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MEDIATION FOR ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES

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The English language skills of today's younger generation are generally sufficient to meet everyday communication needs. This is ensured by national education policies that support English learning up to the B2 level in upper secondary schools. In a globalised world where English functions as a lingua franca of information mediation, young people often go further, independently reaching higher levels of competence.

At the Language Centre of Estonian University of Life Sciences, we analysed the language skills required by future professionals in the field of natural sciences, comparing these needs with the students' current levels. Our work was guided by the *Companion Volume for the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR/CV, 2020), which updates and expands the CEFR to include descriptors for mediation, online interaction, and plurilingual/pluricultural competence.

Given that most students already possess sufficient receptive and productive skills, we are now focusing on mediation – in particular, the ability to find, comprehend, and reformulate information for academic and professional purposes across languages and registers. Since digital literacy is understood as a core professional competence, the ability to mediate field-specific information efficiently with appropriate digital tools, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) based applications, is essential. Generative AI as a component of a wider digital ecosystem is transforming learning processes, offering students across disciplines, including language learning, tools for anonymous practice, reducing judgment and embarrassment (Ruano-Borbalan, 2025). Students must not only use such tools, but also critically assess their credibility, relevance, and linguistic accuracy.

To reflect these developments, the subject formerly titled *English for Specific Purposes* has been updated and modified to *English/Estonian Mediation for Academic and Professional Purposes*, effective from the 2024/2025 academic year. Students are prepared to comprehend and mediate speciality-related texts, developing integrated language skills, with attention to terminology, cultural context, appropriate register, factual accuracy, and source reliability.

In this context, AI, i.e. systems such as ChatGPT or Copilot that can process and generate human-like language, is introduced as one of many digital tools used in language learning and academic work. AI represents a powerful new category, offering real-time assistance in finding collocations and connotations to specific terms, drafting, editing, translating, summarising, and rephrasing texts. Sallai et al. (2024) emphasise the need to explore how students use AI tools. For example, by sharing, reflecting,

and analysing their chat logs as part of peer work and lecturer feedback, students can significantly improve their learning outcomes.

Digital tools are increasingly recognised for their potential to support language learning (Sim & Ismail, 2023). They act as mediators that enhance learning through interaction and engagement. When embedded in a well-designed educational context, they can significantly improve learning outcomes (Lewin et al., 2019; Lin, 2023).

According to Lewin et al. (2019), Lin (2023) and Sim & Ismail (2023) the impact of digital tools extends across multiple dimensions:

- Cognitive, enhancing engagement and supporting deeper processing of information;
- Social, promoting collaboration and interaction in both physical and virtual environments;
- Linguistic, increasing exposure to language and opportunities for practice;
- Performance, improving overall output quality, organisation, and argumentation.

In 2024/2025 academic year, as a part of the teaching / learning process in the course *English/ Estonian Mediation for Academic and Professional Purposes* we integrated several tasks to evaluate the effectiveness of digital tools for enhanced learning outcomes. The tasks included comprehending speciality-related texts, practicing concept-based approach to terminology, editing speciality-related English and Estonian texts, writing academic abstracts, and preparing slides and speaker's notes for academic presentations. Students worked individually, in pairs, or groups of three or four depending on the task. Students were asked to complete the tasks using ChatGPT/Copilot, critically analyse and evaluate the results.

When asked to comment on the experience, students evaluated it as positive and highlighted that AI easily adapts to the users and their prompts, generates "more natural, human-like" texts, and helps with the editing.

Students' comments:

"ChatGPT can adapt its translations based on the desired tone, style, or formality level."

"Overall best translation was when I used ChatGPT because there was an opportunity to provide instructions on what to change and how to improve the text."

"We liked ChatGPT more because the translation was much better and it was easier to correct the mistakes later."

However, the students were slightly unsatisfied by the fact that they themselves had to work more industriously, be precise in formulating prompts, as well as the fact that conversations with AI required more time.

Students' comments:

"ChatGPT requires detailed instruction ... is more time consuming."

"Chatgpt needed more modifying and guidance."

The comments revealed students' overall positive experience with AI, as well as confirmed that such work contributes to the development of linguistic and mediation skills, stimulates critical thinking and self-reflection.

Furthermore, we hypothesised that AI can support complex linguistic tasks relevant to academic and professional communication and mediation. Below we present terminology, register and style task samples. The terms are likely familiar to students; nevertheless, confusion caused by word-for-word translations is not uncommon. Recognising such mismatches is essential for developing the ability to mediate information clearly and appropriately.

I. Terminology

Aim: to apply understanding of concept-based terminology in practice by exploring how Estonian

equivalents of English terms reflect underlying concepts rather than direct word-for-word translations; to develop strategies for identifying and using concept-driven equivalents.

Task: The term 'wild', as in 'wildlife' and 'wild animals'. Using your AI, find out the possible and relevant collocations and their meaning / concepts associated with the collocations.

Student to AI: "Could you bring examples of the English term 'wild' collocations, their concepts and the corresponding Estonian equivalents, like 'wildlife', 'wild animals', 'wild flowers' etc? Make a summary of the ones about life sciences."

AI to Student: "Absolutely! The English word **"wild"** has a variety of meanings and nuances depending on context, and Estonian often uses **different words** to translate those. Here's a little comparative overview with examples:

"Wild" - Translation Variants in Estonian

English Phrase	Meaning / Context	Estonian Equivalent(s)	Notes
wildlife	Animals living freely in nature	metsloomad, elusloodus, metsik loodus	General term; can include flora in elusloodus
wild animals	Undomesticated animals	metsloomad, metsikud loomad	Often used in everyday speech
wild flowers	Naturally growing flowers	metslilled, looduslikud lilled, metsikult kasvavad lilled	Not cultivated
wild plants	Plants that grow in the wild	metsikud taimed, looduslikud taimed	Less commonly said than looduslik
the wild (noun)	Untouched nature or wilderness	metsik loodus, puhas loodus, loodusesse	Often used in contrast with captivity

It should be noted that the Estonian equivalents suggested in the table by AI as the reply to the Student's prompt require further interpretation, but the idea that 'wild' is not 'metsik' in many contexts is there.

Therefore, the next logical step for students would be to ask about the Estonian concepts of the terms 'metsloom' and 'metsik loom', to see if it triggers AI to „dig deeper” than the word-for-word translations. As seen below in the example, the result of the next step clearly indicates the Estonian terms are not synonyms and further search for collocations and context in Estonian might be insightful. Notice that the AI included a column „Implication”, and suggests a further step with the English terms 'wild', 'feral', and 'domesticated'.

Lecturer to AI: "What's the concept of 'metsloom' and 'metsik loom' in Estonian?"

AI to Lecturer:

"Summary Table:

Term	Meaning	Implication	Typical English Equivalent
metsloom	Animal living in the wild (by nature)	Non-domesticated species	wild animal, game species
metsik loom	Animal behaving wildly (by character)	Untamed, uncontrolled (not necessarily non-domestic)	feral animal, savage beast (contextual)

Want to take this further into a concept tree or comparison with English terms like “wild,” “feral,” and “domesticated”?”

The AI responses indicate that the concept-based approach enables users to identify appropriate equivalents, thereby increasing the likelihood of correct contextual usage.

II. Terminology and register

Aim: analysing register for mediating message according to target groups.

Learning activity with an original paragraph from an EU Knowledge Guide on bioeconomy: “What is a circular bioeconomy? A circular bioeconomy is an economy powered by nature. It is a new economic model that emphasizes the use of renewable natural capital and focuses on minimizing waste, replacing the wide range of non-renewable, fossil-based products currently in use.”

The sample below gives a somewhat unconventional version of the prompt by the students. Remarkably, AI was still able to infer the intended meaning.

Task. Use AI to modify the style and register of a text in English for a different target group.

Student to AI: “> chat i have another sentence for you, but use english and more humanising vocabulary”

AI to Student: “A circular bioeconomy is basically an economy that runs on nature. It’s a new way of doing things – using renewable resources, creating less waste, and replacing all the fossil-based stuff we rely on with greener, more sustainable options.”

The use of AI proved effective in demonstrating how texts can be adapted across different registers, enabling students to compare versions and adjust language appropriately to mediate the message to their intended audience.

III. Register, focus and style

Aim: noticing and applying specific features of oral vs. written style; finding, focusing and mediating the main message.

Background: A student had a problem with the speech notes prepared for a presentation, as there was “too much information” and the sentences were “too complicated”, so the student had trouble finding the main focus and making the sentences suitable for oral style.

Task. Use AI to highlight the main focus and modify the sentences for an oral presentation.

Student to AI: “I need to make a PechaKucha presentation based on this text. Would you find the key phrases that I have to include, and make the sentences shorter, as the text is for reading, but I need to speak.”

The text compiled by the student, and the AI suggestions are compared in the table below.

Compiled text by Student	AI suggestions
<p>Slide 1-2: Introduction to Modular Construction Modular construction involves the off-site fabrication of building components, which are then transported and assembled on-site. This method contrasts with traditional construction, where all building activities occur on-site. The modular approach offers potential advantages in speed, reduces in cost, higher quality control and there are much more benefits that is not discovered yet.</p>	<p>Slide 1-2: Introduction to Modular Construction Modular construction means building components are made off-site and assembled quickly. It offers faster completion, lower costs, and better quality control.</p>
<p>Slide 3: Speed and Efficiency Here you can see how these modules are lifted into place and how quickly it goes, which allows the client to receive the building faster and start using it.</p>	<p>Slide 3: Speed and Efficiency Here, you see modules being lifted into place. This rapid process allows clients to use buildings sooner.</p>

<p>Slide 4-5: Economic Efficiency and Cost Reduction One of the primary drivers for adopting modular construction is economic efficiency. Studies indicate that modular methods can reduce construction schedules by 20–50% and costs by 20%. These savings result from streamlined processes, reduced labor requirements, and minimized material waste. Since modules are built in a controlled factory environment and ordered in large quantities which reduces the total price, and construction timelines are less affected by weather delays or site constraints.</p>	<p>Slide 4-5: Cost Savings Modular construction reduces schedules by 20–50% and costs by 20%. Savings come from efficient processes, less labor, and minimal material waste.</p>
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AI can support students in identifying key message within a text and convey it in an appropriate register.

