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Human Language, Rights and Security publishes peer-reviewed research on interdisciplinary language studies to ensure human rights, foster sustainable development and social security of contemporary society.

The journal provides original, up-to-date, and authoritative vision of topical and emerging trends that produce a profound impact on research, Academia and Industry, as well as the public at large.

The journal explores language policies and international trends with regard to the status of language in national legislations and politics in general, as well as in education, mass media, legal, administrative, healthcare, humanitarian and other settings, in particular.

Challenges and promising practices with regard to the language rights provision within the above-mentioned dimensions are subject to interdisciplinary consideration from the multicultural angle.

The journal strives to highlight the tendencies that map a variety of challenges for cross cultural communication with various layers of native and non-native speakers who differ difference in their cultural, religious, social, educational status, age, etc.

The perceptions and opinions of language service target audiences and providers as well as the findings regarding their activities are explored in the journal.

The journal also aims to consider specifics and benefits that various language units and discourse tools provide for better implementation of social services in multilingual environment, foster human protection against abuse, extremism and other phenomena that hinder the sustainable development and hamper social security of contemporary society.

The implementation of digital tools in language communication and mediation are explored in the journal. This issue is considered from the angle of the language providers' awareness of and their competency in using up-to-date digital tools.

The journal is committed to impartial, substantial and well-grounded consideration of the landmark language phenomena, challenges and changes in multicultural world of the Third Millennium.

The editorial board invites authors to submit papers on the above mentioned topics.

The structure of the paper should meet international standards of research description and presentation in academic journals.

Review articles on the topic in line with the journal scope and mission are also welcome.

The references should be arranged according to APA 7th edition https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/apa_changes_7th_edition.html.

The authors are kindly asked to identify a conflict of interest (if any) or declare no conflict of interest.

The authors are also expected to specify each co-author's contribution to the research and paper preparation.

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CONTENTS

HUMAN LANGUAGE, RIGHTS, AND SECURITY 2021. Vol. 1. No. 1. P. 4
RUDN University http://hlrsjournal.ru

Editorial

FOREWORD FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

***Dear Colleagues*,**

As the Editor-in-Chief, I feel privileged and honored to present you the first issue of *Human Language, Rights, and Security*, a new biannual regular volume of the RUDN University research journals collection.

Our peer-reviewed broad-scope journal spans diverse areas, including language policies and rights, tendencies and challenges for cross cultural communication among speakers of different languages, the role of language for the professional career development, specifics and benefits of various language units and discourse tools from the angle of their contribution to human protection against phenomena that hinder the sustainable development and hamper social security of contemporary society.

The current issue follows an interdisciplinary pathway of academic studies and integrates a number of topics. The language role for the society development is considered through the language use policy and information provision management during the COVID-19. The research in language covers issues of Natural Language Processing (NLP) applications for speaker's behaviour analysis in public and institutional discourse.

The issue also explores the relevance of the language skills training for professional development and provides an opportunity to consider various approaches to language-based mediation skills training at university level. A particular emphasis is laid on the technology potential for foreign language training, reading skills are subject to the study in this issue.

I would like to express my genuine gratitude to all contributors who have generously submitted their work to this issue. I deliver my sincere appreciation to reviewers and Associate Editors who have handled the materials for the current issue and currently engage in collecting submissions for our future volumes.

This issue is an excellent example of the joint efforts and international collaboration that can make things happen under the tremendous uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide.

I am looking forward to the feedback from our readers whose commitment to the solid academic research standards paves the way for this new edition development.

On behalf of the editorial team, I encourage scholars who work within the framework of the journal scope and mission, to submit your latest findings for publication in our journal.

Vladimir Filippov
Editor-in-Chief
RUDN University President
Academician of the Russian Academy of Education

HUMAN LANGUAGE, RIGHTS, AND SECURITY 2021. Vol. 1. № 1. 5–18
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LANGUAGE ROLE IN SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

FOCUS OF THE ISSUE: COVID-19 AND LANGUAGE USE

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Research article

Might Covid-19 Require Revision of Language Management?

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Abstract. Language management refers to state administrative regulations, policies, and activities on the language(s) use within educational, legal, and other public domains and to the scientific discipline which studies this phenomenon. We argue that during COVID-19 health emergency, the concept of language management might need revision as new topics and contexts have come to light within the discussion on language use amid the current pandemic. We explore key dimensions of this discussion representation in public communication, identify language-use related topics which have been mentioned in this discussion, study its levels and major actors. The texts from official sites of international organizations, national governments, public and non-profit social agencies, mass media were selected. The corpus of 238 sources with a total of 193478 words was subject to manual and computer-based thematic content coding and clustering. The results reveal language-use related topics within the information and discussion topics during the COVID-19, specify the levels at which the above topics discussed, outline those actors who initiate/take part/form the target audience within the discussion on language use during the COVID-19. The research also leads to the conclusion on the critical importance of such issues as the style of international and national leadership's addresses, production and timeliness of multilingual data on the pandemic, countermeasures against misinformation and anti-nation bias, development of protocols for the use of fact-based rational language. The mentioned items are considered as the key components of a language management framework for policy and actions which need a coordinated interagency response within local and global contexts during the COVID-19.

Keywords: language management; language policy; risk communication; health emergency

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INTRODUCTION

Academia has shaped a comprehensive theoretical background, integrating such concepts as *language policy*, *planning, and management* which have been explored and revisited across 20–21st centuries.

Historically the concept of *language planning* mostly focuses on grounds and argumentation for norm selection, codification, implementation, and elaboration (Haugen,1959, Costa-Carreras, 2020). The phenomenon of *language policy* has always been associated with a set of societal goals and needs-oriented activities with regard to *language use* in various domains in settings, with account of state vision of political, economic, cultural goals (Rubin & Jernudd, 1971). The latter have been shaped and introduced through relevant administrative legal regulations (Kaplan & Baldauf,1997). They lay grounds for language planning, which might lead to prevailing interests of some social groups and inequality of others (Tollefson, 1991). Further, the idea of *language management* as theory and practice of actions (Spolsky, 2009, Neustupny, 2012) has become crucial for language policy and planning (Nekvapil, 2016).

The above scholars underline that *language management* integrates linguistic, communicative and sociocultural aspects of strategies and tactics with regard to language use and recommended change thereof. Moreover, currently researchers specify that these aspects operate specifically at diverse levels, ranging from family preferences and social communities' traditions to state and supranational policies and actions (Spolsky, 2019).

Academia considers the *language management* concept and its application in various dimensions, including the following:

– situation with contact languages in neighboring countries (Fan 2020, Sherman, 2020) with particular focus on national attitudes to linguistic purism (Kristinsson , 2020)

– language issues within corporate governance of international multicultural organizations (Park, 2020)

– language management in major socio-economic dimensions, including education (Neves, 2020), social services multilingual activities (Woydack, 2019), scientific research and knowledge dissemination (Gajo & Berthoud, 2020)

– focus on language management in specific professional domains, for instance, medical area (Ludányi, 2020)

– language management initiatives and language use in public spaces (Birnie ,2019)

– research in codification with regard to different countries which use the same language (Takahashi, 2020)

– investigation of the situation with language minorities and indigenous languages in a particular country with specific focus on legal aspects (Sokolova et al., 2019)

– organization and provision of multilingual support and services in humanitarian settings, including natural disasters (Cadag, 2019), and the 21st century crisis of forced migration (Marlowe, 2019).

As far as the 21st century health pandemics are concerned, researchers have consistently focused on discourse of SARS (2002–2004), H1N1 (2009–2010) and COVID 19 pandemics to explore the following topics with regard to communication and information provision:

– global communication trends amidst pandemics (Ding, 2014)

– constrains among nations and phenomenon of blaming the other (Barreneche, 2020)

– national leadership and government statements (Pop-Flanja, 2020)

– information provision by healthcare services (Liu et al, 2020, Powers & Xiao, 2008)

– specific medical discourse and terminology of pandemics (Alvarez 2020)

– mass media communication and public community talk (La et al. 2020)

– metaphor overuse in representation and evaluation of disease situation the (Wallis & Nerlich 2005, Sabucedo et al., 2020)

– negative sides of labeling pandemics through animals, colors, geographical names (Vigsø, 2010).

The review of respective publications leads to the remark that in general, language issues are mentioned within the consideration of risk communication management. The literature analysis reveals that earlier studies has focused on isolated topics related to language use during healthcare emergencies, and the comprehensive discussion on language management during the COVID 19 times is still ahead.

While over 470 papers and preprints have been found on discourse and language related to COVID 19, no paper with an explicit call for language management during the COVID 19 has been found. Meanwhile, the global community has faced a skyrocketing spread of misinformation in social and traditional mass media (Richtel, 2020). Close to this challenge, the discourse of fear and respective language patterns use have become subject to language studies (Rafi, 2020). Amid the above, Academia has already addressed its call towards governments and health care authorities to provide accurate, up-to date, evidence based and knowledge-focused information (Tangcharoensathien et al., 2020), use rational language (Stedman et al., 2020). Moreover, it is healthcare community whose members have specified the language importance during the current pandemics (Brandt & Botelho, 2020).

The present *research goal* is to explore the language management phenomenon during current health emergency related to COVID-19 spread across the world.

The research sets forth *the following hypothesis*: COVID-19 might require updated measures in terms of language policy and management during the pandemic.

This goal assumes the description of the language management directions, actors, tools and levels of implementation.

Therefore, based on the previous research as introduced above the present paper stipulates the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are language-use related topics within the information and discussion topics during the COVID 19?

RQ 2: At what levels are the above topics discussed?

RQ 3: Who are those actors who initiate/take part/form the target audience within the discussion on language use during the COVID 19?

1. Materials and Methods

The research materials were found across the formal communication on language-use -related issues during the current pandemic in the digital sphere which has recognized as a standard environment for official verbal interaction, along with printed paper-based statements, publications, etc. (Leuckert, 2020).

Data collection. The search for mentions of language use issues resulted in the list of official sites of international organizations, national governments, public and non-profit social agencies, official international and national mass media. The written verbal information on these sites was produced from January 1st to January 1st, 2021.

Data collection was implemented through the Google search engine. The keywords COVID 19 *language use/communication/ translation management* were used. The above keywords were selected in line with major areas of studies in community-based language use and its management (Murphy, 2020).

The search for mentions of language use issues resulted in the list of official sites of international organizations, national governments, public and non-profit social agencies, official international and national mass media.

The respective texts contained the mentioned keywords and formed the empirical database. By the specified period, it covered 238 sources including 33 United Nations (UNO)-affiliated documents, 26 World Health Organization (WHO) documents, seven documents of International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), 29 Council of Europe and European Union documents, 14 items related to the statements of the national leaders and governments, 48 publications in the official international and national mass media, 68 posts in independent news digital platforms, 13 sites of translation associations, and non-profit agencies.

The variables included the document genre, affiliation, type of its production. The distinctions included the following features:

– document theme (s) with regard to language use/management

– international/regional/national level of the document production;

– production by the institution/ by the leadership representative/by independent professional/non-governmental organization (NGO), the official mass media agency/personal blog publication.

Data Processing. Methodology for Language Management research traditionally relies on various types of interviews, focus groups, conversational analysis (Fairbrother et al., 2018). However, as the present paper aims to explore the language management concerning COVID-19 mass communication, the methodology followed the researchers who stand for thematic content analysis of the material related to communication research (Roberts, 2020).

To this end, the texts were structured into the electronic corpus, with a total amount of 193478 words. Data processing combined manual and computer-based coding.

QDA Minor Lite was used for keywords frequency search. The list of computer-based search for frequent keywords served as the initial list of predetermined codes for manual coding, and emergent codes were considered (Kyngäs 2020). The manual coding was implemented individually by the author and four invited specialists, who have over 20 year-long experience in multilingual discourse studies, to foster the objectivity of coding.

In line with the required percentage in statistical research on language (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020), only the codes with 90% coincidence between coders' data and the computer-based most frequent word combinations were considered.

According to the existing practice (Rayson 2008), the computer-based list of frequent key words was used for further identification of major semantic domains that were cross-checked by coders on the grounds of computer-based search.

Further, the textual data were structured into the electronic corpus for computer-based analysis through QDA Minor Lite clustering function to identify major themes related to the language use issues within the COVID 19, the level of discussion document production at international/regional/national level, document source.

2. Results

The thematic content analysis made it possible to identify major thematic codes in the textual corpus.

These codes form clusters of language-use related topics which the society has discussed during the COVID 19 period, as introduced in Figure 1.

We consider it relevant to comment on the above figure by providing concrete examples.

The first cluster outlines the focus on COVID-19 issues found in speeches and statements delivered by international and national leaders who addressed the pandemic emergency. Their speeches have been subject to discourse analysis. Analysts explored various productions, including the UNO Secretary-General, the Italian Prime Minister, the USA president (Witchalls 2020a), the German Chancellor, the French Prime Minister (Freedman 2020), etc. The experts mention that speakers portray the process of disease tackling as bloody fight, and COVID-19 as the killer and enemy. Healthcare workers are at the front line. The leadership speeches might combine aggression or defensiveness, or focus on clear and concise language to announce the steps to be taken (Dhatt & Kickbusch, 2020).

Figure 1. Language-use related topics within the information and discussion topics during the COVID-19 (author's data)

The second cluster reveals that international, regional, and national institutions strive to support language rights during the pandemic. They emphasise indigenous peoples' language needs. The trend can be found in the UNO documents (COVID-19 Pandemic: Language matters 2020), Council of Europe efforts (COVID-19 crisis… 2020), China' s language response to language minorities' needs by the publication of information on measures to protect from and fight the COVID in 39 minority languages (Jia 2020).

Moreover, the WHO efforts at the international level and the US activities at the national level can be mentioned as examples of multilingual response foreigners' language rights support. Thus, the WHO has launched real-time training courses in 47 languages on COVID-19 treatment (Responding to COVID-19, 2020) to address health professionals, decision-makers, and the public. The USA system of centres for control and prevention of the US Department of Health & Human Services has launched the information platform in over 55 languages (CDC Resources in Languages Other than English 2020).

The third cluster is closely connected with the second one and introduces the multilingual service provision industry response to COVID 19. The relevant examples come from international, regional, and national levels; integrate translation professional associations and NGOs' activities. Asia-Pacific Translation and Interpreting Forum summarized the translation industry present and prospective contributions to fight against pandemics (Zhang & Gao, 2020). In Canada, a non-profit social agency MCIS Language Solutions has arranged basic info about COVID-19 for foreigners in over 40 languages (MCIS COVID-19 RESPONSE,2020, n/d). In Belgium, a Flemish agency has launched a site on COVID 19 in 36 foreign languages, including 27 official EU languages (Coronavirus: meertalige informatie 2020). In the USA, the non-profit organization Translators without Borders conduct diverse activities, including translation into 89 languages (TWB's global response to COVID-19, 2020).

The fourth cluster refers to the COVID-19 related misinformation (infodemic). This phenomenon has been subject to counteractions at international, regional, and national levels, including the UN statements (UN tackles 'infodemic'…2020), WHO address (Novel Coronavirus …2020), EU call to provide fact-based information to reinforce societal resilience (Joint Statement of the Members of the European Council, 2020). Particular countries have undertaken concrete actions. Thus, UK media analysts in cooperation with UK counter-extremism Institute of Strategic Dialogue have found some Facebook sources HumansAreFree.com, RealFarmacy.com which engaged in fake info spread (Miller 2020) and conspiracy theories dissemination (Wirtchhalls 2020b). We should also mention that within this cluster the reference to the power of the social media has been considered from the angle of information dissemination.

The fifth cluster seems to have some connection with the *infodemic* in terms of pandemic influence on language use as a mirror of political and cultural bias and attitudes of particular national actors. Some high profile headlines and speeches can be mentioned.

Jyllands Posten, the Danish newspaper published a cartoon of the Chinese national flag with virus-like symbols instead of five stars. China expressed its protest. The Danish Prime Minister referred to the long-standing Danish respect for the freedom of speech (China demands apology…2020).

Le Courrier Picard, the French newspaper, used such headlines as *Yellow Alert (Alerte Jaune), The yellow danger? (Le péril jaune ?).* Further, the newspaper t published the texts of apology *(À propos de notre une du 26 janvier,2020*).

The sixth cluster covers international and local communities' efforts aimed at careful use of language. At the international level, the WHO, UNICEF, and the IFRC have launched guidelines for governments, media, and local organisations. The document strongly recommends to avoid criminalizing (COVID-19 suspects, suspected cases, victims) or dehumanizing terminology with ethnicity affiliation (Pomeroy 2020).

International and national multilingual mass media giants also underline the need to avoid sensationalist and derogatory language (Kwan et al. 2020; Holdeman 2020).

The empirical analysis of the texts' overall corpus has laid grounds for the **answer to RQ 2** and explicitly defined the **levels at which the mentioned topics are discussed**. The data in general, and the examples, introduced earlier in the section, confirm that the identified topics are subject to consideration within international, regional, local national dimensions of communication, and specific industries or communities, as well.

The above materials reveal that the major international stakeholder, namely, WHO, UNICEF, and the IFRC produce consistent guidelines for human language – based communication on the pandemic topics.

The regional level incorporates activities of major regional organizations. The article has already mentioned the documents produced by the Council of Europe. The activities of the African Union can be mentioned as well (Communication in Africa in the time of COVID-19, 2020). Should be also underlined, that the data reveals the national leadership's consistent focus on the pandemic issues, as well.

The present research data reveals that the international actors focus mostly on measures to tackle the emergency, while regional and national actors include in their statements and comments both factual and evaluative data, sometimes compliment the information with axiological inclusions. Moreover, much depends on the particular institution / agency / community professional / social / political / cultural affiliation and action policies. The respective examples have already been set forth earlier in this section.

The data of research sample has allowed the author to **answer RQ 3** and identify a **tentative pool of actors who initiate and promote the discussion on language use** during the COVID 19 include international and regional political and professional organisations, national governmental and mass media, international and national professional associations (those from health services, social care, language industry), journalists and bloggers, the public representatives, see Figure 2.

Figure 2. Level and Actors within the information and discussion topics during the COVID-19 (author's data)

Regarding the variables, a number points seem to be relevant.

First, we should underline that there are few documents/texts that focus specifically on language issues. The number of such texts in our research did not come over

19%. Although we have to mention that the figure is tentative, as another configuration of sources might lead to another picture. Among the mentioned figure of 19% the overwhelming majority of the sources where the multilingual service provision is concerned come from either the international and regional organizations (among them primarily from those that professionally deal with healthcare issues) or from the language service provision industry.

Two major topics within the language issues discussion cover the challenge of multilingual services provision during the COVID-19, both for foreigners and local communities of minority languages speakers.

3. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The study reveals that COVID-19 has promoted the discussion on language use, its values, and its risks during the healthcare emergency.

The language-use related topics which have been discussed by the public during the COVID-19, the identification of international, regional, and national dimensions for their discussion, the mapping of actors who initiate and promote the discussion on language use during the COVID-19 confirms the need to revisit language management concept with regard to current and prospective health emergencies. Such a statement comes from the empirical conclusions of those who underline the critical importance for mindful communication dueirng world-wide emergencies (Schlögl & Jones, 2020).

This concept continues the Academia' s tradition to view language management as theory and practice of actions put into practice in line with designed policy and planning (Spolsky 2009, Neustupny 2012, Nekvapil 2016) for consideration at micro (local) and macro (beyond national borders) levels.

However, the empirical data on communication and information provision during COVID-19 confirms the idea of those researchers who argue that during the emergencies, language management tends to go beyond linguistic, communicative, and sociocultural aspects (Spolsky 2019).

The research data confirm the hypothesis that COVID-19 might require updated measures in terms of language policy and management during the pandemic. Currently interagency collaboration and coordination at international, regional, national levels are crucial to shape collective ideology in terms of planning and implementing strategy and tactics for language use to foster global and local sustainability by providing adequate, factual, impartial, and timely data which can meet the information needs and perception capacities of varied target audiences within the multilingual community with different ethnic, social, religious, educational backgrounds across continents.

The above vision requires administrative regulations concerning protocols of language-based communication for health emergencies, identification of major stakeholders who deal with the issue (international, regional, national leadership, governing bodies and institutions, language service industry, mass media and communication corporations, healthcare community, NGOs and professional associations, research institutions), their responsibilities and required activities for comprehensive management of language use within risk communication during health emergencies.

