack of updated or perfectly functional devices and difficulty in understanding the procedures. Besides, from a Bangladeshi perspective, participants convey their inability to afford the technological devices and the other elements needed to run the devices for learning. They have budget limitations, such as data packages that are very costly and limited access to technology or platforms because not all platforms are free, and several free platforms contain so many ads that break the participants' concentration. Sometimes, they face health problems like headaches and feeling bored and tired while utilizing EdTech for learning. Furthermore, they face social barriers, pronunciation problems, hesitation to speak in English, understanding the American accent, vocabulary problems, and a lack of a speaking partner to develop their language learning. Many individuals exhibit a perceived inadequacy in their English language proficiency, infrequent utilization of English, and a perception of English communication as a time-consuming endeavor.

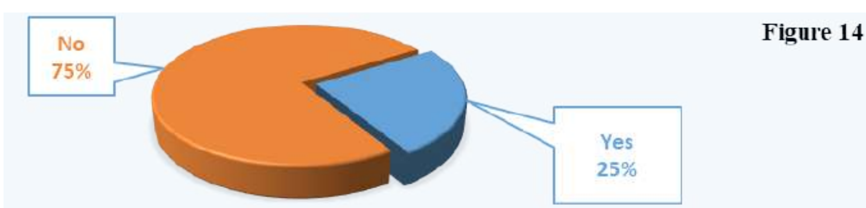

Figure 14. Availability of AR & VR, Extended Reality, Text Inspector, and Quizlet in the institution

This figure shows the availability of some technologies that are generally used in education in developed nations. In this survey, in Bangladesh, three-quarters (75%) of participants gave negative feedback to convey that their institutions do not use developed technologies like AR, VR, Text Inspector, and so on. But one-fourth (25%) of the participants gave positive feedback, and they conceded that these developed technologies are used in their institutions.

Discussion

Although almost all (95%) of the participants are familiar with EdTech, about half (52%) of them use it on a daily basis in their institutions for EFL learning, while the rest of them (48%) make use of it very often. About half of the educational institutions (57%) utilize multimedia projectors in a regular manner when teachers use them for reading and showing different educational elements, while 37% of the institutions do not have the latest technology like interactive whiteboards, as the students said. However, in other cases, such as for writing, listening, and speaking, the use of a multimedia projector decreases while other devices like speakers and sound systems, computers, laptops, and interactive whiteboards are used in their institution to a lesser extent. The results also show that all kinds of technologies and devices are used less by colleges than by universities. Also, in very few cases, the participants' institutions utilize smartphones, online newspapers, writing tools, Microsoft Word, YouTube videos, Zoom Cloud, the internet, and online English language learning platforms. But around 22% of the participants in the study state that their institutions do not use any kind of EdTech for teaching reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English, while a good number of the students (20%) preferred not to answer this matter.

Besides these EdTech, students participating in the survey mention that they use several of the latest EdTech or educational platforms like Fluent U, Hello Talk, Hello English, Duolingo, Google Translate, Khan Academy, and social media for EFL learning on their own, where both free and paid courses are available. Moreover, they watch English movies and cartoons regularly and also watch videos on YouTube like TEDx Talks to improve their language skills. The availability of multimedia content, such as podcasts, TEDx Talks, language learning apps, and YouTube videos, coupled with online writing tools and language assessment platforms, empowers students to develop their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in an engaging and interactive manner. Almost all students responding to the questionnaire have smartphones, so they utilize these EdTech tools and platforms in their own time and places for EFL learning. Besides, more than 60% of participants agree with the statement that they are oriented towards these technologies and platforms. They like it because there are opportunities to learn in an interactive manner by watching videos, graphs, pictures, conversations, stories, real-life incidents (news), and so on. Additionally, parents, family members, seniors, social influencers, teachers, and friends motivate learners to take advantage of EdTech's amenities. Therefore, around 80% of the students participating in the study state that they are enthusiastic to use these EdTechs, and they do it most of the time.

Despite these possible benefits, the study finds some challenges and barriers in terms of implementing EdTech in Bangladesh. Several notable complications in institutions shared by the participating students are inadequate infrastructure (26%) for implementing EdTechs, unstable internet connections, a lack of the latest devices, and unskilled IT officers. Likewise, technical glitches, problems with electricity, or unreliable access to electricity can disrupt students' engagement with educational technology. Furthermore, their institutions (75%) do not use any developed technologies such as AR, VR, or Text Inspector. The findings also show that the teachers (43% of the institutions) are not given any proper training for running the devices, and about 40% of the students are not used to the technologies and devices. Because the operating system of the technologies is a bit difficult for them, they face some difficulties while running the devices. Some students struggle with basic computer skills, navigating online platforms, or effectively utilizing language learning apps and tools. The participating students in the study concede that data packages are very costly; few of them are able to afford the devices, and there is also limited access to some platforms because they are paid. A number of the students are not that interested in any paid EFL learning platforms, though the free platforms break the learner's concentration because they contain so many ads. Also, sometimes it creates hazardous situations for the learners. They face health problems like headaches and feeling bored and tired while utilizing EdTech for a long period of time. Furthermore, they hesitate to speak English before other people; they also face pronunciation problems, a vocabulary shortage, a lack of a speaking partner, and difficulty understanding the American accent.

Limitations

There are several notable limitations to this study. One of the prime limitations of this study is that it was not possible to reach all the universities and colleges in Bangladesh to conduct the survey. Most of the data was collected through Google Forms. Besides, the sample population is of 100 students from different universities, which is comparatively small to get better findings and generalize the outcomes for the whole country. Moreover, only a total of 15 private and public universities and 4 colleges have been covered for the survey. The requirements, effects, and outcomes of EdTech might be different for other universities and colleges and their students. Also, no teacher has been included in the survey for the study. It would have been better if the teachers' points of view had been taken into account. In addition to this, no name or gender has been recorded for the study. The physical observation of the students and their institutions was not included in the study while utilizing EdTech. Furthermore, there were time limitations for the survey, which is why the participants were compelled within a certain period of time to give the answer to the questionnaire. The answer would have been more reliable and broad if they had had more time.

Recommendations

The government and relevant stakeholders should prioritize improving internet connectivity and uninterrupted power supply across the country, especially in rural areas. This can be achieved through infrastructure development, expanding broadband access, and utilizing innovative solutions like satellite internet technology. Hossain and Haque (2022) suggest that "The universities should provide sufficient logistic support to both the teachers and the students in terms of essential technological devices and speedy internet facilities" (p. 293). Also, the government should implement comprehensive digital literacy programs and training that provide students, teachers, and the wider community with the necessary basic computer skills to effectively use EdTechs. Ali and Dmour (2021) as cited by Hossain (2022), say that students must be offered proper training on the technologies and devices so that they can utilize them properly. Moreover, with the collaboration of technology companies and partnerships with non-profit organizations, affordable access to devices such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones and data packages for students needs to be ensured at cheap rates, especially for those who are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, the government should formulate policies that support the use of EdTech in the education system. These policies should address issues related to infrastructure development, curriculum adaptation, digital literacy, ensuring expert teachers and their training, content localization, technology-based seminars, lab facilities, and affordable access to devices. It is also important to ensure interactive multimedia content and adaptive learning platforms to enhance language acquisition and engagement in the technology-based seminar and lab facilities.

In addition to these, institutions need to ensure more updated EdTech devices like those used in developed countries like the USA, Canada, etc. Also, teachers and students need to be comprehensively familiar with those devices and their functions. Learning platforms and channels should create good content, courses, or modules that are developed especially for Bangladeshi EFL students and that can offer interactive speaking activities, grammar drills, pronunciation help, and vocabulary development. These platforms might offer interactive exercises, video lessons, virtual classrooms, native English-speaking chat rooms, and video tutorials.

Conclusion

Using EdTech in EFL learning in Bangladesh is not only a necessity but also presents exciting opportunities for innovation and has far-reaching implications. The key findings of this study assert that Bangladeshi EFL learners use EdTechs to a great extent. Students also use different learning platforms personally besides their institutional EdTechs. Yet, there are difficulties like inadequate training for both students and teachers, logistical support, and economic problems for students. The challenges students face in accessing quality English language education can be overcome through the effective use of EdTechs by removing barriers, making it easy to access, and so on. By embracing interactive language learning platforms, digital language learning apps, virtual language exchanges, and online language learning communities, students can engage in self-paced learning, practice language skills, and interact with English speakers worldwide. These technological tools offer flexibility and accessibility, enabling students to learn English anytime, anywhere, and at their own pace.

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COMMENSALITY AND CULTURE: A SEMIOTIC READING OF IGBO TRIBAL LIFE IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

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Abstract: *Food in literary production signifies the cultural and cross-cultural relations from which it is produced. The emergence of Literary Food Studies engages food as a signifier to magnify human relations and emotions. Food is a mosaic system of signs symbolising diasporic, class, caste, racial, and gender relations. The paper focuses on commensality, one of the mushrooming trends in literary food studies. Commensality is the act of eating together that helps to build relationships and create conviviality, the social pleasure among people. It helps to reinforce the identity and sense of belongingness among the community members. Drawing on the theoretical readings from Mary Douglas and Arjun Appadurai's semiotics of food, the paper explores the possibilities of commensality in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart. The paper tries to argue that, commensality and its food practices along with representing togetherness could also symbolise the complex cultural functioning of the Igbo tribal community. The ingredients of the commensality, the culinary tools, and the order of eating convey cultural meanings. It throws light into the hierarchy and various power relations existing in the community.*

Keywords: *Igbo tribal community, food, commensality, culture, power relations*

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Introduction

Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe's debut novel is renowned for its realistic portrayal of Igbo tribal life and the intrusion of colonial powers. Albert Chinualumogu Achebe, popularly known as Chinua Achebe is a distinguished novelist, poet, critic, and professor who has contributed immensely to African literature. Achebe's familiarity and connection with the Igbo tribe are reflected in his literary endeavours. Most of his writings are rich repositories of African history, culture, and identity. Though the novel has been widely discussed and interpreted since its inception on multiple grounds, very few studies have made attempts to decipher the role of food in critically analysing the functioning of Igbo tribal society. The paper draws theoretical insights from semiotics and critically analyses the role of food, especially commensality, the act of eating together, and its associated practices to comprehend the hierarchies and power relations in the Igbo tribal community.

The evolution of food from structural to cultural and hegemonic domains widely opened the scope of engaging food as a potent tool to unfurl the hidden layers of any society. Research on food and its affiliations has acquired popularity in recent years. "Scholars across disciplines have studied food for a long time, most notably anthropologists and folklorists, but it is only in the last ten to fifteen years or so that food as a focus for scholarly study has gained real acceptance" (Bentley, 2008, pp. 111-116). Historians, anthropologists, structuralists, economists, and health practitioners have been discussing the association of foodways and individual and cultural identity. One of the path-breaking studies in the area is Levi Strauss' (1966/2013) "The Culinary Triangle" in which he elaborated the connection between cooking and culture. His culinary triangle classifies food into raw, cooked, and rotten each representing distinct aspects of culture. He represents "raw" as natural, "cooked" as a product of cultural transformation, and "rotted" as a product of natural transformation. The triangle is suggestive of human characteristics and Strauss compares cooking to language: "Cooking is a language through which society unconsciously reveals its structure" (Strauss, 1979, p. 495). In addition to Strauss, Roland Barthes (1961/2013), and Pierre Bourdieu (1979/2010) have also discussed the cultural aspects of food.

The emergence of Literary Food Studies facilitates manifold opportunities to unleash the interconnectedness of food and literature. Gitanjali G Shahani's (2018) edited book *Food and Literature* widely discusses the relationship between literary studies and food studies. The book is one of the first collections that anthologises scholarly articles that delve into the intersections of literature and food throughthematic and methodological approaches. Shahani remarks that scholarship in literary food studies is attuned to culinary moments in a text (2018, p. 4). Literary Food Studies uses food symbolisms to reflect on cultural identity which encompasses multiple issues of gender, diaspora, and ethnicity.

Gender is a complex notion transcending the fundamental binary understanding of males and females. It is a socially and culturally "constructed set of roles", framed by social, cultural, and historical contexts. Society has set different roles for men and women, and men being the 'norm'[1] enjoy all privileges[2]. The images of gender disparity and stereotyping of women in the culinary domain are recurrent motifs in literary representations. They point to the power relations in society in which women become mere cooks and caretakers in a family devoid of individuality and identity. Food is an intersecting point of sense of identity, belongingness, and nostalgia in a diasporic[3] and ethnic contexts. In academic discourses, diaspora refers to the dispersion or scattering of people away from their homeland due to voluntary and forced reasons. The reasons include economic, political, educational, natural calamities, war, etc. Food plays a pivotal role in the identity construction of the diasporic people in an alien land. The choices and consumption of food grant them a sense of inclusion in the host community, which is defined by Anita Mannur as 'culinary citizenship', "a form of affective citizenship which grants subjects the ability to claim and inhabit certain subject positions via their relationship to food" (2007, pp. 11-31). Simultaneously, the preparation and consumption of familiar foods aid them to recreate and connect to their lost homeland and identity. It is symbolic of their cultural ties. In addition to these, memories related to the sensory aspects of food like smell and taste are also prominent themes in diasporic writings. Culinary nostalgia and gastro nostalgia are terms put forward by Anita Mannur (2007) and Tulsi Srinivas (2006) respectively to emphasize the significance of food-associated memories in diasporic contexts.

Though the role of food is widely discussed in gender and diasporic contexts in literary productions, scholarly engagements interconnecting food and tribal culture in literary productions are scant. Most of the tribal writings[4] are scrutinized for apprehending culture and identity through customs, beliefs, folk elements, gender relations, colonial invasion, and assimilation. A close reading of food in such writings could offer a lens to magnify the hidden and unnoticed cultural aspects from which it is produced and consumed. A textual analysis of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* encourages to accentuate the interconnection of food and Igbo tribal culture.

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1. Norm – Refers to attitudes and behaviours that are considered normal, typical, and standard.

2. Privileges – Refer to any unearned advantage that is available to members of a social category while being systematically denied to others (Johnson, 2005, p.5)

3. Diasporic – Diaspora, the word has its roots in Greek, 'dia speiro' meaning to "sow over".

4. Tribal Writings – Writings which deal with the life and experiences of tribal communities.

Things Fall Apart: A Bird's View

The novel set in the imaginary village Umofia evolves around the life of the protagonist Okonkwo. Through the life of Okonkwo, a wealthy, mighty warrior, the novel unfurls the rich traditions, practices, and customs of the Igbo tribal community. Okonkwo works tirelessly to wash off the stains of his unsuccessful and 'effeminate' father Unoka. Okonkwo earns respect and honour in his community through hard work and perseverance and he is known in the nine neighbouring villages. He is a staunch, strong patriarchal figure towards his three wives[5] and kids. Contrary to expectations, he exiles to his mother's village Mbanta as he accidentally shoots a clansman. His mother's relatives are delighted to welcome him as he is known for his capabilities. The situation in Umofia changes drastically when he returns after seven years of exile. The intervention of colonial powers disrupts tribal life and religious conversion corrodes their rich tribal identity. The life of Okonkwo turns bitter when he beheads a messenger from the District Commissioner. Unable to cope with the tragic events and sluggish nature of clansmen, Okonkwo hangs himself. The greatest warrior of the clan does not get a reputed burial as suicide is a sin in the community. The District Commissioner takes the initiative for Okonkwo's burial. Achebe mentions that the District Commissioner might write a paragraph about Okonkwo in his book titled *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.*

Methodology

Semiotics

Semiotics, the study of signs, also called semiology had its initial traces in the writings of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure defined 'sign' as a system of signifier (*signifiant*) and signified (*signifié*) (Chandler, 2007, p. 14). The signifier refers to the sound pattern and the signified is the concept which it refers to. Semioticians look at how meanings are made and how reality is represented through signs and sign systems. Charles Sanders Peirce is one of the prominent contributors to the domain of semiotics. Peirce distinguished three classes of signs namely: icon, index, and symbol. The classification is based on the relationship between a signifying item and that which it signifies. An icon is a sign that interrelates with its semiotic object by virtue of resemblance or similarity with it. An index is a sign that interrelates with its semiotic object through some actual or physical or imagined connection. In the case of symbol, the relation between the signifying item and what it signifies is not a natural one, but entirely a matter of social convention (Merrell, 2005, p. 31).

5. Polygamy is practiced in Igbo culture.

Charles William Morris (1938), another influential figure in semiotics elaborates on signs in a different light. According to Morris, semiosis is the process in which something functions as a sign. The process involves three or four factors: that which acts as a sign, that which the sign refers to, and that effect on some interpreter in virtue of which the thing in question is a sign to that interpreter. These three components in semiosis are called the sign vehicle, the designatum, and the interpretant respectively; the interpreter may be included as a fourth factor (Morris, 1938, p. 3). The findings of Peirce and Morris contributed significantly to the expansion of semiotics in the later years.

The Semiotics of Food in Literature

Human beings eat to survive and food is the elemental source of nourishment for life. At the same time, food carries the incredible potential to convey meanings that transcend beyond its elemental role. Umberto Eco (1976) asserts that semiotics deals with everything that can be considered as signs. In semiotics words, objects, images, and sounds can be a sign. Food acts as a potent cultural object to symbolise individual, communal, ethnic, and national identities. The preparation and consumption of food offer material means to expose social systems and cultural values. Warren Belasco's (2008) "you are what you eat" echoes the nexus of food with social and cultural identities. One of the prominent readers of the semiotics of food, Simona Stano remarks, "Food is not only a substance for survival and nourishment but is also part of a sign system as it is strictly involved in a process of signification and interpretation" (2015, pp. 646-671).

As semiotics deals with the study of signification and communication systems, it offers valuable insights for comprehending the beliefs, rituals, and practices associated with food. A blend of semiotics and food facilitates the grasping of denotative and connotative[6] meanings associated with food in wider cultural contexts. In the domain of Food Studies, discussions and social interactions surrounding it, serve as perceptible indicators of underlying power dynamics. Mary Douglas, a prominent theorist in her "Deciphering Meals" observes, "If food is treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed" (1972, pp. 61-81). Arjun Appadurai in his "Gastropolitics in Hindu South Asia" also looks at food as part of semiotics. Appadurai writes, "Food, in its varied guises, contexts, and functions, can signal rank and rivalry, solidarity and community, identity or exclusion, and intimacy or distance" (1981, pp. 494-511). Foodways are powerful in connecting and separating people. The connections between man and God, lower class and upper class, and men and women are determined by food to a

6. Denotative meaning – Describe the definitional, literal, obvious, or elementary meaning of a sign. Connotative meaning – The range of secondary and associated significations and feelings of a sign. It depends on the way a word is used in a particular context.

considerable extent. Food transactions[7] in a household may show dominance and submissiveness in terms of gender relations. The traditional gender roles reinforce that women are primarily accountable for cooking and homemaking. The male-dominated patriarchal society relegates and regulates women to subservient positions. Women are responsible for meal planning, cooking, and serving in the familial setup. Her worth and honour are intrinsically bound to her culinary skills. Ironically, they cook considering the tastes and likes of the men in the family. Women typically cook meals while men enjoy them. This division of labour creates a power imbalance in the family through which men exert control over women. The food transactions in larger discourse can signal the cultural frameworks of a community or a society. Every activity centred around food can convey multiple meanings about the functioning of a society. Meaning can refer to

> its significance; the purpose behind preparing or consuming it; the identity or beliefs expressed through it; the associations or emotions attached to it; the thing or idea it refers to; the use of food to demonstrate create status; and its representation of larger, historical, social and cultural patterns (Long, 2017, pp. 204-217).

Though food preferences are highly individual, they say a lot about an individual's cultural background. The ingredients, cuisines, culinary tools, rules, and habits associated with foodways carry layered meanings and the makers' cultures and environments can be inferred from these factors.

The scrutiny of food in understanding a culture in fiction is an emerging trend. Brad Kessler opines the major purpose of food in literature is its cultural significance. Kessler explains food as "Freighted with meaning. Just as in life, food in fiction signifies. It means more than itself. It is symbolic. It opens doors to double and triple meaning" (2005, pp. 148-165). The analysis of foodways in a literary work could lead the readers to the unseen doors of a culture. Defining foodways Kittler and Sucher state that "the term food habits (also called food culture or foodways) refers to the ways in which humans use food, including everything from how it is selected, obtained, and distributed to who prepares it, serves it, and eats it" (2008, p.2). The documentation of a community's culture through food is very vital as food is a highly loaded cultural signifier. Food's signification becomes even more relevant in marginalised communities' narratives. Food plays a major role in the narratives of diasporic communities, tribal communities, Dalits, and refugees. Their age-old suppression, oppression, starvation, nostalgia for lost and forgotten past, belongingness, identity crisis, unity, harmony, and togetherness are well crafted through food signifiers. It would not be an overstatement to contend that food encapsulates a plethora of human emotions.

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7. Food transactions (here) – the acts of planning, cooking, and serving food.

Commensality

Derived from the Latin word, 'commensalis' meaning 'with the table', commensality means eating together. David B Goldstein describes commensality as "the range of relationships that emerge and are reified through the act of eating" (2018, pp. 39-58). He stresses the importance of commensality to strengthen relationships among the people in a community. He adds, "Eating is not simply a biological phenomenon. It is a social one, even if one is eating alone" (2018, pp. 39-58). The process reaffirms one's individual and communal ties. David E Sutton observes "anthropological study of food can be traced back to the origins of the discipline, witness the perceptive writings of Robertson-Smith on commensality" (2001, p. 5). In the scholarly arena, the prime agreement concerning commensality centres around its role in building and nourishing social rapport through the communal act of eating. Concomitantly, it works as a defining boundary within any given social gathering. Generally, individuals who share meals tend to occupy equal social strata and positions. The notion of excluding others, relegating them as unfamiliar or inferior is also a slice of commensality, often referred to as segregative commensality as put forward by Claude Grignon (2001) in his "Commensality and Social Morphology: An Essay of Typology". The root word 'commensalis' refers to the dining table. Critics and scholars point out that the ingrained meanings of commensality could also be deciphered through the material aspects surrounding the process. In addition to the act of eating, the culinary utensils, type of food, quantity of food, and seating arrangements also hold substantial significance in conveying the power dynamics. Central to this is the observation that men traditionally occupy the central position at a dining table and women are reduced to the role of servants attending the dining needs of men. Commensality within a community may serve as an indicator of the prevailing hierarchies and power dynamics. The paper dissects the instances of commensality in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to understand the hierarchies and power dynamics in the Igbo community.

Discussion

Food and Its Significations in Things Fall Apart

Chinua Achebe's debut novel *Things Fall Apart* embarks on a significant position in African literature. Achebe, a member of the same community weaves Okonkwo's story with the insight of an insider. The stereotypical stigmas associated with the mainstream representation of tribal communities are brilliantly dismantled by Achebe. The unique customs, traditions, and rituals of the Igbo tribe find a major place in the novel. The presence of food can be found on all the special occasions in the tribal community, especially in rituals and celebrations. The rituals and celebrations reinforce the cultural ties and identities of the community members. Sudhir Kakar says, for anthropologists, ritual is a “ceremonial form that deepens the individual’s connection- with nature, community, and the sacred- and from which the individual emerges purified and with a sense of awe and significance” (2010, pp. 201-209). They are largely gastronomic affairs that publicize the varied cultural operations of the community.

One of the most significant rituals of the community is the festival associated with the harvest of yams. The Feast of the New Yam is an occasion of ecstasy and togetherness in the Igbo tribal community. Achebe writes, “The Feast of the New Yam was approaching and Umofia was in a festival mood” (2001, p. 35). It is intrinsically connected to the identity and culture of the tribe. It is the main opportunity for a man to show his wealth and status. The festival is observed as thanksgiving to Ani, the goddess of earth, and to commemorate departed souls. As the name indicates, it is the festival of “new yams”. Chima J Korieh describes the cultivation of yam “as a highly ritualised process, yam production often involved elaborate ceremonial rituals at the planting and the harvest season. The New Yam Festival marked the harvest season, when sacrifices were offered to Ahiajoku – the yam spirit, to ensure good yield and continuity of life itself” (2007, pp. 221-232). There are many preparations before the festival day. Yams of the previous year were disposed of the night before the festival. The festival day, the beginning of the new year and prosperity should start with fresh and tasty yams. Yams hold a very significant role in Igbo culture. It is a symbol of man’s identity. Yam, the man’s crop is titled as the “king of crops” (Achebe, 2001, p. 22). The number of yams one possesses attests to a man’s status and rank in society. A man’s success and status are measured in terms of his cultivation and production of yam and the number of barns he possesses. A good yield requires constant vigil and toil in the land. Most importantly, only men are allowed to cultivate yams. “Other crops were regarded as inferior to yam, and their cultivation subjected to the rhythm of yam cultivation” (Korieh, 2007, pp. 221-232). Naturally, the men of the community find the festival as an opportunity to exhibit their masculinity and their capacity to feed their families. The festival becomes the celebration of manhood. Thus, for the Igbo community yam is not just a means to satiate hunger, but a symbol of patriarchal status and identity. Once Okonkwo approached Nwakibie for yams to sow. He politely said, “I know what it is to ask a man to trust with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of hard work” (Achebe, 2001, p. 21). His words suggest that yam cultivation is not everyone’s business. The men with dedication and hard-working mentality could only initiate the cultivation. Only such men could be trusted and given yams. It is his responsibility to return the yams after the harvest and maintain his dignity in the community.

It is surprising to note that some crops other than yam are considered to be women’s crops. “His mothers and sisters worked hard enough, but they grew women’s crops, like coco-yams, beans, and cassava” (ibid., p. 22). These crops and their cultivators (women) are treated secondary in the community. The secondary treatment of women and crops is the reflection and outcome of a patriarchal society. Allen Johnson describes patriarchal society as:

> a society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified, and male centred. It is also organized around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women (2005, p.5).

The women of the Igbo community engage in multiple roles; they work in agricultural fields, in the domestic arenas and are responsible for child upbringing. Yet their contribution to the sustenance and development of the community is devalued as it is a highly patriarchal society. Domestic labour is socially invisible and considered unproductive despite of its enormous energy and time consumption. On the other hand, men cultivate yams and earn respect and honour in the society. Men's works are idealised and acknowledged. In addition to the toil in the fields and household, women become victims of domestic violence as well. There is a compelling instance in the novel in which Okonkwo beats his wife Ojiugo for not providing him food on time. Achebe who was vehemently criticized for his staunch patriarchal representation in his novels justifies this incident as, "Okonkwo was provoked to justifiable anger by his youngest wife, who went to plait her hair at her friend's house and did not return early enough to cook the afternoon meal" (2001, p. 27). Achebe normalises and justifies Okonkwo's act of battering Ojiugo as the primary duty of a wife is to feed her man according to the cultural norms. The passive stance adopted by the neighbours witnessing the violent act showcases the plight of women in the community. It is "normal" to punish the women who do not follow or breach the rules of the community. Okonkwo's other wives try to stop him reminding him it is the Week of Peace. "His first two wives ran out in great alarm pleading with him that it was the sacred week. But Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess" (p. 28). It is significant to note that, the wives stop him only because it is the Week of Peace. Any act of violence during this week is strictly forbidden in the community. The customs and beliefs of the community weigh more than the physical and mental well-being of women. Referring to this incident, Strong Leek notes, "There is, moreover, no week or even day of peace for the women of Umofia. They cannot find sanctuary within the confines of their own homes, or in the arms of their own husbands" (2001, pp. 29-35). Ojiugo remains a representative of the women of the community who are at the receiving end of their husbands' uncontrollable anger. Ekwefi, Okonkwo's another wife is also a victim of his uncontrollable rage. She is beaten for cutting a banana leaf to wrap some food (Achebe, 2001, p. 37). The incidents are shreds of evidence of women's status in the Igbo community as well as their devaluation of women in the institution of marriage. They are the victims of double marginalisation on the grounds of race as well as gender.