Conclusion

Using AI to support human-centred reflective teaching / learning process of language, communication and mediation skills opens possibilities and challenges of creating tasks for students to incorporate AI responsibly and productively in their academic communication and mediation. Various tasks focusing on text comprehension, terminology development, appropriate register selection, editing, and maintaining thematic coherence when mediating information encouraged students to formulate precise prompts to AI, and ask clarifying questions. However, even less linguistically accurate prompts can yield useful results, making this approach accessible to students with varying levels of language proficiency. Through critically engaging with AI-generated examples, students develop a more conscious awareness of language use, mediation and communication strategies they might not yet fully master on their own. Ultimately, by leveraging AI as a tool for refining their language skills, students of all proficiency levels can enhance their ability to mediate and communicate effectively, fostering greater confidence in their language use and critical thinking.

This article is edited by AI.

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Using Patterned and Predictable Picture Books to Teach ESL Freshmen Students at the Institute of Languages in Tabuk University

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Abstract

This article shares findings from a research project that asked the question: What are university students' perceptions of and experiences with patterned and predictable picture books when used as instructional resources for them to learn English as a Second Language (ESL)? It introduces patterned and predictable picturebooks as valuable books for supporting language and language development. Next, it provides a literature review on research for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to university students. Then, it describes the research project and ends by discussing major findings and implications for teaching ESL students.

Keywords: Patterns, Predictable, Picture books, ESL

Using Patterned and Predictable Picture Books to Teach ESL Freshmen Students at the Institute of Languages in Tabuk University

This article shares findings from a research project that asked the question: What are university students' perceptions of and experiences with patterned and predictable picture books when used as instructional resources to learn English as a Second Language (ESL)? It provides a literature review on research for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to university students and introduces patterned and predictable picture books as valuable tools for supporting language and language development with ESL students. Then, it describes the research project and ends by describing major findings and implications for teaching ESL students.

Literature Review

Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to university freshmen students poses unique challenges due to the diverse language backgrounds and varying levels of proficiency among this group. To address these challenges, teachers have increasingly turned to different curricular resources and innovative teaching methods, one of which is using picture books as valuable tools in ESL instruction.

Picture books are not new to ESL instruction. Benitez et al. (2022) investigated Palabras codeswitching and lexical diversity in Spanish-English picture books. This research study focused on a unique subset of picture books known as codeswitching books. These books embed text in one language within another. Analysis of these books indicated three important dimensions: the quantity and quality of text in each language, the complexity of the presented text, and the patterns of language switching.

Zheng et al. (2022) examined the effect of picture book reading on the development of preschool children in rural areas of China. Major findings included that the use of picture books was advantageous and had a positive influence on the development of language and language learning among rural children. Implications of major findings highlighted the use of picture books and instructional strategies to support children's cognitive development in disadvantaged areas and raise significant concerns regarding the design and implementation of literacy interventions in rural settings.

Patterned and Predictable Picture Books

Teaching language skills to English as a Second Language (ESL) university freshmen students can be challenging (Damayanti & Febrianti, 2020; Smith, 2013; Zheng et al., 2022). Patterned and predictable picture books are an effective and engaging resource to support student language acquisition (Strouse

et al., 2018). These books build on pattern recognition and prediction and offer ESL freshmen students a supportive and enjoyable language experience (Sjödin & Dabbous, 2023).

Patterned and predictable picture books are structured stories that follow a particular pattern or sequence throughout the text (Björklund & Palmér, 2020; Terrile, 2022). These books feature recurring phrases, predictable storylines, and visually engaging illustrations that support students through the reading process. They also promote vocabulary development and increase reading comprehension and fluency, essential skills for ESL students at the freshman level (Durrant et al., 2018; Zheng et al., 2022).

Patterned and predictable picture books also support diverse learning styles and abilities within the ESL classroom. They provide scaffolded learning experiences that help students gradually build their language proficiency while feeling a sense of accomplishment as they successfully predict and decode text (Axell & Boström, 2021; Montag, 2019; Tunkiel & Bus, 2022). These books are particularly valuable for university freshmen ESL students who experience anxiety or apprehension about their language abilities in a new academic environment (Björklund & Palmér, 2020; Haghanikar et al., 2022).

Classroom Context

This study was conducted at the Institute of Languages at Tabuk university. Participants in this study were freshmen business administration students aged between 18-19 years old and their English language level ranged between B1 and B2 according to the CEFR. In one course students experienced patterned and predictable picture books as an essential component of their curriculum. The teacher used different strategies with the picture books, such as reading aloud, reading in groups, and stopping at certain points to ask questions.

Research Project

This research project used a structured and systematic approach to answer the research question, relying on numerical data, statistical analysis, and test hypotheses (Creswell, 2018).

Participants: A total of fifty (50) male university freshmen students participated in this study. Participants were a representative sample from a larger population of university students at the University of Tabuk in Saudi Arabia. All participants studied English as a Second Language after learning Arabic as their mother tongue and first language and were university freshmen with an age ranging from (18-19) years old.

Data Collection: Data collected were student responses to a structured questionnaire that consisted of five (5) items, written as statements. The questionnaire included a five-point Likert scale, from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Data Analysis: Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to examine students' perceptions and experiences with patterned and predictable picture books in ESL instruction. Responses to the five-point Likert scale questionnaire were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics to calculate mean scores, standard deviations, and frequency distributions for each item. These measures provided an overview of response patterns.

A correlation analysis was also conducted to explore relationships between responses. This analysis examined whether students who believed patterned and predictable picture books improved their English language skills (Item 1) also found them engaging (Item 2), useful for understanding English text (Item 3), or helpful for vocabulary development (Item 4).

Findings

Major findings are presented in this section. Table 1 illustrates students' responses to the five (5) statements.

Table 1.

Research Question: What were students' perceptions of and experiences with patterned and predictable picture books?

#	Items	SA	A	No	D	SD	Mean	SD
1	I find reading patterned and predictable picture books helps me improve my English language skills.	24	20	0	1	5	4.14	1.212
2	I find patterned and predictable picture books to be engaging and enjoyable for learning English.	7	1	0	25	17	2.12	1.303
3	I believe that patterned and predictable picture books make it easier for me to understand English text.	17	16	0	9	8	3.50	1.515
4	Using patterned and predictable picture books in class is a helpful way to learn new English vocabulary.	9	19	0	12	10	3.10	1.474
5	I feel more confident in my English reading when using patterned and predictable picture books.	12	14	0	10	14	3.00	1.616

Item 1 responses indicate that a substantial majority of participants (44 out of 50) agree that reading patterned and predictable picture books enhances their English language skills. Item 2 responses indicate that fifty percent (50%) of participants disagreed regarding engagement and enjoyment of patterned and predictable picture books for learning English. Only seven (7) students reported the picture books as engaging and enjoyable. Items 3 and 4 focus on the students' beliefs about the utility of these books.

Item 3 responses indicate a substantial number of participants (33 out of 50) believe that patterned and predictable picture books make it easier for them to understand English text (mean score of 3.50). Similarly, Item 4 responses indicate a majority of students (28 out of 50) consider using these picture books in class to be helpful for learning new English vocabulary (mean score of 3.10). Item 5 responses indicate students' confidence levels in their English reading abilities when using pattern and predictable picture books were mixed. Twenty-six (26) students responded that they feel more confident (SA or A), and 24 students responded less confident (D or SD) (mean score of 3.00).

Discussion

Discussion of major findings are organized around the research question. Question 1: *What are university students' perceptions of and experiences with patterned and predictable picture books when used as instructional resources for them to learn English as a Second Language (ESL)?* In general, students perceived patterned and predictable picture books as beneficial for improving their English language skills. This finding is consistent with research by Zheng et al. (2022) indicating that the repetitive nature of patterned and predictable books promotes effective language learning and comprehension.

At the same time, students experienced varying degrees of engagement and enjoyment with patterned and predictable picture books. A total of seven (7) students found these books engaging and enjoyable, while the majority did not share this same experience. This finding extends and enriches research findings by Leung & Adams-Whittaker (2022), indicating that the engagement and enjoyment of these books are influenced by factors such as individual preferences and the choice of books. Items 3 and 4 highlight that students believe these books make it easier to understand English text and are helpful for learning new vocabulary. Varying degrees of student engagement and enjoyment align with research findings by Tunkiel & Bus (2022), which indicate that predictable patterns and visual cues in these picture books aid in comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

Similarly, students experienced varying degrees of self-confidence in English reading from using patterned and predictable books. Many students felt more confident; others did not. This finding reflects research findings by Li & Bus (2023), indicating that student self-confidence in language skills may be influenced by individual learning styles and preferences.

Implications

The findings from this study showed the significance of patterned and predictable picture books in ESL classrooms. Participated students widely acknowledged the effectiveness of these books as tools to enhance their language understanding and vocabulary acquisition (Table1). However, variations in engagement and students' confidence shows the need for teachers to select books that fit students' interests carefully. Selecting the right books can enhance motivation and enjoyment. This can create a more engaging learning experience. Additionally, the reported differences in confidence levels show the need for teachers to use diverse instructional strategies that address individual needs.

The study also underscores the role of these books when it comes to improving specific language skills, such as grammar and reading comprehension (Table2). Students acknowledged the effectiveness these books have for providing visual and repetitive support for improving reading skills. They also acknowledged the role these books play in reinforcing grammatical concepts. At the same time, their limited impact on pronunciation and fluency shows the need for supplementary activities. Targeted exercises, such as pronunciation practice and fluency drills, might be integrated alongside these materials to ensure balanced language development.