The need to develop plain language communication protocols for healthcare services at the national level has already been set forth by scholars (Dauksewicz 2019). Researchers also launch monitoring platforms to understand the communicative patterns and language role in response to the humanitarian crisis in healthcare that pandemic caused (Betsch, 2020).

However, the present study argues for a structured interagency response at both national and international levels with regard to language use policy development and management of its implementation within local and global contexts. This will help to improve the provision of up-to date information that is critically important at times of the pandemic uncertainty, as scholars underline Krause et al., 2020).

The research findings lead to the conclusion on the critical importance of such issues as the style of international and national leadership's addresses, production and timeliness of multilingual data on the pandemic, countermeasures against misinformation and anti-nation bias, development of protocols for the use of fact-based rational language. The mentioned items are considered as the key components of a language management framework for policy and actions which need a coordinated interagency response within local and global contexts during the COVID-19.

The outlined approach to the concept of language management during global health emergencies requires the establishment and permanent operation of a specific international institution affiliated division/task force formed by national representatives of world countries to unite efforts aimed at comprehensive policy, planning, and actions development.

The proposed stance requires comprehensive research through up-to-date technology application with respect to diverse areas, ranging from language use and its perception in multilingual and multicultural society during pandemics across the world, towards the creation of multilingual medical discourse and terminology corpora on the 21st-century pandemic diseases and multilingual protocols for their treatment.

The present analysis has limitations in terms of the period of studies and data selection. Currently, there is a limited scope of available data which refer to particular countries, institutions, languages. More facts and aspects related to language issues within the pandemics are sure to further appear for the public consideration, along with the COVID-19 scale down.

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Short communication

Enhancing Tools for Sustainable Health Communication within Covid-19

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Abstract. The paper provides short commentary on key features of public health communication during the current pandemic. The paper contains empirical analysis of field data from international, regional, and local national sources related to the industry, institutions, research in the field of study. The thematic content analysis through the computer-based coding served as the background investigation method. The study provides preliminary data on the key topics within official communication on health care issues during COVID-19, explores challenges to communication on health issues during COVID-19, identifies possible tools for sustainable health communication in the current COVID-19 pandemic, and outlines tentative recommendations to foster sustainable communication on health issues during the pandemic.

Keywords: health communication, COVID-19, language planning

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INTRODUCTION

The third Millennium witnesses unprecedented flow of healthcare emergencies, including flues, AIDS, Zika, MERS, and COVID-19. Therefore, communication on healthcare issues has become one of critical instruments for the contemporary society to cope with such global challenges and keep safe. The present paper aims to provide brief commentary on those topics which shape the health communication during COVID-19.

The hypothesis states that along with official communication on COVID-19 at international, regional, and national levels the current pandemic has brought to light challenges and solutions which stem from the world globalization and digitalization.

The paper explores the following research questions:

– What are key topics within official communication on health care issues during COVID-19?

– What are challenges to communication on health issues during COVID 19?

– What are possible tools for sustainable health communication in the current COVID-19 pandemic?

1. Research Design

The research design incorporated diverse field data for empirical analysis. The sample included publications of the international, regional and national authorities and agencies, and the academic papers, as well. Totally over 478 sources were subject to study.

The Google search engine with the keyword *COVID-19 health communication/information* was used for selection of institutional data. The Google Scholar database was also used for selection of academic papers for brief review of relevant literature on the topic under study. The custom rage was limited to the year of 2020.

The study used thematic content analysis through the computer -based coding by QDA Minor Lite application.

2. Preliminary Results and Discussion

2.1. Key topics within official communication on health care issues during COVID-19

Major international stakeholders, including the United Nations (UNO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) consider effective and coordinated communications as a critical instrument to foster the global community health, this vision becomes even stronger during COVID-19 (Communicating for health, n/d, Coronavirus global health emergency, 2020).

Regional institutions, for instance, the European Union policies (ECDC activities on health communication, 2020), Pan American Healthcare Organization actions (COVID-19: Communication Materials, 2020) promote the same approach. The mentioned stakeholders share background information about the virus and preventive measures for the population, data for professionals and the public regarding preventive measures, vaccination development and campaign.

At national level, countries also try to enhance consistent health communication, tailor information for general population and professionals, update treatment protocols for disease different phases, specify health service provision for particular audiences (Coronavirus COVID-19, 2020).

Specific emphasis is laid on support for doctor's wellbeing, see for instance, recommendations of British Medical Association (COVID-19: your wellbeing, 2020), and the recommendations provided by the Czech republic authorities (COVID-19 – Key issues and measures in the Czech Republic, 2020).

In line with the global community vision, Academia considers communication on health issues during COVID-19 within crisis and emergency risk communication framework (Abrams & Greenhawt ,2020). Scholars underline the critical value of information transparency and trust during the COVID-19 pandemic (Spalluto et al., 2020), specify the need to carefully consider genres of leadership and authorities' messages (Koh et al., 2020), highlight the need for doctors to master specific communicative skills (Rubinelli et al. 2020), explore ethical aspect of health communication during pandemics (Iserson, 2020), consider and evaluate the potential of healthcare professionals' empathy in the course of their communication with patients (Rossi et al., 2021), psychological support for doctors (Walton et al. 2020). Scholars also explore the role of the mass media in raising public awareness of risk and shaping relevant knowledge (Karasneh, et al. 2020).

2.2. Challenges to communication on health issues during COVID-19

During the COVID 19 the world has faced unprecedent spread of misinformation through digital formats. Efforts to fight it have been undertaken at international, regional and national levels. The UN addressed a relevant guidance to its agencies, member states, media, civil society and tech companies (United Nations Guidance Note… 2020). The European Commission shaped the Action Plan to fight illegal or false contents, to enhance digital tools potential for authoritative information, to foster fact checking and research, to support the media and civil society as essential actors of reliable, fact-checked information delivery (Tackling COVID-19 disinformation, 2020). National agencies implemented legal measures, as well. Operative activities against social media which spread misinformation were conducted in the UK (Miller, 2020). Countries across the world were ready to criminalize the misinformation activities (Budryk 2020).

The current pandemic revealed the need for multilingual solutions for communication on health issues during the pandemic within modern communities which integrate nationals migrating from different countries, on the one hand, and indigenous people, on the other. The matter has been subject to activities of international and regional organizations, see the UNO, WHO, EU sites mentioned in previous sections. At national level, countries also tried to develop multilingual platforms on COVID-19 prevention and treatment, see for instance, multilingual resources of the USA Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Communication Resources, 2020).

However, these actions were not coordinated as policy actions. Biased and sensational language in the media increased tensions in community, as well. Analysts point out that media language tended to used criminalizing or dehumanizing terminology with ethnicity affiliation. For instance, some mass media affiliated with different countries and institutions across countries used sensational headlines with reference to China (Coronavirus – Made in China, 2020). Analysts draw attention to careful use of language with regard to explicit mentions or implicit references to vulnerable audiences

(Obosi, 2020). Such an approach was strongly criticized by the key international stakeholders (McCartney et al., 2021).

The countries of the Visegrad group (Urbanovics et al., 2021) have also paid a specific attention to the socio-political impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic t with respect to the V4 countries, including information provision issues.

2.3. Possible tools for health communication development in the current COVID-19 pandemic

The current pandemic has revealed the Artificial Intelligence potential within health emergencies.

The WHO has launched WhatsApp chatbot to inform the public about the new coronavirus infection. The initiative was also supported by Singapore, Israel, South Africa, Indonesia (Bucher, 2020). Moreover, WHO regional office for Europe launched a similar regional AI-based service. It provides countermeasures to misinformation and myths, delivers accurate information about COVID-19 in several languages (HealthBuddy, 2020).

Regarding the Czech Republic, recent comparative studies reveal how the Czech and Austrian COVID-19 mobile phone apps in the battle against the virus (Stehlíková, 2021).

Bearing in mind the data of previous sections, it seems logical and reasonable that both industry stakeholders (Tagliacozzo et al., 2021), institutional agencies (Lau et al., 2021), and Academia (Xiao et al., 2021) set forth the need for coordinated language policies and communication planning for health emergencies.

Respective activities imply guidelines for language use, multilingual information provision, the mentioned documents being coordinated at international, regional, and national levels (Dreisbach & Mendoza-Dreisbach, 2021).

Moreover, both Industry and Academia argue for the urgent importance to create interagency and international interactive tools and platforms to provide real-time alerts of rumors about coronavirus, the instruments would enable health officials and relevant stakeholders to respond rapidly with a proactive and engaging narrative to mitigate misinformation (Depoux et al., 2020).Such actions can foster ecosocial approaches to solving social problems (Jusko, 2020).

3. Concluding Remarks

The data reveals that the world globalization and digitalization produce an impact on the phenomenon of public health communication during the COVID-19. Along with official communication on health care issues some challenges emerge due to cross-cultural bias, national identity matters, specific language use in the mass communication, increasing gadget applications spread. The international and national actors who engaged in public health communication should go beyond the healthcare topics themselves, take into account emerging challenges and think of communication policies which would respond to the global public good and meet the national specifics, contribute to community resilience, and work for society sustainable development.

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RESEARCH IN LANGUAGE

FOCUS OF THE ISSUE: SPEAKER BEHAVIOUR AND POSSIBLE NATURAL LANGUAGE PROCESSING (NLP) APPLICATIONS

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Research article

Registering the Impact of Words in Spoken Political and Journalistic Texts

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Abstract. Words in spoken political and journalistic texts may inspire, infuriate or even become mottos. Often, the entire spoken interaction may be forgotten, yet individual words may remain associated with the Speaker and/or the group represented by the Speaker or even the individual word or words themselves obtain a dynamic of their own, outshining the original Speaker. In the current-state-of affairs, connected with the impact of international news networks and social media, the impact of words in spoken political and journalistic texts is directly linked to its impact to a diverse international audience. The impact or controversy of a word and related topic may be registered by the reaction it generates. Special focus is placed in the registration and evaluation of words and their related topics in spoken political and journalistic discussions and interviews. Although as text types, spoken political and journalistic texts pose challenges for their evaluation, processing and translation, the presented approaches allow the registration of complex and implied information, indications of Speaker's attitude and intentions and can contribute to evaluating the behaviour of Speakers-Participants. This registration also allows the identification of words generating positive, negative or diverse reactions, their relation to Cognitive Bias and their impact to a national and international audience within a context of international news networks and social media.

***Keywords**:* cognitive bias, associations, implied information, paralinguistic features

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INTRODUCTION

Words in spoken political and journalistic texts may inspire, infuriate or even become mottos. Often, the entire spoken interaction may be forgotten, yet individual words may remain associated with the Speaker and/or the group represented by the Speaker or even the individual word or words themselves obtain a dynamic of their own, outshining the original Speaker. This phenomenon is common and well-known, especially in political speeches and political history of the recent past. However, in the current-state-of affairs, connected with the impact of international news networks and social media, the impact of words in spoken political and journalistic texts is directly linked to its impact to a diverse international audience. Furthermore, the individual words in question are not necessary within the context of political speeches but rather within the context of interviews, debates and discussions and social media.

As text types, spoken political and journalistic texts pose challenges for their evaluation, processing and translation due to a set of typical, distinctive characteristics (Alexandris, 2020), including the existence of complex and implied information often containing indications of Speaker's attitude and intentions. This information is not always perceived or correctly understood by the recipients, particularly if an international public is concerned. Information content and its perception by the recipients is often related to Cognitive Bias.

1. Registering the Impact of Words and Related Topics

Words and the conversation-interview topics they signalize constitute the basis of most spoken interactions, but may also constitute the basis of complications in spoken political and journalistic texts, especially if non-native speakers and the international audience are concerned. This context may be regarded as a typical case in most international news networks and national or local news networks presenting topics of interest to an international audience. Interviews, debates and political discussions may contain words and related topics of particular impact or controversy to Speakers-Participants and audiences alike. These words and related topics are not restricted to sensitive and controversial issues known to a general and international public but may be indirectly linked to them or linked to less known sensitive and controversial issues. Furthermore, words and related topics related to sensitive and controversial issues may also depict the form, type, nuance and degree of sensitivity and controversy of an issue concerned, according to the diversity of political, historical and socio-cultural factors of the Speakers-Participants and audiences involved. In spoken political and journalistic texts, these properties may be described as "the devil in the details", since overlooking or misinterpreting the above-described words and related topics result to obtaining false or incomplete information, failure of persuasion or negotiation and conflict. Analysts may pour over volumes of files, news reports and studies related to the political, historical and socio-cultural elements concerned. However, registering the impact of words and related topics in spoken political and journalistic texts, at least from a linguistic aspect, may contribute to the analysis of data and information and training of the professionals in journalism, administration and politics.

- **Registering Reactions**

The impact or controversy of a word and related topic may be registered by the reaction it generates. Special focus is placed in the registration and evaluation of words and their related topics in spoken political and journalistic discussions and interviews.

In particular, the registration and evaluation of Speaker reactions and overall Speaker behaviour in respect to words and their related topics in spoken political and journalistic discussions and interviews provides information to the following three cases:

(1) Speaker's reluctance to answer questions, avoidance of topics, or a polite or symbolic presence in the discussion or interview but not an active participation.

(2) Speaker may persist on discussing the same topic of interest by repeating the same subject or may try to direct the discussion in the topic(s) or interest

(3) Speaker purposefully creates tension in the interview or discussion.

- **Additional Dimensions of Word Content**

The words and their related topics linked to the above-described Speaker reactions and Speaker behaviour may concern additional information, beyond their lexical meaning and definition. Specifically, the additional information contained may correspond to additional dimensions of a word's meaning, namely its relations to other words and related topics, by association and its semantic meaning in relation to socio-cultural factors.

The additional dimensions of a word's meaning concerning its relations to other words and related topics by association may be described as a "horizontal" dimension of a word and word-topic in question. These "horizontal" dimensions between words and topics may either be associated by their semantic meaning or by circumstantial association.

Example 1.

• "politics" – "foreign policy" (foreign policy is a type/domain of policy)

• "Angela Merkel" – "Germany" (Angela Merkel is the Chancellor of Germany)

The additional dimensions of a word's meaning concerning its semantic meaning in relation to socio-cultural factors may be described as a "vertical" or "deep" dimension of a word and word-topic in question. The "deep" dimension of a word and word-topic is related to socio-cultural elements and can, therefore, be perceived in a different manner by native speakers and the international audience. These words, referred to as "Gravity" words and "Evocative" words (Alexandris, 2018b, Alexandris, 2020) are either related to their multiple meanings in case of polysemy or to their role in History, in Tradition, in Music and in Literature. These word and topic types are challenging to detect, process, interpret and translate in regard to spoken political and journalistic discussions and interviews concerning non-native Speakers-participants of a language and the international audience. Typical examples are the following:

Example 2.

"Weltschmerz": Strategiefähigkeit und Weltschmerz. Die deutsche Außenpolitik bis 2030

"Wucht": Die geballte Wucht einer sich abwendenden Schutzmacht in Kombination mit der Infragestellung der bestehenden Ordnung durch aufstrebende Mächte und destabilisierende regionale Entwicklungen

https://deutschland-und-die-welt-2030.de/de/beitrag/strategiefaehigkeit-und-weltschmerz-die-deutsche-aussenpolitik-bis-2030/

The additional dimensions of a word's meaning and the topic it describes are connected to Cognitive Bias, in particular, Lexical Bias (Trofimova, 2014), concerning its perception by its Speakers and/or recipients. Both types of "horizontal" and "vertical-deep" additional dimensions of a word and related topic are detected by registering the reaction of the Speakers and/or recipient in the spoken interaction concerned. This registration is achieved by generated visual representations of dialog flow in the spoken interaction and the depiction of points of tension between the Speakers-Participants. Both types of "horizontal" and "vertical-deep" additional dimensions of a word and related topic are described in respect to the generated graphical representations.

2. Words and Reactions: Interactive Registration

As presented in previous research (Alexandris, 2019, Alexandris, 2018a), generated visual representations of dialog flow and the general pragmatic structure of discussions and interviews (Alexandris, 2019) enable the evaluation of failure of spoken interaction, by-passing Confidence Bias (Hilbert, 2012) of the evaluators of the interview or discussion.

The generated visual representations are based on the relations of word-topics of each segment of the discussion or interview, and the perceived relations-distances between them. In the presented approach concerning an interactive system (Alexandris, 2018a), topics are defined (by the User) at a local level with the activation of the "Identify Topic" command, in respect to the question asked or issue addressed by the interviewer or moderator. This interactive topic definition, based on previous research concerning the interactive annotation of pragmatic features in transcribed journalistic texts (Alexandris et al., 2015), allows the content of answers, responses and reactions to be checked in respect to the question asked or issue addressed. Topics, treated as local variables, are registered and tracked. The automatic signalization of nouns by the Stanford POS Tagger in each turn taken by the speakers-participants in the respective segment in the dialog structure provides assistance in choice of topic (Alexandris, 2018a). We note that the use of the registered and tracked keywords, treated as local variables, is crucial for the signalization of each topic and the relations between topics, since automatic Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) analysis procedures (Stede et al., 2017, Zeldes, 2016) usually involve larger (written) texts and may not produce the required results.

With the activation of the “Identify Relation” command, relation types between topics are determined by the User. In the domain of journalistic texts, these relations cannot be strictly semantic and heavily rely on associations and world knowledge: automatic processes may result to errors.

The User choses the type of relation (“Repetition”, “Association”, “Generalization” or “Topic Switch”) between the topic of the question or issue addressed with the topic of the respective response or reaction (Alexandris et al., 2015). The “Repetition” relation (“REP” tag) involves the repetition of the same word or synonym and corresponds to the generation of the shortest distance between defined topics (“Distance 1”– a short line or one dash in generated pattern). The “Association” relation (“ASOC” tag, “Distance 2”), defined by the User’s world knowledge (can be evaluated with a lexicon or WordNet) is represented as a longer line to the next word-node (a longer line or two dashes). The “Generalization” relation (“GEN” tag), also defined by the User’s world knowledge (comparable to a lexicon or WordNet) corresponds to the generation of the longest distance between defined topics (“Distance 3”-the longest line or three dashes). The “Topic Switch” relation (“SWITCH” tag) is used when the topic of a discussion or interview changes between selected topics without any evident semantic relations. “Topic Switch” (Distance -1: slash “/”) generates a break in the sequence of topics. Examples of segments in (interactively) generated patterns from user-specific choices between topics are the following (Example 3 and Example 4):

Example 3 (Alexandris, 2018a)

- “Britain”-“the UK” (REP-1)
- “propaganda”--“social-media” (ASOC-2)
- “police”---“security” (GEN-3)
- “security”/“entrepreneurship” (SWITCH- -1)

Example 4

- “Syrian Government”-“ Syrian Arab Republic” (REP-1)
- “military confrontation” -- “chemical weapons”- (ASOC-2)
- “treaties”---“international commitment” (GEN-3)
- “Cold War”/“World Cup” (SWITCH- -1)

The distances (II) between topics in the generated patterns (I) are registered as triple tuples (triplets): (Britain, the UK, 1), (propaganda, social media, 2), (police, security, 3), (security, entrepreneurship, 4) (Example 5 and Example 6):

Example 5 (Alexandris, 2018a)

- (Britain, the UK, 1)
- (propaganda, social media, 2)
- (police, security, 3)
- (security, entrepreneurship, -1)

Example 6

- (Syrian Government, Syrian Arab Republic, 1)
- (military confrontation, chemical weapons 2)
- (treaties, international commitment, 3)
- (Cold War, World Cup, -1)

The content (i) and form (ii) of the generated patterns (for example, multiple breaks) as visual representations of Cognitive Bias target to depict:

- (1) Degree in which all topics are addressed.
- (2) What topics are avoided – either by changing a topic or by persisting to address the same topic: Observed to be evident in length and form of generated pattern.
- (3) How participants may be lead or even forced into addressing a topic – by association or generalization: This is also observed in length and form of generated patterns.

Therefore, targeting to by-pass Confidence Bias (Hilbert, 2012) of users-evaluators (II), the above-presented points allow the determination of the Speakers-Participants in the conversation (or interview) who were successful in their spoken interaction and the Speakers-Participants who were less successful.

3. Graphic Representations of Word-Relations and Reactions

As described above, the generated graphic representation is based on the relations of the topics to each other, including distances from one word to another. In previous research (Alexandris, 2018a, Alexandris et al. , 2015), Distances 1, 2 and 3 were depicted as vertical lines from top to bottom, in the case of the generation of a tree-like structure, or as horizontal lines from left to right, in the case of the generation of a graph. Topic switches were depicted as breaks in the continuous flow of the generated graphic representation, generating a new, disconnected point or node. This approach envisioned a possible further development with graphic forms similar to discourse trees (Carlson et al., 2001, Marcu, 1999), however, it presented difficulties in matching points of the generated structure to the respective segments of the spoken text.