As a ritual, there are strict rules and practices associated with the celebration of the festival. It is compulsory and customary to prepare fresh yams on the festival day. The cleanliness followed by the community members is clearly explained by Achebe. It is not only confined to the culinary domain but the entire house and surroundings are also cleaned and decorated for the festival. The general misconception of tribals as unhygienic people is brilliantly reconstructed by Achebe. He writes, "All cooking pots, calabashes, and wooden bowls are thoroughly washed, especially the wooden mortar in which yam was pounded" (Achebe, 2001, p. 35). The culinary tools are treated with special care. R S Khare stresses that kitchen utensils produce a highly complex system of symbolism. "Food utensils just like food area and cook logically reinforce the cultural principles of rank and ritual interrelations" (Khare, 1976, p. 54). Some of the utensils are taken out only during special occasions and are kept separate from the utensils of daily domestic use which are ritually impure.

Okonkwo's wives and kids decorate the house to welcome the festival.

> Okonkwo's wives had scrubbed the walls and the huts with red earth until they reflected light. They had then drawn patterns on them in white, yellow and dark green. They then set about painting themselves with cam wood and drawing beautiful black patterns on their stomach and on their backs. The children were also decorated, especially their hair, which was shaved in beautiful patterns (Achebe, 2001, p.36).

It is essential to note the creative expressions of Igbo women. They are talented in decorating and beautifying themselves and their living surroundings. Painfully, the men or the history itself fail to appreciate and acknowledge their women's creativity and potential. The main part of the festival is the commensality associated with it. It helps to comprehend societal relations through a bigger lens. Scrutinizing not only consumption but also the other stages of foodways is effective in documenting various cultural aspects of a group. Okonkwo and every other man in the community display their status and success through the feast. Yam foo-foo and vegetable soup are the main dishes of the day. The quantity of the foo-foo is a determining factor of a man's degree in the community. It is said, "No matter how heavily the family ate or how many friends and relations they invited from neighbouring villages, there was always a huge quantity of food left over at the end of the day" (p.35). The leftover food stands for their previous year's achievement in yam cultivation. The famous story associated with commensality is the following:

> The story was always told of a wealthy man who set before his guests a mount of foo-foo so high that those who sat on one side could not see what

> was happening on the other, and it was not until late in the evening that one of them saw for the first time his in-law who had arrived during the meal had fallen to on the opposite side. It was only then that they exchanged greetings and shook hands over what was left of the food (p.36).

As yam stands for the representation of masculinity, the feast associated with the festival aids a man in gathering name and fame among the community members and his relatives. Other than the quantity of food, the involvement and seating in cooking and eating are pointers of power dynamics. Arjun Appadurai observes, "Food transactions express the superiority of men largely their priority in being served food, the positions which they physically occupy, and their disengagement from the cooking process" (1981, pp. 494-511). Okonkwo remains disengaged from the act of cooking as it is considered 'women's domain'. Okonkwo "was always uncomfortable sitting around for days waiting for a feast" (Achebe, 2001, p. 36). The male members' disengagement from cooking and domestic activities highlight the gender roles entrenched in the community. He prefers working on his farm. It is attached to the societal acceptance of masculinity and success. It is his deliberate attempt to wash off the stains associated with his effeminate father. He strictly keeps away from any kind of act or word that tamper his masculinity. He does not even prefer to show his love towards his children as showing emotions is a sign of femininity and hence weakness. The only emotion he expresses is his uncontrollable rage, especially towards his wives. He never misses an opportunity to exhibit his masculine powers and features. Thus, the feast of the festival becomes an opportunity to show a man's masculinity, power, status, and dominance.

Though not discussed in detail, the food arrangements associated with a wedding are narrated through the wedding of Obierika's daughter. Yam pottage, foo-foo, and soup were the main attractions of the day. The community members' unity and cooperation can be deciphered through the associated acts of food preparation. Cooking of yam and cassava, and pounding of foo-foo are done simultaneously by women and young men. The division of labour rests on the defined gender roles. The heavy tasks of splitting woods and pounding yam are men's affairs. These are done by young men entering manhood. It is a matter of pride for them as these tasks exhibit their masculinity. On the contrary, women's hard work and efforts to feed the whole gathering remain unnoticed and normal. The attunement of young boys and girls to the prescribed gender frameworks of the community is embedded in such tasks. Achebe mentions Nwoye, Okonkwo's son:

> Nothing pleased Nwoye now more than to be sent for by his mother or another of his father's wives to do one of those difficult and masculine tasks in the home, like splitting wood, pounding food. On receiving

> such a message through a younger brother or sister, Nwoye would feign annoyance and grumble aloud about women and their troubles (p. 49).

Nwoye must have ingrained the 'ways of a man' from his patriarchal father, Okonkwo who is delighted to see his son's manly development. Simultaneously, he scolds his favourite daughter Ezinma to sit and behave like a woman. On the other hand, he thinks, "If Ezinma had been a boy I would have been happier. She has the right spirit" (pp. 61-62). It is disheartening to note that, despite of Ezinma's potentials and capabilities, Okonkwo contemplates she should have been a boy. The men of the community never acknowledge or value the real potentials, creative talents, and existence of women.

Obierika's eldest brother breaks the kola nut in the ceremony. Kola nut is of paramount importance in Igbo culture. The breaking and offering of kola nut precedes any other acts of a gathering. Ikenna Ukpabi Unya writes,

> The kola nut is to the Igbo people what the prayer book stands for in the Christian world. It has ritual powers for peace, long life, prosperity, and unity; also used for sacrifices and functions, as a facilitator of communication between men and the gods (2021, pp. 289-312).

Talking about the acceptability of kola nuts, Unya continues:

> In Igbo cosmology and philosophy, the kola nut is seen and described as a king. This is because it always comes first in every social gathering. It is used to welcome guests during meetings or public gatherings, used for marriage ceremonies, title taking, oath taking, sacrifices and others (pp. 289-312).

Like yam, kola nut also connotes the supremacy of masculinity. Usually, only men are privileged to break the kola nut and initiate the customs of a ritual or celebration.

There is another instance of commensality in the novel. The feast is arranged by Okonkwo as part of thanksgiving to his mother's clan members. Okonkwo's authority over his wives is explicated through his culinary instructions. They are asked to provide cassava for the feast. Ekwefi provided cassava, Nwoye's mother and Ojiugo provided smoked fish, palm oil, and pepper for the soup (Achebe, 2001, p. 154). Okonkwo decides the items for the feast and it is the responsibility of the wives to fulfil his orders which once again points to the decision-making power of men in the community. As a highly patriarchal society, men enjoy the privilege of taking decisions on every aspect of community and family life and women merely follow.

The ingredients he asks for are laden with the significations of femininity, especially the cassava. Okonkwo takes the responsibility of collecting yam and meat. Meat always stands for masculinity and patriarchal powers. The act of consuming meat "represents the dominance of man over animal and has been historically linked to status and power" (Adams, 2010, p. 48). This is also another way of displaying Okonkwo's supremacy over his wives as both ingredients, i.e. yams and meat, are highly symbolic of masculinity, dominance, and power.

Okonkwo's stern patriarchal nature is echoed in his reply to Ekwefi's comment on the number of goats to be slaughtered. Ekwefi suggested slaughtering two goats, but Okonkwo outrightly replied, "It was not her affair" (Achebe, 2001, p. 155). He strongly believes, the status of a man rests on his ability to control his family. Okonkwo thinks, "No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially women) he was not really a man" (p. 50). His fierce retort further elevates his patriarchal attitude, asserting complete control over the women and the feast arrangements.

The feast turns to be a symbolic representation and reflection of the hierarchical order of the community. The breaking of the kola nut, the order in which the items are served, and the role distribution in the commensality enfold layers of power structures. The main dishes of the day include yam pottage, foo-foo, egusi soup, bitter leaf soup, and palm wine. The oldest of the extensive family breaks the kola nut and prays to the ancestors for the well-being of the family. Following the tradition, yam pottage is served first. Yam, the masculine crop, not only shows its power in the agricultural land, but also on the dining table. It is the king of crops and has prime position on the table as it is cultivated by men who hold prime position in the society. Then comes foo-foo, which is a little lower in status. Thus, the order of serving the dishes offers a microcosm of gender disparity among the Igbo community.

One could not trace the voice of a woman in the gathering. The gathering is a men's affair to talk and renew relations. Chinua Achebe is vehemently questioned and criticized for his one-dimensional characterization of women. Discussing the role of women characters in male-authored works, Carolyn Kumah (2000) observes that the women characters are silent, submissive, and rarely granted primary status and they remain absent in the public sphere. The highly patriarchal world of Achebe never grants voice to female characters. Women's absence in commensality is conspicuous. They become background characters facilitating the smooth functioning of gatherings. They prepare and serve food for the guests. They become silent spectators but active facilitators who smoothen the act of communal eating. Age old histories of gender disparity and bias poignantly narrate the challenges and inequalities faced by women in domestic and culinary realms. They remain voiceless blindly following the directives of men. Historical accounts from eighteenth-century rural Sweden document a practice wherein women in the household were not allotted chairs at the dining table. Instead, they were expected to stand throughout the meal, ready to address man's needs in the table setting (Grignon, 2001, pp. 22-33). Even after centuries, the plight of women in some cultures remains the same.

Emphasizing the momentousness of eating together, one of the elders commented,

> A man calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so. (p.157).

The act of eating together reasserts the cultural identity of the community members. Talking about the interlaces of rituals and food of the Oglala tribe[8], William Powers and Marla Powers write, "Special kinds of ritual foods are prepared and eaten by the congregation in a way that serves as a symbolic statement about their sense of identity" (1984, pp. 40-96). Deborah Lupton opines, "Sharing and incorporating food in a ritual meal implies the incorporation of the partaker into the community simultaneously defining his or her particular "place" within it. The individual, in the act of eating, is both 'eating into his body or self and being eaten into the community" (1996, p. 17). The process of eating cements the bond among the community members. They use such events to discuss the functioning and transformations happening in society.

The tribal community's respect and indebtedness towards their ancestors is of utmost significance. Ancestors are remembered and fed on every special occasion in the village. They believe in the spirit of their dead ones and appease them for harmonious living and good yield. Tom Standage in his *An Edible History of Humanity* notes, "Food offerings and sacrifices were used to maintain the stability of the universe and ensure the continuation of agricultural cycles" (2010, pp. 49-50). During the feast at Okonkwo's mother's place, Uchendu the oldest of the family offers the sacrifices. Okonkwo offers sacrifices to his forefathers during the New Yam Festival as well. "Early that morning as he offered a sacrifice of new yam and palm oil to his ancestors he asked them to protect him, his children, and their mothers in the new year" (Achebe, 2001, p. 38). It is no wonder the order of hierarchy reflects in the prayer as well. He mentions the women of the house at the end of the prayer as 'mothers' completely neglecting their essence of self-importance and worth. Their identity is intrinsically bound to the culturally conditioned gender roles of 'mothers, wives, and daughters.' They are never valued and acknowledged for their individuality, hard work, talents, and contribution to the family and community's development. It is not only the case of Okonkwo's wives. All women in the community are destined to

8. Oglala tribe – The Oglala are one of the seven subtribes of Lakota people, who live on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

be known in relation to their husbands and kids. Throughout the novel women are seen as cultivators and cooks who look into domestic affairs and are also responsible for their children's upbringing.

If the ritual is conducted in the family, the head of the family is entitled to do the offering. In a communal or extensive family gathering, the oldest and the most respected male member provides the offerings. Gods and ancestors, are given supreme importance in Igbo culture and they are the first recipients of the prepared food or kola nuts. The order of eating also signifies the hierarchy existing in the society. The community members are allowed to eat only after the customary offerings.

Conclusion

The burgeoning of Literary Food Studies bestows an augmented apprehension of culture. Food and its associated habits and ways disclose the cultural and social functioning of a community. Commensality, a slice of Food Studies, is a way to build and cherish social relations through the act of eating. A reading that transcends the accepted definition of commensality offers a lens to understand the hierarchies and power dynamics in a society. The food as well as the way one eats carry cultural meanings.

Though food is not the centre of Achebe's debut novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the cultural operations in the Igbo community can be deciphered through their foodways. The semiotic reading of commensality and the accompanying tasks in the novel holds a mirror to the identity, wealth, rank, status, power, supremacy, and gender inequalities among the Igbo community members. The culinary utensils, ingredients, language, and order of serving in eating are highly symbolic of the hidden cultural transactions of the community.

Okonkwo, the main male character in the novel, displays his wealth and masculinity through yam cultivation and grand feasts. His staunch patriarchal ideology and authority over his wives, and the subservient position of women in a patriarchal family and community are reflected in commensality.

The patriarchal Igbo community never grants women any voice in the public and private sphere. Women remain mute spectators, but vibrant coordinators of men's communal eating, the mere act of which reinforces the assigned traditional gender roles of women as cooks and care takers. Unfortunately, women's significant contribution to the proper functioning of family and community is undervalued and unacknowledged. Commensality, one of the emerging areas in academic discussions can not only unite people, but also separate them. The instances of commensality in a literary writing offer a possibility to delve into the deep layers of culture from which it is produced.

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FROM REEL TO REALITY: EXPLORING THE NOTION OF OBJECTIVITY AND MEDIA ETHICS THROUGH THE FILM 'NEW DELHI TIMES'

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Seek truth and report it. Minimize harm. Act independently. Be accountable.
Society of Professional Journalists, 2011

Abstract: *An award winning and critically acclaimed movie, New Delhi Times is among a very few films which grapples with the dark and dubious relationship of politics, media, and corruption. The film debates on the traditional construction of objectivity in news reporting. It sets our sight on the journalistic ethics by reviving the debate whether if a journalist is covering a riot, should he or she help a wounded victim on the road or rejoice at a perfect photograph or a story he or she has chanced upon? In the contemporary media scenario, journalists are often accused of compromising the ethical standards while reporting a disaster or a tragedy. Taking the film as a case study, this paper ponders on the desensitization of media professionals towards tragedies and questions the role of a journalist as a detached observer or someone who bears the obligation of unravelling truth behind the incident.*

Keywords: *journalism, politics, corruption, objectivity, ethical reporting*

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Introduction

The realm of journalism has seldom been explored in Hindi cinema. However, the 1986 film *New Delhi Times* stands out as an exception, being remarkably ahead of its time in its realistic depiction of the intricate connections between politics, criminal activities, and the media. Exploring a relatively unchartered path, the film has taken up the responsibility of exposing the rot within and that is precisely the reason why *New Delhi Times* is relevant even today. Directed by Ramesh Sharma, the film revolves around Shashi Kapoor as Vikas Pande, an upright executive editor of a daily newspaper *The New Delhi Times*, which is run by an honest businessman Jagannath Poddar, a role aptly played by Manohar Singh. When Vikas Pande decides to investigate the murder of a MLA, which seems linked to a bigger political conspiracy, the incorruptible journalist is dragged into a quicksand of lies, deception, political manipulations, and murder. All evidence leads to the dynamic political leader Ajay Singh, played onscreen by Late Om Puri, but politics is rarely ever so simple, a fact that Pande learns the hard way as he goes on unravelling the mysterious murder case.

New Delhi Times emerged as a sharp and gripping political thriller with well-crafted characters and an exceptional storyline that delved into complex themes like journalistic impartiality and media misconduct. Only a handful of films have come close to presenting a genuine portrayal when tackling matters of the press. The film draws inspiration from the real-life case of *The Indian Express*, where editor Arun Shourie uncovered the criminal associations of Maharashtra chief minister, A.R. Antulay. The character of Jagannath Poddar in the film is believed to be a portrayal of *The Indian Express* owner, R.N. Goenka.

New Delhi Times refuses to compromise its integrity in any way. It confronts the murky and questionable nexus between politics, media, and corruption, and tackles significant concerns regarding ethics, impartiality, and editorial integrity. These concerns remain pertinent even in today's journalistic landscape, and the film adeptly addresses them with a convincing approach, supported by substantial evidence of thorough research.

Objectivity revisited

Stressing the paramount importance of objectivity in news reporting, Mindich (1998, p. 1) wrote that "If American journalism were a religion, as it has been called from time to time, its supreme deity would be objectivity". Conventionally, journalism as a profession has emerged alongside the notion of objectivity. According to Schudson (1978, p. 5),

> Objectivity is a standard that requires journalists to try to put aside emotions and prejudices, including those implanted by the spinners and manipulators who meet them at every turn, as they gather and present the

facts. They recognize objectivity as an ideal, the pursuit of which never ends and never totally succeeds.

This resulted in new set of rules for the newsroom to ensure journalists stick to facts and leading to first ethical code for journalism. Maras (2013, p. 18) stated that, objectivity 'in general' is a powerful cultural idea, one that has its roots in the foundations of Western science and the enlightenment.

Also, as Hackett (1984, p. 232) puts it, the ideal of objectivity suggests that "facts can be separated from opinion or value judgments, and that journalists can stand apart from the real-world events whose truth or meaning they transfer to the news audience by means of neutral language and competent reporting techniques". Therefore, the notion that journalists should maintain a detached and unbiased stance while presenting information, abstaining from incorporating their personal values and viewpoints into their reporting responsibilities, is inevitably inherent to discussions about objectivity.

The film puts a thinking cap on us and asks whether the role of a journalist is to be a passive spectator, like the photojournalist Anwar, played by M. K. Raina, or be someone whose duty is to inform public about the truth behind the incident.

When they reach the hotel room, Anwar says-

"Yahan aaya to pata chala dange ho rahe hain, mazaa aa gaya…

Bas camera leke toot pada."

[1]ET - On reaching here, I found out that riots are happening. I was thrilled. I just jumped at it.

Pande asks-

"Tumhe riots me mazaa aata hai?"[1]

[1]ET- You are thrilled by riots?

Anwar says,

"Ama yaar tum samajh gaye na main na kya keh raha hun. Tumhe ek achchi story mil gayi, mujhe kuch achche photographs. Bas."

[1]ET- You understood exactly what I was saying. You found a good story. I took some good photographs. What else.

Visual Reference 1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsbxWDcrlqM

* [1]ET is English Translation.

The progressive development of the principle of objectivity in journalism has entailed a transition from emphasizing neutrality to highlighting accuracy, balance, and fairness. Numerous journalists started confessing that they no longer adhered to the concept of objectivity, rather valuing truthfulness, and ethical rectitude, thereby simplifying the issue of knowledge into a question of ethical principles, often interpreted in a relativistic manner.

Visual Reference 2

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sm8-tf4Dfgo

Critics also point out that journalists engage in more than just conveying facts; they also choose the facts they present, their sources, and their perspective on a narrative. Objectivity was seen as unfavourable since it fosters reporting practices that come with inherent biases, like heavy dependence on official sources. Furthermore, striving for objectivity is believed to foster uninteresting reporting that falls short of delving deeper into the truth. In the contemporary media world, as stated by Overholser (2006), "most major codes of ethics no longer use the word objectivity and with the turn of the century, the Society of Professional Journalists, the oldest organization representing journalists in the United States, removed the term from its code and added instead accountability."

Media Ethics and Editorial Independence

One of the longstanding ethical principles in journalism, pertains to editorial autonomy, stress that editors must remain uninfluenced by advertisers and commercial influences. *New Delhi Times* has unequivocally highlighted the issue of editorial independence. In one of the scenes of the film, the owner of the newspaper is seen refraining from interfering in the selection of news stories and headlines by saying,

"Ye kaam editor ka hai, usi ko karne do".

[1]ET- This is the job of an editor, let him do it.

Visual Reference 3

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmjt3dKS0JE

The devaluation of the office of editor is a serious issue hampering the news selection process in Indian media houses. While addressing on the National Press Day in 2009, Justice G.N. Ray, former chairman of Press Council of India, said that:

> the editors have been increasingly marginalised, and they have little or no say about the content of the newspaper. In practice, it is the person heading the department of marketing and advertisement, who decides what space to be left for contents to be published other than advertisements or write ups desired by the advertisers and corporate sector.

The impact of marketing on journalism to gain maximum profit with high circulation figures has shrunk the role and opinion of an editor. These marketing managers are generally graduates from international universities and amidst the growing media culture of commercialization and corporatization, they tend to utilize their international exposure of treating a newspaper as a brand and to earn maximum profits even if creditability must be sacrificed for it. That's how journalism in India which had played the role of serving the nation has transformed into a full-fledged corporate business to achieve financial benefits. This decline in standards of journalism by ignoring the role of editors is a serious challenge in present print media industry. Big business houses that invest large amounts of money in newspaper industry lack confidence in an editor who can harvest them high profits and instead look upon for a marketing manager for returns. This has affected the individuality of an editor who feels suffocated in their marketing scenario and is unable to carry forwards his or her viewpoints strongly amidst corporate interests of owners. As a result, the impact is felt on the content priorities, leading to a disregard for genuine concerns of the populace and marginalized groups. The role of an editor has been condensed in the newspapers because of new generation of marketing managers and publishers entering the arena of journalism.

The autonomy of editors is currently facing a more significant risk than ever witnessed in the past within the realms of newspapers and broadcasting. This includes legal regulations and other factors. Moreover, the pressure of vying commercial concerns to expand their readerships or audiences for sustainability adds to the threat. Concurrently, advertising auctions among media entities and proliferation of numerous internet and alternative platforms compounds the situation by "appropriating" stories from well-funded traditional newsrooms, which possess substantial editorial budgets, and providing them to recipients without any cost.

In this new landscape, there is an additional obstacle facing those responsible for safeguarding editorial concerns, as an editor has little time to perform as an editor. He/she is now perceived more as the leader of the production process, responsible for generating content across various platforms. This includes being deeply involved in overall management, human resources, circulation, marketing, and devising strategies for generating revenue through the website. The role of an editor had been reduced to the task of a marketing agent, who is responsible for producing a product that sells. Several editors of prominent newspapers who refused to stoop in front of political pressures had been shown the door by the management. Editors nowadays have become disposable commodities if they fail to meet the private interests of the management of their newspapers. It would be poignant to mention that *New Delhi Times* has hinted the initiation of this process when the son of the newspaper owner takes charge of the office in the absence of his father.

Visual Reference 4

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49QOaR9KKvQ

A real challenge to pursue media ethics at ground level has been reflected in the film through the Plight of the local newspapers. The conversation between an editor of a Delhi based newspaper (Shashi Kapoor) and the editor of the local newspaper in Gazipur paints the grim economic and social conditions in which local newspapers run their daily business. The editor of the local newspaper narrates how impossible it is to create a meaningful experience in the shape of a probing news story out of a good leads and content. They are at the mercy of the local administration and face a constant threat of closure if they strengthened the courage to publish any story which might displease the local high and mighty.

Visual Reference 5

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOlJLsCvKpw

Investigative journalism and its impact on journalists

The film reflected on one of the least studied issues of the impact and toll of investigative journalism on the life and family of a journalist. The stress, anxiety and vulnerability of a journalist investigating a story which might unravel political corruption has been vividly depicted in the film as Vikas Pandey, the Executive Editor of *New Delhi Times*, played by Shashi Kapoor, feels that he is entrapped by media-politician nexus.

Greene (1983), as quoted in Janisch (1998, p. 16), has defined investigative journalism as follows:

> It is the reporting through one's own work product and initiative; matters of importance which some persons or organizations wish to keep secret. The three basic elements are that the investigation be the work of the reporter, not a report of an investigation made by someone else; that the subject of the story involves something of reasonable importance to the reader or viewer; and that others are attempting to hide these matters from the public.

Janisch (1998, p. 20) describes more precisely investigative journalism by saying: "The heart of investigative journalism is the scandal. The purpose of investigative journalism is to unravel a scandal. If it achieves to do so, it is effective." Janisch (1998, p. 20) mentions two stages that need to be passed through for an issue to become a scandal. "First, investigative journalism needs to expose the issue; it needs to unearth something of public interest. Secondly, it needs to be able to create public resentment; the public needs to be outraged about the issue." This can only occur when there is a breach of moral or legal norms that individuals wish to rectify and address. This entire process results in the news which is not only a piece of investigative journalism but also verified through research.

Investigative journalism is also considered as a form of resistance that can be learned by a journalist. Pöttker (2003, p. 14) quoting Ludwig, elaborated it as a "fine art or the supreme level of journalism". Investigative journalism employs a distinct language that enables resistance through communication. It's explicit in divulging information that is typically suppressed, while also maintaining subtlety, implanting unnoticeably fresh concepts into readers' thoughts. By being explicit, attention is drawn, provoking strong reactions. The combination of these elements works to shape new realities, aligning with the core intention of investigative journalism and its approach to resistance. *New Delhi Times* depicts this form of resistance quite vividly when the management of the newspaper, under the temporary leadership of the owner's son Mr. Jugal Kishore, played by Kulbhushan Kharbanda, asks the editor Vikas Pande to mellow down the article he has written unveiling the murder mystery of Gazipur MLA, the journalist not only refuses to oblige but tersely says that:

"This article is so provocative. Bina changes hum isse nhi chhaap skte."

[1]*ET -This article is so provocative. We cannot publish it without changes.*

"Agar ye article chapega to ase he chapega Mr Jugal Kishore. Main is article me coma ya full stop bhi badalne ke liye taiyar nahi hoon."

[1]*ET - If at all it is published, it will be as it is, Mr Jugal Kishore. I am not going to change even a coma or a full stop in this news story.*

Visual Reference 6

https://youtu.be/_t6AEsYnF40s

Place of emotions in reporting

The movie also underpins the role of emotions within journalism. Scholars and professionals in the media field have advocated the necessity for a skilful fusion of emotional and impartial journalism. The notion that journalism should maintain a distant and unbiased stance amidst chaos is no longer relevant. Reports on infamous incidents like the Delhi rape case, Jessica Lal's murder, Priyadarshini Mattoo's assault and murder, among others, weren't the outcome of detached journalism. These stories would not have come to light if the journalists covering them had opted for a neutral and disengaged approach. Emotions serve as a driving force for journalists and contribute to public engagement. The conflict of emotions and detached reporting came alive in the film during a conversation between Vikas Pande, his wife Nisha and an ex-bureaucrat Mr. D'Mello. On Vikas's persistence of Ajay Singh's involvement in murder and hooch tragedy, his wife responds:

Nisha- "Vikas, tum ek baat lekar aise peeche pad jaate ho - Pata nahi kis hadd tak jaoge?"

[1]ET- Vikas, you just get obsessed with an issue, don't know how far you will go?