Responses regarding collaborative use in group or class settings (Table 3) further illustrate the value of these books as they create interactive and engaging learning opportunities. Students who favored collaborative activities noted their effectiveness in building motivation which creates positive attitudes toward learning English. These findings suggest that incorporating patterned and predictable picture books into ESL curricula can enhance language acquisition when combined with group activities and individual-focused strategies. Thus, using these resources thoughtfully and addressing students' diverse needs, educators can maximize their impact on language learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This research study investigated university freshmen student perception of and experience with patterned and predictable picture books to learn English as a Second Language. The major findings of this study provide valuable insights regarding students' perceptions and experiences with these teaching and learning resources and indicate many benefits and challenges. Overall, findings suggest that patterned and predictable picture books play a significant role in teaching English for ESL students as it enhances language acquisition and comprehension among ESL freshmen students. Students generally acknowledged the benefits of using these books for improving their English language skills. These books help in understanding English text and learning new vocabulary. They also recognized the positive impact of these resources on their motivation to read in English and their overall enjoyment of the learning process.

At the same time, students' engagement and enjoyment levels of these books varied, highlighting the need for educators to consider individual preferences and interests when incorporating these materials into the curriculum. Additionally, the impact of these books on aspects like pronunciation and fluency varied. This suggests that these tools should be complemented with targeted exercises in these areas. Moreover, students expressed a willingness to recommend patterned and predictable picture books to their peers and indicate a preference for collaborative group activities involving these resources. This underscores the potential for these books to create a sense of community and engagement within the ESL classroom (see, Appendix A).

In summary, this study contributes to the body of research on ESL instruction by showing the multifaceted nature of patterned and predictable picture books in supporting language learning. Educators can use these insights to inform their instructional strategies and curriculum design. They also can tailor their approaches to meet the diverse needs and preferences of ESL students. Harnessing the power of these pedagogical tools will help educators to create supportive and enjoyable learning.

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Appendix A.

Predictable and Patterned Texts

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Notes from a little classroom: Planets in a learning space

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"No tolerance
of energy wasting" (Fin.)

*I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are.*

*I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.*

*Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud --
We in ourselves rejoice!
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light.*

*("Dejection: an Ode" 37, 45, 71-74)
Samuel Taylor Coleridge*

Part 3

Welcome back to the continuing series of my classroom sketches, where I share notable incidents and reflections from both past years and more recent times. I also depict some characters, each with their own quirks and traits that make them memorable. For the first two parts, you can refer to issues 62 (2023) and 63 (2024). In a nod to respecting privacy, the names of the learners have, of course, been replaced. In my stories they are *planets* floating in a learning space.

1

Starting a lesson by pointing out some fascinating facts is always a great way to capture attention and make students look beyond their textbooks and the usual routine of learning. Not only does it stir their curiosity, but it also introduces them to some new vocabulary. On occasion, I begin my lessons with a question, something like, "What's the most expensive fish ever sold in the world? Take a guess - what type of fish was it, where was it sold, and how much do you think it cost?" The students eagerly make their guesses, only to be astounded by the answer. It does pack a punch. In 2019, a bluefin tuna, weighing a whopping 278 kilograms, was sold for \$3.1 million at Tokyo's Toyosu Fish Market. It instantly became the most expensive fish ever recorded since records began in 1999. The buyer? Kiyoshi Kimura, who is famously known as the "Tuna King" - the president of a popular sushi restaurant chain in Japan. What's quite remarkable, however, is that despite this extraordinary price tag, the cost of a single sushi piece made from that tuna remained at the usual price.

From here, I like to bring up other lavish purchases that capture the imagination, such as the Rolls-Royce Boat Tail, which set a buyer back a staggering \$26.2 million, or the Bugatti La Voiture Noire, priced at \$18.1 million. And then, I turn the conversation to something a bit more personal. "But," I ask, "what do we, ordinary people with modest incomes, have to do with such extravagant indulgences of the wealthy? What can we learn from it all?" I lead them to this conclusion: "Perhaps the most expensive thing in the world isn't something you can buy with money - it's *your life*. You can't put a price on it, and once it's lost, it's gone forever. So, let's take care of it and cherish it." And with that, we circle back to the idea of security, *kaitse*. Both personal security, as well as national protection in our turbulent time. A reminder that some things are too valuable to be measured in mere currency.

2

I remember one particular lesson with my beginner group, where I set a simple task: to have a short conversation “between friends” about making plans to go somewhere together. Two of the ladies took on the task and began chatting. But, as often happens when you’re just starting out with a new language, things took a rather amusing turn right from the outset. One of the ladies greeted her friend with a rather unexpected question: “Who are you?” instead of “How are you?” It was clear that the question words hadn’t quite been fully grasped yet. Luckily, the other lady knew the difference between “who” and “how” and, rather than fluster, she caught on immediately. With a cheeky grin, she replied, “Oh, I’m your old-time friend! Do you remember my name? If you do, let’s go to the cinema. I remember who *you* are.” The whole class burst into laughter at this little mix-up – a perfect reminder that in language learning it’s not just the words you say, but the cheerful moments that make it all worthwhile.

3

“He” and “she” – a typical confusion for many learners of English. I remember one of my friends in Finland suggested that people should start using a new, rather amusing form – “she-he.” It’s easy to pronounce and makes perfect sense in Finland and Estonia, where separate gender forms for “he” and “she” are absent. That joking form “she-he” wasn’t about the controversial issue of “multiple genders” and their pronouns. Well, I did have, however, some teenage students who were questioning their gender identity. One particularly introverted girl, who was by far the brightest in her class and had the best English skills, became quite serious about transitioning. One day, she asked me not to call her by her female name any longer, explaining that simply calling her “you” would suffice. At first, I thought she was joking – but she wasn’t. It wasn’t funny at all, actually. It was a real challenge, as I had to adjust to this new twist and start avoiding any gendered pronouns when speaking about her (or him) in class. The confusion between “she” and “he” was then *for me*. I hope she (or he) is doing well in social interactions. I haven’t seen her (or him) for quite some time, so I’m not sure if the decision still stands. It’s a sensitive matter that requires careful handling. In my view, neither praise nor condemnation would be appropriate in such situations. It’s about understanding and giving space for an individual to develop.

4

lapetus, a teen planet in grade 8, walked into the classroom one day looking utterly miserable, as though he was on the verge of tears. Naturally, I asked him what had happened. With a long face, he explained that, just before class, he’d been playing a game on his phone – and had lost. Concerned, I asked if he had been playing for money, but he shook his head. “No,” he said, “but I lost all my *points*, and now I have to start the game from scratch.” For a teenager, that can feel like a real tragedy – losing points in a game can seem like the end of the world, as if *everything* they’ve worked for is gone. For them, virtual reality often feels more real than the life happening around them. I tried to console lapetus, offering him some reassurance: “It’s just a game, don’t worry. You’ll play again and win many times.” But it made me reflect again on how modern teens experience the world. While I don’t want to be overly critical or come across as a senior with a bit of a grumpy streak, there’s something almost pitiable about their immersion in virtual reality. It’s hard to watch, at times, when they feel like the stakes are so high over something so intangible.

5

Eris, a young planet in grade 4, comes for tutoring lessons once a week. She’s fallen behind in her English at school, so she needs some extra help. The kid really struggles with the differences between English and Estonian spelling, grammar and pronunciation. She often mixes up words from the two languages. But slowly, she’s improving. One day, I asked her, “What’s the plural of ‘cloud’?” Without hesitation, she answered, “*Cloudsid!*” She has no problem learning Estonian, which has become the main language of instruction in this region. It’s a challenge, but one she’s taking on with genuine interest.

We were working on pronunciation one lesson when she tried to say “we’ve got.” It took a lot of effort to get it just right. Finally, she explained with a smile, “Oh, I know what it is! Our teacher told us that *this sign*” – she pointed to the apostrophe – “you know, up there... can you see it? It’s like a comma, but it’s on top, and you really need it there. It means that ‘ha’ is gone, and ‘ve’ is lonely now. It’s supposed to be one word, but now it’s split up. So, this upper comma is actually a tear, d’you know why? Because ‘ve’ is crying!” It was such a sweet, original explanation. I might start using it myself.

Eris has a curious and inventive side: she loves experimenting with objects, referring to it as “physics tricks.” Out of nowhere, she might start setting up a pendulum using a pen, a pencil, an eraser, a string and whatever else she can find around her. She never likes to sit still; she’s always on the go, constantly busy with something new.

“Who has written this?” Eris wonders aloud, gazing at one of the pages in her workbook. “Was that me? Doesn’t look like...” I raise an eyebrow and ask, “Do you think it was your clone? Actually, would you like to have your own clone to attend school lessons and do your homework instead of you?” She shakes her head vigorously. “Noooope! I wouldn’t. I want to study myself!” Ah, what a diligent child. But then something a bit darker creeps into the story.

“You know, our English teacher at school is very strict,” she says with a frown. “At the slightest breach of discipline, she starts shouting, ‘Discipline, discipline, children!’ and we really hate it. When she leaves the classroom after one of her outbursts, almost all the kids start shouting, ‘Peg out! Get lost!’” I’m taken aback. It’s a bit shocking, really. “She does help us with the right answers, though, when we’re doing tasks,” Eris adds, as if that somehow could make up for the tension. Children, as I see it, don’t quite understand the full meaning of life and death. They can be cruel in their own innocent way, sometimes just for fun. Another time, Eris told me that their English teacher “can sometimes be actually *kinda good*” and “*even say nice things*” to them.

When Eris starts telling me about her adventures in gaming, I often find myself lost. She speaks in a language of gaming terms and references that are completely alien to us *dinosaurs*, as kids might say. Once, she told me a chilling story about a boy who used to play computer games a lot and “got some *evil stuff* in his game and perhaps on his gadget, too.” He played the same game as Eris, but he was from another country. After playing for hours in his room, “he just disappeared, and his mum never saw him again.” She continued with a serious tone, “The window was open at the time... and two drops of blood were on his desk! Nobody’s been able to find him. The search is still going on.” Then, in a way that sent a shiver down my spine, she added, “But... you know, since then, I’ve sometimes seen two white eyes on my screen in the game. I’m sure *it’s him!* Other players also see those white eyes, and they’re also sure it’s him. Not only that! I sometimes see the two white eyes in my room.” Eris told me all of this with such gravity, without the slightest hint of jest. It was unsettling. Or perhaps... children can be such convincing little actors. Just in case, I later decided to mention it to her mum, asking her not to tell Eris that I’d brought it up.