The present approach targets to allow the alignment of the generated graphic representation with the respective segments of the spoken text, facilitating a possible integration in transcription tools (Mourouzidis et al., 2019).

Similarly to the approaches presented in previous research (Alexandris, 2018a, Alexandris et al., 2015), the length of the lines between points corresponding to topics depends on the type of distance to the next word-node, with the shortest line corresponding to the relation of “Repetition”, related to Distance 1 and the longest line corresponding to the relation of “Generalization”, Distance 3.

In the present application, henceforth referred to as “PRAG-GRAPH” (Alexandris, 2020), Distances 1, 2 and 3 correspond to the respective values “1”, “2” and “3” (y=1, y=2 and y=3) depicted in the generated graphic representation. The “Topic Switch” relation (“New Topic”) is assigned value “-1” (Figure 1).

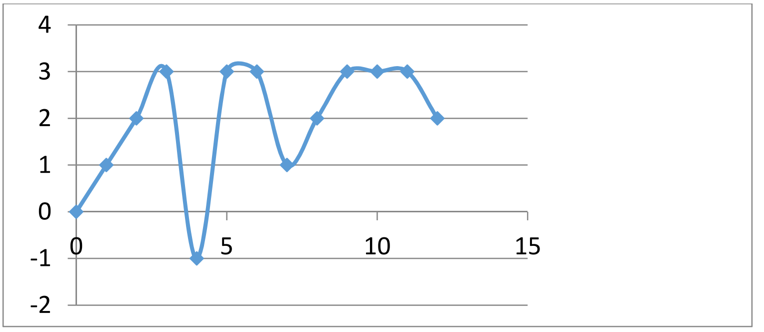

Figure 1. Distances and values between topics
(Mourouzidis, Floros and Alexandris, 2019)

The starting point of the graphic representation of the spoken interaction depicted in Figure 4.4.1 is point zero (0) in the time frame (x), where (x,y) = (0,0). From point 0 there is an occurrence of two (2) keywords and one "Repetition" relation between them, represented as value "1" in the y axis (y), where (REP): 1, corresponding to point (1,1) (Mourouzidis et al., 2019).

From the 1st to the 2nd point (x =2) of spoken interaction, the 3rd keyword demonstrates an "Association" relation with the previous, 2nd keyword, represented as value "2" in the y axis (y), where (ASOC): 2, corresponding to point (2, 2).

In the 3rd point of spoken interaction, there is one more 4rth keyword and its relation with the previous, 3rd keyword is an "Generalization" relation, represented as value "3" in the y axis (y), where (GEN): 3, corresponding to point (3,3).

In the 4rth point of spoken interaction, the 5th keyword demonstrates a "New Topic" relation with the previous, 4rth keyword, represented as value "-1" in the y axis (y), (NEW TOPIC): -1, corresponding to point (4,-1).

Two "Generalization" relations follow in the spoken interaction, where the relation between the 6th keyword and the previous, 5th keyword and the following 7th keyword is represented as value "3" in the y axis (y), where (GEN): 3, corresponding to points (5,3) and (6,3).

Between the 6th point and the 7 th point there is a "Repetition" relation between keywords, represented as value "1" in the y axis (y), where (REP): 1, corresponding to point (7,1). The 8th point is related to the previous 7th point with an "Association" relation between keywords, represented as value "2" in the y axis (y), where (ASOC): 2, corresponding to point (8,2).

A sequence of three "Generalization" relations follow in the 9th to 11th point in the spoken interaction, where the relation between the 10th keyword and the previous, 9th keyword and the following 11 th and 12th keywords is represented as value "3" in the y axis (y), where (GEN): 3, corresponding to points (9,3), (10,3) and (11,3).

Finally, in the 12th point of spoken interaction, there is one more 13th keyword and its relation with the previous, 12th keyword, is an "Association" relation between them (ASSOC): 2, corresponding to point (12, 2) (Mourouzidis et al., 2019).

- **Graphic Representation and Relation Type**

Empirical data so far demonstrates a predominance of "Association" relations, a slightly lower occurrence of "New Topic" and "Generalization" relations and a low occurrence of "Repetition" relations. In the following examples (Figures 2-5) we present dialogue segments of 12 seconds (12 sec) with 13 word-topics and 12 relations between each word-topic, where x = the instances of keywords within the time frame and y = relation between two topics (Mourouzidis et al., 2019).

A remarkable predominance of specific types of relations results to the generation of characteristic types of graphic representations. As previously described above, the overall shape of the generated graphic representation is dependent on the mostly occurring relation types in the discourse structure of the interview or discussion. (Mourouzidis et al., 2019) The graphic representation in Figure 2 demonstrates a high frequency of "Repetition" relations with a development around the value y=1 level, with eight (8) registered "Repetition" relations. The generation of a graphic representation of multiple high peaks is illustrated in the example in Figure 3 corresponding to transcripts of available online interviews. The characteristic plateau-like shape (Mourouzidis et al., 2019) of the peaks in the generated graphic representation is affected by the relatively high percentage of "Association" relations on the value y=2 level.

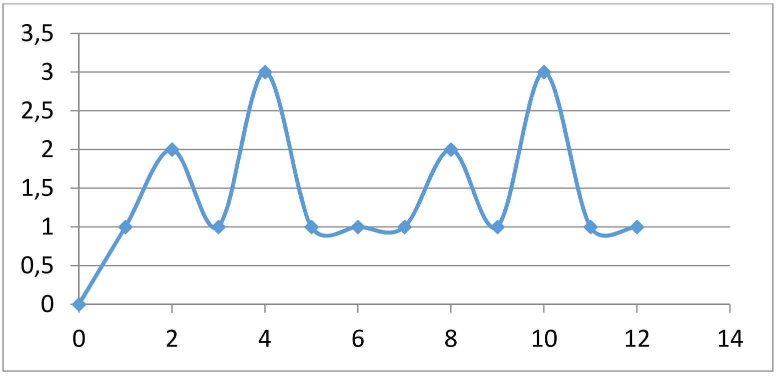

Figure 2. Generated graphical representation with a "Repetition" relation (Mourouzidis, Floros and Alexandris, 2019)

Characteristic graphic representations are generated with a relatively high percentage of "New Topic" (change of topic –"Topic Switch") relations, creating a notable sequence of sharp peaks with multiple sharp drops in the value y=-1 level (Figure 4) (Mourouzidis et al., 2019). The characteristic high plateau-like shape of the peaks in the generated graphic representation (Mourouzidis et al., 2019) is generated by the relatively high percentage of "Generalization" relations on value y=3 level, in which the "Generalization" (GEN) relation between topics is repeated seven (7) times (Figure 5).

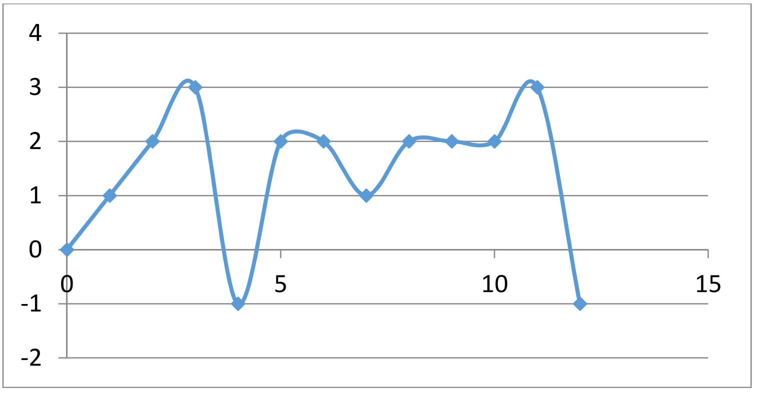

Figure 3: Generated graphical representation with multiple "Association" relations (Mourouzidis, Floros and Alexandris, 2019)

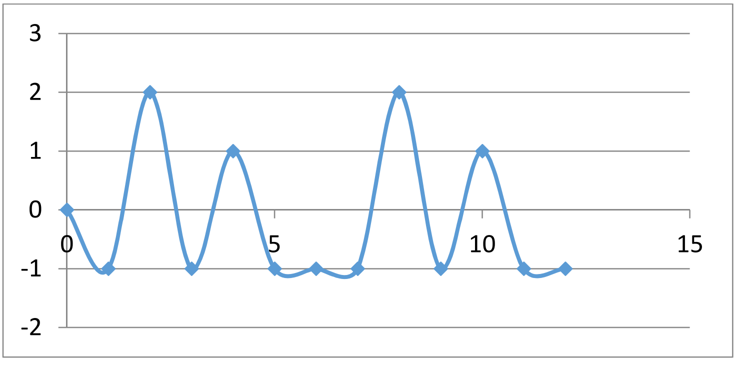

Figure 4. Generated graphical representation with multiple "Topic Switch" relations. (Mourouzidis, Floros and Alexandris, 2019)

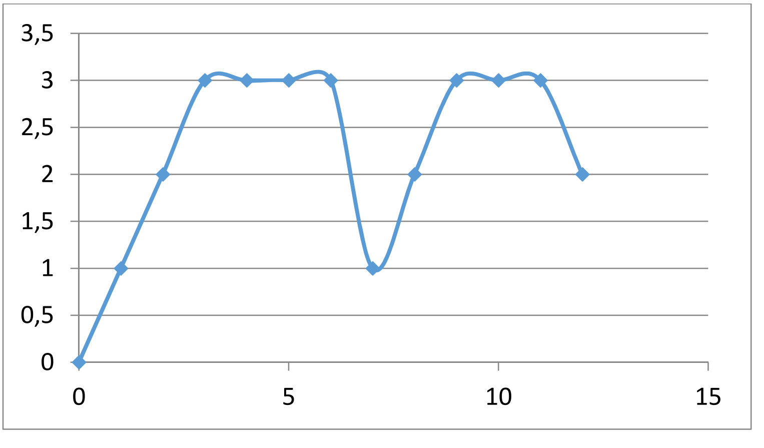

Figure 5. Generated graphical representation with multiple "Generalization" relations. (Mourouzidis, Floros and Alexandris, 2019)

4. Words, Word-Relations and Cognitive Bias

Associations and other types of relations between words can be related to Cognitive Bias, in particular, Lexical Bias (Trofimova, 2014) and can also be used to evaluate interviews or discussions and the existence of Cognitive Bias between the Speakers-Participants. The evaluation of spoken interactions may also concern any existing Confidence Bias (a category of Cognitive Bias) (Hilbert, 2012) of the evaluator.

The following definitions of Confidence Bias (Hilbert, 2012) and Lexical Bias (Trofimova, 2014) are presented as types of Cognitive Bias:

• "The *confidence bias* originates in the internal uncertainty of the judge, rather than environmental uncertainty regarding the objective evidence (like conservatism or the exaggerated expectation bias). It refers to subjective uncertainty about the objective facts (see Wagenaar & Keren, 1985). More specifically, the confidence bias is the experimentally confirmed fact that we tend to be overconfident in our judgments when we are fairly certain about something, and under confident when we have a high level of subjective uncertainty (for discussions see Keren, 1997; Liberman & Tversky, 1993; McClelland and Bolger)" (Hilbert, 2012).

• Lexical Bias: **"**Methodological considerations of studies investigating the semantic perception of lexical material: The main challenge in studying the semantic perception of words is the diversity of meanings and associations that people attribute to the words. Meaning appeared to be individually unique and different not only between people from different cultures, social and family background, but also between all individuals" (Trofimova, 2014).

Simultaneously, the perceived relations-distances between word-topics perceived by the User, related to the above-stated type of Lexical Bias (Trofimova, 2014), are generated and measured in the above-presented form of triple tuples (Example5 and Example 6). Varying degrees of familiarity and bias with topics discussed in spoken journalistic texts result to different perceptions of successful conversations or debates. Therefore, evaluators may "forgive" any complications or mistakes.

It is also observed that data from transcriptions and respective visual representations created so far indicates cases of observed differences between identified topic relations among some journalists that are non-native speakers of English (especially in respect to "ASOC" and "SWITCH"). Differences may in some cases be attributed to lack of world knowledge of the language community concerned (Paltridge, 2012, Hatim, 1997, Wardhaugh, 1992), particularly in non-native speakers. This implies that the international audience may often perceive and receive different and/or incomplete information in respect to evaluating conversation and interaction (Yu et al., 2010, Alexandris, 2010, Ma, 2010, Pan, 2000). Topics and words generating diverse reactions and choices from Users result to the generation of different forms of generated visual representations for the same conversation or interaction (Example 7):

Example 7 (Alexandris, 2018a)

• “Country Z” – “defence spending” (ASOC) or (SWITCH)
• “Country Z” — “defence spending” (ASOC)
• “Country Z” / “defence spending” (SWITCH)

In Example 7, the “Country Z” (in this case, the United States of America) can be associated with “defence spending” for the American audience (ASOC). For an international audience, the concepts “United States of America” and “defence spending” may be perceived as unrelated to each other and are, therefore, evaluated as a change of topic (SWITCH) in a discussion or interview.

- **Lexical Bias in “Gravity” and “Evocative” words**

Lexical Bias (Trofimova, 2014) concerning the semantic perception of words is observed to be associated with “Gravity” and “Evocative” words (Alexandris, 2018b), constituting commonly used, semantically “primitive” nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs that may sometimes be problematic when it comes to their correct interpretation and transfer in another language. Both “Gravity” words and “Evocative” words are related to socio-cultural elements and can, therefore, be perceived in a different manner by native speakers and the international audience. Differences in the perception of “Gravity” and “Evocative” words may be linked to Cognitive Bias in regard to their meaning and to the evaluation of the overall spoken interaction.

In the research presented, Cognitive Bias is attributed to a large extent to current political and context-specific associations which may vary among Speakers. However, “Gravity” words (for example, “country” or “people”) and “Evocative” words may be the same for many Speakers belonging to the same native language and/or same language community (Alexandris, 2020). (Example 8, Example 9 and Example 10).

Example 8 (Alexandris, 2020).

Fragments of interviews and relation of topics (names of countries, nations and people withheld):

• Citizens – Laws – *National* – state – *country* Nationals – minority group – people – country – *country’s* culture – nationalist – nationalism – violence – Law

Example 9 (Alexandris, 2020).

Fragments of interviews and relation of topics (names of countries, nations and people withheld):

• Country’s Economy – country’s people – country’s Economy – country’s people – country’s foreign policy (with country X) – country X’s people – country’ Xs foreign policy (with other countries) – country’s people

Example 10

Fragments of interviews and relation of topics: Sequence of associations (names of countries, nations and people withheld):

• military confrontation – chemical weapons – strikes – danger – crisis – consequences – punishment

It is often observed that the semantic equivalent of the same word in one language sometimes may appear more formal or with more gravity than in another language. These words with "gravity" in their meaning may either emphasize the role of the word in an utterance or be related to word play and subtle suggested information. In particular, the presence of such words may contribute to the degree of formality or intensity of conveyed information in a spoken utterance.

These differences between languages are often related to polysemy, where the possible meanings and uses of a word seem to "cast a shadow" over its most commonly used meaning. Therefore, the most commonly used meaning, appearing as the "first" meaning in a dictionary, online lexicon or translation memory, may not always correspond to a correct transfer in the target language.

For example, the word "lazy" has a negative connotation in English, but in some contexts, it is also associated with the meaning of "laid back" ("a lazy afternoon"). The equivalent of "lazy" in German, the word "faul" may, in some contexts, appear to be of too negative "gravity" to accurately correspond to the English word "lazy" (Alexandris, 2018b). We note that in German the word "faul" also means "rotten", for example, "faule Eier" ("rotten eggs"). Another example of polysemy which may be related to the "gravity" of a word connected to its multiple meanings is "logos" in Greek, which is connected to meanings such as "speech", "logic", "intelligence", "reason", "word of honour", "ratio" (in mathematics) and even "God" (in religious texts) (Alexandris, 2018b).

Furthermore, some words may contain semantic features characterizing them with exact opposite of "gravity", namely a lack of "gravity". A typical example is the word "pink" in American English (Example 11), even the word "nice" (Example 12), as opposed to the word "trust" (Example 12). In both cases, "Gravity" is observed to be a feature to apply in both cases and can be marked as either "+ Gravity" or "-Gravity".

Such words can often be related to Lexical Bias concerning semantic perception (Trofimova, 2014) (presented in the following section). International speakers may misinterpret the intention of a native speaker due to the "gravity" of words in their native tongue: Word play and subtle suggested information may often be unnoticed by an international public in political discussions and interviews.

Words with perceived "gravity" in their semantic content that can create complications in their correct interpretation, transfer and/or processing are linked to the following properties: (a) Commonly used, semantically "primitive" nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs and (b) Polysemy – multiple uses and meanings.

Example 11 (Alexandris, 2020)

"**pink**" (American English)
pink ("tickled pink" – American English: very pleased)

https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/tickled-pink
pinkie/ pinky = the smallest finger of a person's hand (American English)
https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pinkie#translations

and that really, truly, deep down and with a pinky swear,

https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/07/the-russians-are-coming/565478/

Example 12 (Alexandris, 2020)

Transcribed Spoken Test:

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with BBC HardTalk 720-16-04-2018

Question: You say there is no **trust**. You mean zero **trust** now between Russia and the United States?

Sergey Lavrov: I said they are losing the last remnants of trust – which is not yet zero.

Question: Not yet zero. I just wonder: as Foreign Minister of Russia when you wake up in the morning and you read on Twitter the words of the United States President and the Commander-in-Chief saying in essence: Get ready Russia; our nice, new, smart missiles are coming – what do you make of that?

Sergey Lavrov: Well that the President of the United States writes his tweet.

Question: And your response to those tweets is?

Sergey Lavrov: Well, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, as you know. So, we waited for these smart new – what else was there? – **nice** missiles to be used at the attack and we calculated that two thirds of them did not reach their target because they were intercepted.

Another word group that can be related to Lexical Bias concerning their semantic perception (Trofimova, 2014) is a group which we refer to as "evocative" words. Similarly to the above-described category, "evocative" words are commonly used, semantically "primitive" nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs. Their evocative element concerns their "deeper" meanings related to their use in Tradition, in Music and in Literature and sometimes may be related to emotional impact in discussions and speeches.

Since this word category concerns common every-day words, their evocative features are less obvious and are not always consciously used or perceived by native speakers. As in previously presented words with "gravity" in their meaning, with "evocative" words, word play and subtle nuances in expressions may often be unnoticed by an international audience.

In contrast to “Gravity” words, “Evocative” words usually contribute to a descriptive or emotional tone in an utterance. These common words may be related to concepts such as colours, for example,“grau” (“grey”) in German or the natural world, for example, “thalassa” (“sea”) in Greek or “moon” in English.

Words with “evocative” usage in specific contexts often co-occur with words with a positive or a negative connotation or with a scholarly or vulgar usage. For example, the word “Hund” (German: “dog”) co-occurs with the word “Verlierer” (German: “loser”) and is used with its evocative properties (Example 13).

Example 13 (Alexandris, 2020)

https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik/kommentar-zum-aerger-in-der-cdu-angela-merkel-muss-ihren-politischen-nachlass-regeln-29639694

Berliner Zeitung, 20.07.2018

Entsetzen, Enttäuschung und Unruhe zeigt sich schließlich in ihrer Partei, die darin zumindest fürs Erste (mal) sogar die SPD übertrifft, was man erstmal schaffen muss. Wochen- und monatelange Verhandlungen sind vorbei, die Phase der Ungewissheit beendet – und die CDU schleicht sich davon wie ein geprügelter **Hund,** ein reichlich gefledderter Verlierer, und die Müdigkeit der Vorsitzenden nach langen Nächten tut ihr Übriges. Ein Aufbruch soll die neue Regierung qua Eigendefinition vermitteln. Der größte Partner überlässt das erstmal den anderen.

[…]

Erneuerung ist das Stichwort – das Interessante ist, dass die Erneuerung darin bestehen soll, ein Stück weit zurückzukehren zur „alten CDU“, wenn auch nicht gleich zum Kinder-Küche-Kirche-Modell vielleicht.

These words are not easily detected with automatic procedures. However, in many cases they either receive prosodic emphasis and/or their phonetic-phonological features are intensified when articulated by native speakers. These elusive words are linked to the following properties: (a) Commonly used, semantically “primitive” nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, (b Commonly used in tradition, in music and in literature and (c) Often have prosodic and phonetic-phonological features intensified. The intensification of phonetic-phonological features and/or the use of prosodic emphasis in “evocative” words underlines the “deeper” levels of the semantics of the word in question.