Vikas- "Sirf sach ke hadd tak."

[1]ET- Only onto the truth.

Visual Reference 7

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8-ZxYrvsfI

Media scholars contend that individuals are more responsive to emotions rather than mere ideas or facts. Emotions act as a driving force, propelling people to engage more with news stories. They also motivate journalists to move upwards in an industry that often lacks consistent rewards for honest and commendable work. In the current media landscape, emotion is gaining prominence as a significant factor in both the production and consumption of news. The accentuation of emotional significance not only redefines the traditional concept of journalistic impartiality, but is also fundamentally reshaping the very notion of news. Grasping the way individuals connect with news on both personal and communal level is crucial for those seeking to establish a connection through their journalism. While practical or professional motivations might render news relevant, the emotional response also assumes a pivotal role in reacting to or assimilating news content.

However, journalism based on emotions has a real danger of slipping to self-promotion or self-congratulation. The news coverage of Haiti's disastrous earthquake in 2010 by CNN is the classic example of the same. Dr Sanjay Gupta, the principal medical correspondent for CNN, guides a film crew to a hospital, revealing the dire circumstances faced by the victims due to shortages of beds, medical professionals, and medications. Notably, CNN also ensured frequent display of an additional scene, featuring the correspondent dashing through the streets to pick up a child, holding and checking the child for any injuries. Now can this coverage be termed as an expression of compassion or a perfectly choreographed scene of self-promotion?

It is imperative for a journalist to not let the emotion override and overshadow critical inquiry and analysis required for the news story. A suitable approach to balance emotion with professionalism is by means of transparency. By being transparent, a journalist can avoid subjectivity and biases which may seep in the news story laden with emotions. While being objective and detached might be effective in political coverage, these qualities are inadequate when it comes to narrating tales of profound human distress. Arguably, the best journalism in the face of tragedy emerged from reporters who permitted themselves to experience emotion both internally and externally of their news story.

Violence against journalists

Increasing impunity for violence against journalists has been perfectly captured in the film. Growing attack on media people and organizations by state and non-state actors has been plaguing the Indian media and is a matter of grave concern. The film reminds us of the contemporary India where information is danger. When Shashi Kapoor narrates the attack on him, the managing editor of the newspaper Mr. Shah says,

“Vikas, tum per koi politician attack nahi karega”

[1]ET- “Vikas, no politician will touch a journalist like you”

and Shashi Kapoor replies,

“vo jamane gaye Shah sahib, ab to kuch bhi ho sakta hai”

[1]ET - “Gone are those days Shah Sahab, nowadays, anything can happen… to anybody”

Visual Reference 8

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0v73ppvMeI

The exhaustive list maintained by the American non-profit and non-government organization, the Committee for Protection of Journalists reflects that 75 media professionals have been killed in India since 1992 and among them 44 were killed with definite motives. Journalist Jagendra Singh, Rajdev Ranjan and Gauri Lankesh were among them. Their stories are an example of how a journalist writing about politics, crime and corruption in India is confronted with fatal consequences. As per the annual ranking of ‘World Press Freedom Index’ released by Reporters Without Borders (RWB),

> India ranked 161st out of 180 countries and journalism organizations have already expressed alarm over an increased level of hostility towards the media encouraged by politicians, as well as efforts by authoritarian regimes to export their alternative vision of journalism.

The report also mentioned, "a total of 67 journalists were killed in the year 2022, 534 are currently in prison, and 65 are being held hostage".

The non-profit organization based in Paris conducts a yearly global assessment of fatal aggression and mistreatment faced by journalists, and their data reveals an unparalleled surge in antagonism directed towards media professionals. The prominently covered assassinations of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi and the Slovak data journalist Jan Kuciak underscored the extreme measures to which adversaries of media freedom are willing to resort. Majority of the journalists who lost their lives were intentionally singled out. Employing violent tactics to stifle the media serves as an alarming indicator of a deteriorating democratic framework. Impunity doesn't solely arises due to ineffectual law enforcement and criminal justice systems; it also reflects a society that readily embraces and sustains violence without questioning it.

Desensitization of journalists towards tragedies

In addition to exploring the interconnection between politics and the media, *New Delhi Times* also deliberates on a pertinent issue of media neutrality and the feasibility of journalists distancing themselves from the tragedies they report on. The film contemplates a significant concern of journalists being desensitized towards distressing events, a matter they regularly confront. Often, journalists arrive at the scene shortly after a traumatic occurrence, becoming the initial receptacles of the fragmented memories of those affected by the trauma. According to Van der Merwe (2005), "their ability to maintain objectivity might erode, and enduring changes could emerge in their cognitive frameworks, beliefs, and perceptions about themselves and others".

In a poignant sequence, Pande gently reproaches a photographer for finding enjoyment in capturing scenes of a riot. The photographer candidly admits that such situations used to deeply affect him when they occurred infrequently, but the continuous coverage of riots and law enforcement issues has desensitized him over time. McMahon (2001, p. 55) has also concluded after intensive study that "journalists reporting trauma stories get desensitized over a period of time".

According to Castle (2002), "personal exposure to traumatic news stories and images can be an issue for reporters, photographers or broadcast news crews working in the field. Empirical evidence shows that exposure to trauma has a negative impact on journalists". Figley (1999, pp. 3-28) notes that "one can be affected by traumatic stress without physically being harmed or threatened. Hearing about an event or witnessing its aftermath has the potential to cause significant post-traumatic stress”.

Balancing the concept of Gender equity

One of the rare Hindi films on gender relations, *New Delhi Times* perfectly showcased the beautifully balanced relationship between working couples and the professional and intellectual acumen of Shashi Kapoor is deftly supported by Sharmila Tagore who is presented as an equal partner. Throughout the film, you will not find any instances where her intelligence, her profession and her advice have been undermined by the husband and even the filmmaker seems to be aware of the same. Through the conversations between husband and wife, the viewer is unable to decide who has a voice in these discourses and who is silenced.

Conclusion

Journalism plays a pivotal role in upholding the proper functioning of democracy and serves as a vital platform for exposing corruption at the highest echelons of power. However, it’s not immune to corruption itself. The primary duty of journalists is to keep the public well-informed. *New Delhi Times* serves as a reminder of the timeless definition of news: information that someone, somewhere does not wants you to know. This definition remains relevant in the contemporary era. Governments, political entities, and various institutions strive to manipulate the media to shape public perceptions. It is essential for the media to resist manipulation while ensuring that it does not become a battleground for competing groups of spin doctors and vested interests. The concluding dialogue of the film portrays the nexus of crime and politics and the resolve of a journalist to continue exposing the same. Arguably the most significant lesson from the movie is that, despite the prevailing pessimism, the catastrophic decline of journalism has not transpired. Journalists continue to persist in their vocation, even though the financial uncertainty within the field heightens their apprehension, particularly regarding investigative reports that may provoke hostility.

Visual Reference 9

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YblKUs6uuhA

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VISUAL PUNS IN THE ARABIC SUBTITLED AND DUBBED VERSIONS OF *SHARK TALE*

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Abstract: *This piece of research, which is part of a project concerned with the translatability of figurative language in AV content from English into Arabic and vice versa, investigates the translatability of visual puns in the animated movie Shark Tale from English into Arabic in both its subtitled and dubbed versions. The data of this study consist of the original English film scenes and their Arabic subtitles and dubs. Based on Aleksandrova's (2019) taxonomy, which treats pun translation as a cognitive game in the translator's mind, it was confirmed that puns can be translated by accepting the game of translation using two different strategies: (a) Quasi-translation: where the translator preserves one of the signs of the original pun and replaces the other with a suitable one from the target language. (b) Free Translation: where the translator replaces the two signs of the source pun with new signs from the target language. It was also confirmed that the game of translation can be rejected by using Literal Translation where the translator literally translates the pun into the target language. Another minor issue raised in this study is that visual puns and complex puns that are culturally very local are subject to be ignored by No Translation, which is the omission of the linguistic host of pun. The current study concludes by providing some implications and solutions for translators dealing with pun in animated films.*

Keywords: *audio-visual translation (AVT), puns, subtitling, dubbing, Alexandrova's taxonomy*

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Background

A translator is not simply a person who masters two languages. Instead, a translator is an author. S/he performs the process of authoring twice: (1) when s/he deeply understands the source text along with all its components, including its message and style, and (2) when s/he transfers it to a target language by composing a natural and equivalent text in that language.

The growing interplay of globalization and translation, in its basic shape and its modern manifestations (e.g., audio-visual translation), has been inevitable in the last few decades. Globalization helps in the unprecedented spread of audio-visual content, and audio-visual translation contributes to the openness among the heterogeneous cultures of the world (Abulawi, Al Salman & Haider, 2022; Alrousan & Haider, 2022). Translation reinforces this global openness and contributes to intercultural exchange (Gamal, 2007; Chen, 2015, among many others). This emphasizes the significant role of the translator, which is not simply translating words from a particular language using the lexical and functional counterparts from another language. Instead, the translator should expose the cultural components of the source language to people around the world or at least to the target audience (Al Saideen, Haider & Al-Abbas, 2022). Translators are supposed to create ties between cultures, as they transfer various cultural components, including but not limited to literary works, scientific knowledge, arts, music, and laws (Smadi, Obeidat & Haider, 2022; Weld-Ali, Obeidat & Haider, 2023). On this basis, translators can see reality through two different pairs of eyes, as they have enough exposure to at least two different cultures (Köksal & Yürük, 2020).

Since the onset of the film industry, movies have gained much popularity worldwide. This popularity is paralleled by the demand for having movies translated, either subtitled or dubbed, from a source language, especially English, into many target languages (Abu-Rayyash & Haider, 2023; Abu-Rayyash, Haider & Al-Adwan, 2023). The introduction of translation into the field of the film industry made translators treat unprecedented challenges, such as dealing with particular linguistic details that belong to non-standard aspects of languages. To give a brief overview of translators' challenges while translating AV contents, consider the following classification, which is not necessarily exhaustive. Note that the examples below are drawn from the animated movie *Shark Tale*. First, language-related challenges (e.g., treating different word orders, semantic extensions of words, and functions/denotations of morphemes). For example, *Kelpy kremes* is a form of wordplay derived from the original brand *Krispy Kreme*. More specifically, it is a process of deriving a new word by using the name of a sea element, *kelp*, a seaweed. However, when it comes to the Standard Arabic translation, *kaʕkah muħallaah* (back translation: 'sweetened bun'), the Standard Arabic equivalent of the English *donuts*, is added as a means of explicitation. This translation delivers the semantics of the source English item. Nonetheless, such a translation hinders the sense of humour in the original text and the signs of the pun. Specifically, the paronymic pair of signs *Krispy* and *Kelpy* is lost in the translation. Second, there are technical challenges, such as the need for spaces and the number of words in a line (Georgakopoulou, 2009). More importantly, as it would be shown in this study, there are culture-related challenges.

In this study, the main focus is on how puns (those collected from *Shark Tale*), which should be challenging to translate, are treated while translating the English source content to Arabic. Further, this study, from a theoretical perspective, aims to account for the way translators deal with puns within a theoretical framework that can predict all the possible options (or decisions) that a translator may take while dealing with puns of different natures and complexities.

This study attempts to answer the following question:

How do translators deal with visual puns in audio-visual content in a way that preserves its signs?

Literature review

Theoretical background

Concerning the trends of AVT as a field of academic study and research from a diachronic perspective, several trending AVT topics have emerged and been under study: the general AVT of cultural expressions (e.g., de Mendoza Azaola, 2009; Malenova, 2015; Guillot, 2016; Debbas & Haider, 2020; Firdaus & Nauly, 2022; Haider & Hussein, 2022; Haider, Saideen & Hussein, 2023; Samha, Haider & Hussein, 2023). Another trend of AVT studies targets specific cultural-bound expressions, such as humour (including but not limited to Vossoughi, 2005; Carra, 2009; Radochová, 2012; Stasik, 2022). Some other studies focus on treating linguistic variation interlingually and intralingually (Remael et al., 2008; Fernández, 2009; Bruti, 2010, among many others). Moreover, many studies deal with the deaf and hard of hearing (Neves, 2005; Matamala & Orero, 2010; Szarkowska et al., 2013; Al-Abbas & Haider, 2021; Al-Abbas, Haider & Saideen, 2022), and audio description for people with visual impairment (Darwish, Haider & Saed, 2023; Darwish, Haider & Saed, 2022).

Humour, in general, is discussed, as pun is one of its types Creating humour is one of the complex cognitive abilities, as it has an idiosyncratic nature and serves a wide range of purposes, such as in-group bonding and correcting socially improper behaviours (Dore, 2019). Identifying the triggers (or functions) and types of humour has been explored in a considerable body of research, the so-called Humour Studies. Nonetheless, there needs to be an agreement on how this complex process should be explained in the relevant literature on humour (Attardo, 1994).

Notwithstanding the theoretical controversy on the nature and triggers of humour, the most prominent theories of humour in the relevant literature, which can explain why we use humour in our oral and written communications, are (1) Relief Theory, (2) Superiority Theory, and (3) Incongruity Theory (Berger, 1993). In Relief Theory, people produce humorous expressions and laugh because they have to relieve physiological stress occasionally. Thus, humour causes laughter and joy to release nervousness. According to this viewpoint, humour is mainly to vent suppressed desires and reduce socially constructed barriers (Berlyne, 1972). In Superiority Theory, people invent humour and then laugh because they feel triumphant over others or superior to them. According to this viewpoint, humour mainly acts as an expression of feelings, assisting the humorist in developing self-worth and confidence (Meyer, 2000). Finally, in Incongruity Theory, people laugh at situations that are shocking or unbelievable. In this theory, violating an expected pattern causes the recipient to laugh. Hence, Incongruity Theory stresses cognition instead of the physiological (Relief Theory) or emotional (Superiority Theory) functions of humour (McGhee & Pistolesi, 1979).

Regarding the classification of humour, it is generally accepted that humour is typically produced in the form of a joke. As stated in Zabalbeascoa (2001), a joke can be an international/binational joke, culture/institution joke, national-sense-of-humour joke, language-dependent joke, visual joke, or complex joke. In this research paper, the main concern is linguistic or language-dependent jokes, specifically language-dependent jokes that take the form of a pun (i.e., phonetically manipulated words that may create a sense of humour).

Concerning the translation of humour, a body of research (e.g., Bucaria, 2007, 2008, 2017; Dore, 2009, 2019; De Rosa et al., 2014; Iaia, 2015) has been growing on the ground of the work of the most prominent scholars in the field of translating humorous content in the last three decades, including but not limited to Delabastita (1994), Zabalbeascoa (2005) and Chiaro (2006, 2008). Some studies suggest taxonomies for translation strategies of humour. Several classifications are offered in the relevant literature, such as Fuentes Luque (2000), who classifies the strategies of translating humour into literal translation, explanatory translation, non-translation, omission, and compensation.

Empirical Studies

The relevant literature explores the translations of several English-animated movies into different languages. One of the studied animated movies is the American movie *Shrek*. Jankowska (2009), for instance, discusses the translatability of various elements of humour from the original English version of *Shrek* to Polish and Spanish. The main concern is comparing the efficiency of dubbing and subtitling in rendering humour in the target languages. Based on Martnez Sierra's (2005) method, which calculates the percentage of the original humorous load and the target text load, Jankowska reports that, regardless of the target language or strategy of translation, the target texts contain fewer humorous features than the source texts. In general, when compared to the dubbed versions, the subtitled versions retain less content of the original comedic load. Further, they contain fewer comedic elements. Expectedly, this implies that dubbing is generally more faithful to the source text regarding the quantity and quality of humorous elements (i.e., form and meaning). In conclusion, this study sheds light on the observation that linguistic elements that carry humorous loads, whether they are cases of pun, irony, or any other types of humour, are, to a certain extent, subject to be ignored by translators.

Another animated movie examined in the relevant literature on AVT of humour is *Shark Tale*, which is the target movie of the current study. Brotons (2017) explores how humour in *Shark Tale* is dubbed into Spanish. Twenty-one different humorous expressions are analyzed. The findings exhibit different obstacles that translators face while dubbing *Shark Tale,* such as the film's various linguistic, sociocultural, and semiotic constraints, which complicate the translation process. The main finding is that the most common translation strategies are as follows: (1) non-translation is exploited in 12 examples, and (2) literal translation, compensation, and explanatory translation are exploited in the translation of three humorous expressions each. Again, the findings of this study are consistent with Jankowska's (2009) in that the use of non-translation 12 times and literal translation in some other cases indicate that humorous loads in the hosting linguistic items tend to be ignored.

The interim conclusion here is that translating humour, whether in AV context or any other context, is challenging, as the translator must be a double agent. S/he should be faithful to the meaning and the sense of humour in the source text. Further, it can be inferred that transferring the meaning and the sense of humour to the target language is more successful while dubbing (than subtitling).

Before offering the qualitative method of the current study, some research works tackling the translation of puns should first be reviewed.

Díaz-Pérez (2014), for instance, examines the translation of puns using Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), which relates a specific translation and its source text by creating interpretive similarity between them (Gutt, 1998, 2000). The collected data are 190 Spanish and Latin American film titles with examples of puns and their English translations. The translators' strategies for rendering puns in the translated titles are examined. Díaz-Pérez (2014) concludes that literal translation is the most frequent strategy in the collected translations, which is paired with reproducing the source pun in the target language. Regarding the rest of the translations, he reports that translators think of creating a new pun in the target language that could create cognitive effects on the audience of the target language, similar to those on the audience of the source language. These findings give the impression that translators opt for accepting the game of translating puns in Aleksandrova's (2019) terms, although they rely on literal translation. This is because there is another round of translation, which is reproducing the pun in the target language. On this basis, this process should be treated as **Quasi-translation**, as one of the signs of the source pun is expected to be preserved in the target language. The cases where the pun is replaced with one from the target language should be regarded as **Free Translation**, in Aleksandrova's terms, as the two signs of the source pun are replaced with a pair from the target language.

As observed in this section, translating puns is non-trivial and often tricky. In other words, transferring the sense of humour, the signs of a pun, and the source text's denotative meaning needs much concentration. This implies that the task of the translator gets more complicated if the genre of the target content (e.g., a movie or a series) is a comedy, as s/he will encounter more core linguistic (semantic and morphological) and non-core linguistic (pragmatic) challenges. Therefore, it is reported in several studies (e.g., Delabastita, 1994; Brotons, 2017) that puns tend to be frequently ignored by translators. Nonetheless, pun translation is still a cognitive game that can be declined or accepted by translators. Once accepted, it is the responsibility of the translator to treat the signs of the source pun and find the best way to transfer it to the target text.

Methodology

The Movie: Shark Tale

Shark Tale, the 2004 American animated comedy movie, is deliberately chosen, as it is rich in humorous content that should pose translation difficulties while translating (whether in the form of subtitling or dubbing) to Arabic. This movie is the story of a young fish named Oscar, who works in a whale wash and dreams of being wealthy. However, when Oscar is on the verge of being killed by the shark Frankie, who is teaching his peace-loving brother Lenny how to be a brutal shark, Frankie is accidentally killed when an anchor falls on him. Then, Oscar fabricates a story that he is the killer of Frankie and becomes 'the Sharkslayer' in the reef. At that moment, Frankie's father, mob boss Don Lino, dispatches his henchmen to track down Oscar, allegedly his son's killer, and then events evolve.

Data Collection, Validation and Analysis

In the present study, puns are identified by the researcher and manually extracted from the screenplay of the target English movie *Shark Tale*. Likewise, the Arabic translations of these English tokens in the Netflix subtitled and dubbed versions are manually collected. Each token (English pun) is listed in a table along with its subtitled and dubbed counterparts in Arabic letters.

Four professors with expertise in AVT served as the jury, who carefully analyzed the data and suggested a few changes. The changes were successfully put in place by the researcher.

The collected English tokens and their translations (subtitling and dubbing) are qualitatively analyzed according to Aleksandrova's (2019) taxonomy of translation strategies of puns. Aleksandrova (2019) proposes that translators generally treat puns in one of the following ways: Literal translation, Free translation, and Quasi-translation (See Figure 1).

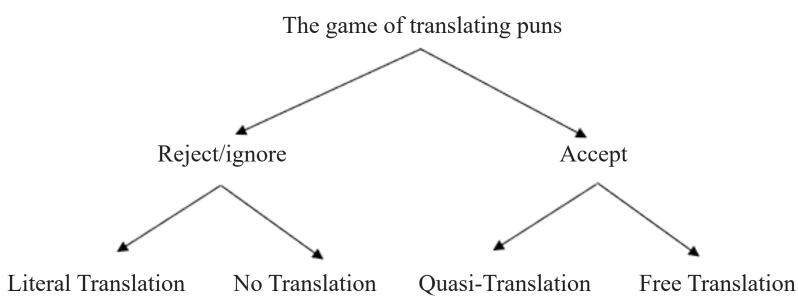

Figure 1. The game of translating puns

The first one indicates that the translator rejects the game of pun translation, whereas the other ones are pathways that translators may take after accepting the game of pun translation. In other words, it is determined how the translators treat each case of pun in the movie: do they translate the pun, replace the original pun with a new one from Arabic, or replace the pun with the preservation of one of its signs? Aleksandrova's (2019) taxonomy is obviously translator-oriented. The proposed strategy in this taxonomy is concerned with the mental processes and decisions made by the translator (e.g., game rejection and acceptance).

Analysis and Findings

Visual puns from the dubbed and subtitled versions are analyzed according to Aleksandrova's (2019) taxonomy either by accepting the game of pun translation by using either Quasi- Translation or Free translation.

Seal

In the first scene of the movie, which is like the *Hollywood Walk of Fame*, a starfish introduces some celebrities. One of them is *Seal*, a British singer. In this scene, a *seal*, which is a sea creature, appears. It falls where the name of the singer is written. This can be understood as a case of pun. To illustrate, the name of the British singer *Seal* is the homonym of the name of the sea creature, or vice versa. Note that this pun is visual, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. *Shots taken when the seal falls on the star*

In both the Arabic subtitled and dubbed versions of the movie, the word '*seal*' is left untranslated (Table 2). Concerning Aleksandrova's (2019) taxonomy of how translators deal with puns, although the translators avoid transferring the word '*seal*' (i.e., they ignore it), this should not be treated as a kind of **Literal Translation**. It should rather be considered **No Translation**, which should be introduced as a new strategy of how a translator could ignore the translation game of puns. This may mean that visual humorous effect is subject to be ignored, especially when (1) the cultural referent of the pun in the scene (e.g., the singer *Seal*) is not well-known among the target audiences, (2) and a part of the linguistic components of the pun is a visual effect (e.g., the name '*seal*' written on the *Walk of Fame*).

Table 1. *Subtitling and dubbing seal by No Translation.*

00: 03: 20		
English Token	Subtitling and dubbing	Back Translation
Seal	_____	_____

Here, it should be highlighted that creating a totally different pun in Arabic to raise a sense of humour is very difficult, as the visual effect (the *seal*) will make the signs of the pun very specific. Thus, there is no room for creativity in the target language (Arabic). On this basis, **No Translation** of a pun with a visual sign could be inevitable in some cases.

Coral-Cola

Coral-Cola is an example of paronymy. It involves two signs; (a) *Coral*, which is a sign selected from the sea life, and (b) *Coca*, the first part of the name of the company that produces a carbonated soft drink. The pun of *Coral-Cola* should be treated as a visual pun, as shown in the shot in Figure 8. In both subtitling and dubbing, this pun is not translated. Thus, this visual type of linguistic humour is omitted, notwithstanding the popularity of this beverage worldwide. In other words, Arab audiences are expected to figure out easily that *Coral-Cola* is the result of manipulating the components of *Coca-Cola*, yet fewer Arab people are expected to guess all the signs of the pun. Specifically, the word *Coral* may not be familiar to Arab spectators.

Concerning Aleksandrova's (2019) taxonomy of how puns can be treated, the omission of *Coral-Cola* indicates that the translators ignore the pun and its signs; however, Aleksandrova's taxonomy cannot account for this case. It cannot be considered a Literal Translation of a pun, as the translators do not only ignore the pun and its signs but also omit *Coral-Cola*. It does not show up while subtitling and dubbing. This implies that No Translation should be integrated as one of the ways a translator ignores the game of pun translation. The negative impact of this strategy on the denotation, connotation, and figurative aspect of the source token in most cases is more severe than Literal Translation. This is because Literal Translation preserves the denotation of the source text but ignores the pun, whereas No Translation ignores both. On this basis, visual humourous effects (visual puns) tend to be ignored in the target text. Note that Quasi-translation (replacing the source signs of the pun with a pair of signs from Arabic) is so difficult, as the translator will preserve the sign of *Coca-Cola* in the target text and find a referent from sea life that phonetically resembles *Coca* in name. This logic also rules out the use of Free Translation, as the visual cue in Figure 3 (i.e., the image of Coca-Cola ad) prevents the replacement of this sign while translating to Arabic. Otherwise, this change will lead to confusion.

Figure 3. *The ad for Coral-Cola*

Table 2. *Subtitling and dubbing Coral-Cola by No Translation*

00: 34: 54		
English Token	Subtitling and dubbing	Back Translation
Coral -Cola	_____	_____

It is obvious, up to this point, that translating puns involving a visual sign is the most challenging one for translators. Further, puns that are featured with culturally very local signs are also difficult to translate. Puns that have signs that refer to critical issues in the target culture, such as creating puns from names of celebrities, could be less difficult to deal with; however, they are ignored as it could be illegal to use Free Translation to translate them.

GUP

Another example of puns involving visual signs in the movie is *GUP*. As shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5, *GUP* is a paronym of *GAP*, which is an American worldwide clothing retail company.

Figure 4. *The shot of the ad of GUP in Shark Tale*

Figure 5. GAP slogan

However, this pun is not that simple. To clarify this pun, *GUP* is connected to a referent in the animated series *Octonauts*. In this series, *GUP* is an underwater vehicle. Consider the shark-shaped *GUP* drawn from the animated series in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Shark-shaped GUP

These connections indicate that the pun of *GUP* is very complex as it has serval signs: (1) *GUP* is the paronym of *GAP*, the clothing company, and (2) GUP_1 is the homonym of GUP_2, the shark-shaped underwater vehicle in the animated series (the fact that *gup* also means a small fish should also be taken into consideration). On this ground, three interconnected signs are available in this pun. The paronymic pair *GUP* and *GAP* indicates in a funny way that Oscar in Figure 4 above is acting in a television advertisement, and the homonymous pair GUP_1 and GUP_2 show that Oscar is now famous, as he is the shark slayer (the shark-shaped vehicle alludes to this meaning).

As for the subtitling and dubbing of this complex pun, which involves a visual sign and needs retrieving more than one sign, it is left untranslated (**omission** strategy), as Table 3 shows.

Table 3. *Subtitling and dubbing GUP by No Translation*

00: 34: 51		
English Token	Subtitling and dubbing	Back Translation
GUP	_____	_____

As for the way the pun is treated, it should be considered a case of **No Translation**. It is a very complicated type of pun, and therefore it needs a lot of mental effort. This is, maybe, the reason why it is entirely omitted from the original scene. Another reason is that one of the signs that should be recalled by the audience to understand the pun and grasp the humourous part is culturally not that common worldwide, namely *GUPs* in the animated movie *Octonauts*. Hence, the abandonment of the pun makes sense. In turn, this asserts that visual puns, along with all its traces, are ignored while translating.