“Oh, I’ve lost sixty euros that I paid to the game for some new skins and weapons. That’s a real loss!” Eris says with a dramatic sigh. “Lost the money? How did that happen?” I ask, genuinely curious. “My phone just stopped working,” she replies. “Actually, it started emitting smoke, I think the battery overheated. You know, I use my phone so much for playing games. Well, my mum bought me a new one, here it is. But my money in the game is gone for good, because the account somehow disappeared with the old phone.” “Goodness,” I mutter. “What’s the name of the game?” “Hide or Die,” she says very seriously. Good for the game producers, I suppose. They’ve got Eris and her parents hooked.

Eris communicates with one of her friends almost entirely through emojis. She proudly shows me one such conversation on her phone screen. There are no words – just a long exchange of various emojis. I think it’s a real threat to the development of thinking, speaking and writing skills (in story 16 below I describe one of such examples). It can be seen in essays from many older students, and it’s clear that over-reliance on this kind of communication isn’t helping. Seeing my bewildered expression, Eris confidently told me, “I can write better than my friend!” Apparently, the other girl’s writing skills are much worse than Eris’s. We’re going over homework. “Tim’s got ___ eyes.” Eris is pondering which of the three adjectives to choose. “Curly?” she suggests. “No, eyes can’t be curly,” I correct her. “OK, then Tim’s eyes are blue! Just like mine!” She beams, proud of her answer.

“Where is Estonia on the map?” She’s struggling a bit. I point out Europe and show her where Estonia is located. “Now I see. But I’m worried that those big oceans around the continents might flood us!” she exclaims with wide eyes. Then I ask, “What’s the language people of the world normally use to communicate if they don’t understand each other’s languages?” Without a moment’s hesitation, she replies, “I’m

sure it's Estonian." I realise she's serious. "Well, I'll tell you, the Estonian language is indeed very important here. But, actually, most people around the world use English to communicate with each other when they don't share a common language." Eris looks at me, wide-eyed, as though I've just revealed some sort of secret. I suppose, in her world, this is news. Kids have now got so much more Estonian at school than before, so this might be the reason of that amazement.

6

I often hear students say, "The mouth starts aching after just a few minutes of practising English sounds and phrases." It's something I can completely understand. Until speaking a foreign language becomes second nature, it can feel a bit like self-inflicted torture for a while – both for the mouth and the mind. The speech muscles aren't used to the new movements, and the brain is working overtime to process everything. But after a while, it becomes easier, almost like any new skill.

7

Callisto, an elderly planet, is always meticulous. Her learning skills are better than those of others in the group, but she never fails to get annoyed when others make mistakes or take more than five seconds to start answering, though I'm there, ready to help students out. Callisto has a remarkable tendency to comment on *each and every* mistake made by others, almost as if it's a reflex. She also has a rather strong aversion to Western countries, especially the US (see the last *Open!* Part 2 of this series, with a chapter titled "William's not home," which touches on the challenges of teaching English in the northeast of Estonia). Yet, despite her biases, Callisto has diligently been learning English for quite some time, saying she simply likes the language and the process of learning it.

One day, another lady brought a beautiful hand fan to the classroom, as it was quite hot in late May. She said that it had been bought in Venice, Italy. I couldn't help but mention that, sadly, the gorgeous city of Venice is gradually sinking and could very well disappear within a hundred years, according to scientific studies. Someone added that the Netherlands, and even some neighbourhoods of New York, are at risk of being swallowed by the rising ocean levels caused by global warming. Callisto, however, responded in her usual antagonistic way, saying, "I would be happy if New York disappeared." A mind-blowing idea from someone who is learning English! Naturally, I had to challenge this remark. "Is it really good to wish suffering on other people or countries? Let's wish for all people to live in peace, safety and prosperity. I've never heard of a single American who would wish *your town* and *your home* to disappear under the water." Luckily, Callisto's opinions aren't shared by others in the group. It's not always easy to handle biased, captious or censorious attitudes, but you can always expect it from someone in a group. Despite her views, Callisto is generally a good person. We sometimes have meaningful conversations and share quite a bit of understanding. It's a bit of a *Jekyll and Hyde* situation, to be honest.

One time, as I happened to run into Callisto at the entrance and we were hurrying upstairs to the lesson, I saw it as a perfect opportunity to gently address the issue of interrupting others in class. "You know, for some reason, *some people* tend to react a bit too emotionally to mistakes made by others in class. I think it's best not to worry about *their* errors," I said, trying to approach it tactfully. "No, no, I don't do that. How could I? That would be so wrong!" she responded defensively. "I didn't mean *you*. I just wanted to know your opinion." For about a month after that, Callisto made a real effort to hold back, remaining calm when others made mistakes. But eventually, she couldn't resist. Her righteous indignation would burst forth once again. Whenever someone's answer was off, she couldn't contain herself. "Oh my God, how is it possible to pronounce this word *like that*? You should have learnt it long ago!" she'd exclaim. It's not easy for Callisto to keep her reactions in check, but at least now and then, she makes an effort to control herself when others protest or when I remind her subtly. My role is to cultivate a friendly, welcoming atmosphere in the classroom, where students feel at ease. Through English, I hope to help some of them set aside their biases and, in doing so, gain a broader and more nuanced understanding of the world.

8

Umbriel, a teen planet in grade 8, sends me a message: "Sorry, I can't come to class today." Now, I had seen him just a few minutes earlier, getting off the bus before the lesson started. So, when I received his message, I couldn't help but think he might have had something else more important to do – perhaps

retaking a school test after receiving a poor mark. But about thirty minutes into the lesson, who should walk in but Umbriel, along with his friend Hyperion. They both declare they're late because they missed their bus. I decide not to mention that I had actually seen one of them getting off the bus earlier. Usually, when students decide to skip a class, they're all in – no showing up at all. But this time, it seemed a bit different. The two lads clearly hadn't had enough fun outside, changed their minds and eventually decided that coming to the lesson might just be more entertaining than hanging around outdoors.

9

Whenever I organise language games in class, with points given individually, I've noticed that learners, especially kids, tend to dislike it. Those who score poorly often get quite upset and sometimes even feel that the teacher is being biased. On the other hand, those who score higher and win can get rather boastful, which only serves to upset the others even more. I've found that dividing the class into two or three teams works far better. It's much less disheartening to lose as part of a team, rather than feeling singled out. It tends to keep the atmosphere more balanced and the competition fairer.

10

Perhaps my most challenging student has been a man whose English course was funded by the unemployment office, on the grounds that he could get a job abroad. Unfortunately, he simply couldn't care less. His attendance was abysmal, he was irresponsible, and he made no effort to do his homework, understand the grammar or learn new vocabulary. He'd skip lessons and even managed to lose his textbook at one point, before eventually dropping out of the course entirely. In class, he was never particularly attentive, unless something struck him as amusing – usually words that, in his language, sounded like swear words. His understanding of the language – and, well, the world in general – was rather limited; he could hardly manage very basic conversations and struggled to answer most questions. Teaching him was a real struggle. He needed English for his work abroad, but seemed to think it would be an easy skill to pick up – like a course of pills to be taken for a month or two, pills that would magically fix everything. He was given a chance, his course was paid for, yet he squandered the opportunity, showing little interest or effort. Organising his studies was a troublesome task, to say the least. With some students you just can't help but feel a great sense of relief when you no longer have to "squeeze water from a stone."

11

One lady studied in one of my groups for a semester. She really struggled with pronouncing English words, and everything seemed so difficult for her. She tried hard, but her progress was slow, especially when compared to her classmates, whose improvement was much more visible. At one point, she even asked me not to give her any tasks during class because she felt embarrassed all the time. Perhaps individual lessons would have been a better option in her case. In the end, she decided not to continue with her studies. Some time later, she informed me that she was leaving Estonia for the United States, specifically one of the southern states, as her relatives live there and "there is no one left in the family in Estonia anymore." That news came as a complete surprise. She didn't strike me as the type of person who could ever imagine herself moving all the way to the US. I encouraged her to keep learning English, especially since immersing herself in an English-speaking environment would likely accelerate her progress. This, of course, was before we could imagine the scale of the sweeping changes unfolding in the States. So much has shifted since then, yet I do hope that, at the very least, the English language won't be deported from the US. A bit of a joke, by all means.

12

Proteus, an adult planet, studied two B1 courses in a group before taking a break for a year. After that, he decided to take a B2 course individually. He was the technician type, preferring hard facts and concrete details. It was a real challenge for him to discuss human emotions or feelings. Whenever we came across tasks in the coursebook that required a bit of imagination, he would openly admit that he had a poor imagination and didn't have much to say. With some prompting from me, though, he could manage to get through speaking exercises.

There are some people who are overly focused on the literal meaning of words or grammar and struggle to go beyond that. Once, for example, Proteus confused about the Past Simple versus the Present Perfect

when we discussed actions *completed* in the past. He couldn't understand why these actions weren't related to the present. "Wait a minute," he said, "*everything* that was done in the past is somehow related to the present." Of course, we understand that everything is part of a chain of events, and life is a continuum of causes and effects, but that's not quite the point when discussing the grammar of the Past Simple versus the Present Perfect.

One day, Proteus read a question from the coursebook: "Who is the kindest person according to you?" He paused for a moment, then surprised me with his answer. "That's me. I am the kindest person." I was a bit taken aback by such an unexpected response and thought it was something said in jest, but Proteus insisted it wasn't. "Oh really? Why do you think you're the kindest person in the world?" I asked. "Because I don't like evil or angry people around. And I never become angry," he replied confidently. Well, that's fine, I suppose. But claiming to be the kindest person? I had to admire his self-assurance. Especially considering that, not long ago, he used to say he had no interest in talking about emotions at all. Lessons with him were, overall, quite interesting, as he came across as both a keen learner and a curious person.