This inherently “deep”, complex semantic information is stressed but not determined by Prosody. “Gravity” words and “Evocative” words can be related to language-specific and culture-specific word categories with similar complex semantics and characteristics defined in other languages such as “Kenayeh” (allusion) words in Arabic and Persian (Kheirandish and Dorri, 2013).

The detection and processing of “Gravity” and “Evocative” words is not easily integrated in automatic procedures. A more realistic approach would be including this word group in post-processing procedures with the aid of resources identifying typical contexts in which the words occur, as well as possible collocations (Alexandris, 2020). The use of transcribers or other speech processing tools is required for the integration and processing of distinctive phonetic and phonological features or any other form of special prosodic features, if applicable (Alexandris, 2020).

5. Words Generating Tension in Spoken Interviews and Discussions

Word-topics may also be linked to the generation of tension between Speakers-Participants. Word-topics may ignite tension by Association, but also by any existing socio-culturally determined semantic features, such as the case of "Gravity" and "Evocative" words. Points of possible tension and/or conflict between Speakers-Participants are referred to as "hot spots" in previous research (Alexandris, 2019, Alexandris 2020). In this case, the words and related topics related to the generation of tension between Speakers-Participants may be detected in the signalized points of tension. Special emphasis is placed in discussions and interviews containing larger speech segments where there is a specific agenda and a defined protocol in turn-taking (in contrast to spontaneous turn-taking, among other turn-taking forms, Taboada, 2006, Wilson and Wilson, 2005, Sacks et al., 1974). In the case of discussions and interviews containing larger speech segments, phenomena signalizing tension and conflict such as avoidance or switching of topic (Alexandris et al., 2015) or interruptions are less common than the case of multiparty-discussions or interactions with small speech segments. However, in the case of larger speech segments, tension can be registered with the detection and signalization of "hot spots", as described in previous research (Alexandris, 2019, Alexandris 2020).

- **Signalizing Points of Tension in Spoken Interviews and Discussions**

The signalization of "hot spots" is based on the violation of the Quantity, Quality and Manner Maxims of the Gricean Cooperativity Principle (Grice, 1975). Cognitive Bias is registered by comparing content of the Speaker turns in the signalized "hot spots" and assigning a respective value (Alexandris, 2019).

In a discussion or interview, "hot spots" concern speech segments where there is a recognition of speaker turns, namely a switch between Speaker 1 and Speaker 2 by the Speech Recognition module of the System / transcription tool. Even if Speakers-Participants display a calm and composed behaviour, the signalization of multiple "hot spots" indicates a more argumentative than a collaborative interaction.

A "hot spot" (Alexandris, 2019) consists of the pair of utterances of both speakers, namely a question-answer pair or a statement-response pair or any other type of relation between speaker turns. In the case of automatic detection, (Alexandris, 2019), the first 60 words of the second speaker's (Speaker 2) utterance are processed (approximately 1–3 sentences, depending on length, with the average sentence length of 15–20 words, Cutts, 2013) and the last 60 words of the first speaker's (Speaker 1) utterance are processed (approximately 1–3 sentences, depending on length).

The speaker turns are extracted to a separate template for further processing, containing not only the detected segments but also the complete utterances consisting of both speaker turns of Speaker 1 and Speaker 2.

Example 14. Signalization of multiple "hot spots" in a spoken text segment (Alexandris, 2020).

Spoken text (Overview):
(S1 /S2 = Speaker1 / Speaker 2) Speaker turns in a transcription tool:

Speaker1 / [text]
Speaker 2 [text]
--- {…}
Speaker 1 / [text] **[hot-spot-1]**
Speaker 2 [text] **[hot-spot-1]**
--- {…}
Speaker 1 / [text]
Speaker 2 [text]
--- {…}
Speaker 1 / [text] **[hot-spot-2]**
Speaker 2 [text] **[hot-spot-2]**
--- {…}
Speaker 1 / [text] **[hot-spot-3]**
Speaker 2 [text] **[hot-spot-3]**
--- {…}
Speaker 1 / [text]
Speaker 2 [text]
--- {…}
Speaker 1 / [text] **[hot-spot-4]**
Speaker 2 [text] **[hot-spot-4]**
--- {…}
Speaker 1 / [text]
Speaker 2 [text]
--- {…}
Speaker 1 / [text] **[hot-spot-5]**
Speaker 2 [text] **[hot-spot-5]**
--- {…}

Prosodic emphasis is included in the conditions related to "hot spot" identification (Alexandris, 2019). Specifically, for a segment of speaker turns to be automatically identified as a "hot spot", at least two of the following three conditions (1), (2) and (3) must apply to one or to both of the Speaker's utterances:

(1) "Additional, modifying features: In one or in both speakers' utterances in the segment of speaker turns there is at least one phrase containing a sequence of two adjectives (ADJ ADJ) (a) or an adverb and an adjective (or more adjectives) (b) (ADV ADJ) or two adverbs (ADV ADV) (c). These forms of adjectival or adverbial phrases

are detectable with a POS Tagger (for example, the Stanford POS Tagger)" (Alexandris, 2019).

(2) "Reference to the interaction itself and to its participants with negation. In one or in both speakers' utterances, the subject of the sentence containing the negation is "I" or "you" ((I/You) "don't", "do not", "cannot") (a) and in the verb phrase (VP) there is at least one speech-related or behaviour verb-stem referring to the dialogue itself (b) (for example, "speak", "listen", "guess", "understand"). This applies to parts of speech other than verbs (i.e. "guessing", "listener") as well as to words constituting parts of expressions related to speech or behaviour ("conclusions", "words", "mouth", "polite", "nonsense", "manners"). The different forms of negation are detectable with a POS Tagger. The respective words and word categories may constitute a small set of entries in a specially created lexicon or may be retrieved from existing databases or WordNets" (Alexandris, 2019).

(3) "Prosodic emphasis and/or Exclamations. (a) Exclamations include expressions such as such as "Look", "Wait" and "Stop". As in the above-described case (2), the respective words and word categories may constitute a small set of entries in a specially created lexicon or may be retrieved from existing databases or WordNets. (b) Prosodic emphasis, detected in the speech processing module, may occur in one or more of the above-described words of categories (1a, 1b, 1c, 2a and 2b) or in the noun or verb following (modified by) 1a, 1b and 1c" (Alexandris, 2019).

Conditions (1), (2) are directly or indirectly related to flouting of Maxims of the Gricean Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975). In condition (1), the Speaker violates the Maxim of Quantity in the Gricean Cooperative Principle.

Specifically, in 1a, 1b and 1c, there is extra information added to the basic content of the utterance consisting the necessary information required to fulfil the Maxim of Quantity of the Gricean Cooperative Principle ("Do not make your contribution more informative than is required").

Condition (2) implies a violation of the Gricean Cooperative Principle in respect to the Maxim of Quality ("1. Do not say what you believe to be false", "2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence", Grice, 1975) and/or in respect to the Maxim of Manner (Submaxim 2. "Avoid ambiguity", Grice, 1975) in the utterance of the previous Speaker. In the case of 2a and 2b, the Speaker perceives a violation of the Gricean Cooperative Principle by the previous Speaker. Here, in 2a and 2b, the content of the Speaker's utterance refers to the dialogue itself, mostly functioning as a comment and is not limited to the current topic in question. The content of the previous Speaker's utterance is considered to be unacceptable, ambiguous, false or controversial by the Speaker (Alexandris, 2019).

In an average time of discussions and interviews containing larger speech segments in the Media (30–45 minutes), the benchmark for evaluating a remarkable degree of tension in a discussion is signalized by multiple "hot spots" detected and not sporadic occurrences of "hot spots". Thus, the number of 12 "hot spot" occurrences in longer speech segments in question (30–45 mins) signalizes a low degree of tension.

A remarkable degree of tension in a 30–45 minute discussion or interview is related to a number of at least 4 detected “hot spots” (where the number of 3 hot spots constitutes a marginal value). A typical example of a dialogue with many detected points of possible tension and/or conflict between Speakers-Participants is an approximately 32 minute long interview with seven (7) registered “hot spots” (Example: BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation: HARDtalk interview by journalist Stephen Sackur on 16th April 2018, name of interviewee withheld).

In a semi-automatic procedure of “taking the temperature” of a transcribed dialogue, the number of detected points of possible tension and/or conflict between Speakers-Participants is measured and calculated in relation to the duration of the discussion or interview in the Media (Alexandris, 2019). Specifically, the benchmark for evaluating a remarkable degree of tension concerns the calculation of the time of discussion / interview (for example, 35 mins) and the number of “hot spots” detected in Speaker turns. The defined benchmark (Y) for evaluating Speaker behaviour is the number of minutes divided by the number of identified speech segments signalized as “hot spots” which should contain a single digit number (< 10), if the above-described minimal number of at least 4 detected “hotspots” is calculated. For example, in a 35 minute interview with a number of 5 (five) detected “hotspots”, the value is “7” (seven). In this example, the value is below the “Tension” benchmark (Y < 10) and, therefore, the interview is considered to contain several points of possible tension and/or conflict between Speakers-Participants (Alexandris, 2019).

- **Words Generating Tension in Spoken Interviews and Discussions**

The signalized “hot-spots” as points of tension between Speakers-Participants may be depicted as a shaded area (Alexandris et al., 2020) in the above-presented generated graphic representations as visual representations of dialog flow and the general pragmatic structure of discussions and interviews (Mourouzidis et al., 2019). Since the generated visual representations are based on the relations of word-topics of each segment of the discussion or interview, with the activation of the “Identify Relation” command (Mourouzidis et al., 2019), words and word-topics generating tension may also be identified by the User. This is illustrated by the following example:

E x a m p l e 1 5. Words generating “hot spots” in a spoken text segments

Speaker 1 / [text-chemical weapon] **[hot-spot-1**]
Speaker 2 [text] **[hot-spot-1**]

Speaker 1 / [text-agreement with Country Y] **[hot-spot-1**]
Speaker 2 [text] **[hot-spot-1**]

Speaker 1 / [text-(human) rights] **[hot-spot-1**]
Speaker 2 [text] **[hot-spot-1**]

The generated points of tension and/or conflict and related benchmarks contributes to an evaluation of Speakers-Participants behaviour and intentions during the interaction.

6. Evaluation of Speaker Behaviour and Further Research

The above-described features, graphic representations, word sequences and values enable the evaluation of the behaviour of Speakers-Participants, depicting possible instances of Lexical Bias (Cognitive Bias) and may also serve for by-passing Confidence Bias of the User-Evaluator of the recorded and transcribed discussion or interview. Furthermore, the above-presented information also allows the identification and detection of additional, “hidden” illocutionary acts not restricted to “Obtaining Information Asked” or “Providing Information Asked”, as defined by the framework of the interview or discussion (Mourouzidis et al., 2019). In spoken discussions and interviews, the illocutionary act (Searle,1969, Austin, 1962) performed by the Speaker concerned may not be restricted to “Obtaining Information Asked” or “Providing Information Asked” and other or additional intentions regarding presence and role in the interaction may be involved. For example, a Speaker may focus in (purposefully) creating tension in the interaction, in emphasizing opinion (or the policy of the network concerned) or in consistently avoiding the topics addressed and not sharing any information, demonstrating a mere presence in the discussion or interview.

Speech acts performed by one or multiple Speakers-Participants usually involve complex illocutionary acts beyond the defined framework of the interaction. This feature differentiates speech acts in two-party or multiparty discussions or interviews from task-specific dialogues (Tung et al., 2013) and typical collaborative dialogues (Wang et al., 2013, Yang et al., 2012). In particular, the illocutionary acts not restricted to “Obtaining Information Asked” or “Providing Information Asked” may be related to one or more categories of speech acts concerning less explicitly expressed Speaker intentions. These speech acts and their respective illocutionary acts cannot be defined, since they are not explicitly expressed (Alexandris, 2020).

However, three frequently detected categories of pointers to implied (“Hidden”) Speech Acts are presented, namely the “Presence”, “Express Policy” and “Make Impression” pointers. We note that all three Speech Act pointers may be connected to each other and may even occur at the same time. The “Make Impression” Speech Act pointer is distinguished from the other two Speech Act pointers since it is identifiable on the Prosodic-Paralinguistic Level (Mourouzidis et al., 2019, Alexandris, 2020).

The “Presence” (Speech Act) pointer is identified by the Speaker’s reluctance to answer questions, avoidance of topics, or a polite or symbolic presence in the discussion or interview but not an active participation. Besides the Speaker’s silence (Silence/No Answer) as response to questions or statements, a “Presence” pointer is signalized by remaining in the same “safe” topic by repeating the same subject (“Repetition”) or by introducing a “safer” and more general topic (“Generalization”) or a different topic ("New Topic or Topic Switch"). "Presence" Speech Act pointers can be identified by a high frequency of one or more of the above-described relations, especially in combination with instances of no response (Silence/No Answer) (Du et al., 2017, Mourouzidis et al., 2019, Alexandris, 2020).

With the "Express Policy" pointer, there is a direct or even blatant expression of opinion or policy. In this case, the Speaker may persist on discussing the same topic of interest by repeating the same subject ("Repetition") or may try to direct the discussion in the topic(s) or interest by "Topic Switch" ("New Topic"). In contrast to the case of the "Presence" pointer, in the "Express Policy" pointer the repeated topic(s) or the topics introduced are all – or almost all – semantically or associatively related (Mourouzidis et al., 2019, Alexandris, 2020). With the "Make Impression" Speech Act pointer, the Speaker purposefully creates tension in the interview or discussion. This is distinguished from the previous Speech Act pointers in respect to features in the Prosodic-Paralinguistic Level of one (or all) of the Speakers, including rise of amplitude, prosodic emphasis and other prosodic features, gestures and facial expressions (Mourouzidis et al., 2019) (Alexandris, 2020).

The above-described pointers of pointers to implied ("Hidden") Speech Acts may also be linked to applications such as alternative approaches to Sentiment Analysis strategies, since they revolve around the role of words and the relations between them. However, in this type of application several factors should be taken into account, including the link of the words and their relations with the Prosodic Level and the Paralinguistic Level. In applications such as Sentiment Analysis, the visibility of all types of the information content, including information not uttered should not be excluded. Information not uttered is not only restricted to features in the the Prosodic Level and the Paralinguistic Level but also in the reaction and overall behaviour of the Speakers-Participants. include the processing. Registering and analysing Speaker behaviour contribute to achieving visibility of various types of the information content. Visibility of all information content facilitates its processing in Natural Language Processing (NLP) applications, including Machine Translation and Data Mining (Opinion Mining-Sentiment Analysis, Information Extraction, Information Retrieval and other Data Mining applications). Even though most recent NLP applications process word groups and word sequences with the use of neural networks, the complexity of the content of spoken political and journalistic texts requires annotated corpora, at least as initial training and test sets. This can be achieved with the registration and analysis of Speaker behaviour, which can produce the appropriate type of annotated corpora.

The above-described evaluation of Speaker behaviour and possible Natural Language Processing (NLP) applications are based on the identification and registration of word and word topics and the relations between them as well as on the identification and registration of word and word topics and the respective reactions linked to them, either by Speakers-Participants or by the audience.

The above-described approaches allow the registration of complex and implied information, indications of Speaker's attitude and intentions and can contribute to evaluating the behaviour of Speakers-Participants. This registration also allows the identification of words generating positive, negative or diverse reactions, their relation to Cognitive Bias and their impact to a national and international audience within a context of international news networks and social media.

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Research article

International Negotiation Competition For Law Students: National Rounds Outward Glance

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Abstract. Language is an essential instrument for many professionals and lawyers are among those who occupy the first lines. The lawyers use the language to address the court, interview a client, negotiate a contract or a dispute. Communicative competence is crucial for the legal profession and participating in competitions for law students is one of the ways to foster and master it alongside taking traditional classes and courses. The article gives a brief overview of existing international competitions for law students and aims at finding ways of improving the International Negotiation Competition (INC) national rounds organization. This goal is approached by conducting a survey among former participants of INC national rounds in Russia and Norway and analyzing its results. The conclusions prompted are as follows: to conduct timely surveys among all participates, to engage former participants in national rounds organization, to work out new rules for holding online events.

Keywords: essential skills, communication, law students, negotiation, international competitions, lawyering skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding what your client wants and needs in addition to their stated positions, and trying to find a workable solution, is far more important than the legal rights and wrongs of what has taken place. In situations like these lawyers spend a large proportion of their time negotiating effective settlements.

Lawyers are negotiators. Many lawyers are not aware enough of what skills they are using when they negotiate. Negotiation skills are important for all practicing lawyers. Lawyers in any situation need to explore all potential steps up the courthouse stairs for resolving disputes in their client's best interests. Lawyers need to consider and advise their clients on the principle that parties should be able to choose how to resolve their disputes and that litigation should be a last resort. Could this dispute be solved with help of conversations dialogue assistance, negotiation, mediation, arbitration (these are all alternative dispute resolution (ADR) methods), or is litigation the best way? It is an ethical obligation to consider all those steps and with the client's best interests of time, money, and emotional costs in mind. This is in addition to the lawyer's thorough knowledge of the facts of the dispute, the law, and the procedures relevant to the case.

Around the world, independent of how far the legal communities have come in developing ADR methods, most disputes are resolved by ADR methods rather than proceeding to court.

Negotiation can only happen if the parties communicate constructively, so lawyers need to develop and use essential skills. Among those skills are lawyers' use of empathy, perspective, and personal connection with the client to feel whole and satisfied. Lawyers' ability to develop emotional intelligence, use active listening, and build relationships are all-important negotiation skills for lawyers.

Where and how can lawyers-to-be gain this skill?

1. International Competitions for Law Students: Skills Training in 'Real Life'

1.1. International competitions for law students: brief overview

The competence approach to education has shifted the emphasis from knowledge acquisition to skills mastering and legal education is not an exception. Surveys of employers and newly qualified lawyers regularly conducted by different bodies and researchers show the importance of skills, either taught within a curriculum or gained through extracurricular activities, over knowledge both for career and professional success (Case, 2013, Vyushkina, 2018, Martin, 2019). More and more discussions and conferences in different countries are held to improve the ways of teaching future lawyers.

However, changing law school curricula is a rather slow and difficult process in any country. Many "practicing lawyers continue to challenge the legal academy to provide more instruction in skills and practical training, and spend less time focusing on esoteric issues and scholarly debates" (Thompson, 2009), although some law schools do have "client interviewing, case preparation, and trial advocacy" (Levinson, 2010), lawyering and even legal negotiations in their course catalogs (Chapman n.d., Lewis n.d.). Moreover, for example, American Bar Association expects students to have "at least six credits in experiential courses as a condition of graduation" (Kruse, 2015).

There is a positive move towards teaching a variety of skills within curricula but for a rather long time, one of a few ways for students to develop lawyering skills has been participation in competitions for law students along with law clinics and internships. Not considering legal writing which has always been paid much attention in law schools, there are three types of such competitions: moot courts, negotiation, and client counseling (Teply, 2003). Moreover, recently mediation tournaments for law schools have gained popularity as well (INADR, SIMI).

When the first competitions appeared (e.g.: The Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition in 1960 (USA), the Telders International Law Moot Court Competition in 1977 (Netherlands), teaching lawyering skills within law school curricula was not even discussed, and participating in such events was a rare opportunity for law students to gain a kind of 'real-life' experience. Today skill-oriented courses have become integral but not numerous parts of curricula. As for the list of competitions for law students, it has grown rather long with moot courts, no doubt, leading in number.

Wikipedia enumerates more than twenty moot courts held in different countries and covering diverse subject matters: from a broad area of public international law to aviation law or space law. Qualification of teams for participation varies: some competitions require to go through national rounds and/or pre-moots, others look at written submissions, almost all have a registration fee. Law students have a great opportunity to dive into the professional atmosphere of a trial or appellate court, to try on roles of applicants and respondents, to master written and oral communication skills which are considered to be among the ten fundamental lawyering skills (MacCrate, 1996: 645).

Turning to contests not connected with court representation the Brown Mosten International Client Consultation Competition (1985) is still a unique event aimed at mastering students' skills of interviewing and counseling, as well as communication skills necessary for practicing law. To participate in the ICCC a team must win a National Competition which might have a slightly different name, e.g. in England and Wales it is called "The Client Interviewing Competition" (https://www.clientinterviewing.com/). In common law jurisdictions, such as Canada or the USA, with a rather long history of competitions for law students, teams are to go through regional selection as well.