On this basis, the game of translating simple puns is often subject to be accepted, while complex puns are expected to be ignored.

Prawn Shop

Prawn shop is a paronymic pun that involves a visual sign. Specifically, *prawn shop* is derived from *pawnshop*, which means “a shop where a pawnbroker operates their business” (Harley, 2017). As shown in Figure 7, the statement ‘we sell quality **stolen** goods’ asserts that the *prawn shop* is linked with a *pawnshop*. See Figure 8, which is a picture of a *pawnshop*. The humour in this pun is that *prawn*, which substitutes *pawn*, is a sea creature.

Figure 7. Prawn Shop billboard

Figure 8. A pawnshop

Prawn shop, as observed in Table 4, is subtitled using **Literal Translation**. In other words, the translator provides the two signs of the pun, yet *rihaan* and *rubjaanijj* in the subtitling do not form a case of pun (e.g., paronymy) in Arabic, and thus the translator ignores the pun.

Table 4. *Subtitling Prawn shop "We Sell Quality Stolen Goods" by Literal Translation*

00: 03: 26		
English Token	Subtitling	Back Translation
Prawn Shop "We Sell Quality Stolen Goods"	„متجر الرهن الروبياني نبيع بضائع مسروقة جيدة" *matdʒr al-rihan* *al-rwbjaan-ij* shop DEF-stakes DEF-prawn-ATTRIB *nabjiiʕ* *badˤaaʔiʕ* *masrwqa* *dʒajda* 1.PL-sell goods stolen new	Prawn pawnshop "We Sell Quality Stolen Goods"

In the dubbed version, *prawn* shop is omitted (Table 5). Thus, it is clear that the translator ignores the pun and wipes out the traces of the pun. This should be taken as a case of **No Translation** of a pun, as this pun has a visual sign. It is worth repeating that Quasi-translation and Free Translation are so challenging when one of the signs of the pun is visible in the scene.

Table 5. *Dubbing Prawn Shop "We Sell Quality Stolen Goods" by No Translation*

00: 04: 05		
English Token	Dubbing	Back Translation
Prawn Shop "We Sell Quality Stolen Goods"	–––––	–––––

Starfish Tour

Starfish Tour can be treated as a paronymic pun and has a visual sign. The first sign of the pun is the bus-shaped fish, where *Starfish Tours* is written, as shown in Figure 9. This sign should be considered the paronym of the *Hop-on Hop-off Hollywood bus* provided in Figure 10.

Figure 9. A close-up shot of Starfish Tours

Figure 10. *The Hop-on Hop-off Hollywood bus*

In the subtitled and dubbed versions of the movie, *Starfish Tours* is omitted (**omission**), as Table 6 shows:

Table 6. *Subtitling and dubbing Starfish Tours by No Translation*

00: 02: 35		
English Token	Subtitling and dubbing	Back Translation
Starfish Tours	-----------___________	_____-------_____

This **omission** implies that the strategy of treating this pun is **No Translation**, i.e., all the traces of the pun are wiped out. No Translation makes sense, as the pun involves a culturally local sign. Additionally, the pun is visual and therefore is very restricted. For these reasons, accepting the game of pun translation (whether it is Quasi-translation or Free Translation) is challenging for translators.

Fish King

Fish King can be treated as a paronymic pun that comprises a visual sign. The manipulation of the real sign (referent) is achieved by word replacement. Specifically, the slogan of *Fish King* in Figure 11 recalls the slogan of *Burger King* in Figure 12.

BURGER KING

HAVE IT YOUR WAY®

Figure 11. *The ad for Fish King* **Figure 12.** *Burger King slogan*

Regarding the translation of this visual pun, which humorously retrieves the American-based multinational chain of restaurants, it is omitted in the subtitled and dubbed versions (**omission**) as Table 7 shows.

Table 7. Subtitling and dubbing *Fish King* by No Translation

00: 34: 54		
English Token	Subtitling and dubbing	Back Translation
Fish King	_____	____

This omission shows that translators tend to ignore translating puns when they are visual. It seems that they leave them for the foreign audience to understand the message and to guess the signs of the pun. In the current pun, its two signs are easy to guess by the audience. This may be the reason why they leave it untranslated. Thus, the strategy of pun translation, in this case, is **No Translation**, which ignores the signs of the pun and the visual content.

Swim/ Don't Swim

The pair *Don't Swim/ Swim*, as shown in Figure 13, can be a paronymic pun that involves a visual sign (or reference). It alludes to the pair *Don't Proceed* (or *Stop*)/ *Proceed* (or *Go*) of the traffic lights. The humourous part of this pun is that the verb *swim* signals the sea life where the scenes of the movie take place.

Figure 13. *The shots of Swim/ Don't Swim traffic light*

In the subtitled version, it is literally translated, as in Table 8. It seems that the translator ignores the translation of the pun (i.e., **Literal Translation**). However, this translation is efficient in transferring the signs of the source pun, as the two signs of the traffic lights are known worldwide (i.e., it is not culturally local). Hence, any foreign audience should understand the pun, especially with the shots in Figure 13 making it easy for the audience to recall the image of regular traffic lights. On this ground, visual puns may be ignored by the translator, but they may be easily figured out by the audience if the signs of the pun are international concepts.

Table 8. *Subtitling Swim/ Don't swim by Literal Translation*

00: 03: 18		
English Token	Subtitling	Back Translation
Swim/ Don't swim	اسبح / لا تسبح *isbaħ / la tasbaħ* *Swim/Don't Swim*	Swim/ Don't swim

In the dubbed version, the pun and its traces are not translated (Table 9). Thus, this should be regarded as game rejection. More specifically, it is a case of No Translation of a pun. Still, the foreign audience can guess the visual pun easily, for the same reason just mentioned above (i.e., the signs of the pun are international).

Table 9. *Dubbing Swim/ Don't swim by No Translation*

00: 03: 18		
English Token	Dubbing	Back Translation
Swim/ Don't swim	---------------	-----------------

Conclusions and Recommendations

The section summarizes the findings, which are based on qualitative analyses, and points out the contribution of this study to the existing knowledge. It also addresses the limitations of the study and offers possible recommendations and directions for future studies.

Three methods for translating puns have been established by Aleksandrova's taxonomy: literal translation, quasi-translation, and free translation. This study attests to the usage of these techniques in the Arabic dubbing and subtitles of jokes from the animated movie *Shark Tale*. While sometimes it can accidentally transmit the humour of the pun when similar puns exist in the source and target languages, literal translation entails a straightforward translation of the joke's host, which may result in the loss of the pun's indicators. The study also emphasizes the use of No Translation as a means of avoiding literal translation of puns, setting it apart from literal translation by eliminating the linguistic context of the pun entirely. Puns with images or those that are culturally distinct may not be translated, letting the viewers make their own interpretations. While sophisticated and culturally unique puns are frequently missed, simple puns are more likely to be understood and translated. Two methods are possible once the translation game is accepted: quasi-translation, in which one sign is kept, and the others are changed to more appropriate ones in the target language, and free translation, in which the original signs are changed to new ones in the target language.

Puns can usually be translated, especially if the translator decides to play along with the translation game and finds a method to move or change the pun's signs. Puns with a visual or cultural component, however, might be tricky to translate. Varying translators may have varying levels of creative pun translation.

The current study has focused on translating puns interlingually from the English animated movie *Shark Tale* to Modern Standard Arabic. Therefore, future research should look into the translation of puns from English to different Arabic dialects (e.g., Egyptian vernacular), as Arabic varieties are, to a certain extent, linguistically variant paired with some cultural nuances. This investigation could enforce the awareness of the obstacles and techniques involved in successfully transferring puns. Additionally, the study has focused on puns and their translatability in a single animated movie. Therefore, findings and discussions undoubtedly need to be supported by other studies that should be conducted on other movies of the same genre.

Moreover, while the study concentrates on puns and their translatability, humour can also be expressed through linguistic devices such as irony, sarcasm, and other figures of speech, such as hyperbole. Investigating the translatability of these linguistic tools that express humour should contribute to our understanding of how translators treat these linguistic tools from a cognitive perspective and from a text-oriented viewpoint.

Finally, examining how the target audience receives and perceives translated puns may shed insight into the efficacy of various translation strategies. Surveys, examinations, or focus groups with viewers who have come across translated puns should gain some insight into how translators could treat figurative language while translating.

The results of this study have substantial implications for those who translate puns in animated movies. The study firstly offers translators useful ways to translate the funny effects of puns from English into Arabic by confirming the presence of translatability strategies for puns, namely quasi-translation and free translation. The data allows translators to make wise choices depending on the context and intended audience, guaranteeing that the humour of the pun is maintained while being adjusted to the linguistic and cultural quirks of the target language.

Furthermore, the fact that complex puns and visual puns are hard to translate emphasizes the necessity for translators to properly consider pun's visual and cultural components. The study highlights the fact that some puns, especially those that largely rely on cultural allusions, may be prone to the No Translation method, in which the pun is purposefully left out to prevent misunderstanding or loss of meaning. When dealing with such puns, translators must be aware of these complications and use ingenuity and cultural awareness.

In conclusion, this study presents useful information about the translatable nature of puns in animated movies and offers useful advice for translators. Translators can overcome obstacles and produce excellent translations that successfully communicate the humour and the intended meaning to the target audience by acknowledging various tactics and considering the cultural and visual features of puns. This study contributes to the field of translation studies and promotes future investigation and development of pun translation methods in many circumstances.

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AL JAZEERA'S PARATEXTUAL REFRAMING OF *THE ATLANTIC* AND *FOREIGN AFFAIRS* COVERAGE OF THE 2022 RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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Abstract: *The Russian-Ukrainian War, which began in February 2022, has recently become a trend and attracted the attention of different news agencies. This paper examines the paratextual components of ten news articles on the Russian-Ukrainian War. The source articles are extracted from The Atlantic and Foreign Affairs, while the Arabic translation is retrieved from Al Jazeera website. In this paper, the narrative theory is adopted (Baker, 2018) since it is a dynamic and flexible approach that emphasizes the role of translators and interpreters as active participants in constructing reality. The English articles with their Arabic counterparts were compared, and the parts that were paratextually reframed in the translated versions were identified. Investigating how Al Jazeera reframed the Russian-Ukrainian War through translation, Al Jazeera appears to sometimes create different, diverse, and contradictory versions of the narrative. This may result in various and, sometimes, different views of the same story. The findings showed that the paratextual framing strategies utilized by Al Jazeera to reframe the Russian-Ukrainian War include titles, subheadings, introductions, and footnotes. The paper concludes that the war is framed in the source texts in line with the source media outlets' agenda and is then reframed in the target language through translation. The entire process might affect how the target audience views the event under study.*

Keywords: *Russian-Ukrainian War, translation, paratextual framing, Al Jazeera, titles*

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Background of the Study

Narrative discourse is a description of events that uses verbs of speech, motion, and action to describe a series of events. Drawing on Baker (2018) theory of narrativity, this paper investigates the role of translation in reframing one of the recent events that attracted the whole world's attention, which is the Russian-Ukrainian War. News reporters and translators are not neutral in their coverage, and media outlets, in most cases, have an ideological bias toward one of the conflict parties (Al-Salman & Haider, 2021; Haider, 2019; Haider & Hussein, 2020).

In February 2014, Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine after the Revolution for Dignity and aided pro-Russian separatists in their conflict with Ukrainian forces in the Donbas. The situation then worsened, and Russia launched a full-scale attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Western officials have argued that the scale of the war could be the largest in Europe since 1945. The conflict led to a humanitarian crisis. The EU, the US, and some countries imposed sanctions on Russia. The Russian-Ukrainian War provoked a debate among Arab populations about the adverse effects the war is having on the economies of some Arab countries. Some claim that the robust man model (using Putin as an example) inspires the Arab people as a way to develop and influence the world order. Putin is portrayed as the leader who defied the Western plot of democratization in Eastern Europe, created the West dependence on Russian energy, interfered in the US presidential elections, and contributed to stabilizing the Syrian regime. Moreover, the war has already affected several sectors in the Arab region, including oil and gas, agricultural imports, and tourism. There is only one Arab government that is genuinely pro-Putin, namely the Assad regime in Syria, while most of the remaining Arab states prioritize their Western ties. However, this does not imply that Arab nations are at war with the Kremlin. Instead, they typically view Russia as a sizable global power that still matters in their region and occasionally makes interventions advantageous to their interests.

Although there are few studies that tackled reframing narratives in media translation (Al Sharif, 2009; Allawzi, Al-Jabri, Ammari & Ali, 2022; Qin & Zhang, 2018; Smadi, Obeidat & Haider, 2022), this study is significant since it investigates the reframing of the Russian-Ukrainian War, a hot issue that has implications for the whole world. It demonstrates the complex interplay between translation, politics, ideology, and power. This study examines the paratextual reframing strategies when translating news articles from English into Arabic. Thus, it fills a gap in the literature of translation studies and can be useful for media reporters and owners, translators, political scientists, and communication specialists.

This paper examines the paratextual components of ten news articles on the Russian-Ukrainian War. The source articles are extracted from *The Atlantic* and *Foreign Affairs*, while the Arabic translation is retrieved from *Al Jazeera* website. This paper contends that the source texts frame the war in line with the agenda of the media outlets they originate from and then undergo a process of reframing when translated into the target language. The questions posed are:

1. What are the main paratextual reframing devices that *Al Jazeera*'s translators used in reframing the Russian-Ukrainian War narratives?

2. How do paratextual reframing devices affect the Russian-Ukrainian War narratives?

Review of Related Literature

Narrative Theory and Paratextual Framing

In this paper, narrative theory is adopted since it is a dynamic and flexible approach that acknowledges the complexity of human behavior and does not follow static patterns (Baker, 2010). It also emphasizes the role of translators and interpreters as active participants in the construction of reality. According to Baker (2018), a narrative is a public and individual 'story' that people subscribe to, and that conducts their manner and behavior. They are the stories people tell about the world(s) they live in. The uses of the terms 'narrative' and 'story' are interchangeable in this context. Baker (2018) demonstrates how translation can create or reframe the same story in the target text using the concept of framing. Different narrators can tell the same story differently, depending on their skopos and political objectives. Accordingly, researchers may examine how translation supports, undermines, or changes elements of a particular narrative. In this study, narrative theory is used as a theoretical basis for analyzing and classifying ten articles related to the Russian-Ukrainian War based on paratextual design.

The French theorist Gerard first introduced the term "paratext," arguing that all supplementary content surrounding the main text is deemed paratext (Genette, 1997). In addition, he stated that paratext is an integral part of the text, and any text without paratext cannot be considered a text.

Wolf (2006) stated that various devices fall under paratextual framings, including titles, epigraphs, images, picture frames, footnotes, postscripts, intertitles (in printed literature), opening or closing credits (in films), or captions (in visual arts). He distinguished between "authorized" or "intra-compositional" paratextual framing and "unauthorized" or "extra-compositional" paratextual framing. The former has to do with the paratextual techniques employed by the author of the original text. Conversely, the latter refers to paratextual elements that others, such as translators and interpreters, have altered or added to the original and actual framed text. The relevance of paratextual framing devices, in general, resides in their ability to mediate between the text and the readers of that text (Kovala, 1996). Endnotes, footnotes, and glossaries are tools used in translation studies that give translators and translation companies a space to remark on and share their opinions on translation (Baker, 2006).

Conflict narratives are politically loaded, which is evident in the public's knowledge (Abu Rumman & Haider, 2023; Al-Abbas & Haider, 2020; Haider, 2019). Interpreting and translation are effective instruments for recognizing the political significance of narratives when the relevant conflict is discussed worldwide. The translation or retelling of a story is eventually embedded within the personal narrative of the translator/reteller and reframed within specific contexts (Hijjo, Kaur & Kadhim, 2019).

Empirical Studies

Different studies have investigated how political texts are translated into various languages and examined what reframing strategies are used in rendering these texts. For example, Hijjo and Kaur (2017) examined the effectiveness of paratextual reframing devices in manipulating reality by analyzing the English translations of the Arabic media reports on Daesh using the theory of narrativity proposed by Baker (2006). This research suggests that paratextual devices, such as titles, headings, and images with captions, are powerful reframing tools that operate outside the immediate text. Similarly, Sanatifar and Jalalian Daghigh (2018) conducted a study on how the Iranian media reframed the way that the Western media had structured the public view of the social and political aspects concerning its nuclear program. The study employed a socio-narrative perspective to analyze the societal narrative and how it operates within society's various units and institutions. It also examined the strategies used by local translators to reframe the story from a micro perspective. The analysis reveals that the translators attempted to remove or downplay the undesired effects of the primary story on their target audience or offer a completely different image of the story.

Qin and Zhang (2018) used Chinese and English versions of news coverage of Edward Snowden's case to demonstrate the framing tactics. The primary body of data for the study comprises 47 Chinese news texts and their English translations that were published between 2013 and 2015 in state-owned Chinese news outlets. The findings showed that the translated reports of this incident are reframed, although the ideologies of the news agency that translated the texts and the organization that broadcasts the Chinese news are the same. Furthermore, the findings revealed that Chinese state-owned news organizations frequently employ selective appropriation and labeling as reframing tactics to validate their versions of events and match their political beliefs. Moreover, Qin and

Zhang (2018) argued that various elements, including the intended readership, the political situation, and the news agency's political orientation influence the process of reframing any narrative.

Adopting Baker's (2006) narrative theory, Hijjo et al. (2019) discussed the potential impact of translators in shaping ideologies and political agendas through their translations of stories. Their research examined how "Daesh" was portrayed in Arabic editorials and their English translations published by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), an organization that frequently receives support from major Western media outlets and is pro-Israel. The study employed narrative theory to examine how narrative legitimizes, normalizes, and justifies specific actions to the public. The results imply that MEMRI uses translation to advance its ideologically charged aim of presenting Arabs and Muslims as terrorists by drawing on the meta-narrative of the War on Terror. This is done through selective and decontextualized excerpts and mistranslation of some others, resulting in a misleading representation of the original Arabic narratives. This difference misled the English audience and impacted their official and public opinion regarding important subjects like the War on Terror, which affected millions of people's lives.

After reviewing the literature and to the best of our knowledge, no study has been conducted to investigate the paratextual reframing of the translation of the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian War narratives, a gap this study attempts to fill.

Methodology

This section introduces the methods and procedures to be followed in conducting the current study. It discusses the investigated media outlets, data selections, theoretical framework, and study procedures.

Investigated Media Outlets

As mentioned above, three media outlets are examined in this study. The English source texts produced by *The Atlantic* and *Foreign Affairs* are compared with *Al Jazeera's* target articles published in Arabic.

Al Jazeera

Al Jazeera, launched in 1996, is a well-known news channel based in Qatar. It has more than 80 offices around the world. *Al Jazeera* Arabic was the Arab world's first independent news station dedicated to offering comprehensive news and live debates. By shattering long-standing taboos in the region's media, such as hosting Israeli officials or engaging with Arab regimes, *Al Jazeera* has given the Arab world access to contemporary journalism.

This channel is a major Arabic-language news network that has played a significant role in shaping the media landscape in the Arab world. Several fundamental ideologies guide *Al Jazeera*'s editorial approach. Firstly, the network strives to provide an alternative perspective to mainstream media by providing thorough coverage of news stories from a local and international angle. Secondly, it seeks to be an objective, impartial source of information that promotes critical thinking and a range of viewpoints. *Al Jazeera* adheres to freedom of speech and promotes democratic principles. It speaks candidly about human rights issues and pro-democracy movements throughout the Arab world, hoping to give marginalized perspectives and representatives a voice (Figenschou, 2013).

The Atlantic

The Atlantic is an American magazine and multi-platform publisher launched in 1857 in Boston. It features articles on politics, business, foreign affairs, culture, arts, technology, and science. The magazine has gained a good reputation across the United States for supporting meaningful careers and identifying emerging poets and writers. The magazine also presents the opinions of knowledgeable writers on significant modern political issues like abolition, education, and others.

The Atlantic remains dedicated to creating open-minded forums that allow for vigorous intellectual inquiry along with diverse perspectives for its readers. Despite having no defined partisan or ideological objective, it endorses informed analysis while valuing critical thinking considerably. Thus, its editorial team prioritizes challenging traditional mindsets by entertaining concepts from different political spectrums while advocating comprehensive coverage of global concerns such as international conflicts, diplomacy, and development to benefit from a comprehensive grasp of worldwide complications.

Foreign Affairs

Foreign Affairs is an American magazine founded by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) way back in 1922 that has evolved into a multi-platform media company providing various services such as print magazines alongside websites/ mobile sites/apps and social media feeds. It caters to diversified international subscribers representing multiple interests.

Its focus extends beyond national coverage, engaging in rigorous intellectual analysis independently illuminating varied perspectives without any specific ideological framework aligning itself against or subscribing towards understanding multiple views on complex issues. The magazine's editorial staff favors in-depth investigation and analysis based on trustworthy information. They strive to provide readers with a comprehensive grasp of complex global issues because there may be numerous interpretations and policy recommendations.

Data Collection and Corpus Size

The focus of this study is on the articles that were written in English and translated into Arabic. An English-Arabic parallel corpus of ten pairs of articles on the Russian-Ukrainian War published between February and October 2022 is used. The source texts contain 22,170 English words, and the translated texts 19,416 Arabic words. The first five English source articles were extracted from the Atlantic media outlet, while the other five were retrieved from the Foreign Affairs Magazine's website. The Arabic versions of the ten articles were extracted from *Al Jazeera*'s official website. Table 1 provides some details on the five selected articles from *The Atlantic* magazine.

Table 1. A brief introduction of the selected articles from *The Atlantic*

No.	Title/ Link	*The Atlantic*	*Al Jazeera*
1	Title	**What Russia Is Stirring Up at Chernobyl** The 1986 explosion at the plant was a turning point for independence in Ukraine. Now, Russia is threatening to make the country relive that trauma.	حرب نووية دون قنابل.. ماذا تريد روسيا من مفاعل تشرنوبل؟ *(Lit. Nuclear war without bombs... What does Russia want from the Chornobyl reactor?)*
	Date	MARCH 02, 2022	MARCH 26, 2022
	Link	https://theatlantic.com/science/archive/2022/03/ukraine-russia-chernobyl-warning/623878/	https://t.ly/T9Xi6
2	Title	**Putin Doesn't Realize How Much Warfare Has Changed** The Russian president's obsession with World War II is hindering his invasion of Ukraine.	إخفاقات بوتين.. هل أغفل الرئيس الروسي دروس التاريخ؟ *(Lit. Putin's failures... Did the Russian president ignore the lessons of history?)*
2	Date	MARCH 24, 2022	MAY 14, 2022
	Link	https://theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/03/putin-doesnt-realize-how-much-warfare-has-changed/627600/	https://t.ly/BMi4G

No.	Title/ Link	*The Atlantic*	*Al Jazeera*
3	Title	**Putin Is Just Following the Manual** A utopian Russian novel predicted Putin’s war plan.	كتاب الكرملين المفضل.. الرواية التي تنبأت بحرب أوكرانيا *(Lit. The Kremlin’s favorite book... The novel that predicted the war in Ukraine)*
	Date	MARCH 26, 2022	APRIL 19, 2022
	Link	https://theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/03/putin-kremlin-foreign-policy-strategy/629388/	https://t.ly/od6KC
4	Title	**The Biggest Threat to Putin’s Control of Crimea** Crimean Tatars have long helped shape Ukraine’s sense of self as a vibrant multiethnic, multiconfessional, multilingual place.	تتار القرم.. السنة المسلمون يقودون المواجهة ضد روسيا في أوكرانيا *(Lit. Crimean Tatars... Sunni Muslims lead the confrontation against Russia in Ukraine)*
	Date	MAY 17, 2022	SEPTEMBER 10, 2022
	Link	https://theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/05/ukraine-war-crimean-tatars-stalin-soviet-union/629824/	https://t.ly/64332
5	Title	**WHAT IF RUSSIA USES NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN UKRAINE?** A look at the grim scenarios - and the U.S. playbook for each	سيناريوهات الحرب النووية: أين يمكن أن تستخدم روسيا سلاحها النووي؟ وكيف سترد واشنطن؟ *(Lit. Scenarios of nuclear war: Where can Russia use its nuclear weapons? And how will Washington respond?)*
	Date	JUNE 20, 2022	SEPTEMBER 23, 2022
	Link	https://theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/06/russia-ukraine-nuclear-weapon-us-response/661315/	https://t.ly/1Uu7u

Table 2 provides some details on the five selected articles from *Foreign Affairs* magazine.

Table 2. A brief introduction of the selected articles from *Foreign Affairs*

No.	Title/ Link	*Foreign Affairs*	*Al Jazeera*
1	Title	**The Coming Ukrainian Insurgency** Russia’s Invasion Could Unleash Forces the Kremlin Can’t Control	كابوس بوتين المُنتظر.. ملامح الانتفاضة القادمة في أوكرانيا *(Lit. Putin’s anticipated nightmare... The features of the upcoming uprising in Ukraine)*
	Date	FEBRUARY 25, 2022	FEBRUARY 26, 2022
	Link	https://foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-02-25/coming-ukrainian-insurgency	https://bit.ly/3GH2azz

2	Title	**The Return of Conquest?** Why the Future of Global Order Hinges on Ukraine	الحدود الهشة.. لماذا تريد روسيا محو أوكرانيا من خريطة العالم؟ *(Lit. Fragile borders... Why does Russia want to erase Ukraine from the world map?)*
	Date	APRIL 06, 2022	APRIL 20, 2022
2	Link	https://foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-04-06/ukraine-russia-war-return-conquest	https://bit.ly/3GkQZfJ
3	Title	**China's New Vassal** How the War in Ukraine Turned Moscow Into Beijing's Junior Partner	تعملُق التنين وتقزّم الدب.. هل تحول حرب أوكرانيا روسيا إلى دولة تابعة للصين؟ *(Lit. The dragon is stomping, and the bear is stunting... Will the Ukraine war turn Russia into a state of China?)*
	Date	AUGUST 09, 2022	AUGUST 11, 2022
	Link	https://foreignaffairs.com/china/chinas-new-vassal	https://bit.ly/3RlCrCy
4	Title	**All the Tsar's Men** Why Mobilization Can't Save Putin's War	كل رجال القيصر.. هل تنقذ التعبئة العسكرية بوتين أم تورطه في مستنقع أوكرانيا؟ *(Lit. All the Tsar's Men... Will the military mobilization save Putin or get him involved in the Ukraine quagmire?)*
	Date	SEPTEMBER 23, 2022	OCTOBER 03, 2022
	Link	https://foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/all-tsars-men	https://bit.ly/3uENAFS
5	Title	**Can Ukraine Survive the Winter?** What the Country Needs to Hold Out	معركة البرد والرصاص.. هل يحسم الشتاء حرب أوكرانيا؟ *(Lit. The battle of cold and lead... Will winter decide the war in Ukraine?)*
	Date	NOVEMBER 08, 2022	DECEMBER 27, 2022
	Link	https://foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/can-ukraine-survive-winter	https://bit.ly/4a2pUvs

The compiled data were divided into two main sub-corpora based on the language, mainly an English sub-corpus and an Arabic counterpart. The English sub-corpus contains the texts that were written in English (English as a source language/SL), while its Arabic counterpart contains the Arabic translation of the English articles (Arabic as a target language/TL).