13

The topic of the lesson was problem-solving, and one of the questions from the coursebook was: "What's the biggest problem in your country?" One of the lads studying in grade 8 answered without hesitation, "It's the language. Learning difficult subjects in Estonian is really challenging. And in this region, English is just a dream for many people; they either delay or simply don't care to start learning it. In this part of Estonia, learning and practising language skills is definitely a problem."

14

Slight clashes in group classes are unavoidable; it's just part of the deal. I suppose it's up to me to keep things under control – who else would? In one group of adults, there was once an "ageism" misunderstanding. Two middle-aged men were sitting next to each other. One of them was reading something about the film *French Kiss*, starring Meg Ryan and Kevin Kline. "It's a romantic comedy about an American woman. She goes to France, meets a guy, and they fall in love. It's quite old, but it's really funny." The two younger men found this amusing and started giggling, thinking the couple had a significant age difference. (Though, certainly, there's nothing wrong with an age gap in love.) They made a few comments about it, but for some reason, an elderly man sitting at the other end of the classroom took it personally. He retaliated in a joking, yet somewhat annoyed tone: "It was quite old—the *film*, not the man! Can't you tell the difference between 'it' and 'he'? You guys are *illiterate*!" That was an unexpected turn of events. It seems not only can *he* and *she* be confused, but *he* and *it* as well!

Once, towards the end of one lesson, two ladies in another group began discussing which language was more difficult to learn: English or Estonian. I allowed them some time to debate, but before long, their discussion turned into a heated argument, becoming more personal with each passing second. Realising it was getting out of hand, I stepped in and reminded everyone of our classroom rule: we maintain a friendly atmosphere and respect one another – regardless of which of the two languages is more difficult to learn.

15

At the beginning of the school year, I found myself continually mixing up the names of two ladies in one of my groups, as for some reason they both seemed so alike to me. The more I tried to avoid the mistake, the harder it became. It's just one of those things that may happen when you're dealing with new groups. Naturally, it was terribly embarrassing, though the students knew it wasn't intentional or due to negligence on my part. I make every effort to call people by their correct names. In one lesson, I mixed up those two names again, and, feeling awkward, I apologised profusely and explained my confusion – like some sort of endless mental loop. It was so "cringe", as teenagers would put it, but we managed to move on. However, soon after, I noticed one of the two ladies sitting at the back was in tears. I thought to myself, how foolish I was to have made her cry. I apologised again, but she reassured me it was fine. Still, my mind felt utterly disbalanced for the remainder of the lesson, and it was quite difficult to focus on what we were doing in class. After the lesson, the woman explained that her tears had nothing to do with the name mix-up. She had been dealing with personal issues at home, had lost her job and was having

a difficult time with a misunderstanding at the unemployment office. It was one of those rough days that come out of nowhere, and you wish you could rewind time. Neither of us had a good day, it seemed. I did my best to console and encourage the woman, and thankfully, things soon brightened up for her. She received an offer to enrol in a course to train for a new job.

16

Diane is a teen planet in grade 8 – troubled, quiet and clearly lacking in confidence. An outright introvert. Her words are almost indistinguishable, and when I ask her to repeat what she’s just said, she slips into what I can describe as “turtle mode,” even physically shrinking into herself – pulling her head into her shoulders. After a long pause, she speaks even more softly, as if hinting that if I ask her to repeat herself once more, she’ll fall into complete silence. Requests to speak a little louder or clearer simply don’t work. The situation is pretty inconvenient, really. I end up asking someone else to answer instead, hoping for another chance for Diane to speak up later.

When she first joined my class of teens, she made it clear right away that “words just don’t want to stay in memory.” Learning English seems to be a constant battle for her. I can’t help but feel concerned for teenagers like Diane, as they often become targets of bullying at school. It’s obvious that Diane has difficulties communicating with others.

Most likely, she’s yielded to a gaming addiction. When I asked her how her summer holiday went, she answered, “I played my computer games the whole summer and I was happy. Well, my parents once took me to an island for a day trip, but I don’t remember its name. And I didn’t enjoy it much.” Should I have asked her more about the themes and levels in her games, or how she tackled challenges *there* during the summer? Finding a way to engage her imagination and get her to speak clearly about things in the outside world is tricky. I still haven’t found the key to unlock this “turtle mode.” It’s a tough case. The most extreme version is when Diane withdraws into her iPhone as though she’s on strike. I have to gently remind her that phones should be put away in class so we can focus on our studies. Certainly, she gets annoyed at someone telling her what to do, which only adds another layer of difficulty.

Diane has always been the first to arrive for class, without fail, and one day, she decided to take the opportunity to show me some seagull feathers she’d just picked up from the ground. She never smiles, though. When she answers “hello,” Diane never looks at you – not because she’s being rude, perhaps she’s not, it’s just her way. She’ll never say hello first either, as she’s always lost in her own world. So, she showed me the seagull feathers and then a photo of the seagull that had owned them. With no hint of excitement and in a flat tone, she simply said that the seagull “came up very close.” Another time, before class, she unexpectedly pulled out a long item from her bag and revealed a deep-green costume that looked like a large puppet. “Nice costume. Are you going to a cosplay party?” I asked. “It’s not a costume,” she replied matter-of-factly. “It’s a puppet, a sort of mermaid or something. We’ve got to make one of these for our craft assignment.”

It’s Friday. “Do you like Fridays?” It’s almost impossible to hear whether she says yes or no. On the second try, I can make it out – a surprising no. “Why not?” I ask. “Because I have to attend English class on Fridays. I can’t go home straight away after school and start my weekend.”

Diane rarely speaks her mind – it has happened just a couple of times over the past few months. But when she does, it’s always something unusual – and very sudden, too. “Over the last school holidays in February, I had the same dream several times,” she tells me. “I’m late for this English class by half an hour.” I tell her that’s curious, considering she’s always the first to arrive, well ahead of time. She spends the wait in the hall, sitting and gaming. We are in different worlds, in all likelihood.

17

Learning rhymes or tongue twisters is a fantastic way to kick off a group lesson. It’s an excellent icebreaker, often bringing a smile to most students’ faces and paving the way for tackling more difficult topics. I sometimes expand on a tongue twister, turning it into a slightly bigger story while keeping the focus on the targeted sounds. For instance, I once took “She sells seashells on the seashore” and added more

characters and details to the narrative – introducing *sharks, shows, shade, shabby shacks, sharing, sheriffs* and *sharp* objects. It becomes even more absurd and amusing that way. The talented Finnish comedian Ismo Leikola humorously addresses this in his stand-up performance named “English is so messed up.” He jokes that you can’t imagine being in a situation where you’d need to use a phrase like “She sells seashells,” pointing out that it’s a rather bizarre scenario – trying to tell someone that a certain woman is selling pointless seashells on a seashore that might already be full of them. Ismo loves to explore various “absurdities” of English from the perspective of language learners. “English is full of those silent letters. You are forbidden to pronounce them! They’re only for paper, not for the mouth. Why waste paper? Stop writing them. And if you have so many silent letters, why not silent numbers as well? They would be far more useful. Say, I owe you 75 dollars. But *the seven* is silent. So, here’s five, thanks.” Telling jokes in a language that’s not your native tongue, especially in front of large audiences of native speakers, is a tremendous challenge, but Ismo does it brilliantly. In 2015, he moved to the US, and his performances have been quite appreciated there.

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One day in December, I received a phone call from a woman who asked if I could do a test for her son, who was in grade 9. She must have got my number from somewhere. I sensed something wasn’t quite right, especially when she mentioned having photos of the test. It seemed likely that her son had somehow managed to get pictures of that particular test from another group that had already taken it. “It’s just a few pages, and I can pay you. We need it urgently,” she said. I replied, “Sorry, but I don’t do such things. Students should learn the subject and take the tests themselves.” There was a pause on the other end of the line before she said goodbye, clearly disappointed by my refusal to get involved in what was plainly a dodgy situation.

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“Have you ever eaten exotic fruit?” An adult learner replied, “I ate a kind of exotic fruit two *ears* ago.” *Ears* and *years* are easily confused by a beginner, making the phrase funny. She knows Estonian quite well and sometimes mixes up words from the two languages. I often have to check how she understands certain terms. “You’ve just read about *seafood*. What does *seafood* mean?” She thinks for a moment and explains, “Well, it must be a dish with pork.” I smile and correct her, “I think you’re a bit mistaken there. It’s not the Estonian word *sea*, like in *sealiha* (pork).”

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Ixion, an elderly gentleman in a group of adult learners, shared that he had gone to the United States last summer to visit a relative. The others in the group were curious to hear what he liked or didn’t like about his trip. He mentioned that Starbucks wasn’t particularly appealing to him. The building, he said, was “big and impressive,” but the coffee was far from great, and everything was quite expensive. He did enjoy the famous monorail train in Florida, near Orlando. He also liked smiling, outgoing people all around, which he knew was characteristic of Americans. When asked about practising English during his stay there, he explained that there wasn’t much opportunity to do so, as his relative’s family and friends communicated in a different language. It’s a common “diaspora effect,” where people in a new country tend to stick to their own community, making it harder to integrate and practise the local language. Ixion says he’s actually been getting a lot more English practice in our regular classes in this small Estonian town. I’m pleased to hear that, but it’s important not to neglect the opportunity to chat with native speakers.