Mediation tournaments vary in organization. The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Mediation week is held annually in Paris and brings together professional mediators, academics, law, and business students. Professional mediators take part either as judges or mediators facilitating the moot negotiations between students' teams composed of a 'lawyer' and a 'businessman' (ICC n.d.). INADR organize International

Law School Mediation Tournaments at the Law School at Loyola University in Chicago, IL, in even years, and outside of the U.S. in odd years (INADR n.d.). During these tournaments in three preliminary rounds law students have an opportunity to take on the role of a mediator, a lawyer representing a client, and a client. And while the first two roles require professional knowledge and skills, the latter demands a great deal of acting.

1.2. International negotiation competition

The International Negotiation Competition (INC) is the oldest one among such kind contests followed by Intercollegiate Negotiation Competition in Japan, HSF-NLU International Negotiation Competition in India, and some others. Structured on the American Bar Association Negotiation competition model the INC is a legal negotiation simulation aimed at concluding/contracting an international transaction/employment agreement or settling a dispute.

Teams composed of two law students meet in three or four rounds of two-, three-, or four-party negotiations to do their best in representing their clients' (a business or a person) interests. Competition participants have about three weeks to get prepared after receiving general and confidential information from the INC Executive Committee. The rounds are judged by practicing lawyers (mostly from a country hosting the competition), teachers of law, negotiations or related subjects, former participants, professionals somehow involved in negotiations.

Unlike many other competitions for law students, there are no semi-final and final rounds: all teams compete in all rounds. Evaluation criteria are aimed at assessing the process of negotiations itself and a negotiation result is just one criterion among many rubrics taken into consideration by judges. Preparation beginning from identifying the client's interests and goals to choosing strategy and style, communication with a partner and teamwork along with interaction with the other party, skills of gaining and sharing or concealing information are aspects the judges evaluate, to name a few.

Another important aspect of the International Negotiation Competition is a one-day workshop and/or conference where law students, judges, organizers, and other participants have a great opportunity to listen to outstanding and experienced negotiators (e.g. Ron Shapiro in 2017, Oslo), learn about cross-cultural issues from joint presentations of professors representing diverse regions of the world (e.g. the USA, Qatar, Singapore, Denmark), discuss and solve problems together with participants from other countries within workshop sessions.

The INC gives law students a unique opportunity to gain international professional experience, to familiarize themselves with new cultures, to make new friends. There is also a language challenge: for many participants (about a half or even more) English is a second language. It can easily become much more complicated for both sides when you negotiate in a foreign language and a cross-culture environment. Students can check their communication skills with foreigners, and those who have not considered this aspect while preparing for the competition usually have problems in rounds where they face language and cultural challenges. This is true for both native speakers of English, who might think that as English is their mother tongue they are in a preferable position, and non-native speakers of English, who might not expect struggling with some other foreign accent of a team from a non-English-speaking country.

The INC is run by the INC Executive Committee chaired by Professor of Law, Dr. Larry Teply (Creighton University, USA), and including representatives of both Americas, Asia, Europe, and Australia. Meeting face-to-face in full once a year during the international rounds members of the committee are in constant touch through e-mail or other Internet services dealing with current issues as well as responding to unexpected concerns and difficulties (as the INC-2020 postponement due to the pandemic situation in the world).

The INC is a competition for National rounds winners and representatives of about 30 countries. Winners from North and South Americas, Europe, Asia, and Australia have participated since the first competition was held in 1998. Then students from four universities from Australia, Canada, England, and the United States met. New country entrance to the competition is fixed in the INC Rules in such a way that it launches national rounds in that county the following year.

1.3. INC national rounds

In different countries, the level of INC development varies greatly, for example, in the US law students are to go through regional contests to get to national rounds, so the competition is very intense. In smaller (in terms of territory/population/number of universities) countries there might be only several Law Schools involved in national rounds but that does not mean an easy victory for teams. Other reasons for a low representation of law schools in national rounds can be as follows: the novelty of the event, insufficient level of teaching skill-oriented courses and as a consequence a problem with coaching, difficulties with judge recruiting, and a variety of others caused by country-specific peculiarities.

Today the INC has its representatives in twenty-five countries (plus four countries in a process of changing representation) most of whom are university teachers, in some European countries ELSA (European Law Students' Association) runs national competitions (INC n.d.). Sometimes a country enters the INC, participates a few times, and then ceases to take part in the competition due to different reasons: lack of academic support, shortage of financing, deficit of sponsors, etc.

So, how can a country enter the INC? If a country is not represented in the INC, any University Law School (in a broad sense) can apply to the INC Executive Committee to be registered for the competition and the committee register the team provided the University commits to organize INC national rounds in the following academic year. That was the way Russia and Norway followed.

Russia entered the INC in 2013 and Norway the year after, and are regularly represented at the international rounds of the competition but coordinating authorities for organizing national rounds differ. In Norway, ELSA is in charge of national rounds while in Russia, the National representative initiates the competition in different universities.

Russian Law School curricula are knowledge-oriented (Vyushkina, 2018: 253) and, at first, it was necessary to persuade university authorities that the INC was worth being involved in. It is necessary to note, that students responded with enthusiasm to this new extracurricular activity, shared information about the competition through social nets, and after the first four-team competition at Saratov State Law Academy in 2014 twelve teams were representing eight universities participating in INC-Russia-2020 at RUDN-University, Moscow.

To give momentum to further development of the INC in Russia it is necessary to accomplish several tasks: to promote competition publicity; to find partners and sponsors among international law firms; to expand international cooperation, in particular, to invite guest speakers for an educational day of the event. It is the latter that has made this collaborative work possible as authors together ran the INC-2019 in Moscow.

Active involvement of law firms, labor organizations, and valuable contribution of practicing lawyers, psychologists, and mediators in training teams and organizing national rounds allowed Norway to successfully host the INC in 2017 with a record 32 teams participating in the outstanding international event.

In Norway, ELSA hosts the regional round located at the three law faculties, Tromsø, Bergen, and Oslo. In each city, a local law firm organizes negotiation lectures and runs the regional competition. The regional winners meet in Oslo and in a three-day competition a national winner is designated. Because of the pandemic, the national final was held online via zoom for the first time. A great success, and among several reasons because we could be joined by skilled negotiation professional judges from all over the world. The judges came from 14 different countries and provided a cross-cultural chard never experienced in a national final before. Something we would never have the ability to sponsor if we hadn't run the competition online.

One more important thing for developing the INC at the national level is getting constant feedback from participants, judges, coaches, host institutions, and guests, to improve national rounds organization and to expand the university's involvement. This has become as relevant as ever because we need new solutions in lockdown situations banning any mass meetings and events.

2. INC and INC-national Participants Survey

There is no doubt that participation in INC national rounds and further the INC itself gives students priceless experience and motivates for career and professional growth. But for the successful promotion of this educational event at the national level, it is necessary to know what participants like about the competition. It is also necessary to know what they want to change, to what extent they are ready to be involved in the organization of future competitions, and how to solve a new challenge connected with lockdown due to the pandemic situation in the world.

2.1. Materials and methods

A survey was conducted among law students and graduates, former participants of INC-Norway and INC-Russia so the sample can be called a convenience one (Long, 2005). A questionnaire was sent to respondents by e-mail and through social networks: each of the article authors sent the questionnaire to the participants of their country respectively. Then the authors exchanged the results and analyzed them.

The offered questionnaire consisted of two parts containing ten rubrics. The first part was intended for all respondents (six questions) and the second part for those who participated in the international rounds.

The former competition participants were asked how many times they had participated in national rounds, what they had found most difficult in their experience (a multiple choice question with several options and blanks for their answers and comments), whether they had been taught negotiation within the curriculum and if no whether they would like to have such course, how useful the judges' comments had been, and whether the experience had been useful. Those who participated in the international rounds were asked the same questions connected with the competition and whether they would like to be involved in national rounds as judges or some other capacity.

2.2. Results and discussion

Predictably, not all former participants replied to authors' letters but the provided feedback is informative and thoughtful. INC-Russia engaged sixty-four participants in seven competitions (2014–2020), twenty-seven having responded. Fifty-four law students took part in six INC-Norway national competitions (2015–2020) and eleven answered the questionnaire.

Answers to most questions do not depend on the country and some of them have been predictable. For instance, the authors had no doubts that the answer to the question about the usefulness of participation experience would be positive and the expectation came true: all respondents answered "yes". One of the comments reads: "The experience has given me a basis to develop my negotiation skills, and I am grateful I got the opportunity to start developing skills I will need to further develop in my future career when studying."

Turning to difficulties mentioned by respondents, 'preparation' was indicted by about half of them in each country sample. Some of them indicated reasons for that: "Preparing for the competition was very time consuming and was difficult to plan along with studies and part-time job", others showed their attitude to this phase of the event as a whole: “Preparation is the most difficult part and the most interesting one at the same time”.

The INC is held in English, so are the national rounds, thus, ‘understanding the other(s) party(ies) (from a foreign language point of view)’ was one of the offered options to the question about the difficulties met. About one third ticked this option but comments varied greatly. Those who did not think about using English as a problem wrote: “I find international students these days to master the English language quite well which made it rather easy to understand each other.” Others indicated it as a complication in their performance: “Although my partner and I felt above average proficient in English, it became much more difficult to exhibit good rhetoric. Therefore, the arguments did not come as naturally, and consequently, it became more difficult to readjust the plan.” And for some participants it was a real obstacle: “Level of English skill varied and was at time a hindrance to good communication: sometimes it was hard to understand what the other party meant as they didn’t express their ideas in English explicitly.”

‘Communication with your partner’ was mentioned as a difficulty only once in a very interesting context: “Especially when negotiating via the internet”. Although respondents were not asked to indicate the year of participation some of them did and this comment was made by a law student who had got experience of negotiating online during the current year. This point will be discussed later in terms of perspectives of the INC. Another comment about teamwork showed deepness and attitude to prepare for the competition: “We were also well acquainted with each other’s strengths and weaknesses; so it was clear to us when we were supposed to speak. Therefore, it became very natural for us who should hold what role, as well as who was best suited to answer given questions.”

Another offered option of difficulties which was mentioned by about a third of respondents was ‘following the prepared plan’. Some respondents indicated their attitude to this option by putting three ticks instead of one other commented: “The participating teams always prepare well in advance, but there will always come some unexpected curveballs from the other party, whom you never can predict. I think this separates the best negotiators from the second-best; the ability to be able to adjust when “the game changes.”

Speaking about difficulties which former competition participants indicated themselves were “sometimes there is a very narrow zone of potential agreement” and “multicultural issues” (at the level of international rounds). The INC and INC national rounds are, first of all, educational events and it is determined not only by the first-day workshops but by judges’ comments even to a bigger extent. None of the respondents gave negative feedback on judges’ comments ranking them either useful or extremely useful, the latter got a slight preponderance.

The comments save explanations: “I still benefit from their comments and feedback.” “Getting feedback helps you grow and learn. And even if you don’t agree with the feedback it gives you other perspectives that can help you grow. In my opinion, feedback is extremely useful." "Very useful. The judges feedback was instructive. Grounds; the feedback was constructive. … It was very "educational" to learn from people who have broader experience in negotiations than yourself." Some comments were less enthusiastic: "It varied, but were either somehow useful or extremely useful. Getting feedback was the most educational portion of the competition." "They were very polite, spoke constructively, pointed out our strengths and weaknesses, were objective." "I found that the judges had different experiences, and their comments varied with their experiences and personalities. … I however found that some of the judges believed that their feedback was "the best" and that there could be no other way of negotiation than their way." "I found that some judges were more useful than others. I preferred the judges with precise points and advice on how specific things could be done differently."

It is understandable why the question about judges' feedback prompted so many comments: respondents, in the first instance, took part in the competition, worked hard preparing for it, and wanted to win. So, when it comes to the situation that "Not all judges seem to know the case sometimes" the participants are not likely to say that the judges' feedback was 'extremely useful'. Unfortunately, the authors' experience of judging the INC does not allow negating the latter comment, although, the reason can be explained. As it was mentioned above one of the difficulties competition organizers meet both on the national and international level is judge recruiting. So, sometimes judges are assigned to a round at the last moment and the only thing they can do is to look through Judges' summary and not the whole judge pack. Moreover, when practicing lawyers are involved, they sometimes do not realize the educational potential of the competition and do not know the INC rules well which also leads to diversity in evaluation. That is why the last question about participation as a judge seems to be very important as one of the ways of solving the judge recruitment problem.

Engaging former INC participants in judging national rounds helps organizers in filling judge slots and allows them to stay in touch with each other and former teachers: "It's fun and a great way to network!" Respondents who have not participated in the competition at the international level also want to do the job: "I would not decline such honorable opportunity", "I would love to do this if I gain more experience in the negotiation field", "I think it would be fun to participate as a judge as I see it as a way of contributing to the community".

As it was mentioned above most answers do not depend on the country and, although the question 'Did you / Would you like to have a Negotiation course within your curriculum?' also got only positive answers, the comments show how the state of things differs in Norway and Russia. All Russian respondents answered 'yes, I would' while Norwegians added to their 'yes' the following explanations: "The art of negotiations is not in focus in Norwegian law schools", "I am still in my study, and I am planning to have a Negotiation course in my curriculum", "I would most definitely appreciate a negotiation class in my curriculum. In my opinion it may be one of the most practical skills you can learn as a lawyer", "Negotiations are not a compulsory part of the study, but there are opportunities to take negotiations as an elective in the fifth year of study”.

3. Concluding Remarks

This brief survey allows making several conclusions. Some of them are exteriorly some are not that obvious.

In terms of professional development, participating in negotiation competitions law students gain invaluable experience for their future careers, build connections with future colleagues in their home country and the world, master communication and professional skills. Later they can join competition organizers as judges or guest speakers and contribute to competition development.

In terms of organizing the competition, several aspects can be considered. Firstly, the development of a detailed questionnaire for participants, coaches, judges and distributing it right after the competition will provide organizers at the national and international levels with efficient feedback. Secondly, engagement of former participants in organizing, judging, advertising the competition can facilitate its expansion. Thirdly, the current situation of lockdown affects all kinds of mass meetings and competition organizers are to look for new forms. For example, in the USA the ABA students’ division quickly and efficiently amended competition rules for conducting the event through ZOOM. In Norway, the national final in 2020 was postponed due to the pandemic and was then conducted online via ZOOM. The participants, judges from 14 countries, observers as well as the organizers were aligned – to conduct the competition online was a huge success. No doubt, it is necessary to study and adopt such practices.

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Research article

Mediation as a Component of Communicative Competence in Training International Relations Professionals: Collaboration Between Russia and Kazakhstan

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Abstract. The world lives in the era of conflict, when the safety and well-being of states or individuals to a large extent depend on the availability of well-trained professionals who are able to perform mediating functions, keeping in mind ethnic, national, political, cultural and other differences between conflicting sides. However, employers increasingly claim that today's graduates lack the skills required for conflict management and mediation even in homogeneous working environments, let alone multinational teams and international interaction. This problem is particularly relevant for the field of international relations where conflict resolution by peaceful means is very important. Countries with transition economies, such as Russia and Kazakhstan, where there is a gap between labor market requirements and university teaching practices, have been searching for new ways to educate and train young specialists. This article presents the preliminary results of a collaborative project between Petrozavodsk State University of the Russian Federation and Gumilyov Eurasian National University of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The project includes a set of dialogue- and polylogue-based learning activities with special focus on addressing any discrepancies, misunderstandings and divergence of views. The aim of the paper is to assess the impact of professionally oriented cross-border communication in the English language on the readiness of international relations students from Russia and Kazakhstan for resolving future professional disputes through mediation. The authors used formal structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions for obtaining necessary data and the comparative analysis method for interpreting them. The results suggest that systematic English-language cross-border communication in a realistic work-like environment will demonstrate the importance of mediation as a component of professional communicative competence to the students and will better prepare future foreign affairs staff for conflict resolution and mediation.

Keywords: mediation, cross-border dialogue, dialogue-stimulating activities, mediation readiness

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INTRODUCTION

Moving towards the knowledge economy requires rapid human capital development, therefore, it is important to provide young professionals with a set of skills and competences that will enable them to stand up to increasingly complex professional challenges, manage their own career and personal development, acquire, use and generate new knowledge, and effectively evaluate individual and collective achievements and failures. These demands are especially urgent in the field of international relations, because the number of conflicts in various spheres of life is on the rise, with "unresolved regional tensions, breakdowns in the rule of low, illicit economic gains and the scarcity of resources exacerbated by climate change being the dominant drivers of conflict" (United Nations, 2020).

However, according to the survey "Russia 2025: Resetting the Talents Balance" (2017), 80% of working-age Russians are unprepared for conflicting working environments and resolving conflicts. Employees report that many young professionals are not capable of or ready for problem-solving tasks, accountability and open expression of their personal and professional views. Middle managers and senior executives also emphasize that graduates often lack such universal competences as self-regulation, autonomous motivation and willingness to independently pursue life-long learning ("Employees' View on Generation Z", 2019). A similar situation exists in the Republic of Kazakhstan, one of Russia's key post-Soviet partners. Recent OECD data show that the country's higher education system does not pay proper attention to the relevant universal skills of the 21st century (Bayzhanova, 2019), including problem-solving techniques, teamwork skills, and adaptability. These professional qualities play a key role in career success and in the wellbeing of employees in general. The lack of them leads to the situation when after graduation young people in Kazakhstan are unemployed, underemployed, have low incomes or work outside the chosen area of expertise (Bureau of National Statistics, 2019). This indicates a wide gap between higher education institutions, the labor market, and the workforce. The situation seems precarious for all the spheres, but in international relations it raises special concerns, because here people's lives and countries' fates are at stake.

The demands for conflict management knowledge and skills do not come only from the employers; they are clearly set forth in official higher education standards.

In Russia, FGOS 3++ standard (2016) lists the following mandatory professional competences for the students of international relations:

– ability to work in a team, embracing social, ethnical, confessional and cultural differences;

– being aware of the requirements of politically correct corporate culture in order to be engaged in effective formal and informal cross-border communication and find compromise through negotiation;

– bility to adjust to working in multiethnic international teams and use certain special features of foreign professional cultures for effective professional communication, when necessary;

– understanding the mechanisms of international conflict management through the use of various diplomatic, political, legal, psychological, social, economic and enforcement methods.

A similar standard for the Republic of Kazakhstan (2010) contains the following requirements for the graduates with international relations degrees:

– comprehensive understanding of modern conflicts, their types, mechanisms and regulation, and their impact on international relations;

– knowledge and adequate use of the concepts and terms of modern conflict resolution studies;

– awareness of what various international relations theories and approaches say about modern conflict management;

– ability to theorize, analyze, systematize and reflect on professional issues and conflicts;

– knowledge of specific features of modern conflicts and ability to resolve them effectively.

In practice, this means that these specialists are expected to engage in cross-cultural communication from the perspective of diversity, integrate people representing different cultures into effective working teams, and choose optimal behavior and patterns for mediating conflicts in multicultural working environments.

1. Literature Review

In the context of this study, from the theoretical and methodological perspective mediation was seen as a communication strategy aimed at effective conflict solving. Communication in the sphere of international relations is not possible without complex negotiations with existing or future partners, discussing the terms of contracts, resolving disputes, project collaboration, teleconferencing, online meetings, etc. All these actions take the form of a dialogue or polylogue. Therefore, dialogue or polylogue construction in a process of mediation in the English language is a mandatory component of social, media or political discourse. Professional dialogue can be defined as a special functional category of spoken language, distinguished by specific stylistic patterns

(Shatilov, 2012). Work-related discussions or negotiations, unlike everyday conversations, pay special attention to the formal expression of thoughts, accuracy and unambiguity of statements, correct use of terms, and adherence to language norms (Malyuga, 2011). A properly structured dialogue is a very effective instrument of international communications, which helps peer employees, partners or conflicting sides to understand each other, accept different points of view, identify discrepancies and find compromises. It gives an impetus to creative and productive cooperation, reduces the risk of misjudgment, and ensures more effective interaction (Lauring & Selmer, 2012).