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Baker's (2018) narrative theory. By drawing upon this theory, the study aims to explore the influence of translation on the target readers, emphasizing the significance of understanding the interconnection between texts to comprehend the overarching narrative. Additionally, in line with Baker's framing concept, the study explores how translation might construct or reframe a story in the target language, stressing the influence of many narrators with various skopos and political objectives. This approach will provide insights into how translation choices can maintain, undermine, or modify narrative aspects.

Procedures

The procedures (to be) followed in this paper are as follows:

1. Selecting an occasion that different news outlets densely covered. The Russian-Ukrainian War 2022 was selected.
2. Looking for online news websites and broadcasters in Arabic and English that covered the event. Three main media outlets were selected, namely *Al Jazeera*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *The Atlantic*.
3. Ten pairs of Arabic and English articles were extracted from the websites of the three news outlets.
4. Comparing the English Articles with their Arabic counterparts.
5. Identifying the parts that were paratextually reframed in the translated versions.

It is worth noting that all Arabic text excerpts and examples included in this study have been translated into English by the authors, who acknowledge that it is their obligation to ensure that the translations accurately communicate the original Arabic content's intended meaning. Additionally, these translations were checked by two scholars with expertise in translation to guarantee the highest degree of translation quality.

Analysis and Findings

In this section, the paratextual framing strategies utilized by *Al Jazeera* to reframe the Russian-Ukrainian War were examined. These strategies include titles, subheadings, introductions, and footnotes.

Titles

Titles are the first elements to be read, and based on them, one decides whether to continue reading the article or not (Al-Salman & Haider, 2021; Haider & Hussein, 2020). They act as indicators of the text's content. They also direct the reader's comprehension of the narrative. Whether original or translated, titles can influence and guide people's ideas about specific events by supporting or undermining certain public narratives as they occupy an initial position in the article with a bold font (Lanser, 1981). Table 3 shows examples of paratextual title framings.

Table 3. Examples of paratextual title framing

No.	Source	ST	TT (*Al Jazeera*)	Literal Translation
1	*Foreign Affairs*	All the Tsar's Men Why Mobilization Can't Save Putin's War	كل رجال القيصر.. هل تنقذ التعبئة العسكرية بوتين أم تورطه في مستنقع أوكرانيا؟	All the Tsar's Men... Will the military mobilization save Putin or get him involved in the Ukraine quagmire?
2	*Foreign Affairs*	China's New Vassal How the War in Ukraine Turned Moscow Into Beijing's Junior Partner	تعملُق التنين وتقزُّم الدب.. هل تحول حرب أوكرانيا روسيا إلى دولة تابعة للصين؟	The dragon is stomping, and the bear is stunting... Will the Ukraine war turn Russia into a state of China?
3	*The Atlantic*	The Biggest Threat to Putin's Control of Crimea Crimean Tatars have long helped shape Ukraine's sense of self as a vibrant multiethnic, multiconfessional, multilingual place.	تتار القرم.. السنة المسلمون يقودون المواجهة ضد روسيا في أوكرانيا	Crimean Tatars... Sunni Muslims lead the confrontation against Russia in Ukraine
4	*The Atlantic*	Putin Doesn't Realize How Much Warfare Has Changed The Russian president's obsession with World War II is hindering his invasion of Ukraine.	إخفاقات بوتين.. هل أغفل الرئيس الروسي دروس التاريخ؟	Putin's failures… Did the Russian president ignore the lessons of history?

In Example 1, the translator reframed the original narrative by using some specific lexical choices such as "تورطه في مستنقع أوكرانيا؟" (Lit. *get him involved in the Ukraine quagmire?*) to draw the reader's attention to the fact that mobilization may not save Putin, but rather lead him into a pit. The word "quagmire" itself has a negative connotation. It relates to a difficult, complicated, or unpleasant situation that is not easy to avoid or escape.

In example 2, using the term "vassal" in the title of an American editorial implies that Russia is subordinate to China, which clearly indicates the balance of power between the two nations. However, *Al Jazeera* replaced the title of the ST with a new one to attract the audience by employing specific symbols. The dragon is a powerful symbol commonly associated with Chins in Western media, representing power. Meanwhile, the bear is a symbol often associated with Russia, symbolizing its potency and resilience. As Hijjo and Kaur (2017) put it, "framing by labeling in the translation of the article's title signals a different narrative than of the source, thus leading the target audience to a framed interpretation of the text" (Hijjo & Kaur, 2017, p. 25).

In Example 3, *Al Jazeera* replaced the narrative of the ST with a completely new one to shift the viewers' attention to the fact that the Crimean Tatars Sunni Muslims oppose Russia. Since the majority of *Al Jazeera*'s audience is Muslims, the translator wanted to draw attention to this particular group and thus make them empathize with the war.

In Example 4, *Al Jazeera*'s translator reframed the original narrative by using simpler words and to the point. The new narrative suggests that Putin's actions in Ukraine may be seen as a failure and that he might have missed out on important historical lessons. The title points out that Putin might have made errors that could have been avoided if he had learned from the past, while the source one highlights his lack of adaptability to modern warfare. Using the examples above, it is clear that title manipulation through framing may be utilized to reframe narratives through translation (Baker, 2018).

In conclusion, the variations in the previously mentioned titles show how minor changes in wording can highlight various viewpoints and generate contrasting meanings. Three of the examples above change definitive statements into questions, thus assuming the middle-of-the-road position. Because of this, it is crucial for readers to critically assess titles and be aware of any potential bias or agenda. It is worth emphasizing that readers can access the original text since *Al Jazeera* left a link to the original text at the end of each article. This encourages a closer investigation of the actual content to get a thorough comprehension of the subject.

Subheadings

Subheadings are paratextual materials introduced by the text producer to split a text thematically into sections so as to make reading easier (Hijjo & Kaur, 2017). Subheadings, intertitles, and internal titles are also used in translation to reframe narratives in translated texts since they help create cohesive narratives by integrating diverse narrative parts and directing readers to a newly created narrative (Al Sharif, 2009). *Al Jazeera* divided all ten translated articles under investigation into sub-sections. In many cases, it tended to translate an already existing subheading from English into Arabic, and in many others, it has created new ones. Table 4 shows some examples of paratextual subheading framing.

Table 4. Examples of paratextual reframing through subheading

No.	Source	ST	TT (*Al Jazeera*)	Literal Translation
5	*Foreign Affairs*	MISTAKES BREED MISTAKES	خطايا روسيا الأربع	Russia's four sins
6		FORCES UNLEASHED	الشعب الأوكراني يخرج من القُمقُم	The Ukrainian people are coming out of the bottle or emerging from the abyss.
7		LEAVE A LIGHT ON	شتاء 2023.. البرد أقسى من الرصاص أحيانا	Winter 2023... The cold is sometimes harsher than bullets.
8	*The Atlantic*	-	روسيا في تشرنوبل	Russia in Chernobyl
9		-	الهوس بالتاريخ	Obsession with history
10		-	تتار القرم.. رحلة الألم والغُربة	Crimean Tatars... A journey of pain and alienation

In many cases, the translation of subheadings on *Al Jazeera* was neutral and balanced. In Example 5, the English subheading, retrieved from *Foreign Affairs*, is "*MISTAKES BREED MISTAKES,*" whereas the TT is "خطايا روسيا الأربع" (Lit. *Russia's four sins*). The translator conveyed almost the same meaning using more specific words. The Arabic subheading refers mainly to "Russia's four sins," which implies that the blame for the conflict lies squarely on Russia's shoulders. Furthermore, the use of the word "خطايا" (*sins/mistakes*) also holds a moral connotation, which further reinforces the negative portrayal of Russia's actions. The subheading may have been translated in this way to appeal to Arab readers who might have a different understanding of the Russian-Ukrainian struggle. In many parts of the Arab world, there is a deep mistrust of Russian actions in Syria and other regional conflicts, which could have influenced the translator's decision to frame the narrative in this way. Additionally, using numbering, as in "the four sins," is a common rhetorical device in Arabic media, which could have made the subheading more attractive to Arab readers. Arab media frequently includes cultural features that appeal to Arab audiences. By using numbers, the topic can feel more accessible and recognizable in light of this cultural background. The anticipation that a numbering scheme can evoke can entice readers to keep reading to find out what each item comprises. This can be a good way to grab the audience's interest.

In example 6, the English subheading "*FORCES UNLEASHED*" is translated as "الشعب الأوكراني يخرج من القُمقُم" (Lit. *The Ukrainian people are coming out of the bottle or emerging from the abyss*). The translator appears to have engaged in reframing by creating a new subheading that highlights the agency of the Ukrainian individuals rather than the movements of external forces. It is also worth noting that the Arabic subheading contains a relatively cultural reference to the phrase "الشعب يريد إسقاط النظام" (Lit. *The people want to overthrow the regime*), which was a famous slogan during the Arab Spring protests. This allusion may be an attempt by the translator to compare the situation in Ukraine to the larger worldwide battle for democracy and human rights.

In example 7, the source English subheading "*LEAVE A LIGHT ON*" is a metaphorical expression that suggests hope and resilience in the face of hardship, adversity, and trouble. Therefore, it can be interpreted as an encouragement and motivation to keep the light of hope burning even in the darkest times, which is relevant to this context. On the other hand, the translated subheading "شتاء 2023... البرد أقسى من الرصاص أحيانا" (Lit. *Winter 2023... The cold is sometimes harsher than bullets*) represents the harsh winter weather conditions in 2023, with the added emphasis on how the cold can be just as deadly as bullets. However, it is worth noting that the selection of subheadings can greatly impact how the reader interprets the text. In this instance, the subheading's translation might give a more accurate account of the severe winter weather in 2023. Still, it may also lack the source subheading's emotional impact and motivation.

As noted from the previously discussed three examples (5, 6, 7) extracted from the *Foreign Affairs*, subheadings existed in each article, and many were capitalized to get the readers' attention. At the same time, the authors in *The Atlantic* magazine did not divide the articles into sub-sections at all. As shown in examples (8, 9, 10), *Al Jazeera* created a new subheading that is consistent with the translated texts beneath. However, adding sub-headings may be confusing for some readers as to whether they were in the original article or added by *Al Jazeera*.

In example 8, the translator of *Al Jazeera* employed a reframing strategy by adding a new subheading, "روسيا في تشرنوبل" (Lit. *Russia in Chornobyl*). This subheading may serve to reframe the narrative by drawing a parallel connection between the disaster in Chornobyl and Russia's involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian War. In the ST, no subheading corresponds to "Russia in Chernobyl." Hence, the translator has included this subheading to highlight Russia's involvement in the ongoing conflict. Since Chornobyl is a well-known disaster with enduring repercussions on people and the environment, this reframing technique may also convey a sense of urgency or significance. Moreover, by connecting the article to a well-known historical event and subject, this subheading might also increase readers' interest in the report.

In example 9, the newly inserted subheading by the translator is related to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Here, the translator attempts to give the reader a particular perspective on Putin's actions and motivations in the current conflict. The subheading, which translates to "Obsession with history," implies that Putin’s actions in the war are driven by his personal beliefs and ideas about Russian history and nationalism. By including this subheading, the translator provides context for the reader and frames the story in a way that shapes how they see Putin’s actions. This subheading could also be an attempt to appeal to readers’ emotions and create a more powerful story. By emphasizing Putin’s historical “obsession,” the translator asserts that the conflict is deeply rooted in his perspective rather than just political tactics or reasoning. Such a portrayal of Putin’s behavior could evoke stronger emotions from the reader and elevate their worries regarding the conflict’s consequences.

In example 10, *Al Jazeera*’s translator has inserted a new subheading, “تتار القرم... رحلة الألم والغُربة” (Lit. *Crimean Tatars... A journey of pain and alienation*), which not only summarizes and reiterates the central theme of the article but also adds a new layer of meaning to the main highlights of the text, which is the situation of the Crimean Tatars, who were forced to leave their homes as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian War. The translator’s decision to insert a new subheading could be interpreted as a purposeful attempt to reframe the article’s narrative in a way that appeals to the intended audience (Gentzler, 2016). In the Arabic subheading, for instance, the misery and exile of the Crimean Tatars are emphasized, which is likely to resonate with certain Arab readers who have experienced exile and expulsion in the past. The translator can better connect emotionally with some readers and place the text within a larger narrative of injustice and human suffering by framing it in this way.

In general, the use of subheadings as a paratextual reframing tool in translation is often successful because by adding new subheadings, translators can influence how readers interpret the material and create stronger emotional connections with their target audience. However, such reframing strategies can also be controversial, as they involve making decisions about texts that the original authors may not have fully authorized. Therefore, translators should be aware of such strategies’ potential risks and benefits and use them judiciously in their work (Baker, 2006).

Introductions

Introductions are essential elements of news articles as they provide readers with a first impression and prepare them for the content of the article. The main goal of the introduction is to let readers be familiarized with the topic of an article. In its translation of news articles from other sources, *Al Jazeera* designated a section for providing an introduction. This intentional addition aids the framing process by providing readers with information that shapes their first expectations about the story in question (Wolf, 2006). Table 5 shows examples of paratextual introduction framing.

Table 5. Examples of paratextual introduction framing

No.	Source	TT (*Al Jazeera*)	Literal Translation
11	*Foreign Affairs*	**مقدمة الترجمة** في الوقت الذي بدأت فيه أنباء الانتكاسات الروسية في أوكرانيا تتسرب إلى وسائل الإعلام، خرج الرئيس الروسي فلاديمير بوتين في خطاب في 21 سبتمبر/أيلول ليُعلن تعبئة عسكرية غير مسبوقة منذ الحرب العالمية الثانية. وفي حين يجادل خبراء أن إعلان التعبئة في جيش بحجم الجيش الروسي يمكن أن يقلب الموازين العسكرية رأسا على عقب، يراهن آخرون أن هذه الخطوة يمكن أن تعمق أزمة موسكو بدل من أن تحلها. في مقاله المنشور بمجلة "فورين أفيرز" الأميركية، يجادل لورنس فريدمان، الأستاذ الفخري لدراسات الحرب في كينجز كوليدج لندن ومؤلف كتاب "القيادة: سياسة العمليات العسكرية من كوريا إلى أوكرانيا"، أن قرار التعبئة الأخير سوف تكون له عواقب وخيمة على روسيا، ليس فقط في أوكرانيا، ولكن في موسكو نفسها.	**Introduction to translation** As news of Russia's setbacks in Ukraine is leaking to the media, Russian President Vladimir Putin made a speech on September 21 declaring a military mobilization unprecedented since World War II. While experts argue that declaring mobilization in an army the size of the Russian could turn the military balance upside down, others bet that this step could deepen Moscow's crisis rather than solve it. Lawrence Freedman, who is an Emeritus Professor of War Studies at King's College London and the author of "Command: The Politics of Military Operations From Korea to Ukraine," in his article published in the American magazine "Foreign Affairs," argues that the recent mobilization decision will have dire consequences for Russia, not only in Ukraine but in Moscow itself.
12	*Foreign Affairs*	مقدمة الترجمة ما الذي تخطط له روسيا حقا بشأن أوكرانيا؟ وأي مستقبل ينتظرها حال بسطت سيطرتها بالقوة على البلاد؟ في هذا المقال يأخذنا دوغلاس لندن، المسؤول السابق في وكالة المخابرات المركزية الأميركية لأكثر من ثلاثة عقود، إلى السيناريو الذي ستواجهه روسيا حال قررت احتلال أوكرانيا بالكامل أو أجزاء منها، متنبئا بأن موسكو سوف تواجه حرب عصابات شرسة باهظة التكلفة ربما تتجاوز تداعياتها الساحة الأوكرانية إلى داخل روسيا نفسها.	**Introduction to translation** What is Russia really planning to do about Ukraine? And what future awaits it if it forcibly extends its control over the country? In this article, Douglas London, a former CIA official with more than three decades of experience, takes us through the scenario that Russia will face if it decides to occupy Ukraine in whole or in part, predicting that Moscow will face a costly and fierce guerrilla war whose ramifications may extend beyond Ukraine and into Russia itself.

No.	Source	TT (*Al Jazeera*)	Literal Translation
13	*The Atlantic*	**مقدمة الترجمة** لم يتوانَ الرئيس الروسي "فلاديمير بوتين" عن التهديد والتلويح باستخدام الأسلحة النووية في أوكرانيا، لا سيما في بداية غزوه للبلاد. ولم تستجب الولايات المتحدة لأيٍّ من تلك التهديدات حتى الآن فعليا، لكن متى على الولايات المتحدة اتخاذ قرار بالرد؟ وكيف سيكون شكل هذا الرد؟ حول هذا النقاش الدائر في أوساط مجتمع الاستخبارات والأمن الأميركي، أعدّ الكاتب والمحرر "إريك شلوسر" تحليلا نشرته مجلة "ذي أتلانتيك" الأميركية.	**Introduction to translation** Russian President Vladimir Putin did not hesitate to threaten and allude to the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine, especially at the beginning of his invasion of the country. The United States has not yet responded to any of these threats, but when will the United States decide to respond? And what will the nature of this response be? This is the debate that is currently taking place among the American intelligence and security community. The writer and editor, Eric Schlosser, prepared an analysis published by the American magazine "The Atlantic" on this issue.
14		مقدمة الترجمة في هذا المقال من مجلة ذا أتلانتيك، يقارن الباحث في التاريخ العسكري "أنطوني بيفُر" بين التكتيكات العسكرية التي تستخدمها روسيا في حربها الحالية في أوكرانيا، والتكتيكات التي استخدمتها القوات السوفيتية إبان الحرب العالمية الثانية، ليخلص إلى أن الرئيس الروسي يعيد اليوم استنساخ الأساليب العسكرية القديمة نفسها، وهو سيناريو يمكنه -وفقا لبيفُر- أن يُفرز نتائج مدمِّرة سببها الأساسي هو عجز بوتين عن تجاوز الماضي السوفيتي لروسيا.	**Introduction to translation** In this article from The Atlantic magazine, military historian "Anthony Beevor" compares the military tactics used by Russia in its current war in Ukraine to those used by Soviet forces during World War II. He concludes that the Russian president is now reproducing the same old military methods, which, according to Beevor, could lead to devastating results, mainly caused by Putin's inability to move beyond Russia's Soviet past.

As Table 5 shows, *Al Jazeera* reshaped the TT by inserting politically charged introductions to the translated text to provide recipients with some background information before reading the rest of the text. In Example 11, the introduction contained some information about the topic to be discussed in the article. Initially, it highlighted the news of Russia's defeat in Ukraine and how Putin announced an unprecedented military mobilization. It also included quotes from professionals and academics who argue that the action would worsen Moscow's issue. This framing makes an initial expectation that the news story will be focused on the negative outcomes of Putin's actions and their potential impact on Russia. According to Entman (1993), framing involves choosing some aspects of a perceived reality and emphasizing them in a communicative text in order to stimulate a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral assessment, and/or treatment prescription. This is exactly what the *Al Jazeera* introduction does. It chose a few key details from the news story and presented them in a way that supports a particular problem definition (the Ukrainian crisis and its potential to worsen), causal interpretation (Putin's military mobilization), and treatment recommendation (the necessity of international action).

In example 12, *Al Jazeera* added an introduction that aids in framing by providing context and raising interesting questions that bring the reader's attention to the subject. It prompts two important queries: What is Russia's strategy for Ukraine, and what will happen if it succeeds in its efforts to take control of the nation by force? By presenting these queries, *Al Jazeera* prepares the ground for a more thorough investigation. The author, Douglas London, a former CIA agent with more than three decades of expertise, is also briefly introduced in the introduction, which increases the article's credibility. It is worth mentioning that almost in each introduction, *Al Jazeera* provides some information about the journalist who wrote the article. Usually, this information is written at the very end of the original article as a footnote, but *Al Jazeera* decided to give more credit to the original author of the ST by putting his/her name at the very beginning in the introduction section.

In example 13, the introduction provided by *Al Jazeera* highlights Russian President Vladimir Putin's threats to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. It also begs the question of how and in what manner the United States will respond to these threats. *Al Jazeera* frames the story in a way that underscores the gravity of the situation and begs questions about the possible consequences by offering an introduction focusing on Putin's nuclear dangers. As previously discussed, mentioning the authors' analysis from the selected magazine in the introduction lends the story more authority. According to Kellner and Share (2007), determining the truthfulness and persuasiveness of media messages depends heavily on the source's reliability.

In example 14, the inserted introduction summarizes the key ideas covered in Anthony Beevor's article. It draws attention to the contrast between the military strategies employed by Soviet forces during World War II and those used by Russia in its ongoing war with Ukraine. It also implies that the Russian president is employing outdated military strategies, which could have disastrous consequences. Readers might influence their opinions by comprehending the major themes of the article through this introduction. The introduction also offers readers a framework for understanding the article's context and main key concepts.

While analyzing the ten selected articles, it was found that *Al Jazeera* used introduction framing to support certain frames in each article that drive readers' thoughts to the intended narrative. *Al Jazeera*'s framing recontextualizes the English narratives under study by adding a brief introduction to the translations, thus signaling different interpretations than those in the sources. This acts as a framing tool that establishes the tone for the rest of the article and molds the first expectations of the readers. By citing reliable sources and using persuasive language, the outlet can attract readers and highlight the situation's seriousness. In addition, *Al Jazeera* boosts the credibility of its news and emphasizes the gravity of the concern by quoting reputable journalists and sources.

Footnotes

Footnotes, endnotes, and glossaries are tools that help translators remark on their translation (Baker, 2006). They are paratextual materials that allow authors to further explain and support their arguments and ensure that the target audience understands the texts smoothly (Hijjo et al., 2019). Footnotes frequently include "framed" definitions and links to resources that can be found outside the text.

Providing links to primary sources is a persuasion tool and a way to gain the audience's trust. The translated articles on *Al Jazeera* have a special section at the end in which a link to the source article is attached. Table 6 shows examples of paratextual footnote links and the author's biographical information.

Table 6. Examples of links and some biographical information

No.	Source	ST	TT (*Al Jazeera*)	Literal Translation
15	*Foreign Affairs*	LAWRENCE FREEDMAN is an Emeritus Professor of War Studies at King's College London and the author of Command: The Politics of Military Operations From Korea to Ukraine. MORE BY LAWRENCE D. FREEDMAN	هذا المقال مترجم عن Foreign Affairs ولا يعبر بالضرورة عن موقع ميدان. ترجمة: كريم محمد. المصدر: مواقع إلكترونية	This article is translated from *Foreign Affairs* and does not necessarily reflect the site's point of view. Translated by: Karim Mohammad. Source: Websites
16	*The Atlantic*	Dina Khapaeva is the director of the Russian studies program at Georgia Tech's School of Modern Languages. She is the author of *The Celebration of Death in Contemporary Culture.*	*تعليقات المترجم. ترجمة: نور خيري هذا التقرير مترجم عن The Atlantic ولا يعبر بالضرورة عن موقع ميدان. المصدر: الجزيرة	*Translator's remarks. Translated by: Noor Khairy This article is translated from The Atlantic and does not necessarily reflect the site's point of view. Source: *Al Jazeera*

Example 15 shows that *Al Jazeera*'s endnotes include references to the primary sources of the article, as well as the translator's name and the link to their other works. It is worth noting that the Foreign Affairs footnote contains biographical information about the author of the text itself, Lawrence Freedman, and a link to his other published articles. The target text footnote, on the other hand, informs the reader that the article is translated from Foreign Affairs and may not necessarily represent the website's views. The reason behind *Al Jazeera*'s disclaimer in the TT footnote is likely connected to the concept of reframing narratives in media translation. Media translation involves translating words and conveying cultural values, viewpoints, and ideologies. *Al Jazeera* may have inserted this disclaimer to clarify that they merely provide a translation of the original article and that the opinions represented therein may not always correspond to their own editorial stance. This is particularly important in media translation since differing cultural and political backgrounds could affect how the target audience perceives the same material.

Same as in example 16, the ST footnote provides biographical information about the author, Dina Khapaeva, while the TT footnote contains no biographical information. Instead, it provides the translator's name and the link to the source of the translation. As mentioned before, *Al Jazeera*'s statement in the TT footnote: "This report is translated from *The Atlantic* and does not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of *Al Jazeera*," is a form of reframing narratives in media translation. It is a way of distancing the media outlet from any possible debate or criticism that may arise from the content of the translated report. By acknowledging that the report is a translation and not an original piece of work produced by its own media outlet, *Al Jazeera* demonstrates that they are not responsible for the report's content and that any opinions expressed do not necessarily represent its own views. As it acknowledges any potential biases and perspectives included in the source material and allows readers to establish their own opinions and thoughts, this can be viewed as a sort of responsible journalism.

A glossary is a collection of words and definitions related to a specific subject. Glossaries make it simple for readers to find terminology and explanations for some jargon (George, 2022). By ensuring that the audience is aware and capable of understanding the meaning of the terms and expressions used in reports, glossaries can play a crucial part in reframing narratives in the context of media translation. In all ten selected articles, *Al Jazeera* only **once** provided its target audience with a footnote glossary. Table 7 shows an example of a paratextual footnote glossary.

Table 7. Example of paratextual footnote glossary

No.	TT (*Al Jazeera*)	Literal Translation
17	هوامش: *اليهودية القرائية أو العنانية: هي تيار في الديانة اليهودية لا يؤمن أتباعه إلا بالتوراة المكتوبة، وينكرون نزول تفسيرات شفهية للتوراة بعد العهد القديم.	Margins: * Karaite or Anani Judaism: It is current in the Jewish religion whose followers believe only in the written Torah and deny the revelation of oral interpretations of the Torah after the Old Testament.

While English editorials do not typically have glossaries in any of their articles, in *Al Jazeera*'s translation, they are presented in only one article. In example 17 above, *Al Jazeera* tends to provide its reader with the meaning of "Karaite or Anani Judaism" because some of the target audience may not have come across this term before. Moreover, this definition provides readers with meaningful context and background information essential for understanding the subject matter and helps ensure reporting accuracy.

Overall, the ST footnote provides additional information about the article's author. In contrast, the TT footnote provides information about the translation and its source, in addition to the translator's name and links to his\her other translated works. This serves as an effective tool to gain the audience's trust. Furthermore, by providing definitions and explanations for specific terminology and jargon, glossaries in translated articles can help bridge the gap between the source and target cultures and promote greater accuracy in reporting. Still, *Al Jazeera* only once used a certain meaning of the word in its translations of ten selected articles.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper discusses the reframing narrative strategies employed by *Al Jazeera* in its Arabic translation of *The Atlantic* and *Foreign Affairs* coverage of the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian War. The study showed that *Al Jazeera* used numerous paratextual framing techniques, including titles, subheadings, introductions, and footnotes, to reframe the story of the Russian-Ukrainian War. The paper concludes that the war is framed in the source texts in line with the source media outlets' agenda and is then reframed in the target language through translation.