Ixion stubbornly slips up with the verb ‘*be*’ in the Present Simple, a common mistake stemming from his L1 (unlike in Estonian or Finnish). I hope he will eventually get over this, though he feels a bit uncomfortable each time I have to point it out. Ixion understands this grammar, but he can’t help omitting *am, is,* and *are* when speaking. He tries his best in our classes, enjoys conversations in English, and isn’t afraid to voice his opinion, often doing so in a rather artistic way. The problem is that thoughtful Ixion mostly hears himself, without much regard for how others might understand him. He starts speaking from his notes on the assignment, attempting to imitate an “American” accent and speaking fast, which only makes it more difficult to comprehend. When I ask him what the mispronounced word was, he looks at me with a surprised expression, as if to say, “Don’t you recognise this word?” At first, I was perplexed about how to approach this. After a while, I had the idea to arrange the desks in such a way that people could see each

other more easily, while also being able to view the whiteboard without having to bend their necks each time. I then asked learners to address others in the group, not just me, when sharing something from their notes or doing a speaking task on the spot. I reminded the entire group (not just Ixion) about the importance of speaking more clearly and not rushing too much. "When we speak, we do it mainly for others, right? We understand our thoughts well enough even without speaking them out." A few reminders over the next lessons helped solve the problem of crumpling up phrases in an attempt to imitate accents.

When some students claim they prefer a "British" accent and dislike an "American" accent (especially if their relatives live in the UK and they sometimes visit them), Ixion gets a bit annoyed. He prefers American English over British English. "That's totally fine, but please make yourself clear, whatever 'accent' you might prefer at this stage," I have to remind. In general, the difference between American and British pronunciation and some vocabulary can – and should – be discussed from time to time, also remembering that most beginners don't really care about it at first. In listening tasks, they struggle to understand either of the two "main" accents. However, as they progress, they begin to notice the differences and may get surprised, disturbed or amused by the fact that there seems to be a different accent "every three blocks" in London, let alone the great variety of accents across the UK. Gradually, learners realise that there is no single "British accent." They may hear English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish accents, each with many subtypes and a huge variety of inconstant regional or urban slang. "What's that word you've just used? Could you please repeat and explain it?" The same is true – though perhaps with less variation – about North America. Beginners shouldn't get too bogged down by these differences early on. Even without that, learners already have plenty "on their plate" to absorb and practise.

Even more advanced students' faces will definitely get *as long as Livery Street* when they hear some Brummie: "That's *bostin fittle*, I'm *in my oil tot*. *Lickle snap* innit? *Any road up*, I'm done with my *snap*, but you *nause* are *going down the Wrekin*. Mate, you'll *'ave it dark*. This *ain't gettin' the babby a frock and pinny*. I'm off then. *Tarabit!*" Hearing two guys talking over dinner and rushing off to their next destination would be more than enough to surprise an outsider. "Oh my goodness, what was that? What on earth are they talking about?" Even native speakers from other regions might be taken aback to hear such a Brummie accent and slang. Or down in London, when a tourist hears a local bloke asking someone to return the borrowed money and explaining his tight corner, after a few pints in a pub: "You don't have the *gumption* to get down to *brass tacks*, do you? Ain't got a *didgeridoo*? It's all now gone *Pete Tong*. I've been so *skint* I couldn't pay *the Duke of Kent* on time." It's fun to explore the different accents and regional slang of English, but not in the early stages. Learners will likely encounter it and feel profoundly "discouraged" by most of that later on, once they're able to confidently express themselves and understand much more. First, you learn how to drive, and only later, if you truly want to, might you add a decal to your car. Driving a vehicle with a flashy decal in a reckless and unruly manner won't get you very far.

How Powerful AI Advances Are Reshaping Our Future

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How Powerful AI Advances Are Reshaping Our Future

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is fashionable today, given the media coverage and public interest. Talking about AI cannot be avoided. But AI does not mean the same thing to all people. To some, it is about artificial life that surpasses human intelligence. To others, it implies the process of transforming raw data into useful information for future use. The popularity of AI today increases in part because we tend to re-label anything from statistics to business analysis as an AI creation.



What is Artificial Intelligence?

There is a geeky joke that defines AI as “cool things that computers can't do.” The irony is that there is an element of truth. AI cannot make progress without computers, as demonstrated by Alan Turing and Marvin Minsky, two fathers of AI. Computers are essential to advance AI capabilities.

“It seems probable that once the machine thinking method had started, it would not take long to outstrip our feeble powers. They would be able to converse with each other to sharpen their wits. At some stage, therefore, we should expect the machines to take control.” ~ Alan Turing (1951)

“Every system that we build will surprise us with new kinds of flaws until those machines become clever enough to conceal their faults from us.” ~ Marvin Minsky (1970)

What is — and what is not — AI? Why is public perception of AI so ambiguous? Let's look at a few reasons

No universal definition

AI researchers have no exact definition of AI. The field is constantly being redefined, as some topics are re-classified as non-AI, and new topics make an appearance as AI. Years ago, automatic methods for search and planning were considered to be AI-sourced. Today such methods are taught to every computer science student.

The role of science fiction

AI is often confused and misunderstood, given the way AI is portrayed in literary and cinematic works of science fiction. AI is often characterized as a friendly humanoid servant that provides unreliable information or amusing chat.

Other depictions encourage us to hope that the character can become human: Pinocchio, ET and Bicentennial Man. Robot portrayal is also humanoid, so that human readers can relate. Otherwise the audience would be intimidated by characters that seem quite strange in appearance and are much too intelligent. Another class of sci-fi embraces the sinister in the manner of the sorcerers' apprentice or the Golem of Prague.

It is confusing to determine which tasks are easy and which are hard for AI...

We can pick up objects with ease, and without thinking about the steps involved. Easy, unless the object is too heavy. While we may not appreciate the complexity, grasping objects by a robot is an extremely difficult move. It is an area of active study. And, today, robots are being used in a variety of settings, including as hotel porters, on auto assembly lines and in hospital operating rooms.

By contrast, the tasks of playing chess and solving mathematical exercises can seem very difficult for us, requiring years of learning and the engagement of our 'little grey cells,' as Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot referred to the brain. Initial AI research focused on these kinds of tasks, as they wanted to replicate the nature of intelligence.

Research indicates that computers are well-suited for chess and problem-solving. Computers beat the reigning human world champion, Gary Kasparov, in the famous 1997 chess event. Today, we can challenge the computer to a game of chess, Scrabble, Wordle, Sudoku, or any number of games available to download to our laptops and smartphones.

What is key to defining Artificial Intelligence?

Autonomy: The ability to perform tasks in complex environments without constant guidance by a user.

Adaptivity: The ability to improve performance by learning from experience.

"What all of us have to do is to make sure we are using AI in a way that is for the benefit of humanity, not to the detriment of humanity." ~ Tim Cook (CEO, Apple Inc)

"The development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race. It would take off on its own, and re-design itself at an ever increasing rate. Humans, who are limited by slow biological evolution, couldn't compete, and would be superseded." ~Stephen Hawking (2014)

Functional applications of AI

Content Recommendation

Much of the information that we encounter each day online is personalized. Social media content, online advertisements, recommendations of music on Spotify or movies on Netflix. Online publishers offer daily news from various sources, including newspapers, podcasts, and broadcasting companies. Printed versions of the daily news remain the same, but what you see online is personalized by AI-powered search engines such as Google. AI provides the algorithms that determine content.

While not malicious, AI intrusions into our privacy are not always welcomed.

These recent screenshots taken from my smartphone show that my bedtime habits have been examined and a decision made to significantly alter them. Bedtime will be at 11pm and waking at 7am. Most unsuitable for a night person! This change included putting my smartphone's screen in 'dark theme' at 11pm, which can make viewing almost impossible. Of course, I recovered my former settings — but, I did not appreciate Google's unwarranted interference and cheekiness.

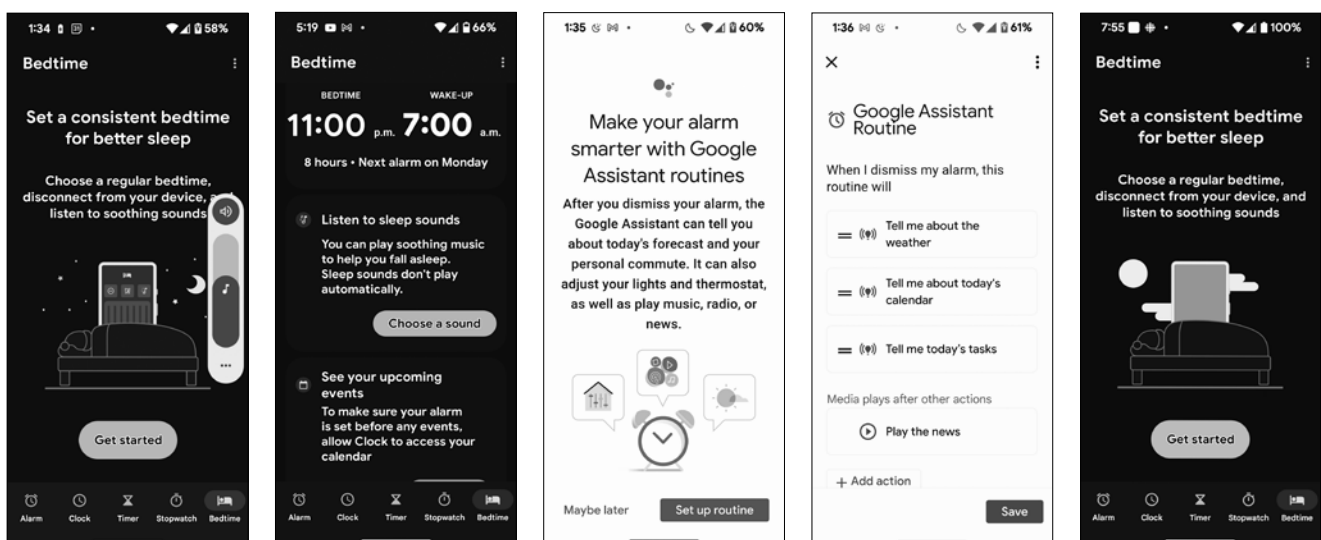


Image and video processing

Face recognition is already used in a variety of personal and business applications: organizing your photos according to people, automatic tagging on social media, and passport control. AI models can adapt or alter visual content using a variety of readily-available apps, such as Pixlar. It takes but little time to create fake photos or videos that are difficult to distinguish from the real. The implications are chilling, as we already encounter disinformation in its various forms.