Polylogue-based encounters in the English language are also an integral part of effective professional communication in many multinational teams. Polylogue is a form of a dialogue that ensures meaningful information exchange for complementary or competitive discussions (Kruglova, 2001) and joint professional decision-making. This type of communication is crucial for promoting innovative collective ideas and building new partnerships with foreign experts and clients, rather than defending individual positions or winning negotiation points (Devi & Zanariah, 2012). Any misunderstandings or disagreements prevent the stakeholders from resolving conflicts by formulating common positions and developing the situation into something that will be accepted by all sides (Prescott, 2011). Learning how to use appropriate strategies for professional communication in English helps to overcome various barriers, thus contributing to building confidence and trust among employees or partners with different cultural backgrounds. Such comfortable environment has a tremendous impact on companies' productivity, success, competitiveness and profitability (Tenzer et. al., 2014).

Teaching professional English dialogue and polylogue skills to non-linguistic students is a serious challenge for English teachers due to various reasons. In the majority of Russian universities it is traditionally done by creating artificial bilingual environment. However, the variety of English classroom activities is limited, which eventually makes them repetitive and predictable. This is very different from live interaction, with all its diversity and spontaneity – especially in the context of political or media discourse. It decreases the productivity of teaching and learning, makes students unprepared for cross-cultural professional functioning in multinational corporate settings, and eventually leads to communication barriers and failures (Gluszek et. al., 2011). Classroom dialogues or polylogues typically contain a fixed number of questions and answers on a given topic, used for receiving anticipated information from familiar people – peers or teachers. In real-life professional situations, when dialogues are often constructed between strangers, the goal of communication is much more complex: interlocutors need to address an issue from different perspectives and understand or interpret the responses and reactions properly (Rogerson-Revell, 2008) Teaching dialogic and polylogic communication is also complicated by its bilateral or multilateral nature, which implies strong interdependence of communication partners. The efficiency of interaction in this case is determined by specific verbal patterns, speed and explicitness of speech production, temperament characteristics, status of interlocutors and various other factors (Vorauer, 2006).

Therefore, it can be assumed that conventional classroom practices and activities within an enclosed learning space with a limited number of peers will not prepare students for future professional challenge management and conflict resolution. This paper describes an attempt to minimize these limitations by expanding learning environment and making learning experience more unpredictable. In doing so, special attention was paid to creating convenient online channels for the exchange of information, following the established standards and practices of professional communication, using diverse technologies, and giving more freedom of choice to the students, along with delegating more organizational functions and assigning more responsibility to them.

2. Research Question and Hypothesis

The following research question was designed to guide the study: which teaching and learning activities can have a significant impact on professional mediation readiness and cross-border communication skills of non-linguistic students with different national and cultural backgrounds? In accordance with the study aim and research question the following hypothesis was formulated in order to be confirmed or rejected through the analysis of the survey data: professionally oriented cross-border communication in the English language involving the search for compromise solutions and consideration of different views will raise the students' awareness of mediation as an important form of international interaction, and therefore will make them better prepared for it. Therefore, the study was aimed at investigating the preparedness and willingness of Russian and Kazakh students of international relations for productive dialogue and mediation in the English-language professional-like environment.

3. Materials and Methods

The described study is the second stage of the cross-border interuniversity project between Petrozavodsk State University (PetrSU) and Eurasian National University (ENU) that was launched in 2019. It involved 80 second-year students majoring in international relations from two partnering universities – Petrozavodsk State University (PetrSU, Russia, n=40) and Gumilyov Eurasian National University (ENU, Kazakhstan, n=40). The age of the participants varied from 18 to 20, and their gender was not considered significant for the research outcomes. Before the enrollment, the participants were classified into the upper-intermediate category according to the results of the standardized EFL test (EF SET).

The study process presented in this paper was organized in three successive stages: 1) a pre-survey, 2) a set of collaborative dialogue- or polylogue-stimulating and mediation-simulating activities, and 3) a post-survey. The pre-survey and the post-survey included one identical question in order to measure the impact of the described project on the study participants. The results were assessed through the comparative analysis of data collected by the means of formal structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions.

4. Results and Discussion

The pre-survey was aimed at identifying the spheres prioritized by the Russian and Kazakh participants and at assessing their readiness for cross-border dialogue and mediation. It included two closed questions, the first one being "Which professional spheres would you choose to work in?" The respondents were given five answer options in a multiple-choice format: human rights protection, global security, sustainable development, countering extremism, and crime prevention. The comparative dissemination of the preferences is demonstrated on Figure 1.

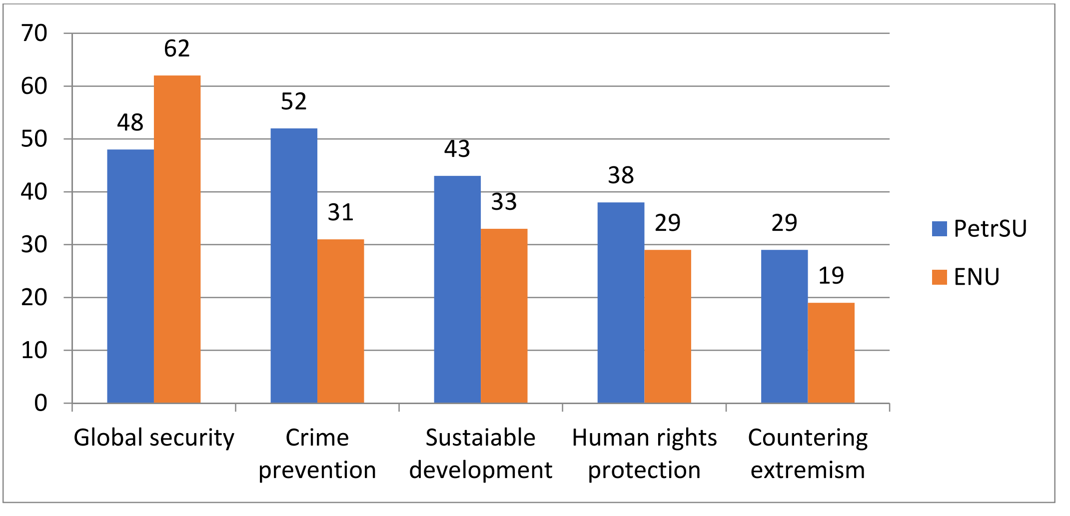
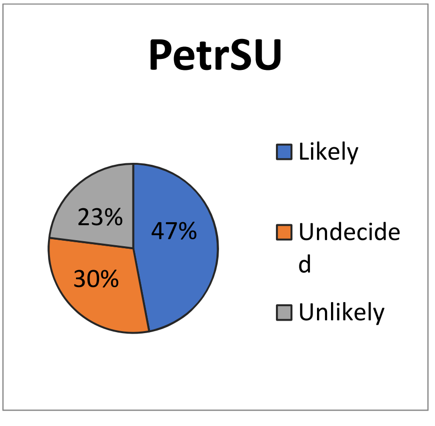


Figure 1. Pre-survey results: dissemination of professional sphere preferences among PetrSU and ENU students

The results showed that ENU students in general were less interested in the suggested areas with global security being the only exception – 62% of participants from Kazakhstan chose this option as their professional priority, while only 48% of Russian respondents were interested in this sphere. Fifty two percent of PetrSU students, in turn, picked crime prevention as their main preference (compared with only 31% of ENU students). Both PetrSU and ENU subjects showed their least interest in countering extremism (29% and 19%, respectively). Such discrepancies require further investigation and analysis. For the purpose of this research, however, it was important that building teaching activities around these five issues was likely to have a high didactic potential for teaching dialogue and mediation, since each side would need to promote the issue it found more urgent and engage the other side into meaningful and productive communication.

The participants were also asked to assess the probability of performing a mediating role in their future career using five possible ratings, ranking from "highly likely" to "highly unlikely". It was assumed that choosing "highly likely" and "likely" options would reflect the students' readiness for dialogue and mediation, while choosing "highly unlikely" and "unlikely" options would evidence to the contrary. The answers are shown in the graphs below.

The graphs demonstrate more variability among ENU students' responses – i.e., PetrSU students avoided choosing the extreme options of the assessment scale ("highly likely" or "highly unlikely"). However, after pooling the answers of those who were and were not ready for mediation, both study groups were comparable in three main indicators: readiness for mediation, uncertainty and unpreparedness (47%, 23% and 30% vs 47%, 25% and 28%, respectively). Thus, the pre-survey helped to identify topics that would appeal to both sides and topics that could create barriers to dialogue, since one side found them more relevant. It also confirmed the readiness of all participants for cross-border communication that always bears a risk of misunderstanding and controversy, thus requiring conflict management and mediation skills.



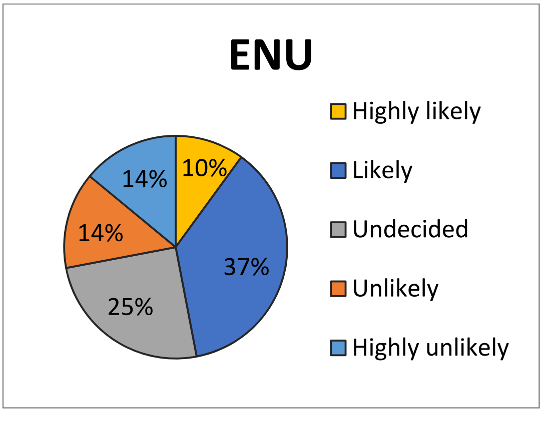


Figure 2. Pre-survey results: readiness of PetrSU and ENU students to perform professional mediation functions

After obtaining the initial answers, the study organizers immersed the participating students into a specifically designed learning environment based on a system of collaborative educational activities implemented over three semesters. In other words, the study participants were involved into a number of dialogue and polylogue-based activities, including briefings, video-debates, online discussions, and interviews. All these activities were aimed at student's professional socialization and developing two distinctive sets of skills: 1) mediation skills, including active listening, emotional intelligence, reflection, thoughtful judgment, stress management, negotiation, empathy, reliance on intuition, impartiality, positivity and open communication (Mediation Skills, 2020; A Practical Guide to Work-Integrated Learning, n.d.); and 2) universal soft skills, including critical thinking, problem solving, team work, collaboration, ICT (information, communication and technology) literacy, and conflict management (Fadel, 2008). For that purpose, special attention was paid to finding mutually acceptable compromises in such situations as setting convenient dates and time for meetings, choosing the most relevant topics, or finding common grounds on sensitive issues during online discussions. This was achieved with the help of a standard mediation model which comprises the following steps: formal contact between the sides, issue identification, generation and evaluation of possible alternatives, selection of appropriate (mutually accepted) alternatives, and conclusion (Mitchell & Dewhrist, 1991).

After all the activities were completed, a post-survey was conducted in order to assess the increase in the readiness for cross-border dialogue and mediation. The participants once again were asked the question: "What is the probability of you performing a mediating role in your future career?" with the same five options they were given during the pre-survey. The number of ENU students who answered "likely" slightly increased (from 37% to 42%), and the number of students who answered "highly unlikely" decreased accordingly (from 14% to 9%). The changes in the mediation readiness of PetrSU students were more significant and are presented in the graph below.

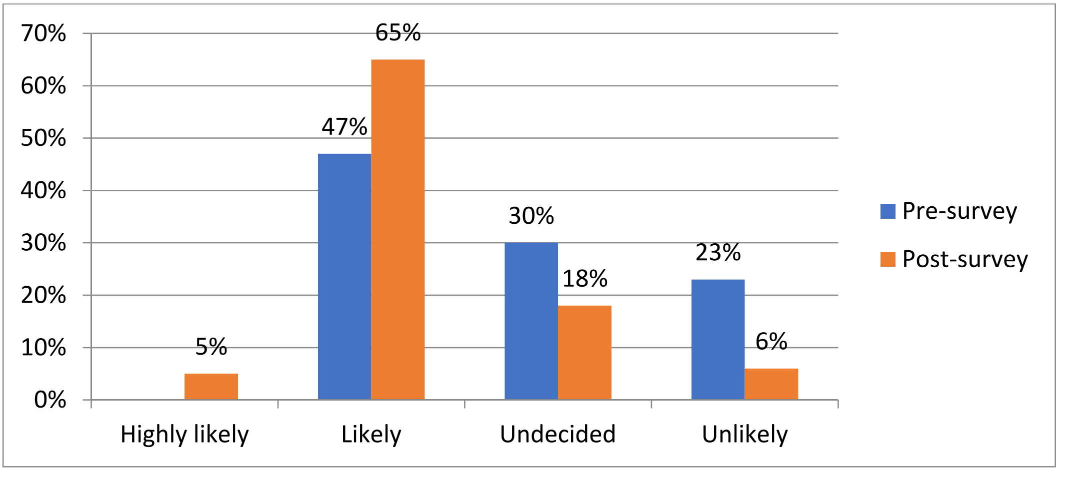


Figure 3. Readiness of PetrSU students to perform professional mediation functions before and after cross-border learning activities

The graph shows that the number of PetrSU students who described the suggested probability as likely increased from 47% to 65%, 5% of respondents chose the option "highly likely", and the number of undecided students and those who though it was "unlikely" for them to be involved in professional mediation in the future decreased (by 12% and 17%, respectively).

To confirm the participants' readiness for cross-cultural communication (as a prerequisite for international mediation and, therefore, an important component of their professional competence) they were asked an additional closed question: "Who do you think you will interact with in your future professional capacity?" and were given four answer options in a single-choice format: native English speakers, non-native English speakers, both categories, and speakers of the respondents' native languages (Russian or Kazakh). The majority of PetrSU and ENU students (62% and 64%, respectively) chose the option "both native and non-native English speakers" and the option of using only mother tongue for interaction was not selected by anyone. This suggests that the participants are fully aware of the importance and advantages of English as the language of professional communication and mediation.The obtained data support the initial hypothesis that regular professionally oriented cross-border communication in the English language between the students of different national and cultural backgrounds majoring in international relations will increase their readiness for future professional conflict solving and mediation, if it focuses on overcoming discrepancies and finding compromises.

5. Concluding Remarks

Although Russia and Kazakhstan are currently going through social and economic transformations, there are gaps between labor market requirements and university teaching practices in these countries. Employers are gradually implementing western workflows and management systems, which include conflict management mechanisms. Therefore, modern specialists need to know how to choose optimal strategies for reducing tensions and resolving disputes. The ability to do so determines organizational capacity and competitiveness. It also fosters communication and collaboration within a company and beyond.

Despite various state supportive measures, today's young people remain one of the most vulnerable categories of labor market actors. After getting their degrees they face many problems, because they cannot find a job according to their degrees, do not have sufficient working experience, and are not familiar with current labor market tendencies and mechanisms. The fact that youth employment remains such a challenge could be explained by a discrepancy between the level of the young people's professional competence (and their readiness for real-life work settings) and the requirements of modern economy. In today's times of rapid global changes, the future of many long-existing occupations, which provided stable incomes for several generations, seems dim. It deepens the gap between business and education practices, as well as between supply and demand for qualified workforce.

One of the possible ways to solve this problem is to integrate curricular learning with workplace-like experience, so that students would be able to combine theory and practice in a real-world communication environment, which will deepen their knowledge and understanding, and will enhance their work-related capabilities (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden, 2010). Such approach will help to create optimal learning conditions for teaching conflict solving and mediation, which will meet the following requirements: challenging students' preconceptions in light of new experience, giving students more opportunities to reflect and apply their knowledge and skills to resolve real-life issues, providing students with experience in a wider real-world environment; individualizing each student's learning by addressing their specific perceptions, thoughts, feelings and behavior patterns (A practical guide to work-integrated learning, n.d.). Another important thing that should be kept in mind is that today both international and domestic mediators are increasingly involved in disputes between non-native English-speakers, who use the same global language but represent distinctive ethnic or national backgrounds. Therefore, in order to train students for future dialogue and mediation with bilinguals, it is not enough to provide them with cultural knowledge regarding those countries where English is a state language. Indeed, at the earlier stages of professional education they will need some general strategies for cross-cultural communication, based on universally accepted values and principles, such as tolerance, non-discrimination, freedom of opinion, respect for diversity, etc. However, it does not exclude the necessity of regional or country-specific focus during the further course of study, especially in developing and maintaining long-term partnerships with foreign universities. This will help to build a solid foundation for safe professional communication and effective management or prevention of conflicts.

RESEARCH DISCLAIMER

- The results of the described study are valid for only its participants, the second-year students majoring in international relations. Further research is necessary in order to establish whether the same effect can be observed for the students majoring in exact, engineering or life sciences.
- The paper presents the results of one stage of a long-term interuniversity project, and subsequent data will be described in further publications after the next stages are completed.
- The authors define mediation as one of the English language communication strategies, therefore linguistic data (including diction, correct use of grammar and pronunciation) were taken into account, but were not described in order to keep the intended focus of the paper.

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TECHNOLOGY FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION

FOCUS OF THE ISSUE: TECHNOLOGY FOR READING SKILLS TRAINING

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Research article

Using Technologies to Foster the Reading Habit in L2 (English)

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Abstract. In a society which is becoming more and more globalized, it is essential to promote teaching processes that enable the meaningful acquisition of knowledge, emphasizing the learning of English, as the main goal of the teachers. Reading in education is the paradigm of culture and is part of the language learning process. Nevertheless, its practice has declined in recent years. Consequently, through this Project, with the aim of motivating the Reading frequency, we intend to take a deeper look into the role of technologies in order to foster the Reading habit in a foreign language, highlighting the importance of reading for the student cognitive development. For that reason, an innovation proposal for promoting reading based on the use of ICT in the educational field is presented, with a specific focus on the Booktube community, as a tool to increase interest and motivation in reading.

***Keywords*:** Promotion, Reading habit, Technologies, Booktube, English.

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INTRODUCTION

The motivation for this research work is the interest of reading in the educational field and especially in the foreign language (English), since it is the *lingua franca* of communication, business and culture. Reading has been and continues to be the paradigm of culture in society. In order to address the issue in depth, reading habits will be analyzed both in the mother tongue and in foreign languages, with the aim of knowing in greater detail the frequencies and tastes in order to try to encourage this practice.

Part of the importance of reading lies in its transversal nature that brings along associated benefits so that, the achievement of a correct reading habit will facilitate the understanding of written materials and, consequently, the achievement of good academic results (Gutierrez-Braojos and Salmerón Pérez, 2012).

The reading habit is embedded in a broader concept, reading competence. According to the OECD, it is defined as "*the ability of an individual to understand, use and reflect on written texts in order to achieve personal goals, develop knowledge and skills and participate in society*" (OECD, 2016). This definition highlights the vital importance of reading within the teaching and learning process, as well as in the acquisition of basic skills stipulated by law in Primary Education and in the integral development of students.

The reading skill is key to the processes of growth and maturity of the population (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2017). Hence the importance of promoting reading habits among students. However, as Lluch and Sánchez-García (2017) point out, its construction is a complex task and requires a continuous great effort.

Numerous studies prove the fundamental role that reading plays in the process of acquiring and learning a foreign language (Brown, Waring and Donkaewbua, 2008; Horst, 2005; Paribakht and Weshe, 1999; Pigada and Schmitt, 2006; Schmitt, 1998; Waring and Takaki, 2003; Zahar, Cobb and Spada, 2001).

In spite of the multiple formats in which it can be found at present – paper, digital, etc. – information decoding takes place in all of them (García-Delgado, 2015).

It should be noted that the use of the new Information and Communication Technologies (hereinafter ICT) has increased considerably and they have become extraordinary means of information, useful for promoting reading and expanding knowledge. However, they can have the opposite effect. Children are reporting a growing demand in the use of numerous devices (tablets, mobiles, computers, etc.), although they do not always use them for educational purposes or to obtain benefits related to deep and critical reading (Malena and Moreno, 2017). That is why the need to take advantage of the benefits of reading. Reading in Spanish develops creative imagination, higher mental processes, improves fluency, works the memory, develops logical thinking, expands the space for communication, improves oral communication and increases vocabulary (Bettelheim and Zelan, 1983), apart from awakening emotions and allowing the reader to develop empathy, among other characteristics.

Besides, reading in a foreign language (English) also allows students to develop attitudinal goals, favouring a positive attitude towards the subject. Likewise, reading in a foreign language also favours the acquisition of the lexicon, spelling and writing fluency and even acquiring grammatical competence (Santos-Díaz, 2017; Elley and Mangubhai, 1983).

Furthermore, reading in English allows access to academic literature, since according to Quezada (2011), 75% of it is written in English. As English is the predominant language in scientific and technological fields we need to have a good command of it to work on a worldwide basis.