The paratextual framing strategies employed by *Al Jazeera* contributed to the reframing of the Russian-Ukrainian War. The titles of the translated articles were extremely important for establishing the tone, emphasizing important details, or introducing the readers to a particular viewpoint. Subheadings provided a structural framework for understanding the various sections or themes inside the articles, while introductions offered a preliminary backdrop or framing for the following content. Furthermore, footnotes served as additional points of emphasis and clarification by providing information about the translation and its source, thus helping to gain the audience's trust.

The findings demonstrate the potential for multiple and divergent interpretations of a single story since different framing decisions result in distinct reader perspectives and comprehensions. To critically interact with news narratives and acquire a thorough grasp of complex conflicts, media consumers, scholars, and politicians must be aware of these instruments and their effects.

Analyzing the paratextual components in the ten chosen news items on the Russian-Ukrainian War has shed light on how the *Al Jazeera* devices reframed the conflict story. The *Al Jazeera* channel strove to adopt a balanced approach, but was not totally effective. They allegedly leaned more toward Ukraine in several cases and expressed compassion for its predicament. This implies that their translation efforts were influenced by prejudices or contextual factors that favored Ukraine over Russia.

Finally, *Al Jazeera*'s coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian War was apparently not neutral since it failed to attain a middle-of-the-road position and leaned more toward Ukraine while expressing sympathy for its cause. Individuals must, however, critically assess numerous sources of information in order to build informed viewpoints about the issue.

This paper presents various implications that should be taken into account. Firstly, it underscores the significant role of media organizations like *Al Jazeera* in molding narratives and viewpoints concerning conflicts. Secondly, it underscores the capacity of media institutions to mold public sentiment through translation and framing decisions. Thirdly, employing different framing techniques in translation results in diverse interpretations of the same narrative, highlighting the crucial role of translators in shaping audience perception. Lastly, recognizing framing techniques provides insight into the construction and manipulation of narratives.

The results also have consequences for efforts to resolve conflicts. Different narratives created through translation and framing can affect how the general public views conflicts and their resolution, which may help or facilitate diplomatic efforts and peacebuilding programs. Policymakers, journalists, and other parties involved in conflict resolution need to comprehend and successfully navigate these divergent narratives effectively.

Moreover, the approach also emphasizes how political and cultural settings affect framing decisions. The audience's cultural background, regional dynamics, and editorial policies may influence *Al Jazeera*'s reframing tactics. The existence of various and incompatible versions of the story in media discourse emphasizes media diversity. Furthermore, this paper also emphasizes the value of audiences' media literacy and critical thinking abilities. Audiences can critically assess news pieces and create well-informed opinions by spotting reframing techniques and biases. Finally, the need for ethical journalism and translation procedures prioritizing accuracy, fairness, and transparency is emphasized.

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MINDSETS AND IRRECONCILABLE POSITIONS: A LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION OF CORONA 19 SOCIAL FRACTURES

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Abstract: *Important subjects such as Flat Earth, global warming, Covid 19, Ukrainian war have given out the existence of two major factions on antagonistic stances, the pros and the cons, that aggressively deny their adversaries' opinions on any of the aforementioned topics. One side's arguments formed by heavy reliance on previous beliefs that stand in high credibility (Nilsson, 2014, p. 16) to that group are denied by the other side's that builds, at their turn, their current beliefs on others their group is usually fond of. This article aims at inventorying the discursive practices which each side makes use of firstly in building their own arguments for their believers and secondly in dismantling the discourse of the opponents. In building their own arguments, the focus of the analysis will be laid on the persuasive strategies used to convince those that already have a serious grounding in either of the sides. In dismantling the others', special attention will be paid to address formulas and any other derogatory means used for the credibilisation of one's stand and the discreditation of the others'.*

Keywords: *mindsets, beliefs, persuasive strategies, discreditation, polarisation*

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Introduction

This article addresses a topic of intra-cultural representation and irreparable rupture between parties (pro-conspiracy theory advocates and conventionalists or anti-conspiracy advocates), which materializes by building on personal beliefs confirmed by similitude with larger socially amassed and supported ideas. The paramount hypothesis of the article is that a unique version of medical events of whatever nature can hardly, if ever, be achieved given the constructivist manner in which meaning is created, the variety of the sources of information, the belonging to a social group which imprints a strong mental representation on an array of reality-related topics and last but not least important, the degree of trust in the state's authorities. In fact, the article endeavours to demonstrate *the impossible illusion of a unique interpretation of reality* (to be read as realities) given the multiple resources that contribute to the reality's transposition into discourse, the loss in range and exposure of high quality sources of information and the loosely acknowledged quality of news generator on the rise thanks to current social media. Over and above, meaning is contextual and historic, and arbitrariness is intrinsic to meaning formation to the point of giving contrastive interpretations to one and the same concept.

The article tackles the dilemmatic question of why and how people who share a common culture, language, education end up making decisions based on beliefs that seem to stem from distinctive backgrounds. The prominence of belief over truth and the dissolution of the category of objective truth are only some of the reasons that fuel a more personal vision of truth, hence a relativisation, and a growth of one's belief's impact on decision making. The purpose is to notice how discourse practices contribute to the formation or confirmation of knowledge for the participants in the social media follow-up discussions caused by the announcement of the Romanian medical authorities that the national vaccination campaign will be closed due to the pandemic's closure[1].

Equally, the article questions the validity of the theory which claims that language plays a compelling role in the shaping of one's perspective (Whorf, 1956) on the world and is thought to account for the contrasting ways in which speakers of different languages have different representations of the world. Supposing this theory were true, how could the blatant differences in perspective in various respects between native speakers of the same language be explained? Though language may have an impact on the way in which speakers of a language shape reality, it is definitely something else that prevails over language as a supraordinate unit more likely to mold people's perceptions.

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1. The data collected for this analysis has been downloaded from https://www.facebook.com/ROVaccinare which represents the official Facebook account in charge of the coordination of Covid 19 vaccination in Romania.

The manner in which people perceive and understand the world should not be limited to the criterion of ‘national’ as one’s belonging to a nation could not circumscribe its inhabitants to a certain thinking pattern that does not exceed the nation’s borders. Though language has been credited with a consistent command over people’s beliefs, it can hardly stand the test of a uniform spreading of ideas over a territory that shares a common language and culture.

One solution to the dilemma on how people belonging to the same geographical area speaking the same language have divergent opinions and representations of actions, principles, concepts was proposed by (Foucault, 1972, p. 32) who professed that people adopt representations of reality by means of *discourse practices* which are “packages of relationships, including symbolic and material elements” (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014, p. 178) that have circulated and have received validation, thus considered true, therefore associated to knowledge. What is said is regulated by *rules of formation* which explain how it is possible to say and know certain things which are embedded in the very discourse practices. The inclusion of the rules of formation in the discourse practices eliminates the likelihood of any external influence on what is said, which signals the impossibility of speakers’ being influenced by other people’s ideas. Foucault claims that statements are important neither for what they mean nor by their content, but by the relations that they create which are necessarily political in the sense that they affect every aspect of their lives. Foucault believes that the meaning of what is said comes second after the function which, in Foucault’s vision on discourse practices, is most important, as people’s statements are aimed at fulfilling a function such as to convince, to make people change their minds, etc. Furthermore, Foucault addressed the issue of the various perceptions and visions of the world which results from the discursive practices’ lack of smoothness and unity. It is this heterogeneity that makes interpretations possible, hence, multiplicity. The Foucauldian vision on knowledge which can be equalled to validated information is utterly different from knowledge in conspiracy theories where validation is granted by affiliation to the same group and by in-group confirmation.

Making sense of the medical realities of the twenty-first century has transformed into a brawl where two main camps (each of them subdividing into other dozens) have disputed the existence, treatment and consequences of a medical condition known as Covid 19. Each camp has had a reading of the reality to which they have given a meaning relying on the code that has established a particular relationship between the virus and their mental representation of a virus (with all features: incubation, symptoms, natural or allopathic treatment, mortality, etc.). The result of this connection proved different to the point of failing to identify any common points between the two main camps. Without neglecting the impact of social and/ or political ideologies which do play a part in the various readings of reality, this article seeks to argue that different interpretations of reality might at times be simply the result of a different reading of reality, starting from the same data, but relying on personal and group beliefs that build on previous conceptions and representations of authority, medicine, and trust.

Reality: language, belief, mindset, truth

Humans understand and make sense of the world around them by language which acts as a mediator between the real world, which exists outside humans' ability to name the items around them, and humans. Language is representational (Hall, 1997, p. 5) in the sense that by means of sounds and words it represents the reality to people who supposedly gain an approximately similar grasp of reality, if speakers of the same language, and likely distinct when speaking other languages. But, although (Hall, 1997, p. 2) postulated that speakers of the same language belong to the same culture, starting from the assumption that culture is about people having shared meanings, hence shared readings of events, it becomes ever more obvious that there are other factors that are likely to impact their representation of the world, such as memory, attitudes, knowledge, education.

Any situation when the representation, understanding or significance attributed to an event takes distance from the major perception, is reckoned as "cognitive bias" (Korteling & Toet, 2022, p. 610) or delusion (false belief) which is held as deviant thinking against what is believed to be true and logical. Korteling, Brower and Toet (2018, p. 2) claim that cognitive bias may be conscientiously used when the speaker is interested in convincing the audience of one's ideas and truth is intentionally disregarded as reaching one's goal is more important than the pursuit of Truth (Hellinger, 2019, p. 21). Personal truths and ways of reaching them seem to be loose thinking strategies that are largely appealed to in order to facilitate decision-making and solution-finding. In this situation, language is the mediator where the natural connection between the sign, the concept and the representation is broken and a new connection is established, which is meant to make sense in the eyes of the viewers. Ergo, language constructs the represented reality of the world which may have or not a correspondence to what is generally held as true.

Of a seemingly similar texture to language, beliefs are mental constructs which originate either from direct sense experiences or from previous (personal or socially generated) beliefs (Nilsson, 2014, p. 22). Beliefs gain consistence by multiple confirmations, which might solidify a belief into an immutable law for certain people or social groups. A possible explanation for the beliefs' being so much revered is peer confirmation which equals a validation of one's beliefs. (Connors & Halligan, 2015, p. 2) define beliefs as "enduring, unquestioned ontological representations of the world that comprise primary convictions about events, causes, agency, and objects that subjects use and accept as veridical."

Still, belief cannot be equated to truth as it stands for a personal representation of events and people. The forced parallelism between belief and knowledge/truth is currently exploited as the borderline between what may not be true and what has not been demonstrated yet (belief) and what is true and demonstrated (knowledge), which may be erased mainly for ideological and political purposes.

A range of beliefs will result in a mindset which could be understood as a system of beliefs about different aspects of life which activates the moment the individual needs to analyse and express one's opinion about a particular matter. Mindsets simplify reality by generating some assumptions and some expectations that will dictate personal (re)actions, attitudes and conduct in life. Modern times by their complexity and thanks to extended media exposure pressure people into dealing with topics they do not know much about (vaccination, Covid, global warming, etc.), but they take sides counting on their pre-existing belief system.

One such factor that facilitates opinion expressing and side taking is the advent of social media which has given everyone a voice and a platform to share their opinions and listen to those of others, which, by positive transfer of representation from classical television and mass-media, places credit on beliefs and short-circuits the traditional connection between the sign and the meaning assigned to it by each individual from a particular culture. That results in a large mass of people prone to deceit that would rather abandon their own interpretation of events in favour of influencers' (here understood as politicians, spokespersons, artists, opinion leaders) opinions which are largely looked up to. Definitely, ideology does exploit the fertile land of volunteer abandonment of one's language-mediated access to reality, and truth and it imprints on those that adhere to its messages a certain perspective on events.

Conspiracy mindsets

The intriguing situation when some people more than others are attracted by conspiracy theories is explained by (Douglas & Sutton, 2023, p. 272) as some people's need to satisfy their epistemic and existential needs. As people want to understand what happens, they expect explanations which, when insufficient or lacunary, might lead to people's disposition for accepting any explanation irrespective of its degree of likelihood. Douglas and Sutton define conspiracies as "allegations that two or more actors have coordinated in secret to achieve an outcome, and that their actions are of public interest but not widely known by the public". (Wood et al., 2012, p. 1) accentuate the conspiracy theory's evil-driven intentions of the plotters. Moreover, they claim that conspiracy theories are *monological* by the fact that the theories interconnect and support one another, thus creating the impression of a cohesive intentional organization of events. The monological character of conspiracy theories could represent a great threat to modern societies as all social and natural phenomena could be reduced to a conspiracy, which might threaten the sound foundations of societies "Over time, the view of the world as a place ruled by conspiracies can lead to conspiracy becoming the default explanation for any given event, a unitary, closed-off worldview in which beliefs come together in a mutually supportive network known as a monological belief system" (Wood et al., 2012, p. 1).

A conspiracy mindset illustrates some minds' predisposition for denying official explanations, justifications, evidence as a consequence of people's distrust in authorities that have previously been demonstrated to try to falsify undesirable facts. In a study carried out on 563 respondents, Frenken and Imhoff (2023, p. 257) have discovered a strong correlation between mistrust and a conspiracy mindset which bears out consistent disadvantages to the society and the society's functioning as a whole.

Representational practices

Representation is an act of categorisation which builds on à priori information with a view to accommodating new data to existing mental frameworks. Appropriation becomes facile by regular practice that assures a rapid classification with flagrant disregard for details or specificity, but with a major interest in patterning and stereotyping. Other than that, representation adheres to personal beliefs in the sense that it will tend to represent the world around in concordance with one's vision of the world. In line with the aforementioned idea, Hall (1997, p. 226) professes that "representation is a complex business and, especially when dealing with 'difference', it engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common-sense way".

By the same token, representations have been given a dominant role by the fact that they create *reality*. Reality, as people perceive it, is actually the image projected by representations in people's minds. Fürsich (2010, p. 114) adds to reality creation another function which is equally important by which representations mediate for "the normalization of certain world views and ideologies." Culturally, sometimes institutionally, repeatedly, representation becomes ingrained, which stands for its transformation into practice.

Sameness is looked for, accommodated, encouraged, otherness is looked down on due to the *lack of identification*. Sameness is inclusive and supports bonding between people with similar mindsets, which automatically leads to the exclusion of the others on the criterion of incompatibility of world vision. The ethnocentricity of sameness gives prominence to its exclusive attachment to *in-group* values which are the only values held true by adherents (Pettigrew, 2005, p. 827). Consequently, any other values that do not correspond to the in-group's are likely to be emanated by an *out-group* that stands for otherness.

Throughout their lives, people belong successively and/ or simultaneously to more in-groups depending on the situation they find themselves in. Bernstein (2015, p. 3) maintains that it is not the simple belonging that makes an individual part of a group, but the individual's psychological identification with the group's values is what triggers their adherence to that group "ingroups are the groups to which individuals both belong and psychologically identify, while outgroups are those to which individuals do not belong or identify."

From a psychological perspective, Fiske and Dupree (2015, p. 6) demonstrate that two main criteria help people decide on who is and who is not part of the ingroup: warmth and competence. Thus and so, the people who are believed to have both high warmth and high competence are viewed as an in-group "friendly, trustworthy, capable and resourceful members" (Fiske & Dupree, 2015, p. 6). Conversely, any person who is perceived as having either low warmth or low competence can be considered as an out-group person, thus, the other. Based on the following four emotions: *liked/disliked*, *warm/cold*, *respected/disrespected*, and *competent/ incompetent* Fiske and Dupree deliberate the division of people into in-group and out-group people.

From a semiotic perspective, Kristeva (1982, p. 65) construes the rejection of the other as a "process of purification" because the other defiles the sacred values of the inner group and because the other is excluded due to their abjection:

> The purification rite appears then as that essential ridge, which, prohibiting the filthy object, extracts it from the secular order and lines it at once with a sacred facet. Because it is excluded as a possible object, asserted to be a non-object of desire, abominated as abject, as abjection, filth becomes defilement and founds on the henceforth released side of the "self and clean" the order that is thus only (and therefore, always already) sacred. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 65)

Correspondingly, there is strong evidence (Sutton & Douglas, 2005, p. 637) in support of the theory according to which one's attitude to *justice to self* and *justice to the others* is a good predictor of one's psychological health related to one's access and being done justice to and of one's harshness towards *the others* (the poor, immigrants, etc.). This is a mental pattern which eases one's way of relating to the world around and a manner in which injustice done to others is ignored or minimised.

Still, in-groups and out-groups presuppose that all people part in any of these groups share all similar opinions towards certain debatable issues. As a consequence, Frenken and Imhoff (2021, p. 2) hypothesize that variable-centred methods overgeneralize the reasons for which people believe in certain conspiracy theories. They suggest replacing the variable-centred methods with the person-centred methods as they "offer more fine-grained analyses" as they might indicate more "differentiated response patterns" (Frenken & Imhoff, 2021, p. 3).

Data description and analysis

When tested for their proneness to conspiracies, Romanians do manifest an inclination for alternative truths maybe as a consequence of their distrust in the political and medical authorities of the country. (Durach & Volintiru, 2022, p. 10) outline some of the most important elements when it comes to Romanians' favourite information sources (Facebook is the most accessed and reliable source of information). The authors of the study "Disinformation, societal resilience and COVID-19" maintain that Romanians favour personal knowledge to the detriment of expert knowledge and they demonstrate high permeability to disinformation in relation to which they behave like "echo-chambers" (Durach & Volintiru, 2022, p. 3).

Though little representative numerically, the volunteer interaction on the Facebook page of the official institution charged with the COVID 19 vaccination campaign generated by the official announcement of the pandemic's closure sets two clearly distinguished camps, either pro- or anti-vaccination. It should be mentioned that some participants have constant replies interacting with several participants in a dialogue-like reply turn taking, whereas others leave only a comment (usually a personal COVID-related story) which either approves of or repudiates vaccination.

The discourse practices in a Foucauldian acceptation that are predominant in this situation underline a confrontational stand where different strategies are used in order to prove that one's side has got better arguments over the other side's. No camp seems interested in convincing the other of the truthfulness of one's arguments. The pro-vaccination camp shows *gratitude* for the doctors' effort of vaccinating and often attempts at explaining the role of vaccination, how the vaccine works, side effects and risks. The replies in the pro-vaccination camp tend to be long (the postings are of explanatory character), emphatically superior and limited to medical consequences for either taking or rejecting the vaccine. The pro-vaccination supporters do not seem to offer each other support, they are involved in one-to-one disputes which they manage individually. In the anti-vaccination camp, the assortment of discourse practices is encompassing ranging from *mockery*, *scorn*, *ridicule*, *threats*, *divinity supplication*, *blame apportioning* to *expressing certainty* and *jeering*. In the anti-vaccination camp, the ideas are picked up by other supporters and frequently they are extended to include further arguments. The discursive practices anti-vaccination supporters draw on are a series of linguistic means which they consider appropriate to counteract the vaccination policy adopted at the level of the European Union.

- **mockery** - This strategy is widely made use of when the anti-vaxxers deride the vaxxers' complaining about the absence of vaccine jabs by offering their own jabs to those who want more. In order to accentuate the foolery of the situation, the anti-vaxxers purposefully exaggerate the number of shots the vaxxers might possibly have.

  (1) Doamnă, dacă doriți să faceți și doza 5 vă dau și porția mea.

  [Madam, if you wish to have the fifth shot made, I will give you my share][2]

By taking this approach, the anti-vaxxers deride the behaviour of the vaxxers who seem insecure and needy, entirely subjugated by their dependence on the substance. By way of contrast, not needing it is a sign of self-confidence and control as in this way they prove their independence from such shots.

- **scorn** - By showing scorn to vaxxers, the anti-vaxxers indicate disrespect, the vaxxers are 'the others', the out-group that does what the members of the in-group would never do. Scorn is much related to power, therefore, when someone is scorned at, they are judged to be in an inferior power position. The scorned person does not deserve attention because of their inferior status (Fiske, 2010, p. 699), which reflects the social perception of that person and implicitly of the stratum the person belongs to.

  (2) Mi-e scârbă de voi, minți infectate!

  [I'm sick of you, infected minds]

The unworthiness of the vaxxers is stated as a comparison between the anti-vaxxers (worthy to be looked up to) and the vaxxers who don't deserve appreciation due exactly to their interest in vaccination.

- **ridicule** - Ridicule is mostly a means by which those who use it highlight the stupidity of the person or group in discussion. The ridicule is a covert comparison where one element of the comparison is the stupid and the other is the person who implicitly evaluates oneself as better than the stupid. Ridicule is omnipresent in this Facebook opinion exchange as the anti-vaxxers consider the vaxxers 'stupid', whereas the vaxxers consider the anti-vaxxers 'gullible', 'credulous'.

  (3) Câte oi proaste și credule avem în țărișoara asta, înțepații!
  [There are so many stupid and credulous sheep in this country, the jabbed]!

  (4) Cad ca muștele, înțepații, și tot nu cred și elogiază otrava și călăii.

2. The translation into English of the analysed fragments has been done by the author of the article.

[They drop like flies, the jabbed, they still don't believe and praise the poison and the executioners.]

(5) Treaba ta, să nu faci Hercule....
[Your problem, beware you don't turn Hercules]

(6) Eu zic să faceți săptămânal câte un vaccin !
[I suggest you have a shot taken every week!]

(7) Ție ți-a dat Dumnezeu creier! Pe-al ăstora de s-au înțepat, te dai cu sania!
[God gave you a brain! You sleigh on that of the jabbed!]

(8) Mulți au căzut testul inteligenței, din păcate, iar urmările nu vor întârzia să apară.
[Many have failed the intelligence test, unfortunately, and it will not take long before the consequences become visible.]

(9) V-a spălat bine pe creier Arahat.
[Arahat has brainwashed you.]

(10) Oricum ăștia care le au cu înțepatu sunt spălați pe creier încât nu concep că-i de vină seru minune.
[Anyway, those who are into being jabbed are brainwashed so they cannot conceive it's the fault of the wonder serum.]

In order to emphasize the vaxxers' stupidity the anti-vaxxers make use of zoomorphism (3) by assigning to humans that accept vaccination features of sheep that are traditionally said to be rather stupid or of flies (4) that suggest a terrible and grand-scale disappearance of the vaccinated. Frequent references to brainwashing and intelligence (7), (8), (9), (10) are a clear indicator of the anti-vaxxers' opinion about the vaxxers who are easily fooled and deceived by the authorities to accept vaccination. By comparison, the anti-vaxxers are smart as they can see the danger lying in the vaccine.

- **threat** - The anti-vaxxers threaten authorities because of the psychological pressure they have put on people to get vaccinated. Though legally powerless they premonitorily foresee punishments for the doctors and the medical system altogether.
  (11) Pușcăria vă mănâncă pe toți.
  [You will rot in jail.]

Despite the vagueness of the addressee, anti-vaxxers seek revenge for what they have felt as traumatic.

- **divinity supplication** - Even though the analysed fragment is meant as a medical information about the end of a serious medical situation, religious characters, events or supplications are frequent in the replies of the contributors. In the opinion of the anti-vaxxers, medical treatments are ineffective and God should be given thanks for having avoided illness.

(12) Vreo sută de mătănii și multe lumânări ca mulțumire că te-a păzit Dumnezeu până acum.
[About a hundred genuflections and many candles as thanks to God's having protected you so far.]

An interesting aspect is the obvious clash between the creationist and evolutionist visions of the two camps in an open conflict over the causes of the disease. On the one hand, some contributors (the vaxxers) explain what they learnt in faculty (what a virus is, how it can be controlled, remedies). On the other, the anti-vaxxers claim that the Holy Bible contains information on what is currently happening.

(13) Facultatea nu v-a învățat și de Sfânta Scriptură care vorbește de tot ce se întâmplă acum.
[The faculty did not teach you about the Holy Bible that speaks of everything that is happening now.]

When confronted with opposing opinions, the anti-vaxxers claim that the satanists reign over the orchestration of this pandemic. The implications are profound as supporters of the medical decisions are deemed as evil doers and medicine is devilish.

(14) Cât de ușor vă controleaza sataniștii!
[How easily satanists control you!]

- **blame apportioning** - Apportioning blame is a recurrent topic in the discussion because when something bad happens somebody must be guilty for it. Interestingly, the participants do not find fault with the possible causes of the disease, they blame the solution finders. Two instances are held responsible for the vaccination: the EU (literally identified in the person of the president of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen) and globalism. In (15) the participant implicitly suggests that the president of the European Union forces excessive vaccination as excessive vaccines have been ordered.

  (15) Nu mai are ce să facă cu vaccinul madame Von der Leyen?
  [Does Madame Von der Leyen have nothing more to do with the vaccine?]

Globalism is the second culprit identified which is a rejection of other party decisions imposed on Romanians.

(16) Ce nu pricepeți dumneavoastră, e că de minciuni ne-am săturat ! CE VREȚI, GLOBALISM !
[What you don't understand is that we are tired of lies! WHAT DO YOU WANT, GLOBALISM!]

- **expressing certainty** - The anti-vaxxers have strong convictions about the deaths that will supervene after vaccination or about the contents of the vaccine.

  (17) Care reacții grave? Eu am făcut trei doze și nu am avut nimic.
  O să aveți!
  [What serious reactions? I have had three doses and nothing happened. It will!]

  (18) Promovați bine vaxurile! oxid de grafen redus!!
  [You promote the vaxes well! reduced graphene oxide!!]

- **jeering** - The anti-vaxxers do not refrain from insulting both authorities and vaccinated people in an attempt at showing their dissatisfaction with the medical solutions on the one hand, and with the different perspective on vaccination on the other hand. Though on an official Facebook page, the anti-vaxxers use a range of jeers meant to show disrespect and irreverence towards the aforementioned.

  (19) Nu vă potoliți, nemernicilor? Tot băgați frica în oameni, i-ați distrus psihic!
  [Won't you calm down, bastards? You keep putting fear into people, you have destroyed them psychically!]

  (20) Criminalilor!!!
  [Criminals!!!]

  (21) Dar morțile și complicațiile în urma vaccinării când le veți raporta, leprelor?
  [What about deaths and complications from vaccination when would you report them, lepers?]

  (22) Așa vorbiti dvs. când delirați?
  Nu, așa vorbesc cu jegurile care au pe conștiință milioane de oameni.
  [Is this how you talk when you are delirious?
  No, that's how I talk to the scum who have millions of people on their conscience.]

The vaxxers sparsely contribute to the conversation and their input is mostly aimed at *expressing gratitude*, *explaining the purpose of vaccination* (retaliating), *parading intellectual superiority*, *defending doctors and science*, *acknowledging everybody's right to decide for themselves*, *showing disappointment*.

- **showing gratitude** - The vaxxers are grateful for the help they received by doctors and the medical system that saved people in critical situations. They do not question the doctors' professionalism or the good intentions of those who devised the vaccines.

(23) V-am spus aceasta poveste ca să înțelegeți că medicii au făcut ce-i omenește, era un handicapat și și-au dat tot interesul ptr el.. înțelegeți ce vreau sa spun…
[I told you this story so that you understand that the doctors did what was humanly possible, he was a disabled person and they gave all their attention to him... you understand what I mean...]