AI-powered personal assistants

Spinach AI

is not only a very accurate notetaker. It also works on the user's behalf by providing: brief meeting recaps, reminders of tasks and ticket purchases, and creating specialized docs. Basically Girl Friday.¹

You.com

This AI tool can research any topic, provide a summary, and then offer a complete document on the supplied topic. This is useful in the businessworld and potentially in education.

Telnyx

A synthetic voice that is AI-powered. The conversational tone is guaranteed authentic and designed to meet the needs of business or education.

Kabata Dumbbells

The world's first AI-powered dumbbells that act as your personal trainer, keeping track of your reps and offering real-time form correction.

AI-powered wearable shoes

These specialized shoes can reach speeds of 7mph. They integrated with an app for real-time feedback and personalized control.

Meta's (Facebook)Maverick

Customer support for docs with text and photos that works across 12 languages

Google's Gemini 2.5 Pro

This is Google search engine's priciest AI model, but it is still cheaper than any of its competitors. The free tier is still available.

Readdy

Talk with AI to create your own websites

AI innovations that may interest or disturb

Jurassic Bark: Colossal Biosciences

Uses AI to revive long-extinct wildlife. They flaunted their recent success in reviving the dire wolf, an extinct species that lived over 10,000 years ago. The wolf cubs were aptly named Romulus and Remus. Since their introduction, much skepticism has been voiced by scientists.

Self-driving cars

The success of self-driving cars depends on a combo of AI and many other complex computer-based techniques and information. All contributors work in a complex environment and they must work with almost flawless precision to avoid road accidents. This you can well imagine. The same technologies are being used in other autonomous systems, such as delivery robots, flying drones and autonomous ships.

Sky Cab

Chinese companies have announced regulatory approval to launch autonomous passenger drones into

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girl_Friday

the sky. At the moment they can only make short-distance runs but will expand into urban networks soon. Their clocking speed is up to 129 kph. This current design is part of China's long-term AI program to dominate the skies.

Drones

Drones come in various sizes and with differing capabilities from aerial sightseeing to warfare. The drone's future has caused serious concern world-wide, as very few international rules or regulations are in place.

Farm Fingers

Scientists have developed a soft-robotic gripper inspired by "a childhood game of unspooling measuring tape," and was created to handle delicate fruits with care. The low-cost system can grip, rotate, and transport produce without damage, bringing us closer to affordable, human-like precision in agricultural robotics.

Ballie the Rolling Roommate

Google's newest launch is a robot named "Ballie", which will be available for purchase this summer. The yellow ball-shaped home companion can project video, manage smart devices, and navigate spaces using cameras and onboard intelligence. Powered by a combo of Samsung's Tizen OS and Google's Gemini AI, the robot integrates with websites such as YouTube, and Google Search. Ballie responds to voice commands, and offers a hybrid AI experience for the home.



Ballie in hand.

Chat GPT is a commanding AI tool, universally used

ChatGPT was developed in 2015 by OpenAI, an artificial intelligence research company, and successfully launched in 2022. It was financed by a group of entrepreneurs and researchers, including Elon Musk and Sam Altman. Microsoft is their most notable research source.

The emergence of ChatGPT created a volume of differing responses by those who were captivated by the possibilities. This free chatbot had such wide-reaching capabilities: writing essays and articles, summarizing long texts, explaining complicated arguments, answering questions, writing code, translating texts, and even creating bedtime stories. Needless to say, it is revolutionary in its scope. However, teachers have been presented with a serious dilemma. Educators are still grappling with the ramifications of this chatbot within their authority at schools, colleges, and universities. There is still the need to gain some control and regulation over the diverse implications of Chat GPT's presence in the classroom.

Open AI's declaration is to ensure "that artificial general intelligence benefits all of humanity." But this claim is far from being universally accepted.

It is speculated that the White House made use of ChatGPT to formulate their recent flurry of tariffs imposed on countries around the world. This could also explain why an island occupied solely by penguins received a 50% tariff on all exported goods. Still an alarming prospect, regarding future undertakings.

Open AI financiers on the future of AI

"AI will probably most likely lead to the end of the world, but in the meantime, there'll be great companies."
~ Sam Altman

"If AI has a goal and humanity just happens to be in the way, it will destroy humanity as a matter of course without even thinking about it...It's just like, if we're building a road and an anthill just happens to be in the way, we don't hate ants, we're just building a road." ~ Elon Musk

"China, Russia, soon all countries w[ith] strong computer science [will be in] competition for AI at national levels most likely will cause WW3." ~ Elon Musk

AI's role in advancing healthcare

AI's role in healthcare is here to stay. Factors considered include the current high cost of healthcare, need for increased accuracy in diagnosis, medical decisions and focus on patient care outcomes. AI is already reshaping medicine and advancing healthcare in revolutionary ways.

Medical imaging

AI algorithms can better analyze complex medical images from CTscans, X-rays to MRIs, making it easier to identify brain tumours and recognize early-stage Alzheimer's disease or dementia. Early detection of pneumonia, tuberculosis, cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, and lung nodules is now possible, equipping clinicians with invaluable insight. Many tech companies now offer AI-driven tools to identify the likelihood of osteoporosis or breast cancer, given the patient's DNA. With increased speed of diagnosis, improved outcomes for patients are assured.

Surgery

AI robots have become a common presence in many operating rooms. They conduct tasks that demand precision and control, such as in open heart surgery. These robots are controlled by the surgeon from a computer console. The robot colleague can help doctors improve their skills, knowledge and experience. There have been fewer complications, shorter recovery periods and less pain after surgery, when this odd couple works in concert.

A 76-year-old cancer patient in the UK credits robotic surgery for a rapid, pain-free recovery following Da Vinci Xi robotic-controlled procedures to remove tumors from his colon and liver.

Medical research

Medical research is time-consuming and costly for scientists. AI algorithms hasten progress, and reveal deeper insights about diseases and treatments. AI's invaluable role has established new cancer treatments, lessened the clinical trial period and introduced specific genetic markers to link responses to treatment. In 2022, Bayer introduced virtual clinical trials to lessen the need for 'real' control groups. The result is cost-effective and cost-efficient, resulting in more patient-centric medical research.

Drug development

Any drug development can be an expensive and time-consuming process. But AI has enabled dramatic changes. AI algorithms analyze, detect and then predict the drug's efficiency and possible side effects. The speed with which 'Big Pharma' produced Covid vaccines during the pandemic is a prime example of AI at work.

Early detection of fatal blood diseases

AI technology can analyze and then predict potential blood diseases, like leukemia. Medical professionals are prompted by AI tools of the presence of both potential and early stage leukemia. The information and prognosis are vital to the physician treating the patient. Scpio Labs, in partnership with an AI-driven imaging platform, has revolutionized hematology by enabling early detection of cancers, infections, and anemia. This new technology provides the patient a better recovery and improved quality of life.

Remote patient care

Remote patient care uses AI-powered technology to provide health care services and monitoring of patients remotely. Telemedicine is a form of remote patient care that enables patients in remote areas to receive real-time consultations, as opposed to seeing the doctor in person.

By enabling remote locations to have access to healthcare services, overall expenditures are lessened by reduced hospital visits. A diabetic patient can be fitted with a wearable device that will alert any abnormal glucose readings. This alert will trigger adjustments remotely. But AI is capable of more than monitoring glucose levels. VirtuSense, an AI-created device, alerts hospital staff of a patient's **intent** to exit his bed seconds before he does so. Falls and injuries in hospitals are reduced considerably.

Accurate and early cancer diagnosis

Cancer remains the leading cause of death. However, if detected and treated at an early stage, many cancers can be healed and cured. Lung cancer is the main cause of cancer mortality worldwide. A team of experts from the Royal Marsden NHS Foundation in London, UK, used an AI model to enable radiomics to determine if abnormal growths on CT scans are cancerous. Radiomics is an approach that uses an advanced analysis, enabling clear images that would be otherwise missed by the human eye. Early-stage diagnosis by the AI model greatly increases the survival rate of lung cancer.

AI assisted gene editing in treatment design

A gene-editing process can rearrange errors in the DNA that cause diseases such as sickle cell anemia, cystic fibrosis, and Tay-Sachs. Using AI tools, researchers have further developed this technique to alter and control genes that can lead to cancer, diabetes, and neurological disorders. In future this AI assisted gene-editing technique may help cure conditions from autism to heart disease and obesity.

Conclusion

With costs skyrocketing world-wide, AI's partnership in healthcare will continue to evolve. It will be essential for healthcare organizations and tech companies to work side-by-side. A stable and positive relationship will ensure that any new technologies will be used in an ethical and responsible way. Vigilant monitoring of the AI role in healthcare will be essential to prevent any exploitation.

AI introduces Gal Friday ~ and ~ Man Friday

Bill Gates and the late Steve Jobs have provided state-of-the-art computer technology since their college days in the mid eighties. Today, Apple and MicroSoft, joined by Google, still dominate the market. AI access is readily available, albeit for a substantial monthly cost. Whatever your needs — help, advice or support — it is possible from Siri, Copilot or Gemini. Jeff Bezos has joined this trio of trusty AI companions with Amazon's Alexa.

We have become dependent on our AI buddies. They correct spelling mistakes, offer grammatical corrections and answer all questions, whenever we're curious, or if memory fails. And it is time to look ahead. What does the future hold?

Bill Gates is clearly invested in a future where AI will service remote and disadvantaged populations, where few schools, teachers, hospitals, and doctors exist. Gates is eager to advance the limits available of human capability.

Seems great. But are we willing — or even prepared — to relegate human control to current AI models?

No single AI model can provide competence in *all* areas. One has only to receive a weird reply from 'hey Google' or strange travel directions from ChatGPT, to realize there is much work still to be done. Recent advancements, particularly in tending to the disadvantaged in remote areas, may feel good but this is a dangerous oversimplification of AI's growing role in our world. The truth is more chaotic.

Gates himself seems conflicted about the future of AI. His recent comments appear inconsistent — and should give us pause.