On the other hand, in the case of technologies, they connect well with the children, increase their interest and curiosity because they are interactive and they have skills to use them (Ruiz and Tesouro, 2013). Additionally, one educational competence is the digital. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that working with technologies contributes to develop skills for lifelong learning (Correa and De Pablos, 2009). Students can use them to share knowledge, encourage concentration or stimulate planning and memory (Cascales and Real, 2011).

Research carried out by Tesouro and Puiggalí (2004), goes deeper into this point, establishing many benefits of technologies: interactivity, student autonomy, decrease of fear of making mistakes, flexibility to each subject, obtaining diverse resources, and the capacity to adapt to each student.

Therefore, due to the perceived decrease in the reading practice observed in schools, it is essential to integrate the use of technologies to achieve the didactic objectives related to reading habits. Reports and research made by governments and education systems in all countries of the world seek to know the reading competence of the young to be able to act accordingly. In this case, two reports are analyzed:

– PIRLS: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study.
– PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment.

1. PIRLS Report

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's (IEA) Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) assesses the reading comprehendsion of students in Grade 4. However, these data do not provide information about how much student do online, because Spain does not participate in EPIRLS, an innovative assessment of reading on the Internet (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2017). The last report, which is conducted every five years, is from 2016.

As for the data collected in Spain, the trend with respect to the previous report conducted in 2011, was an increase in average performance, but still below the rest of the world. Focusing on this report, if we look at the results in reading comprehension, Spain scored 528 points, being at the intermediate level, and below the average of the European Union (539) and the whole of the OECD countries (540), placing us in 26th place out of 33.

If we analyze the results by reading purposes, Spain would still be at an intermediate level (527 in informative and 530 in literary), rising to 18th place, but also below the average of the EU and OECD countries.

Finally, in the comprehension processes results, data are obtained on: "obtaining information and making direct inferences "and" interpreting, integrating and evaluating".

In the first process, 527 while in the second 529 points were obtained. A significant difference can be seen with respect to the EU results (542 and 537) and those of the OECD (542 and 540) which relegate our country to position 21.

Figure 1 is presented below, with a detailed analysis of the evolution of very low and advanced performance levels in reading comprehension.

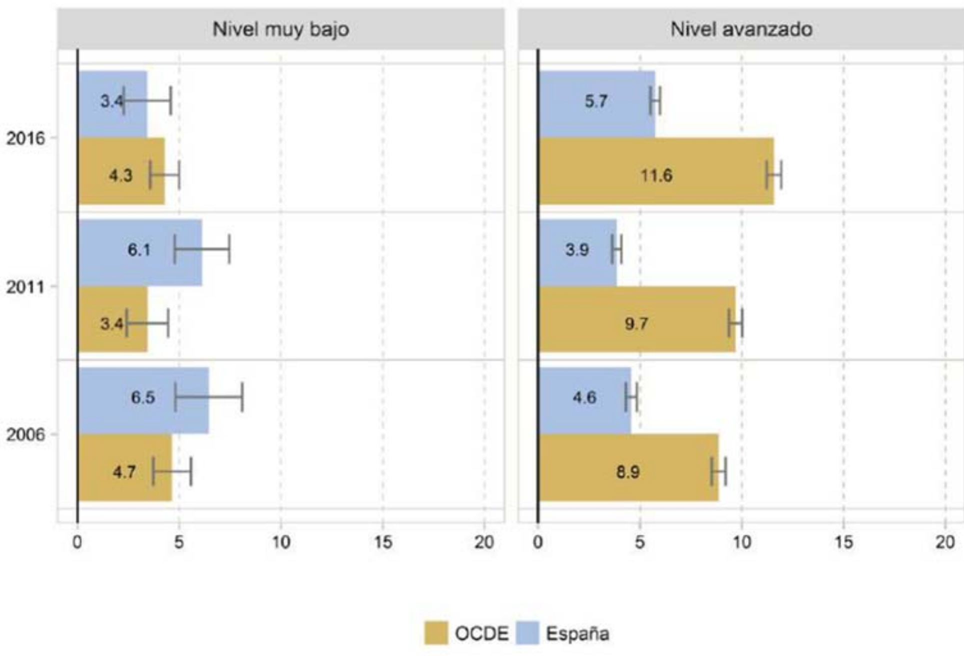

Figure 1. Evolution of the percentage of students in the very low and advanced levels after three PIRLS cycles (2006, 2011, 2016)

These data show the information previously analyzed and allow us to know the situation, in order to take measures that try to redirect and improve the academic results related to reading.

2. PISA Report

The PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) report is an international assessment study that attempts to identify, describe and explain what 15-year-olds know and can do at the end of their compulsory education (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2019).

It is a three-year study, focusing on three core competences: reading, mathematics and science. Here we are only concerned with reading.

The last report dates from 2018 and had reading comprehension as its main evaluation competence. In the test carried out in Spain, anomalies were recorded due to the outstanding number of students who obtained surprisingly satisfactory results in the reading fluency test. This showed that these results were not representative of their actual competence, so they were only partially presented.

Consequently, this paper analyses the overall results, as well as those aspects that have been validated in the recent test. We will now comment on the most significant aspects.

The reports shows that, over the last decade, what we read and the way in which we read has changed substantially, particularly due to the growing influence and dizzying development of ICTs. This new channel of communication is not only textual, but multimodal, as it includes other modes of communication such as audio and visual (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2019).

Returning to the school environment, according to the data from the ICT familiarity questionnaire, the amount of time students spend online has increased between 2012 and 2018 by one hour per day. They have become 3 hours online (outside the school) on school days and 3.5 hours on weekends (OECD, 2019).

At the same time, students say they read less for pleasure. However, they read more to meet their practical needs (transport schedules, advice, etc.) *(Figure 2)*.

From the graph presented, it can be seen that the reading habit in students has increased only in those items in which technologies are involved, highlighting that students do not enjoy reading ("magazines, fiction, newspapers"), and only do so out of obligation ("I read only out of obligation"). These data provide sufficient indications to attempt to address the deficiencies detected and alleviate those factors that can be detrimental to the reading habit (in Spanish and English) since the data obtained can be extrapolated to the foreign language, and can be redirected towards increasing the reading frequency using technologies constructively.

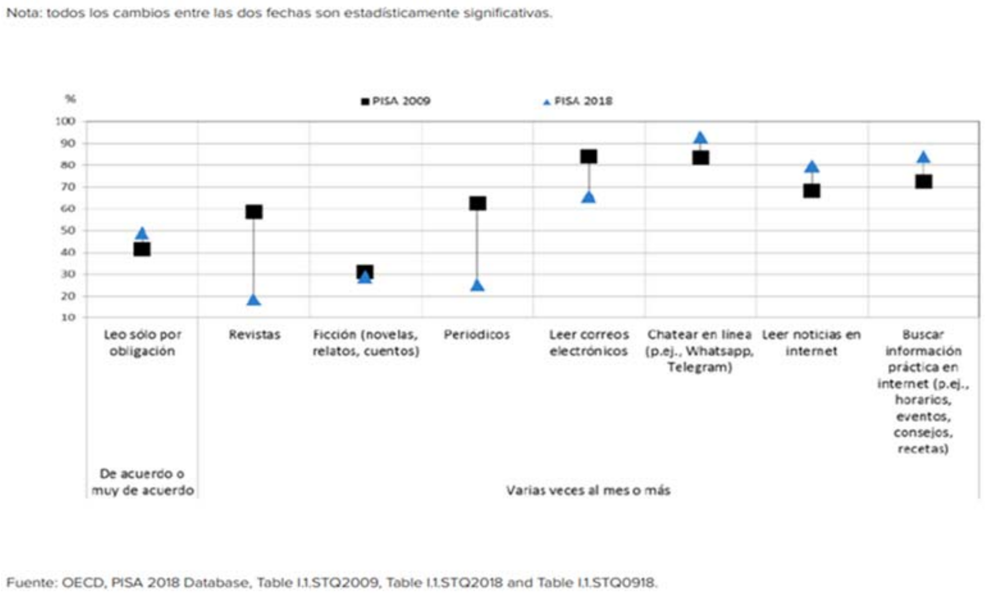

Figure 2. Changes between 2009 and 2018 in the motifs and genders that 15-year-old students read

3. Foreign Language Reading Habits, English

Research in English language shows that similar results to those of the area of Spanish language and literature, emphasizing the lack of reading habit in foreign language. Foncubierta and Fonseca (2018) study the acquisition of reading skills in foreign languages. In their research they find that a high number of primary and secondary students do not have the optimal level of reading ability for their age neither in their mother tongue nor in foreign languages. This, in turn, would lead to a lack of motivation among students, and consequently, a decrease in the reading habit, producing negative results in the reports made (PISA, PIRLS) and in the research carried out (Foncubierta and Fonseca, 2018; Govea, 2017; Gómez, 2014). In the same line, Govea (2017), states that in a sample of 80 people, 56% of the students showed low levels of reading and written production and only 16% had a high level of skill.

Similarly, Gomez (2014) in a study conducted to find out the English reading habits of future teachers, highlighted that 84.5% of participants in a sample of 110 people, had no habit of reading in English, stating that they only read materials required to pass the subjects. This highlights, on the one hand, the scarce reading habit developed during the school period and, on the other hand, the influence that these absence of habits could have on the students.

This emphasizes the importance and influence that the two great agents, the teacher and the family, exert on the reading formation of children at early ages.

Specifically, the primary objective of this research is to foster the Reading habit in English through a proposal that will attract the attention of students, and thus cultivate a habit that is decreasing to benefit from technologies and improve their reading frequency range. However, not only will reading be worked on in the lessons designed, but implicitly and complementarily, other contents of the Decreto 54/2014, *por el que se establece el currículo de la Educación Primaria en la Comunidad Autónoma de Castilla-La Mancha* (Decree 54/2014, *which establishes the curriculum of Primary Education in the Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha*), will be worked on. These are within the programs of the subject of the selected grade and allow not to leave aside the contents established by the curricular area.

Considering the data presented, it is important to act accordingly and try to promote reading habits in a foreign language (English) in order to advance in knowledge and improve the performance of the students.

4. Reading in Educational Laws and the Curricular Decree

4.1. Reading in Spanish

After contrasting the information gathered from the reports carried out by the educational systems, it then goes into more detail on the importance given to it within the education laws.

In relation to the presence of reading in the curriculum of Spanish language and literature of the *Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación* (Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, of Education, Hereinafter LOE) and of the *Ley Orgánica 8/2013, de 9 de diciembre, para la mejora de la calidad educativa* (Organic Law 8/2013, of December 9, for the improvement of the educational quality, Hereinafter LOMCE), some differences can be observed. A detailed analysis of the LOE offers a definition of what reading means and what reading comprehension is, as well as a curricular proposal coherent with this theoretical framework. In Article 19 of this law appears for the first time the mention that in the stage of Primary Education "*in order to promote the Reading habit, some time will be dedicated daily to it*".

In the case of the LOMCE, one can appreciate the integration of contents related to reading with others linked to orality ("*comprehension of texts read aloud*", "*listening to different types of texts*"), with elements closer to the objectives of the curriculum ("*selection of books according to personal preference*") or with the strategies of the centre ("*Reading Plan*") (Trujillo, 2016).

If we focus on the Decreto 54/2014, *por el que se establece el currículo de la Educación Primaria en la Comunidad Autónoma de Castilla-La Mancha*, (Decree

54/2014, of 10/07/2014, *which establishes the curriculum for Primary Education in the Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha)*, we find that its general principle number eight states that:

> *"In the development of the curriculum, teaching centres shall carry out a transversal or specific treatment of the following elements: reading comprehension and reading habits, oral and written expression, audiovisual communication, information and communication technologies, [...]"*.

In addition, objective "e" specifies:

> *"To know and use the Spanish language properly and develop reading habits"*.

Furthermore, we will highlight the Orden ECD/65/2015, de 21 de enero, *que describe las relaciones entre las competencias, los contenidos y los criterios de evaluación de la educación primaria, la ESO y el Bachillerato* (Order ECD/65/2015, of 21 January, *which describes the relations between the competences, contents and evaluation criteria of primary education, secondary education and the Baccalaureate*). This Order was promulgated almost a year after the curricula, and proposes an approach more in line with international proposals such as PISA or the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Trujillo, 2016). Likewise, this Order promotes reading as a school strategy and indicates:

> *"actions such as the design of a School Linguistic Project, a Reading Plan or strategies for the use of the School Library as a space for learning and enjoyment allow a more global and efficient treatment of the competence in linguistic communication"*.

These regulations show the importance attached to reading within the education system. This is where the relevance of the foreign language (English) as a tool for improving the reading habit within educational institutions would be integrated.

4.2. Reading in English

Taking the previous data into account, the interest in promoting and developing the reading habit, both in Spanish and English, is unquestionable. Analyzing the Real Decreto 126/2014, de 28 de febrero, *por el que se establece el currículo básico de la Educación Primaria* (Royal Decree 126/2014, of 28 February, *which establishes the basic curriculum of Primary Education*), one can appreciate the importance of English in terms of the acquisition of communicative skills associated with the improvement of various fields, including the mastery of reading and writing.

Consequently, if we take consider the previously mentioned Decree, we can appreciate in the introduction of the English area how decisive the command of this competence is in order to favour the employability and the professional ambitions of the students.

However, if we continue analyzing this same Decree, in the methodological orientations, we will find the following paragraph:

> *"Reading allows students to deal with themes, functions, structures and vocabulary integrated into a whole and in a contextualized way. The frequent and varied reading of texts in English helps them to develop reading competence and brings them closer to the pleasure of reading and the experience of being informed by a new language. Using strategies, knowing previously learned words of frequent use and identifying the most common graphic patterns will help them to understand what they read. Hence the importance of including in the classroom strategies to approach reading from the first levels, through techniques of listening to the teacher read aloud, participate in shared or guided reading, reaching independent reading".*

In other words, we not only emphasize the importance given to reading in the area of Spanish language and literature, but also and mainly in English since it allows and favours the achievement of the objectives and competences of the educational system, in addition to the benefits it brings to promote the integral teaching of the students and its application in different contexts of their daily life.

5. Influence of Technologies on the Reading Habit

In the findings of the Eurostat report (2017) (Being Young in Europe Today), we read that "the use of ICT is widespread among children and young people, and in some cases is reaching saturation point". On the other hand, research carried out by Fundación Telefónica (2018), as corroborated in the Anibes study on the sedentary habits of minors published in the scientific journal BMC Public Health, indicates that half of Spanish children between the ages of 9 and 17 consume 90% of their time using screens of different types (mobile phone, tablets, TV, computer, etc.) (Mielgo-Ayuso, et al., 2017). This is one of the main reasons why students do not read in their free time. Hence, we must try to redirect these entertainment habits by trying to take advantage of the attraction that ICTs generate in this age group.

The increase of electronic devices in convergence with the expansion of the Internet, is transforming the figure of the reader (Bustamante, 2017; Cordón-García, 2016). This is why several authors, such as McKenna et al. (2012) and Cassany (2016), propose measuring reading practice including that in the digital format. In the same line, Subrahmanyam, Smahel and Greenfield (2006) affirm that there find coherence between the on- and offline behaviour of these young readers, so it can be foreseen that the reading behaviour can be a mediating element in the uses of the net (Larrañaga and Yubero, 2018).

It is necessary to emphasize that the use of this new constructivist tool is not opposed to the enrichment of reading and writing; on the contrary, electronic materials favour the teaching-learning processes by adapting to today's society and the interests of the students, being the core of knowledge and individual cognitive development (Andrade and Moreno, 2017; Yubero and Larrañaga, 2013).

This is why Andrade and Moreno state

> *"Only with the help of ICTs can we make reading and writing pleasant activities, but at the same time useful for acquiring knowledge and contributing to the development of society. The medium is inevitably transforming the way messages are received and the way they are created into new and meaningful texts" (Andrade and Moreno, 2017).*

In this field, digital technologies open the door to multiple resources from publishers, digital libraries, applications, forums, blogs, social networks such as Youtube, or even interactive platforms that promote the reading experience.

ICTs open up the option of book clubs, and as Yubero and Larrañaga (2013) state:

> *"Reading networks generate interpersonal ties of trust, support and a sense of group identity, generating a positive interdependence among readers".*

This context is the one we intend to create within the classroom, a program through which an interactive reading community is created in which students are able to share their reading experiences among themselves, and even with colleagues and friends outside the school, creating their own channels and making videos sharing literary information, increasing the motivation of students towards activities such as reading and writing.

In this way, the activities will take into account the following components established in the Expectation/Value model proposed by Eccles and Wigfield (2002):

1) are relevant to the learners,
2) encourage their curiosity,
3) are useful and
4) do not overexert themselves.

The following section presents the methodology used to implement the proposal presented, the justification of its need, the instruments used, the participants in the experiment and the expected results.

6. Methodology

6.1. Proposal for innovation

After having analyzed and deepened on the theoretical base, the applicable legislation in force and the data offered by the different researches based on the reading habit and the technologies, a proposal based on the use of these ICTs to promote reading in the students, within the English language area, is presented with the purpose of contributing with empirical results that place us in a real approximation of the current situation. Therefore, the aim of this research is to introduce ICT into the classroom, exploring activities where they seek and discover what they like to read, through direct exposure to reading in English with the videos of their peers and *Booktubers*.

Based on this objective, the following study hypothesis is proposed:

> *"The use of technology increases the frequency of reading in English and favours interest and motivation in primary school students for reading in the classroom and as entertainment"*.

At this point it should be noted that the innovation proposal could not be carried out due to the exceptional situation experienced because of COVID-19, but that it is nevertheless planned to be implemented in the 2020-21 academic year.

The design of the innovation is presented below, governed by the conditions under which it was to be implemented.

6.2. Justification for the proposal

Early contact and the widespread use of ICT by children and young people has led to a change in the way they relate to their family and social environment, as well as to the modification of habits that were common in previous generations (López, 2017). Therefore, it could be said that the current generations have been born and raised in a media environment, describing their "natural" ecosystem as that of the 2.0 environment of social networks (Aran-Ramspott, Fedele and Tarragó, 2018) and we can consider them "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001)

This is where the *Youtube* platform would be located, converted into a relevant area of social interrelationship, through videos, for students, which according to Pérez-Torres et al. (2018), favours the role of *youtubers* as reference models. The study carried out by Aran-Ramspott, Fedele and Tarragó (2018) states:

> *"Youtubers are an integral part of adolescent culture as "influencers" and protagonists who help initiate adolescents into multimedia products specifically*

> *aimed at them. Moreover, they can become role models at the same time, especially among the youngest ones, thanks to their ability to improvise, as well as to the sense of authenticity, empathy, accessibility and intimacy they share".*

In other words, the characteristics that attract students are entertainment and the feeling of being part of a digital teenage culture, which they can share with their peers.

Furthermore, the fact that many *youtubers* are young makes it even more valuable to analyze their relationship with pre-adolescent Internet users (Westenberg, 2016). To achieve these effects, they use familiar elements such as greetings, nicknames, or even linguistic devices (e.g., highly emphasized or elongated vowels) (Cocker and Cronin, 2017).

Taking into account the influence that this platform has on students, a community has emerged within it, *Booktube*, whose objective is to transmit and share, through this channel, a preference for reading, using and taking advantage of the interest and motivation that the technology itself provides. Therefore, it favours the possibility of communicating with others, reflecting, learning about tastes, and even establishing a critical dialogue. In a similar way to *youtubers*, *booktubers* are the authors of these videos, defined by Monteblanco (2015), as: "referents and trainers of new readers". The *booktubers* share the opinion of the readings with the viewers using their own language, and putting themselves in the viewers' place, which favours promotion, and the consequent increase in reading frequency (López, 2017), turning reading into a social activity that allows people with a common interest to connect, create new knowledge or contribute information and content that can be useful to other people (Monteblanco, 2015).

6.3. Methodology

It was necessary to employ to a mixed methodological design, carrying out a quasi-experimental investigation, in order to provide information based on the hypothesis and the objective set for this paper.

Two same years groups, 6th grade of Primary Education, class A and B, were selected. In this case, the first group would be the experimental one (class A), while the second would be the control group (class B).

At the beginning of the course and in a first phase of quantitative character, the *pretest* would be applied to both groups. This *pretest* consists of some questionnaires composed by questions structured according to the concept of reading habit, both in the mother tongue and in English, and to the use of ICTs. During the school year, the proposal described below (section 2.5) would be applied to the experimental group, keeping the control group with their usual practice. Before the end of the course, the *post-test* (initial questionnaire) would be applied to both groups.