(24) Felicitări tuturor celor implicați în campania de vaccinare. Efort mare a fost, vă mulțumesc!
[Congratulations to all those involved in the vaccination campaign. It was a great effort, thank you!

- **explaining the purpose of vaccination** - Though some vaxxers refrain from interacting with the anti-vaxxers, others actively participate in discussions by bringing arguments in favour of vaccination. The persuasive strategies they use vary depending on what they intend to emphasize. A soft persuasive strategy is to emphasise the other risks one might encounter in hospitals. The pacifying strategy that some pro-vaxxers use in online debates signal their attempt at convincing the others that reducing the risks of getting infected is a strategy which should not be ignored.
(25) Mor oameni si fără nicio doză, ca asta e, nu suntem nemuritori, și n-avem idee câte zile mai avem. Însa acum în spitale marea majoritate sunt nevaccinați (ceva de genul 95 din totalul de 98). Și știm bine că dacă ajungi într-un spital te pot omori alți crocobauri, nu neapărat covidul, așa că parcă ar fi bine să facem ce putem să stăm departe de spital.
[People die without any dose, too, that's how it is, we are not immortal, and we have no idea how many days we have left. But now in hospitals the vast majority are unvaccinated (something like 95 out of a total of 98). And we know well that if you end up in a hospital, other crocosaurus3 can kill you, not necessarily Covid, so it seems like it would be good to do what we can to stay away from the hospital.]

- **parading intellectual superiority** - The conspiracy theories and some of their propagators are ignored by some vaxxers, whereas others emphasise the intellectual limitations of anti-vaxxers. The polarization of the camps is a strategy of the vaxxers who do not fail to ridicule

3. The translation has intentionally been chosen to reflect the Romanian figurative representation for the viruses that could exist in Romanian hospitals and that could prove deadly for some patients. Zafiu (2021) considers that 'crocobaur' (crocosaurus in English) is a ludic lexical informal creation by lexical deviation which combines 'crocodile' and dragon (balaur in Romanian). Crocobaur is used in a host of situations, but in this particular context it was used to refer to the viruses and bacteria in Romanian hospitals.

the illiteracy of the anti-vaxxers. The implication of this strategy is the immediate and direct association between the intellectually limited and the conspiracy theories. Some pro-vaxxers respond to the ironies of the anti-vaxxers by using the same tool retaliating when brainwashing is brought into discussion. The opposition between the "medical school and clinical research" on the one hand, and "Facebook doctors" is intentional and it is meant to show the distance between those in the know and the ignorant ones.

(26) Se vede ca nu ați citit cu atenție textul din căsuțele albastre. Bănuiți că a făcut efortul de a citi ? Ea le cunoaște din naștere! Dar de la cineva care nu-l știe folosi corect pe "pe care" nu m-aș aștepta la opinii pertinente.
[It can be seen that you have not carefully read the text in the blue boxes.

Do you think she made the effort to read? She has known them since birth! But I wouldn't expect relevant opinions from someone who doesn't know how to use "which" correctly.]

(27) M-a "spălat" o facultate de medicină și munca în cercetare clinică, spre deosebire de dumneavoastră, pe care v-au spălat doctorii de facebook de care râde toată lumea.
[I was "brainwashed" by a medical school and work in clinical research, unlike you, who were brainwashed by the Facebook doctors that everyone laughs at.]

- **defending science** - The pro-vaxxers have made it a purpose in sustaining the advantages of science as opposed to 'popular common sense'. The slogan-like opinion sounds like a verdict which synthesizes the major benefits of vaccines and the painful consequences of scientific ignorance. The attempt at defending and propagating science is unlikely to succeed in convincing the other camp given Romanians' propensity for superstitions, pseudoscience and alternative medical solutions.

(28) Vaccinul este știință, medicină și viață. Lipsa de stiință e moarte, sinucidere și înapoiere.
[Vaccine is science, medicine and life. Lack of science is death, suicide and regression.]

- **acknowledging everybody's right to decide for themselves** - The pro-vaxxers approach the obligatory character of vaccination differently by not imposing their convictions on the others. Free will and informed decisions are the values embraced by the pro-vaxxer participants in this online dialogue. The lack of obligation is repeatedly emphasied given the vehemence of the anti-vaccination camp that insisted on their being forced to accept the vaccination against their own will.

(29) Nu sunteți obligată să vă vaccinați.
[You are not obliged to get vaccinated.]

(30) Citiți cu atenție textul din fiecare pătrat albastru. Nu sunteți obligat să vă vaccinați.
[Read the text in each blue square carefully. You are not forced to get vaccinated.]

- **showing disappointment** - Some participants in the online conversation deplored the conspiracy movement that was propagated in society and impacted so many people (the majority as some might consider). In this way, the pro-vaxxers show stupefaction at the strong rejection of the vaccine despite the disease's having taken its toll. Disappointment is accompanied by the feeling of powerlessness as neither the authorities nor the specialists have been able to convince the conspirators of the rightfulness of the medical measures.

  (31) Unora le-au murit oameni dragi și tot conspiraționiști au rămas. Trist este ca sunt majoritari.
  [Some people had loved ones die and still remained conspirators. The sad thing is that they are the majority.]

Conclusions

This article has aimed at outlining the intricate structure of mindsets which are conglomerates of beliefs and ideas, which stand true even when the contrary is evident for the others. Mindsets help people relate to the world in a facile but rather inflexible way, which impacts the way people understand reality and are ready to react to it. Mindsets equally influence how people see themselves and the others in stereotype-like portrayals. In the unparalleled context created by COVID 19, self-representation and other-representation played an important role in how people accepted multiple opinions and reactions to the danger represented by the virus. The confidence that only what one believes in is true has led to the deepening of the conflict between "the stupid" and "the gullible" who frantically attempted at convincing the others of their truth.

The analysis carried out on extended public Facebook interaction clearly shows that the participants take sides depending on their beliefs which they actually use as arguments for or against vaccination.

By scrutinizing the strategies used by the participants it can be concluded that there are two sides clearly outlined: the pro-vaxxers and the anti-vaxxers. In the online discussion each side makes use of different arguments which suit their mindsets. Thus, the pro-vaxxers appreciate the efforts of the medical system and express gratitude for the vaccine, whereas the anti-vaxxers accuse the doctors of criminal intentions. Moreover, the pro-vaxxers try to popularise the advantages of vaccination and of science in general, whereas the anti-vaxxers make use of ridicule and jeering to signal their disapproval and superiority for not having accepted the vaccination. This is meant to represent the contrast to those who accepted it and are likely to die because of the vaccination. Last but not least, the pro-vaxxers limit their arguments to matters strictly related to COVID, whereas the anti-vaxxers build their arguments by connecting them to any other conspiracy that they are aware of. The opinions of the two sides are irreconcilable given their different way of thinking, the information they rely on and the in-groups they belong to.

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ALL JUST EMPTY WORDS / LEERE WORTE / ПРАЗНИ ПРИКАЗКИ / BOŞ LAF? A CROSS-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE NEW YEAR'S ADDRESSES OF RUMEN RADEV, ALEXANDER VAN DER BELLEN AND RECEP TAYYİP ERDOĞAN

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to analyze and compare the language used in the New Year's addresses of the presidents of Bulgaria, Austria and Türkiye and describe the major differences in terms of topics and expressions used. The cross-linguistic critical analysis attempts to reveal both how the political background of the presidents is reflected in their speeches and how the different scope of powers these presidents possess influences the choice of topics and their linguistic means of expression.*

The presidents of Bulgaria, Austria and Türkiye come from different political traditions, namely the socialist tradition, the environmental movement and the Islamic-conservative tradition. True to historically close relations with Russia, Radev avoids taking sides when talking about the Russia-Ukrainian war. A former speaker of the Austrian Green Party, van der Bellen is the only one of the three presidents who mentions the climate crisis as one of the major challenges of the future. And only AKP's leader Erdoğan resorts to constructing fears and referring to God's help he is hoping to receive. While Radev and van der Bellen position themselves as observers of political and social life, Erdoğan primarily focuses on the achievements of his party. In terms of field of action, the speeches of Radev and van der Bellen can be determined as belonging to 'Formation of public attitudes, opinions and will'. In Erdoğan's speech, we find elements from 'Formation of public attitudes, opinions and will', 'Political advertising' and 'Political executive and administration'.

Keywords: *political speeches, New Year's address, CDA, society, crises*

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Introduction

Born in the 1970s behind the Iron Curtain, I still cherish the memories of the most loved family celebration – the New Year's Eve. Families cooked meals that otherwise rarely found their way to the table, and in the evening gathered together in front of the TV set in an eager expectation of the one and only TV channel's special program. Shortly before midnight, this program ended and the General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, the country's leader Todor Zhivkov appeared on the screen. When people saw him, they knew – in about ten minutes they would finally welcome the new year. People barely, if at all, listened to the man. It was rather, wait for his speech to be over because its end signals the start of the big celebration.

I have long grown up but the old habit to not (really) listen to the head of the state on occasions like New Year's or for that matter Christmas remained. However, those speeches were all around me – from the President of the USA and the (late) Queen of the UK to the German Federal President and his counterparts in other countries I showed interest into. So, one day I asked myself: "Do people actually listen to those?", "What would I hear if I did listen?".

I decided to limit myself to New Year's addresses of heads of state because speeches made on Christmas Eve (like those of the President of the USA Joe Biden, King Charles III, Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier) inevitably focus on the meaning of this Christian holiday and may not reveal as much as I hoped to discover. The countries and/or the languages which I chose to look at are closely related to both my linguistic biography and my personal and professional life, which is an important prerequisite in order to be able to detect the nuances of meaning, the allusions and the messages behind the said and the unsaid. Moreover, Bulgaria, Türkiye and Austria as actors in the international arena are often partners and/or allies – Bulgaria and Austria as members of the EU and Türkiye as a member candidate (although the accession talks were suspended in 2019), Bulgaria and Türkiye as members of NATO with Austria being neutral but working in cooperation with the NATO member states. Geographically, these three countries are in a relative proximity to (the war in) Ukraine and have had or still have close relations with Russia.

Theoretical background

Defining political discourse is not an easy task. Definitions differ greatly as to what should be included under this term. Joseph (2006, p. 17) believes that all language is inherently political, so it follows that practically any language can be regarded as political discourse. Van Dijk (1997, p. 23) also shares the opinion that "practically all text and talk indirectly has socio-political conditions and consequences" and therefore suggests adopting "an arbitrary set of criteria according to which discourse may be categorized as (mainly) political, viz., when it has a direct functional role as a form of political action in the political process". In the narrow sense, political discourse often refers to the text and talk produced by politicians and the language of professional politicians and political institutions has been analyzed in a "vast bulk of studies" (van Dijk, 1997, p. 12). However, as van Dijk (1997, pp. 12-13) points out, the politicians are not the only actors in political discourse and "various recipients in political communicative events, such as the public, the people, citizens, the 'masses', and other groups or categories" should be included as well.

Political discourse exists in the form of different genres. Fairclough (2006, pp. 33-34) categorizes political genres into 1) genres associated with the political system (parliamentary debates, political manifestos and programs, parliamentary or party conference speeches by political leaders, policy documents; 2) mediatized political genres (political news reports, political interviews, political 'chat' shows, party political broadcasts, political advertising in the press and on billboards); and 3) the political public sphere (public meetings, campaign literature of social movements, political forums, and focus groups) but emphasizes the fact that this list is by no means exhaustive.

When we turn our attention to political speeches only, we again find different classifications based on different criteria for categorizing them. Küçükali (2015, pp. 57-58), citing Reisigl (2008) points out that the concept of *political* can be divided into three components: *polity*, *policy* and *politics*. According to Küçükali's definition,

> *Polity* relates to the normative, legal and institutional manifestations of a political actor which frame the basic principles. Their aim is to establish political order and form the values of the political in-group. The overall political system, political norms and values are the main concern of such speeches.
>
> *Policy* is the content-related dimension of political action. It has the function of the determination and formulation of political tasks, aims and programmes in different fields of policymaking.
>
> *Politics* deals with the question of how and with whose help politics is performed. It includes the formulation of political interests and the positioning of political actors against their opponents to make implementation of the aforementioned policy preferences possible. (ibid.)

Küçükali (ibid.) mentions funeral oration, necrology and laudatory speeches of chancellors and presidents as examples within *polity* whereas speeches in parliamentary debates and party-group speeches are representatives of *policy*.

Reisigl and Wodak (2016, p. 29) identify eight "fields of political action", each of which includes different political (sub)genres and different kinds of speeches.

Table 1 illustrates the different fields of political action and gives some examples of what kinds of speeches can be found within each field (ibid.).

Table 1. Fields of political action with possible kinds of speeches (adapted from Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 29)

Field of action	Speeches
Lawmaking procedure	Parliamentary speech Ministerial speech State of the union address
Formation of public attitudes, opinions and will	President speech Speech by an MP Opening speech Radio or TV speech Chancellor's speech Ministerial speech Commemorative speech State of the union address Election speech
Party-internal formation of attitudes, opinions and will	Party jubilee speech Speech at a party convention Speech in a party meeting
Inter-party formation of attitudes, opinions nd will	Commemorative speech Inaugural speech Speech in an inter-party meeting
Organization of international / interstate relations	Inaugural address War speech Speech in summits of supranational organizations Speech on the occasion of a state visit Commemorative speech
Political advertising	Election speech Speech of an MP State of the union address Commemorative speech
Political executive and administration	Chancellor's speech Ministerial speech Speech of resignation Farewell speech Speech of appointment State of the union address
Political control	Speech of an MP Speech of protest Election speech Commemorative speech

It can be noticed that certain kinds of speeches, for example a state of the union address or a speech of an MP, are found in more than one field of action. Indeed, political speeches often have more than one function. As Wodak (2009, p. 40) points out:

> A discourse about a specific topic (un/employment) can find its starting point within one field of action and proceed through another one. Discourses and discourse topics spread to different fields and discourses. They cross between fields, overlap, refer to each other or are in some other way socio-functionally linked with each other.

Special occasions like national holidays, big religious holidays and the New Year's Eve are traditionally used by heads of states and governments to address the people, to review what has happened and/or has been done up to that day and to share plans, hopes and expectations for the future. It will be interesting to find out whether such speeches, normally regarded as standard, stay within the same field of action or whether just like any other piece of discourse they may serve multiple functions and proceed from one field to another.

Methodology

The main method of analysis used in this paper is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

CDA aims to bridge social and linguistic theory. As Fairclough (2012, p. 1) explains:

> Critical discourse analysis (CDA) brings the critical tradition in social analysis into language studies, and contributes to critical social analysis a particular focus on discourse, and on relations between discourse and other social elements (power relations, ideologies, institutions, social identities, and so forth).

For Wodak (1996, p. 15) discourse is "socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned". Discourse as a form of social practice "implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them" (ibid.). CDA is interdisciplinary, problem-oriented and aiming at deconstructing ideologies and power (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 4). When analyzing language, CDA profits greatly from Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, in which language is not seen as a formal system but as a means of communication where, depending on context, different but interrelated linguistic choices (systems) are available for the expression of meaning (Flowerdew, 2013, p. 18).

For the purposes of the investigation, this article adopts a contrastive approach. Contrastive linguistics (CL) is understood as the systematic comparison of two or more languages with or without a socio-cultural link. As Gomez-Gonzalez and Doval-Suarez (2005, p. 19) explain, contrastive investigations aim to

> compare (or contrast) linguistic and socio-cultural data across different languages (cross-linguistic/cultural perspective) or within individual languages (intra-linguistic/cultural perspective) in order to establish language-specific, typological and/or universal patterns, categories and features.

Once considered the Cinderella of linguistics enjoying little respect among linguists (Krzeszowski, 1990, p. 15) developments like globalization and the resulting multilingualism and multiculturalism as well as the creation of large corpora and computer search tools "have turned CL into a reactivated and at present expanding field" (Gomez-Gonzalez & Doval-Suarez, 2005, p. 22).

Classic contrastive research stays within the limits of microlinguistics and concentrates on language structure. According to Ke (2019, p. 9), "the goal of micro-contrastive linguistics is to compare the universal as well as particular structural properties of human languages". Therefore, phonological, lexical and syntactic contrastive studies are typical for this kind of analysis. On the macrolingistic level, on the other hand, the focus is on language use and "the goal of macro-contrastive linguistics is to compare and understand how people use different languages to communicate with each other" (ibid.). Here we find textual and pragmatic contrastive studies. As Gomez-Gonzalez and Doval-Suarez (2005, p. 24) explain,

> Contrastive Discourse Analysis and Contrastive Pragmatics are two partially overlapping labels referring to contrastive research that goes beyond the clause/sentence level to explore the (textual features of) language in use under the assumption that the relations between texts and contexts are mutually reflexive – texts not only reflect but also shape their contexts.

Analysis

The President of the Republic of Bulgaria Rumen Radev, a former general in the Bulgarian air forces, was first elected president in the presidential elections in 2016 with the support of the Bulgarian Socialist Party and is currently serving his second term in office. The Federal President of Austria Alexander Van der Bellen, a former professor of economics and spokesman of the Austrian Green Party, won the presidential elections for the first time in 2016 and again in the autumn of 2022. The president of the Republic of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, after having served as prime minister of Türkiye from 2003 to 2014, has been in office since 2014 winning a second term in 2018. At the beginning of their presidency all three leaders were presidents of parliamentary republics. However, after initiating a constitutional change in 2017, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan abolished the office of the prime minister and made Türkiye a presidential republic. Unlike Radev and Van der Bellen, whose presidency will finish with the end of their second term in office, Erdoğan is hoping to be reelected in the upcoming elections in May 2023.

The President of the Republic of Bulgaria Rumen Radev addressed the people in a New Year's Eve speech which was four minutes long, his Austrian counterpart Alexander Van der Bellen spoke to his people for five and a half minutes and the President of the Republic of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's address to the nation lasted for seven and a half minutes.

In terms of lexis, several differences in the speeches of the three presidents can be observed. The forms of salutation vary considerably revealing certain realities and developments in the respective societies. Differences can also be spotted in the way people are addressed as well as in the level and form of their presence in the speeches. The visibility of religion changes from country to country, too.

The salutation Radev used was "Скъпи сънародници" ('dear fellow countrymen'), Van der Bellen preferred "Liebe Österreicherinnen und Österreicher und alle, die in Österreich leben" ('dear Austrians, female and male, as well as all who live in Austria') and Erdoğan turned to the people with "Aziz milletim". According to the Redhouse Turkish-English Dictionary, the adjective *aziz* means 1) dear, beloved; 2) saintly, holy, sacred; and 3) saint. As for *millet* (without the possessive suffix -*im* which means 'my'), its first meaning is 'nation' but it also has the historical meaning "the adherents of a particular religious creed/ denomination/ sect within the Ottoman Empire".

Comparing the word choices of three presidents, one immediately notices the conscious attempt of Van der Bellen to address not only the holders of Austrian passports, born in Austria to Austrian parents, but also the more than a million people living in the country but having a different nationality. Although such people live in Bulgaria and Türkiye as well – mostly refugees from war regions like Ukraine and Syria – and their number in Türkiye is estimated at over three million, such a special attention and a recognition of their presence in missing in the salutations of Radev and Erdoğan.

Another difference that can be spotted is the conscious use of separate forms for female and male citizens of Austria, which reflects the current linguistic trend in the German language based on emancipatory developments in society. Even though the discussion "to gendern or not to gendern"[1] is still going on, *gendern* is already widely accepted as a necessary linguistic change reflecting the desire to be in line with the trends and needs of society, and as such has been adopted as the official form of communication by businesses and many administrations on local and federal level alike. Although linguistically such a distinction is possible in Bulgarian as well, there is at present hardly any need in society to use "Скъпи сънароднички и сънародници" ('dear fellow countrywomen and countrymen'). On the contrary, such an unusual linguistic choice can easily backfire if it is suspected to be a result of "gender politics". As a result of Orthodox-Christian, conservative and nationalistic political currents, the English word *gender* has gained quite a negative connotation both in Bulgarian politics and in the Bulgarian media. In the minds of the people, it is closely connected with the Istanbul Convention as well, which in Bulgaria was not interpreted as an attempt to prevent and combat violence against women, but as an attempt by some unidentified "Euro-bureaucrats" and "international neoliberal circles" to impose a foreign culture on Bulgarians forcing them to give equal rights to LGBTIQ people against their strong belief in the duality of the sexes. It should not come as a surprise that Bulgaria is one of a very few countries in Europe which have signed but not ratified the convention, the others being the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania.

What the Bulgarian and the Austrian salutation have in common is the use of plural forms to address the people identifying them as single and separate members of the community; the Turkish salutation, on the other hand, addresses the people as a whole, as one single body which by default is supposed to move in a coordinated manner and in the same direction. What can also be said about the word choice of the Turkish president is that although both *aziz* as well as *millet* have readily available alternatives (e.g., 'aziz' – 'sevgili' /dear, beloved/, 'saygıdeğer' /estimable/, 'sayın' /dear/, 'değerli' /valuable/; 'millet' – 'halk' / people, nation/, 'vatandaşlar' /citizens, fellow citizens/, 'yurttaşlar' /citizens, fellow citizens/), he has chosen those two which in certain contexts bear a clear religious and/ or historical connotation. Even though often considered full synonyms, the word *halk* ('people') rather refers to all those living at a certain

1. 'Gendern' in German is used to express the deliberate marking for gender of personal nouns instead of using the masculine form for all.

time at a certain territory, whereas *millet* is a more abstract notion relating to the identification of the people with a certain nation, their origin, past, present and future. However, it must be pointed out that by beginning his speech with "Aziz milletim", Erdoğan actually follows a long-established tradition which can be traced back to the time of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. For the last one hundred years the presidents of Türkiye, regardless of their political background, have stuck to this salutation choosing to preserve the nationalistic flavour it bears.

Apart from addressing the people using a plural form, the Bulgarian and the Austrian presidents further on explicitly name some concrete groups of citizens. Radev thanks all those who fought for a better Bulgaria during the past year ("всички, които през изминалата година се бореха за една по-добра България"). He also expresses his gratitude and incourages the people to do the same towards relatives and friends for their love and support ("близки и приятели за обичта и подкрепата"*)* and those who are at their workplace or on duty in the festive night ("онези, които в празничната нощ са на работното си място и на своя пост") before wishing a happy new year also to all fellow countrymen all over the world ("нашите сънародници по всички краища на света"). Van der Bellen goes into much more detail and underlines the fact that all should feel optimistic that Austria's new year will be successful as long as each and every person continues to approach their everyday duties and responsibilities willingly and in a positive manner. Van der Bellen presents the success of the society as the sum of the work and the efforts of: single mothers, healthcare and social workers, teachers, students, volunteers and civil society, politically active people, journalists, those working in industry and commerce, entrepreneurs, the middle class, engineers, agricultural workers, those working in tourism, workers in the administration, the executive branch and the military, the retired, grandfathers and grandmothers, mothers and fathers.

Türkiye's president, on the other hand, does not explicitly mention any concrete groups of citizens, at least not in such context. Workers in general are mentioned once but only as receivers of high percentage compensations provided by the ruling party in an attempt to compensate the rising cost of living ("Çalışanların refah kayıplarını yüksek oranlı artışlarla telafi etmeye çalıştık."). The young generation is also mentioned once as those who will hopefully inherit a country shaped according to 'our'[2] aims, dreams, civilization and historical heritage so that they can successfully achieve the 'Century of Türkiye' ("Amacımız, [...] gençlerimize Türkiye Yüzyılı'nı, hedeflerimize, hayallerimize, medeniyet ve tarih mirasımıza uygun şekilde başarıya ulaştırabilecekleri bir ülke bırakmaktır."). Finally, Erdoğan sends his New Year's wishes to "milletimizin her ferdi" ('each individual in our nation') and to "tüm insanlık" ('the whole of humanity'). It can be concluded that while for Radev and Van der Bellen the

2. The meaning of 'our' will be elaborated upon further on in this paper

citizens of Bulgaria and Austria, be it relatives, engineers or civil servants, are active doers who shape their own life and future, the citizens of Türkiye are seen as a receiving mass which is being cared for by the ruling party.

Another difference in the word choices of the three presidents is related to the visibility of religion. Christianity is the dominant religion in Bulgaria and Austria and Islam in Türkiye. However, all three countries are secular and state and religion are strictly separated. Throughout their speeches, the heads of state of Bulgaria and Austria do not use any words or expressions with a religious meaning or connotation. New Year's Eve is not a religious holiday; moreover, approximately one third of the population in these countries either belongs to a different religion than Christianity or to no confession whatsoever. In the case of Türkiye, we have a much higher domination of Islam and a ruling party with an Islamic-conservative agenda which has faced two closure trials in its history (in 2002 and 2008) on charges of violating the separation of religion and state. Erdoğan, founder and leader of the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP) uses words with religious meaning or connotation on several occasions during his speech. He starts with the already mentioned "Aziz" ('holy', 'saintly') and finishes his speech with "Allah'a emanet olun!" (God bless you!). Apart from that Erdoğan uses *hamdolsun* ('God be praised!', 'Glory to God'), *inşallah* ('God willing') on two occasions and *besmele* (an abbreviated form of *bismillahirrahmanirrahim* meaning 'In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful') as a synonym of 'beginning' but implying the hope in God that it will be a successful one.

In terms of the topics present in the speeches of the three presidents, we find both similarities and differences. Topics like inflation, the energy crisis and the war in Ukraine are present in all three speeches, however their presentation and interpretation sometimes vary. There are also other topics, e.g. the enemies of the state and climate change which are only found in some of the speeches.

Radev mentions natural disasters like the forest fires and the floods which hit Bulgaria again in 2022 relatively early on but without naming any possible causes ("И тази година не ни подминаха природните бедствия..."). There is no reference to any possible connection with global warming and no mention of the need for more environmental protection. In Van der Bellen's speech, on the other hand, the matter is presented in reversed order: it is the climate crisis with its effects which we feel more and more from year to year that we cannot afford to ignore ("Wir können auch die Klimakrise und ihre Auswirkungen nicht ignorieren, die Jahr für Jahr stärker spürbar werden."). The choice of synonym itself is important here. Even though 'climate change', 'global warming', 'global heating', 'climate breakdown' and 'climate crisis' are often used interchangeably, they reflect to a different extent the responsibility of mankind for this negative development with only 'climate crisis' implying a clear human participation.

In Erdoğan's speech there are no references to either natural disasters or other environmental issues.

When it comes to how united each of the societies under investigation is, both Radev and Van der Bellen recognize the fact that there exist different opinions and disagreements within society, that not all prefer to invest their energy for the common good but instead pursue personal interests, or are simply disappointed with the politicians and have lost their trust in the system and/or their faith in the better future.

Radev mentions the apathy and the division in society which should be overcome ("Да надмогнем апатията и разделението"), points out that salvation is not at the bottom of the drinking glasses ("спасението не е на дъното на чашите") and stresses the fact that there are no unreachable goals provided the energy of the citizens is not spent in order to assure their individual wellbeing but in the name of the prosperity of the whole nation ("Няма непостижими цели там, където гражданската енергия е вложена не за спасение поединично, а за възхода на цялата нация.").

Van der Bellen recognizes the fact that many are afraid that the new year will be more difficult than the old one ("…viele von uns, […], befürchten auch, dass das kommende Jahr härter wird als das vergagene"), and talks about the existing doubts about the integrity of (Austrian) politics ("Zweifel an der Integrität der Politik"). He is aware that some will find his optimism naïve or are simply sick and tired of hearing from him for the 100th time 'We'll manage that' ("Ich weiß schon, manche finden das naiv. Und manche können es auch nicht mehr hören, wenn ich zum gefühlt 100. Mal 'Wir kriegen das schon hin' sage.").

While the presidents of Bulgaria and Austria recognize the differences within society and make a call for more understanding and collaboration among citizens, the president of Türkiye depicts the nation together with its leaders as a united whole sharing the same needs, goals and expectations. Throughout his whole speech Erdoğan uses first person deixis; 'we', 'our' and 'us' are present in 30 out of 37 sentences in total. Of the remaining 7 sentences 2 feature 'Türkiye' and 1 'this country' ("bu ülke") which is indirectly again a reference to 'we', 'our' and 'us'. As for the question of who the pronoun 'we' represents, it is not always easy to determine this for sure. There is a conscious attempt to disguise exclusive first-person deixis as inclusive. This is a desired effect in order to strengthen the feeling of total unity of the nation – unity within as well as unity between the citizens and the ruling party. The following three sentences illustrate the different degrees of clarity as to who 'us' represents:

> Cumhuriyetimizin kuruluşunun 100'üncü yılının sevincini inşallah 29 Ekim 2023'te hayal ettiğimiz şekilde coşkuyla yaşayabileceğiz. ('We will

> hopefully be able to experience the happiness of celebrating the 100th anniversary of our republic the way we have been dreaming of'.)

Whereas one can be relatively sure that most, if not all Turkish citizens see the republic as 'their' republic and will be happy to celebrate its anniversary, it is not clear whose dreams the sentence refers to. It can be speculated here that the dreams of the ruling party and its supporters greatly differ from those of the opposition and its followers, it can also be taken as reference to Erdoğan's personal vision of a reshaped Türkiye which he presented before the general elections in 2011 as "hedef 2023" ('aim 2023') and turned into a government program in the following years.

> Bir başka ifadeyle, biz milletimizi hayat pahalılığı karşısında yalnız bırakmadık, kendi kaderine terk etmedik. ('In other words, we didn't leave our nation to face the high cost of living alone, we didn't leave it to its own destiny.')

Here there is a clear reference to the ruling party and even more to its leader as a caring father figure never deserting the people in need.

> Teror örgütlerinin şehirlerimizi hedef alan eylemlerinin ülkemize yönelik şantaj aracı haline getirildiği günlerden, sınırımızın onlarca, bazen yüzlerce kilometre ötesinde operasyonlar yürütebildiğimiz bir seviyeye geldik. ('We have come a long way from the days when the attacks of the terrorist organizations aiming at our cities were used as a means of blackmailing our country, now we are able to execute operations tens and sometimes even hundreds of kilometres beyond our border.')

This sentence illustrates very well how 'we' can at the same time mean 1) we, the people of this country; 2) we, the decision makers 3) we, the armed forces.

Throughout Erdoğan's speech there is not even the slightest hint that there might be people in the country who disagree with the pursued policies. Those who belong to the nation have clearly stated their support at numerous elections in the past 20 years. This is the message that can be picked up from words like "son 20 yılımız" ('our past 20 years') and "…2023 hedeflerimizi milletimizin takdirine sunup onayını aldığımız 2011 seçimlerden beri" ('since the 2011 elections when we presented our aims 2023 to our nation and received its approval'). It is worth mentioning here that in the 2011 elections, Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party received 49,8% of the votes, which means the approval he is talking about was granted by only half of the voters.

And while there seem to be no divergent opinions as to in which direction Türkiye should be moving, there are numerous enemies on the periphery and the outside who deliberately try to harm the nation and the country. Erdoğan is the only president who not just explicitly talks about the enemies of the people but also goes into much detail while doing so. Erdoğan refers to them as "çok güç odağı" ('various concentrations of power') or "müzmin hasımlar" ('chronic enemies') and talks about their "sayısız saldırı" ('countless attacks'). His concrete examples include not only the PKK (The Kurdistan Workers' Party) and DEAŞ (Islamic State) but also the organizers of the attempted coup d'état from 15.07.2016, the international sabotage aiming at our economy in 2018 ("2018'de ekonomimizi hedef alan uluslararası sabotaj") and the participants in the 2013 Gezi Movement, which was actually a civil movement for more democratic rights. According to Wodak (2015, p. 1) right-wing populist parties often resort to constructing fears and proposing scapegoats in the case of 'various real or imagined dangers'. In other words,

> all right-wing populist parties instrumentalize some kind of ethnic/ religious/ linguistic/ political minority as a *scapegoat* for most if not all current woes and subsequently construe the respective group as dangerous and a threat *'to us'*, to 'our nation'; this phenomenon manifests itself as a 'politics of fear'. (Wodak, 2015, p. 2)

In his speech the Turkish president clearly states that all these enemies have been or are being dealt with using expressive verbs like *ürkütmek* ('to scare somebody'), *açtıkları çukurlara gömmek* ('to bury somebody in the pits they have digged themselves'), *başını ezmek* ('to smash one's head'), *hüsrana uğratmak* ('to disappoint').

When we look at the use of first person deixis in the speeches of Radev and Van der Bellen, apart from the much more limited use of 'we', 'our' and 'us', we notice the deliberate choice of the two presidents to refer to themselves as ordinary citizens, as equals to the rest of the people, while at the same time, they do not neglect their responsibility to alert and warn the political parties in the country in cases of misconduct. This is also connected with the limited powers and the functions of the presidential institutions in Bulgaria and Austria. Here are some examples of the use of first person deixis by Radev and Van der Bellen:

> Минути ни делят от края на година, наситена с кризи и предизвикателства. ('We are minutes apart from the end of a year full of crises and challenges.')

> Бъдещето е в задружните ни усилия, в отговорната позиция на всеки от нас при всеки житейски и политически избор. ('The future is in our joint efforts, in the responsible stance of each one of us when making a life or a political choice.')

> Да я [новата година] посрещнем с вяра в себе си и надежда за бъдещето. ('Let us meet it [the new year] with faith is ourselves and hopes for the future.')

> Aber insgeheim haben wir alle Erwartungen. (‘But secretly we all have expectations.’)
>
> Und in Ihrem Kopf die Möglichkeit offen zu halten, dass wir alle gemeinsam positiv überrascht werden vom kommenden Jahr. (‘And in your head[s] to keep open the possibility that we all may be positively surprised by the coming new year.’)
>
> Weil wir einander so am besten helfen. (‘Because that is how we [can] best help each other.’)

As for the critical words of the two presidents towards the political parties in their countries, we find:

> Година, която постави на изпитание не само икономическата и социална стабилност, но и способността на политиците ни да постигат съгласие и да бъдат редом с гражданите в общия ни път напред. (‘A year which put not only the economic and the social stability to the test, but also the ability of our politicians to reach an agreement and to stand alongside the citizens in our common way forward.’)
>
> Силно се надявам, че през новата година приоритетите на българския парламент ще съвпадат с тези на гражданите, а политическите партии ще поемат своята отговорност за дългосрочното устойчиво развитие на България. (‘I really hope that in the new year the priorities of the Bulgarian parliament will coincide with those of the citizens and that the political parties will assume their responsibility for Bulgaria’s sustainable development in the long-term.’)
>
> Und innenpolitisch, (...), sehen wir uns nach wie vor mit diesem, wie ich es genannt habe, „Wasserschaden“ konfrontiert: Dem Zweifel an der Integrität der Politik. Und auch da sind entsprechende Schritte noch immer nicht gesetzt. Die Generalsanierung hat noch immer nicht begonnen. (‘And [looking at our] domestic politics, (...), we find ourselves still confronted with this, as I called it, ‘water damage’: the doubt about the integrity of politics. And here too the necessary steps have not been taken yet. The general renovation has not started yet.’)

Considered within the respective political context, these sentences become even more meaningful. Having held parliamentary elections in April 2021, July 2021 and November 2021, and being unable to form a regular government after the latest elections in October 2022, Bulgaria is at present ruled by a caretaker government preparing the country for new general elections in April 2023. In the last four years Austria has first had to go through the so-called ‘Ibiza-Affair’, a corruption scandal in the center of which was the Vice Chancellor

Heinz-Christian Strache and then to witness the fall of Chancellor Sebastian Kurz after a corruption investigation was opened against him.

In the case of the Turkish president, even though the word ‘elections’ is mentioned once, there are absolutely no references to any political parties. The wording of Erdoğan’s speech is chosen in such a way that it, on the one hand, disguises the existence of any political opposition in Türkiye, and, on the other hand, presents the changes and developments in the country as having nothing to do with the political agenda of one single party but as an expression of the will of the whole nation.

All three presidents mention the high inflation and the energy crisis as some of the major challenges in 2022. Radev and Van der Bellen admit that these problems will continue to dominate 2023 as well and express their hopes that politicians and citizens alike will do their best to cope with the difficulties:

> До сформирането на редовно правителство, служебният кабинет ще продължи да изпълнява своя дълг за овладяване на енергийната криза и инфлацията... (‘Until a regular government has been formed, the caretaker government will continue to fulfil its duties for keeping under control the energy crisis and the inflation…’)

> Die wirtschaftliche Situation mit Inflation und hohen Energiepreisen (...) ist eine Herausforderung für unsere Gesellschaft. (‘The economic situation with inflation and high energy prices (…) is a challenge for our society.’)

The Turkish president also mentions “ekonomik sıkıntılar” (‘economic distress’), “ekonomik sarsıntı” (‘economic quake’) and “hayat pahalılığı” (‘high cost of living’) but according to Erdoğan, in Türkiye’s case these have been turned into advantages and the country has actually profited from them:

> ...dünyadaki olumsuz gelişmeler, ister istemez bizi de etkilemiştir. Ancak bu süreçte Türkiye’yi, gelişmiş ülkeler başta olmaz üzere dünyadan ayıran en önemli özellilk istihdamdan ve üretimde taviz vermeyen ekonomi modeli olmuştur. Evet, bu ülkede bir hayat pahalılığı yaşanmıştır ama vicdan sahibi herkes kabul edecektir ki aynı zamanda bu ülke tarihinin en yüksek istihdam oranına, en yüksek üretim gücüne, en yüksek ihracat rakamına da aynı dönemde ulaşmıştır. (‘...the negative developments in the world have inevitably affected us as well. However, the most important characteristic which distinguishes Türkiye from the rest of the world and especially from the developed countries is its economic model which makes no compromises when it comes to employment and production. Yes, there has been a rise in the cost of living in this country but anyone who has a conscience will admit that at the same time this country has reached the highest employment level, the highest productivity and the highest export levels in its whole history.’)

In the inflation statistics published by the Turkish Central Bank we find the following: on an yearly basis the November and December 2022 inflation in Türkiye was 84,39% and 64,27% respectively. According to the Bulgarian National Statistics Institute, in the same period inflation in Bulgaria on a yearly basis was 16,9%. The numbers for Austria, published by the Austrian statistics institute, are 10,6% and 10,2% respectively. As for the unemployment rates, according to the Strategy and Budget Direction of the President of the Republic of Türkiye, the unemployment rate for the month of November 2022 is calculated at 10,2% which compared to the same period in the previous year is indeed 1% lower, but still relatively high compared to the numbers for Bulgaria and Austria. For the same month the Bulgarian Employment Agency measures 4,4% and the Austrian Ministry of Labor and Economy 6,2% unemployment rate.

Before we conclude the analysis of the New Year's addresses of the presidents of Bulgaria, Austria and Türkiye, we consider it necessary to investigate how the war in Ukraine has been presented and talked about in the three speeches. After all, in the international arena this is by far the topic with the farthest-reaching consequences both for the world's economic stability and the future of the international relations. In the speech of the Turkish president, we find the war mentioned in a single subordinate clause: "Küresel salgını ve arkasından başlayan Rusya-Ukrayna savaşının yol açtığı..." ('As a result of the global pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian war which started after it…'). This brief mention of the war without explicitly expressing any support for one of the sides corresponds to Türkiye's attempt to present itself as an intermediary between the conflicting sides. It can also be interpreted as a sign that the main focus of attention of the audience should be kept within Türkiye's borders because this audience is the one going to vote in the upcoming elections.

Having in mind the long tradition of close relations between Bulgaria and Russia and the fact that the political background of the Bulgarian president is in the Bulgarian Socialist Party, known to be in favor of friendly relations with Russia, it does not come as a surprise that Radev too prefers a neutral expression which does not indicate any responsibility or guilt of any of the conflicting parties:

> Близо до нас избухна опустошителна за Европа война, която продължава да се разгаря и ожесточава. ('A devastating for Europe war has broken out near us, a war which continues to grow and get more and more violent.'); Институции и граждани си подадоха ръка, за да приютят търсещите спасение от войната в Украйна... ('Institutions and citizens worked hand in hand in order to provide shelter for those looking for rescue from the war in Ukraine.')

Only the Austrian president clearly takes a side in this conflict and thus reflects the common stance of the European Union and, without being a member, of NATO:

> …als Folge des Angriffskrieges in der Ukraine… ('…as a result of the war of aggression in Ukraine…'); Ganz abgesehen von dem menschlichen Leid, das durch die systematischen Angriffe Russlands auf zivile Einrichtungen entsteht. ('Not to mention the human suffering resulting from the systematic Russian attacks on public facilities.').

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, which appears as "Russia's war of aggression" in official EU documents, the EU and its member states have condemned Russia's actions on numerous occasions and imposed a total of 10 packages of sanctions within a year. In regularly published statements, both the EU and NATO emphasize the brutality of the war as well as the fact that it was unprovoked, and clearly commit themselves to continuous support for Ukraine.

Conclusion

The analysis of the three speeches under investigation has revealed some major differences. Politically, the presidents of Bulgaria, Austria and Türkiye come from different political traditions, namely the socialist tradition (in this case a continuation of the communist movement and the respective form of government until 1989), the environmental movement and the Islamic-conservative tradition. This is clearly reflected in their choice of topics and linguistic expressions. True to the historically close relations with Russia, Radev avoids taking sides when talking about the Russia-Ukrainian war. A former speaker of the Austrian Green Party, Van der Bellen is the only one of the three presidents who mentions the climate crisis as one of the major challenges of the future. And only AKP's leader Erdoğan resorts to constructing fears and referring to God's help he is hoping to receive.

The scope of political powers and the eligibility in future elections also affect the choice of topics and their verbal presentation. While Radev and Van der Bellen position themselves as observers of political and social life, and see it as their duty both to encourage different groups within society to cooperate with one another and to warn in case of political misconduct or failure, Erdoğan primarily focuses on the achievements of his party. That is why we find different social actors mentioned by Radev, Van der Bellen and Erdoğan, and only in the speech of the Turkish president the problems related to high inflation and the energy crisis are presented as having been successfully dealt with and solved to an important extent.

In terms of field of action (see Table 1), judging from the contents and the respective political context, the speeches of Radev and Van der Bellen can be determined as belonging to 'Formation of public attitudes, opinions and will'. After all, these two presidents not only cannot run for a third term, but they also have limited powers and the executive powers are concentrated in the hands of the prime ministers of the two countries. In Erdoğan's speech, on the other hand, we find elements from 'Formation of public attitudes, opinions and will', 'Political advertising' and 'Political executive and administration'. This can be explained with the fact that after changing Türkiye's political system from a parliamentary to presidential republic Erdoğan has practically adopted the functions and duties of both president and prime minister, while, at the same time, retaining the leadership of the ruling party as well. Moreover, he is hoping for one more term in office in the upcoming elections in mid-May so he is obliged to adopt election speech rhetoric and purposefully address his potential voters above all.

Looking one last time at the scripts of the three speeches and what I have found in them, I realize that I need to admit the following: I spent four decades not listening. This time I listened. Carefully. I am going to continue listening.

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BOOK REVIEW: LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF CONTESTED IDENTITIES IN THE MEDIA: THE SPECIAL CASE OF SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPEANS AS 'OTHERS' IN THE BRITISH PRESS

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The problem of identity formation and understanding of "Who are I?" (related to the multiple social, cultural, and personal identities one always possesses) has been discussed and analyzed for years. As the theory generally postulates, we understand ourselves on the basis of the differences or similarities we share with other people or groups (Taylor, 2002; Hall, 1996; Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2013). They help us define who we are and where we belong (see Hall, 1996). At the same time, we should not neglect the fact that identity is never static and fixed, but is fluid and always changing. This cannot be more true nowadays when the free movement of people and the intermarriages between them is a reality. Supranational structures as the EU also provoke interests in transnational identities as the next step after the in-between culture discussed by Homi Bhabha (1994). This in itself is a challenging task as not many people, especially those who feel in dominant position, are willing to accept the idea of equality within variety. This is particularly evident when a culture is not familiar with the characteristics of those considered different, but still avoids any contacts with them and thus the abyss between the two expands. To make matters worse, the media which have the power to create reality (Fairclough 1995), fan ideas about the outlandishness of the different ones and even hyperbolize their difference in order to present them as scary, problematic and abnormal (see Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998; Cottle, 2003).

In her book Linguistic representations of contested identities in the media: The special case of South-Eastern Europeans as 'Others' in the British press (2016) Mihaela Culea tries to look into all these problematic areas of changing identities and perceptions of those who are different from us with the focus on (a) minority culture(s).

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Mihaela Culea has used a very broad theoretical, as well as sociological and political base for an in-depth exploration of the problem of Otherness as reflected by the British press in its representations of Southern Europeans. The book *Linguistic representations of contested identities in the media: The special case of South-Eastern Europeans as 'Others' in the British press* (2016) successively explores the issues of European identity, Otherness, the existing dichotomy Centre – Periphery, and the way these are presented in the media through the employment of various metaphors, stereotypes and by ways of specific reporting and subjectivity, among others.

The book consists of two main parts and has six chapters each focusing on a different aspect of the issues mentioned above. The general structure and thematic presentation of the book closely follow and are in line with the author's intention to present the idea of "otherness" from different points of view. In this respect the method of analysis chosen, namely triangulation, employing the perspective of metaphor, stereotypical representation, and moral panic discourse, is particularly suitable.

Nested in the general field of critical discourse studies (Richardson & Flowerdew, 2018; van Dijk, 2016, 2018; Fairclough, 2018), the book provides a comprehensive account of the political, social and historical factors in addition to the discursive practices that govern the presentation of Southern Europeans as the Other in the British media, and the British printed discourse in particular. To this end, Mihaela Culea provides a full account of the period around the creation of the European Union, the formation of common European identity, or at least the idea behind such a formation, and the time of accession of Romania and Bulgaria who joined the union together. This background is a necessary prerequisite for the analysis that follows on how "peripheral" Europeans, namely Romanians, Bulgarians, and Greeks, are perceived and constructed by the "central" Europeans, i.e. the British, as the Other. It only does justice to the author that she has also presented the idea of what it means to be British, so that contrasts would provide a plausible starting point for the analysis to come. As the real world, and "our" real world in particular, is the criterion by which we measure any difference, the contrast between Britishness and un-Britishness is only necessary for the differences between us and them to become even more explicit.

The comprehensive theoretical review in the first part of the book prepares the reader for the analysis of the conceptual metaphors from the point of view of cognitive linguistics and the stereotypes put forward by the British press and the moral panic discourse created as a result of the linguistic choices made by journalists around the possible immigration waves of southern Europeans. The analysis at hand is really significant as it shows the thinking patterns and the underlying cultural, ideological or cognitive framework, or mindset, of a certain community in its historical evolution, and the way these affect or govern the perception of who the Other really is. The study shows that when talking about Romanian, Bulgarian or Greek identities, the British media discourse invariably employs the centre-periphery[1] dichotomy attributing qualities such as poverty, financial difficulty, disorder, crime, savagery, economic abuse or misuse, peril, and calamity, which are invariably linked with the idea of the scary, unfamiliar and strange Other coming from the periphery, an agent perceived as the ultimate threat and the Alter Ego (see Turk, 1993 quoted in Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2020) of the West. As the members of the periphery are usually perceived as a threat (see Cohen, 2002; Said, 1979, 1997) they are also to be kept at a distance and not fully accepted. Therefore, the narrative about them is to be hyperbolized in order for the distance between members of the majority and the new-comers to be maintained, lest they come into contact and the fact that truth has been distorted is brought to the open.

The second part of the book is more analytical in its nature and focuses primarily on the ways the process of othering is achieved mostly through the employment of various metaphors, stereotypes, reporting and subjectivity. The choice of a viewpoint is very appropriate once again as the British media discourse is characterized with high metaphoricity on the one hand (see Fairclough, 1995; Fowler, 1991; Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2013, 2018, 2020), while on the other, the "pictures" in our heads (cf. Lippmann, 1922; Svartvik, 2013) are more memorable and are easier to digest. Still further, the preference for one linguistic structure over another, the use of passive vs. active voice or different types of modality, are meaningful as all these convey the ideas of the journalists covering a particular event and their stance (Fowler, 1991). Thus, readers are introduced to a host of metaphors, such as EU IS AN EDIFICE/ A BODY/ A FAMILY; POLITICS IS WAR; EU IS A CONTAINER; BRITISH POLITICS IS CONFLICT … discussing the perception of British people of EU, their role in it and their sense of belonging to it. The ideas presented through the employment of these metaphors show the somewhat priggish and haughty attitude of the British towards the union and the sense of superiority they have as a result of their perceived uniqueness and the fact that they live on an island detached from mainland Europe.

Analyzing the conceptual portrayal of Greece, Mihaela Culea has singled out metaphors, such as GREECE IS A PROBLEM CHILD, GREEK ECONOMY IS A DISEASED BODY and the GREEK ECONOMY IS A DEAD PATIENT which present the country and its behavior in an unfavorable light and instill negativism towards its subjects in the minds of the British. All these linguistic

1. Said (1979) distinguishes between "positive" geography, i.e. the UK, and "imaginary" geography – everything that falls outside the British borders. It is like an undefined mass of countries producing identities that are backward, scary and illiterate.

representations form the background against which the author explores the metaphoric presentation of immigrants from Romania and Bulgaria. The notions are negative again and by no means new, as immigration has frequently been conceptualized through water metaphors (see Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2017, 2020; Taylor, 2021), as in ROMANIAN (and BULGARIAN) IMMIGRATION IS A DISASTER (FLOOD/ INVASION). Another negative presentation of Romanian immigrants is obtained through the metaphor ROMANIAN IMMIGRATION TO BRITAIN IS AN INVASION. Culea skillfully analyzes the used metaphors not only in terms of their lexical representations but also as a part of some general scenarios put forward and appropriated by the British media. Another typical presentation of minority groups which is also highly governed by the idea of backwardness generally associated with the periphery is the association with a herd of animals or flock of birds. Taylor (2021) defines this type of metaphors as dehumanizing and shows them as conventionalized, used by the media for over 200 years in their discourse on migrants. In Culea's research, the negative image of Romanians traveling to the UK is further stressed through the suggestion that Romanians go to the UK not to work but for pleasure or in search of some kind of benefits, i.e. health tourism and benefit tourism, revealed through the use of ROMANIAN IMMIGRANT IS A (BENEFIT) TOURIST mataphor. All these images create the idea of the unknown or potentially dangerous Other who has to be feared as they pose a threat to everything considered British – their culture, the order created, civilization, rights, etc. (see Smith 1991; Said, 1979). Furthermore, the metaphors, along with their frequency of use, show the thinking patterns applied and further developed by journalists as a result of the existing ideology in regards to immigrants in general and those from South/East Europe in particular.

The messages conveyed in the analysed metaphors are further developed and directly lead to the stereotypical representations of Romanian immigrants. Analyzing the existing stereotypes, Culea follows the same approach undertaken at the beginning of the book, namely showing first the point of view of the "dominant" culture, the one that reports on the Other, as this is the conceptual framework that all British journalists, officials, and common people use to understand the Other, i.e. Romanians.

I find the addition of the cartographic representation of European stereotypes an especially interesting and noteworthy idea which also shows the in-depth understanding and exploration of the topic by the author. She presents the auto stereotypes used by both British and Romanian officials in the respective media discourses which is of importance for the self-identification of the two nations.

When her focus is on the stereotypes employed, Culea successfully applies the methodology developed by Tonkiss (2012) and traces successively the key themes, such as criminality, unemployment and dire poverty, abuse of the British social or health systems, and invasion or conquest, and arguments, which are rarely based on official statistics or real cases of criminal acts. Then she reviews the association between East-European immigration and criminality, or between the Roma people and the Romanians; us vs. them; Labour vs. UKIP. The next aspect analysed is variation exemplified through observed inconsistencies between analyzed problem and offered solution; the use of voice and intertextuality. Culea studies also characterization which is predominantly negative as Romanian immigrants are related to pickpocketing, mugging, begging, rioting, abusing or stealing, and even to selling their own babies. In the same vein the author also shows examples of using people of authority who resorting to data disprove five of the stereotypes mostly associated with Romanian immigrants, i.e. their mobility rate, the abuse of benefits, the rise in crime, the assumption that it is Roma rather than Romanians traveling, along with the fact that Romanians are presented as undereducated. Agency, i.e. the roles of the participants, are also analyzed and Mihaela Culea identifies emphasis, i.e. the frequency of used references to big masses, numbers, data, etc., as well as silences represented through the neglect of certain aspects, groups, of their presence or voice.

In addition to the stereotypes and presentations of Romanians, Culea provides an account of the image Greece enjoys in the British media discourse, which once again is highly negative, equating the country metaphorically with the "bad boy of Europe".

In the last chapter of the book, Mihaela Culea looks into the conceptualization of the dichotomy centre-periphery and the attributes this distinction has on people coming from both locations. The author presents an analysis on how migration and crossing of boundaries and borders interferes with or alters the established dichotomy and shows the push and pull factors for said migration. The aspects of multiculturalism, transnationalism and globalization are also discussed and are then explored in relation to the ongoing movement of people and the perception of the Other as a threat. This section in a way binds together the preceding chapters focusing on the various devices used in the development of the image of the Other and on the resulting marginalization experienced by immigrants. The existing divisions and problems around the integration of the ethnic Others all lead to the moral panic phenomenon as defined by Cohen (2002) and the creation of public devils in the face of immigrants in order for the dominant group to protect what is theirs. The issue of moral panic and the discourse ensuing from it are the focus of attention in this final chapter of the book. The book ends with the voice of Romanians who actually disprove the stereotypes adopted and spread by the British media about them.

I really find *Linguistic representations of contested identities in the media: The special case of South-Eastern Europeans as 'Others' in the British press* an interesting and commendable read as it sets a frame for future analyses which could be further conducted on a comparative basis. The book can be used both by scholars working in the field of media studies, identity politics, culture studies and students making their first steps in discourse analysis, as it provides a comprehensive methodology which is widely applicable to further research in the area of media studies.

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