In a second qualitative phase, a series of interviews with the tutors of both classes would be carried out, both at the beginning and at the end of the course, in order to know their viewpoints about the results obtained, as well as the daily activities carried out in the classroom, paying special attention to the time and the importance given to reading (both in Spanish and in English) and to the technologies.

The variables considered for the characterization of the reading habits of the respondents were:

a) the frequency and the means and formats for reading,

b) reading in another language,

c) literary tastes and

d) motivation towards reading.

On the other hand, the variables considered for the characterization of the use of the technologies of the participants have been

a) frequency of use,

b) the motivation for them,

c) and the pleasure and enjoyment in their use.

For this, as in every experiment or research, an independent variable (VI) has been established. This variable undergoes the changes introduced and is subsequently controlled to know the effects it causes on the dependent variable (VD) which is the one that is measured and investigated. In our case the independent variable is:

– Reading intervention program through the introduction of ICTs.

And, at the same time, the dependent variable would be

– Significant improvement in the levels of motivation, attitude and reading frequency.

The measurement of these levels will be carried out through the administration of questionnaires and interviews. The statistical unit observed in the variables has been the individual student in Primary. The survey would be administered to students through a form on the Google Forms platform to collect the data directly. The questionnaire and the interview were designed based on the defined information needs, establishing a response average time to complete the survey of approximately 10 minutes.

6.3.1. Participants

This study would have a sample, N=52, of students from 6th grade of Primary Education, coming from the same educational centre. The age range of the respondents was 11–12 years old.

Half of them, who belong to class A, would be to the experimental group, while the remaining 26 students would be part of the control group, and belong class B. All participants work with tablets or electronic devices within the classroom.

6.3.2. Instruments

The questions of the questionnaire (link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScP2aoXeKaCcGYNjSJ5TwPoRo1m_OAeLIdZOTq0Gpx9h3rN7A/viewform?usp=sf_link) were grouped into three sections. The first one referred to the general data: age, sex. The second section, related to the reading habit (influence and frequency of reading) both in mother tongue and foreign language. And the third, concerning the use of technologies and their level of importance.

For the second and third sections, validated questions chosen from questionnaires used by other organisations have been used.

In the second section, we selected questions used in the questionnaire on reading habits devised by the *Centro de Estudios de Promoción de la Lectura y la Literatura Infantil y Juvenil* (CEPLI) for Primary Education students (Yubero, 2009), as well as the adaptation of Serna and Etxaniz (2017) from the survey conducted by Yubero and Larrañaga (2010) on schoolchildren in Castilla-La Mancha. These questions mainly inquire into reader pleasure: reading for pleasure both Spanish and English, the frequency of reading in the previous year, the reasons for reading and the reading influence of family, friends and teachers. Six questions and three sub-questions have been established in this section. Among the questions, five are based on the Likert scale typology with a range of answers from “nothing” to “a lot”, “every day” to “no day”, “never” to “many times”; a mixed typology question is also included (combining dichotomous question with open question); and multiple choice questions.

As for the third section, questions were adapted from the Dornaleteche, Buitrago and Moreno On-line Digital Literacy Test (2015), found in Larrañaga and Yubero (2019). The adaptation of Serna and Etxaniz (2017), mentioned in the previous section, was also taken into account. Likewise, original questions were designed to adapt them to the characteristics of the proposal.

The questions of the third section are about the frequency of use of the technologies, the pleasure and use given to them, and the activities the respondents like doing in their free time. Out of four, two are based on a Likert scale typology with answers that range from “never” to “all or almost all days”; one multiple choice and one open question.

The interview (Annex I), as the questionnaire, is divided into three sections: reading in the mother tongue with questions related to the importance given to reading, the reading habit, the teaching-learning processes; reading in English with questions about the promotion of reading in English, the time devoted or the importance given to reading; and finally, the use of technologies within the classroom with questions related to their use or opinion.

The design was based on an interview conducted by Serna and Etxaniz (2017), with the head of a school library apart from other new questions essential for the proposal.

In order to verify the reliability of the questionnaire and the interview, an analysis and verification by a committee of experts was done, with the objective of introducing the modifications related to its adaptation in accordance with the hypothesis and objectives. Likewise, before having the definitive version, primary education students were tested in order to check the correct formulation of the questions and the validity of the answers.

6.4. Description of technologies and applications

For the development of the study, it was necessary to use and know the technologies and the digital platforms that were going to be part of the research.

Therefore, in *Table 1* you may find a brief definition of those more specific in order to know their functioning and usefulness:

Table 1

DEFINITION OF TECHNOLOGIES USED IN THE PROPOSAL

TECHNOLOGIES	DEFINITION
Google Forms	Google tool that allows the creation of different types of questionnaires to collect information, facilitating the work of tabulation by storing the data in spreadsheets (Loya, 2020).
Google Drive	Google tool that allows the online storage and modification of files up to 15 GB (Álvarez y Sánchez, 2014).
QR codes	Platform that allows you to create codes of different sizes to link texts, web pages, links or content. It is a quick way to create an access point to information accessible from any device with a reader (Pinilla, 2020).
Pixton	Virtual tool to create stories through the design of comic book bullets. It allows you to characterize characters, give them movement, facial expression, add details, or make adjustments in focus, among others (Valle, 2014).
Booktube community	Networked knowledge community, formed by users who produce original content, record videos related to their hobby of reading and books, and upload them to the "Youtube" platform. There are several sections that can be made in each video: booktags, wrap up, review, etc. The booktubers (that's how the users of this community are called) are considered as "references and trainers of new readers" (Monteblanco, 2015).

Likewise, in order to investigate the types of video to be worked on in the Booktube culture, it is necessary to know the following terms (De la Torre, 2020) (*Table 2*):

Table 2

TERMS REQUIRED TO DEEPEN INTO THE *BOOKTUBE* COMMUNITY

TERMS	DEFINITION
Book-tag	Simple questions on books.
Book-challenge	Literary challenges.
TBR (To Be Read) o Wishlist	Books that one wants to read.
Wrap up	Tour over books read over a period of time.
Book haul	Sample of the latest literary acquisitions, commenting on expectations, cover appearance, etc.
Top	Book selection according to a criterion.
Bookternet	Content selection of online books.
NaCoWriMo (National Comic Writing Month)	Challenge consisting on writing a comic book during the month using the Pixton tool and showing it to the *Booktube* community.
Book review	Summary and book review.

6.5. Proposal

The proposal is annual so we will work with the experimental group throughout the course within the English language area. Both classes that form part of the research will carry out the questionnaires designed in Google Forms. After that, the innovation proposal will be introduced to group A.

It is considered essential that students develop a pleasure for reading in their own language, so that it can be complementarily fostered in a foreign language (English), and they can benefit from its advantages. For this reason, reading will be worked in both languages, with special emphasis on English.

Due to the fact that the model designed requires ICT know-how, especially those mentioned in the previous section, during the first month we will introduce the tools mentioned so that students can handle them correctly and know how to create QR codes, how to store information in their Google Drive, how to usethe Pixton tool and how to record videos.

This proposal meets all the requirements and characteristics of the Booktube community, using Google Drive as video storage, instead of Youtube, in order to avoid exposure and promote the privacy and security of students.

Generally speaking, students will have to record the a video every month and upload it to their Google Drive, which will be the equivalent of the Youtube channel. With that link, they will generate a QR code, which will be used in the class so that the rest of their classmates can access the final result.

The videos will be in English and will have a maximum duration of 4 minutes.

At the beginning of each month, the teacher will show the them her own video on the corresponding topic, as an example of what the students will have to do during the stipulated time. The language used will adjust to the characteristics, needs and capabilities of the students. These recordings will be based on free reading or reading for pleasure, not on any imposed or mandatory reading, so that they are the students, helped by technologies or recommendations, will choose the book they want to read, or select those they want to show.

For the selection of the books that the students want to read, it is worth mentioning that within the class there would be a Classroom Library with its corresponding section of books in English for book loan . The students will annotate the title and date on which they borrow and return the book in Google Drive. In addition, they will also be able to borrow books from the school library.

Also, to facilitate the proposal kick-off, a book list with recommendations of books in English classified by literary genre and age range will be made.

It will the student who will decide whether to start with books in Spanish or English, in order to promote an atmosphere of security and confidence, to move forward in the proposal, and integrate the books in English from the third video onwards.

On the other hand, during the school year, the last hour of the English class will be devoted to pose questions related to the next video. The next table includes the programming (*Table* 3):

Table 3

SESSIONS OF THE PROPOSAL

WEEKS	CONTENTS
1st week	View next video, doubt solving and a reference sheet containing the outline, parts and explaining how to record the video.
2nd week	The vocabulary, structures and comprehension strategies will be covered to facilitate the recording of the video. All this in line with the English area programming. They will highlight those contents included in the current unit.
3rd week	We will work on the videos and books chosen by each student, to help and solve any doubts or problems that may arise.
4th week	Delivery of the QR code that will be posted on the wall and display of the work of colleagues.

Next, in *Table 4*, the timeline of the research proposal is detailed :

Table 4

TIMELINE OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

MONTH AND VIDEO	DESCRIPTION
September's video: *Introductory video*	Each student will introduce his or her Booktube channel, inventing a characteristic greeting that will be repeated in all the recorded videos. Students can have a characteristic way of speaking that identifies them, explaining the name chosen for the channel, what they are called, how old they are, their tastes and hobbies, and whether they like reading. All this information will be collected in the relevant file to be able to organize your video and define what they want to say and how.
October's video: *Wrap up: Books you read in summer*	The student will have to select some summer readings and talk about them briefly, following the structure of the card.
November's video: *To be Read or Wishlist*	Those books that you don't have and want to read will be explained, specifying who the author is, the reason why you want to read them, their titles, what they are about and if someone has recommended them or how they have discovered them.
December's video: *Book-tag*	Following the card that will be given to them, the students will have to say a book that fulfils the characteristic that is given. For example: say a book from when you were little, the best book read in English, the longest book you have read, a book in English that you would recommend to your classmates, etc.
January's video: *A book in English recommended by my classmates*	Using the recommendation to the classmates of the previous video, each student will have to choose one of those books, read it, and make a review about it, indicating if it has been difficult for him/her, if he/she has understood it, if he/she has liked it, and grade it.
February's video: *NaCoWriMo (National Comic Writing Month)*	In this case, during the month of February, students will have to write a comic book in English, using the Pixton tool, showing the final result and explaining it in the video of the month. The maximum length of the comic will be about 10 pages. To make this video, students will work in pairs, that is, a collaborative video will be made, cooperating with another Booktuber classmate, uploading both to their Google Drive platform.
March's video: *Top 3 comics of my classmates that I like*	Using the comics that the students have written during the previous month, each student will have to read seven of them, selected at random, without knowing the name of the authors, and choose three, which are the ones he will talk about in his "Top 3 comics" video.
April's video: *Bookternet*	Students will have to select content found on the Internet, which is related to the books. These can be other Booktubers, literary blogs, youtube videos, booktrailers, websites, online libraries, etc. They will talk about those resources that they liked or that caught their attention.

May's video: *Book-challenge "Infinite challenge"*	This video will be based on a literary challenge, in which they have to say as many English book titles as possible in one minute.
June 's video: *Book haul: Books that I have and I am going to read this summer*	To do this, they will have to select and search for book titles that they think they might like and record the video of the month, explaining what the challenge is, why they have chosen those titles and try to do it as quickly as possible.

Next, we deal with the evaluation and the progress of the experiment.

6.6. Assessment

After the completion of the last video, the *post-test* will be carried out in both the control and the experimental groups. The interview with the teachers will also be conducted, taking as a reference the *pre-test* and the initial interview, in order to be able to compare the answers to the items with respect to the beginning of the course. Thus we will also check if the hypothesis of the proposal has been fulfilled and up to what extent it has been possible to promote the reading habit in English language.

Likewise, to check the adequacy of the proposal, each student will be monitored through observation and interaction, as well as through the videos. In order to evaluate the implicit contents to be worked on, the standards and criteria established in Decree 54/2014 will be taken as a benchmark.

The chosen methodology is active, allowing the participation and involvement of the students. Therefore, a registration and observation sheet will be used to track the evolution of the different milestones of the initiative.

The activities will follow a progression (explained above) since it is necessary to start with those activities that are simpler, and to grow in learning, requiring a greater cognitive demand as the proposal progresses. In this way, students will feel that the activities are within their possibilities, seeing them as a challenge to achieve and facilitating the evolution of learning. That is to say, the activities will be located in the Near Development Zone, a concept developed by Lev Vygotsky in his sociocultural theory. It states that the teaching-learning processes generate development, adjusting it to the capacities that the student has and the demands and support that are presented to him (González and Palacios, 1990).

Finally, as a method of evaluation, it is considered fundamental to assess the adequacy of the proposal, to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the approach, with the aim of improving it and adapting it, and if necessary, to promote the achievement of the proposed objectives.

The prospective results are set out below, as well as a brief debate analysing the advantages and disadvantages of the approach, as well as the future lines to continue and complement the research presented.

7. Results (Prospective)

After implementing the proposal, the results obtained from the questionnaires and interviews from the post-test would be contrastively compared with those of the pre-test to check whether the objective and the hypothesis posed had been fulfilled.

Starting with the surveys of the students in the pilot group, the results that could be expected would be the increase in reading frequency, especially in English. Therefore, in questions five and six, a positive change should be seen in reading more frequently in leisure time and in a language other than one's mother tongue, developing a pleasure for reading (showing that in questions one and six). In addition, to demonstrate this improvement, the percentages corresponding to the reading habit would be calculated, displayed on a graph and compared with the initial results of the pre-test, so that the changes originating in the students' habits could be visually noticed. Consequently, in questions three, four and five, related to book recommendations, a significant increase should be observed in the search for opinions, in family or from friends or teachers, to obtain new book titles to talk about in the videos. This would demonstrate the influence that these agents can have on student acquisition and encouragement to read. Questions one and five should highlight the little influence that the obligatory nature of the readings would have. Therefore this will prove that they mainly read the books that they choose.

Questions related to reading influence are intended to show how students follow the model of their parents, peers or teachers, and how the behaviours they observe can modify and condition their own habits. The objective is that, in the post-test of the experimental group, a greater number of recommendations, book comments among friends, teachers or family, or even the purchase of a book or reading device as a gift, are recorded.

As for the questions related to technologies and their use, the frequency of use would be similar in both tests (pre and post), but the changes in the students' free time, the purpose of use, and in the use of the technologies would be highlighted, showing a clear predominance in the increase of the items “watching Booktubers videos” and “reading”. Also a graph will facilitate to notice the range of importance of the data obtained.

Next, we would continue with the control group, carrying out the same procedure, analyzing their results, comparing the pre-test and post-test, and finally, contrasting the results of both groups to know the inference that the proposal has had in the tastes, motivation, influence and reading habits of the students. It could be expected that the results obtained in the experimental group would show an improvement in the proposed objectives, while those of the control group would not show significant differences.

As for the final interview with the tutors of both groups, depending on the initial opinion, the results could vary. So, if their opinion was negative, the objective would be the promotion of ICTs and of the reading habit in the English area within the classroom, properly adjusted, which would give rise to the benefits mentioned above in this research work.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

The prospective results also intend to show the improvement in the knowledge of the English language. In a study Santos-Díaz (2017) proved, through a bivariate correlation, that the most assiduous readers in the mother tongue were also assiduous in the foreign language, which is why it was found that reading facilitates updating a greater number of words and the identification of technical terms in the foreign language. Therefore, it contributes to improve the mastery of lexical competence and is even related to greater academic performance of school children (Molina-Villaseñor, 2006).

On the other hand, in the study carried out by Cheng, Hwang, Wu, Shadiew and Xie (2010), they state that the study of English through technological devices and digital applications, favours motivation in learning a language, reduces anxiety and eliminates barriers, as they possess recreational components that students value positively.

Likewise, the results of previous studies (Dornaleteche, Buitrago and Moreno, 2015; Gutiérrez-Porlán, Román-García and Sánchez-Vera, 2018), related to the poor use of the Internet for academic purposes could be due to the low implementation and use of social Internet platforms in the teaching-learning process by educational institutions. Duart, Gil, Puñol and Castaño (2008) actively proved it by integrating social platforms in a natural way within the English area. This allowed students to develop strategies to learn, since they were main actors in their learning process.

Therefore, as far as the hypothesis and the proposed objective are concerned, progress in terms of attitude and teaching method would have to be observed in the results, which would translate into an increase in reading frequency. In addition, in relation to the procedure, a greater enjoyment would be observed, as well as the involvement of the students in their learning process, which would favor a rise in the interest towards the subject. When students gain knowledge through different perceptual channels and relate it to personal daily experiences they find it entertaining and they incorporate it.

Consequently, Coll (2002) adds that the interest and motivation for the content is due to the characteristics of the proposed task. Therefore the aim of this initiative is to reinforce a climate of greater dynamism so that unmotivated students would perceive a higher level of enjoyment, reducing passivity (Perlman, 2010).

However, it is important to highlight that it would be necessary to continue the research with a larger sample, with the aim of verifying the veracity and reliability of the results that would be obtained in this research. This study aims to create a precedent by analysing in detail the influence of a variable, such as technologies, when they become an essential element within the society in which we live.

Likewise, the influence of family and school could be the object of a more detailed analysis in subsequent research, as it does not go into detail on those aspects that determine the personality and tastes of the students. Similarly, and following the line presented, one could analyze the books of obligatory reading in school within the English area, and a continuation in the integration of technologies, since as has been previously analyzed, and as shown by Molina-Villaseñor (2006), the taste for reading is related to better academic performance of the students. Therefore, as shown in Santos-Díaz (2017), it implies a strengthening of the role of the available lexicon in linguistics applied to language teaching given by its precursors Gougenheim, Michéa, Rivenc and Sauvageot (1956).

Therefore, concluding this research and considering the information analyzed, it is undoubtedly necessary for teachers to know how to adapt to changes and generational demands and, therefore, to adapt the tools to the tastes and needs of students, trying to promote teaching-learning processes that are meaningful to them. To achieve this, it is necessary to provide continuous training, and to take advantage of the potential that technological resources can provide, researching those procedures, instruments, strategies or methodologies that allow an improvement in education, more specifically in the teaching and learning of a foreign language such as English.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Forthcoming Academic Events and Contests

The 67th meeting of the European Language Council Board took place on-line on the 18th of June, 2021. The meeting had a number of items on its agenda.

First, the Board members focused on the selection of abstracts submitted for CEL/ELC conference on Languages and Rights and (2nd-3rd of December, 2021, on-line format hosted by the University of Antwerp, Belgium) and the provisional programme draft. The leader of the CEL/ELC working group on Languages and Rights Professor Maurizio Viezzi (University of Trieste, Italy, CUITY President) provided a brief outline of the selection procedure and results. The Board members agreed on the conference key slots and formats of academic exchange.

The conference will unite speakers of Academia and Industry. The keynote speeches will cover linguistic and legal dimensions of language and rights. The major tracks for discussions span areas of language rights and interpreting, language and rights in policy making, languages and rights in COVID-19 communication. The selected abstracts of the prospective reports respectively integrate the issues of the legal concept of vulnerability linked to language rights, language policies on community interpreting accuracy in codes of professional ethics for legal interpreters, explore EU language and translation policy, digital tools for migrant communities translation in healthcare crisis communication. Due to COVID-19 emergency a specific session will focus on linguistic diversity, accessibility of multilingual information about COVID-19 in metropolitan cities and information provision during COVID-19 in multilingual states. The panel on the role of public authorities, academia and professional associations in addressing the issue of Language and Rights is specified on the agenda, as well.

Another item on the agenda concerned the CEL/ELC Outstanding Doctorate Award 2021 Presentation. The award winner will receive a prize of € 1500 and will be given the opportunity to present his/her research at the CEL/ELC Conference and to submit an article based on her/his dissertation for consideration by one of the journals linked to the CEL/ELC1 with a recommendation by the Award Committee. The respective documentation has been published on the CEL/ELC site. The President of Prize Committee Professor Mireia Trenchs-Parera (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona) outlined the selection procedure outcomes of the first round of PhD dissertations submitted for the 2021 contest and set forth the proposals for the second review round procedure.

Some members of the present journal editorial board (Professor Maurizio Viezzi, Professor Michael Kelly, Professor Piet Van de Craen, Professor Anastasia Atabekova) took part in the mentioned meeting in their capacity of the European Language Council Academic Board.

The editorial team kindly invites the journal readership to put the conference dates in the diaries and consider the opportunity for PhD students submit their dissertations for future CEL/ELC Outstanding Doctorate Award contests.