"I believe there are more reasons than not to be optimistic that we can manage the risks of AI while maximizing their benefits". ~ Bill Gates (2023)

"AI is the first technology that has no limit" (2024)

"AI is a brilliant tool for people to be more productive, but that also means the bad guys will be more productive, so they can do more cyberattacks, so they can design weapons". (2024)

Human intervention is needed

Geoffrey Hinton is a renowned computer scientist, often called the 'Godfather of AI' for his crucial work at Google. He left Google in 2023 so that he could talk openly about the dangers of AI. Hinton has regrets today about much of his life's work.

"AI will boost productivity and generate more wealth. But unless the government intervenes, it will only make the rich richer and hurt the people who might lose their jobs. That's going to be very bad for society," ~ Geoffery Hinton (2024)

"Once the computers get control, we might never get it back. We would survive at their sufferance. If we're lucky, they might decide to keep us as pets. I have warned [people in the Pentagon] again and again that we are getting into a very dangerous country. They don't seem to understand."

~ Marvin Minsky (1970)

"AI is an enabling layer that will improve every business." ~ Jeff Bezos (2024)

"Move fast and break things. Unless you are breaking stuff, you are not moving fast enough."

~ Mark Zuckerberg (2023)

We should question who is developing AI, and for what purpose. We need to understand the potential dangers of AI and explore how to manage the risks. Social manipulation is a common AI tool used by corporations and political parties. Meta (Facebook) has announced that it will no longer filter content for erroneous or fraudulent information, even during elections or wars. Meta has decided that its membership is able to solve this dilemma.

"It's clear now that we didn't do enough to prevent these tools from being used for harm. That goes for fake news, foreign interference in elections, and hate speech, as well as developers and data privacy."

~ Mark Zuckerberg (2018)

"I just believe strongly that Facebook shouldn't be the arbiter of truth of everything that people say online. Private companies probably shouldn't be, especially these platform companies, shouldn't be in the position of doing that."

~ Mark Zuckerberg (2025)

Olga Russakovsky, computer sciences professor at Princeton University, cautions us that AI is developed by humans — *and* humans are inherently biased:

"AI researchers are primarily people who are male, who come from certain racial demographics, who grew up in high socioeconomic areas, primarily people without disabilities. A fairly homogeneous population, so it's a challenge for these researchers to think broadly about world issues." [Olga Russakovsky]

The tech community has long warned of threats posed by AI. Today, we can witness automation of jobs, the spread of fake news by governments, and a dangerous arms race intensified by AI-powered weaponry and drones.

Today, the influential tech community instructs and advises current efforts to bring down the world economy with extreme and unwarranted tariffs. According to economists, an economic downturn may well follow, reminiscent of the Great Depression, and much worse than any experienced in recent history.

"Technology is probably the single biggest driver of productivity gains for the developed countries. For example, I think it's much more important than free trade." ~ Peter Thiel

Time to heed the Chinese proverb, *'May you live in interesting times.'* It is interpreted as a curse — a period ahead of hardship and turmoil.

In conclusion...

The printing press was a major turning point in history. The rapid pace of technological development in today's world will continue to have a much more profound and widespread influence. This accelerated change is driven by the convergence of technological advancements and new global interconnectedness.

Our world has changed irrevocably by the evolution of the Internet, computers, smartphones, and latterly, various AI models. It behooves us to consider the potential and impact of these advances and to monitor with an open and inquiring mind.

"AI won't take over the world — people who know how to use AI will."

~ Robert Baldwin, at the World Economic Forum's Growth Summit

"Transhumanism [melding of human and machine] is the world's most dangerous idea."

~ Francis Fukuyama

"There is more scholarly work on the life-habits of the dung fly than on existential risks to humanity."

~ Nick Bostrom, Oxford University philosopher

"I don't want to really scare you, but it was alarming how many people I talked to, who are highly placed in AI, who have retreats that are sort of 'bug out' houses, to which they could flee if it all hits the fan."

~ James Barrat, author of *Our Final Invention: Artificial Intelligence and the End of the Human Era*

Become an Online AI Student:


The Elements of AI is a free online course, offered by the University of Helsinki.

<https://course.elementsofai.com>

Recommended Reading:

"The End of Reality" by Jonathan Taplin shines a light on the enormous power of Peter Thiel, Elon Musk, and Mark Zuckerberg, questioning whether we want our society to be run by such people. It is a scathing critique of the warped worldview of a tiny minority.

"Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies" by Swedish-born Oxford philosopher Nick Bostrom, who has a healthy respect for the danger of 'superintelligent' machines whose cognitive prowess surpasses that of their human creators.



Supporting Teachers with AI: *Less Admin, More Teaching*

Educational Technology

Supporting Teachers with AI: Less Admin, More Teaching

As educators, we recognise the challenges of managing classrooms, tracking student progress, and providing personalised learning experiences. Digital tools not only make our work easier but also improve the learning experience for students.

Enter DigiPlus, a platform designed to support teachers, streamline classroom management, and help students build solid language skills through tailored content that adapts to their needs.

Remote Monitoring: Data-Driven Insights at Your Fingertips

Keeping track of every student's performance and progress is an all-time challenge. In a traditional classroom setting, it often means hours of grading, one-on-one feedback, and managing different learning paces.

With DigiPlus, progress monitoring becomes data-driven and time-efficient. The Teacher's Dashboard allows you to track student progress, identify areas for improvement and gain insights into each student's individual learning journey, all without leaving your desk.

Whether you're teaching in-person or remotely, DigiPlus ensures that you're always in control of your students' progress, pace and needs.

Instant Feedback: Immediate Insights for Better Learning

We all know the importance of timely feedback in the learning process. Waiting until the next class to provide feedback can leave students feeling disconnected or unsure of their mistakes.

DigiPlus helps students learn from their mistakes in real time, minimising the likelihood of repeating errors. With brief, targeted teaching sessions and a scaffolded approach, students receive immediate feedback and the opportunity to correct themselves. This process encourages self-regulation, boosting their confidence while fostering a deeper, more lasting understanding of the material.

For teachers, this means more effective classroom management and more meaningful time spent on teaching. Instead of dedicating hours to individual feedback and one-on-one sessions, teachers can assign a standard session on DigiPlus for students outside of classroom hours. This complements in-class learning by providing personalised teaching sessions and follow-up tasks tailored to each student's unique goals and needs.

Interested in learning more? Our educational consultants are here to help!

A Thriving Learning Journey Begins Here

At the core of DigiPlus is the belief that engaging, progress-driven learning cultivates a positive classroom environment where every student can succeed.

With DigiPlus, students are more engaged, stay motivated, and receive personalised support that adapts to their progress and cognitive profile.

For teachers, DigiPlus provides the tools to manage classrooms effectively, allowing them to teach more efficiently and focus on what truly matters: inspiring students to reach their full potential.

Learn More About Express DigiPlus

- **The Teacher's Sidekick and The Student's Helper:** Discover how Cosmo and Express DigiPlus can work together to empower both you and your students in and out of the classroom.
- **Using AI in Language Learning:** Explore how AI can enhance language learning by providing immediate feedback and adjusting lessons to suit each student's needs.
- **DigiPlus: Our Adaptive Learning Tool:** Learn more about how DigiPlus makes learning more efficient, personalised, and enjoyable for both teachers and students.
- **DigiVerse: our Digital Solutions Ecosystem for ESL classes:** See how DigiPlus fits within a larger ecosystem of digital tools designed to support ESL education.

This article was originally published on Express Publishing's Teacher's Corner Blog. For more resources on effective teaching and learning, visit expresspublishing.co.uk.



Diversity & Inclusion

How-to: Differentiate Instruction in the ESL class

"Children already come to us differentiated. It just makes sense that we would differentiate our instruction in response to them."

— Tomlinson, 1999

Teachers know that every classroom includes diverse learners – some may be struggling, others excelling, and all bring with them different life experiences, learning preferences, and personal interests. Differentiated instruction means adapting teaching to meet the needs of individual learners. It ensures

all students receive the right level of challenge and the support necessary to achieve their personal learning goals.

In that context, a differentiated classroom offers multiple ways for students to:

- access content,
- process and make sense of concepts and skills, and
- develop products that demonstrate their learning

Educators are therefore encouraged to move beyond traditional educational practices – or what they may have experienced during their own schooling – and instead tailor the complexity of instruction, so that every learner has the opportunity to succeed.

It's important to note that customised instruction is not the same as individualised instruction. It does not involve creating separate lesson plans for every student. Rather, it is a structured approach to optimising learning that maintains high expectations for all while remaining flexible enough to reflect each learner's unique characteristics and needs.

How can we approach the concept of Differentiation?

"Differentiated instruction is a teaching approach in which educational content, process, and product are adapted according to student readiness, interest, and learning profile."

– Starr, 2004

Differentiating the process of instruction-giving requires the use of many instructional techniques and materials to enhance and motivate students. A teacher should make activities different and not just add more of the same types of activities – for example giving higher-achieving students twice as many problems to finish.

Well-selected, differentiated resources support the development of critical thinking and communication skills, giving students the chance to recognise and build on their natural talents.

How can I differentiate instruction efficiently?

Step 1: Get to know your students

This can be achieved through surveying past records of student performance so that teachers will be fully aware of their capabilities, prior learning, social background, etc.

It is really important to get to know students informally as well, maybe through an interview, or an open discussion in the classroom, or by asking students to respond to an open-ended questionnaire with key questions about their learning preferences.

Step 2: Use a Range of Teaching Strategies

It's clear that "one size does not fit all," so a successful differentiated classroom will incorporate a mix of approaches. Here are four widely used strategies worth considering:

- Direct Instruction – A teacher-led approach often used to break down complex concepts into manageable steps, followed by guided and independent practice.
- Inquiry-Based Learning – A student-centred method based on questions that arise from students' interests or experiences, promoting exploration and curiosity.
- Cooperative Learning (Flexible Grouping) – Involves learners working in small, mixed-ability groups to support each other's progress through structured tasks.
- Information Processing Strategies – Include tools and techniques such as visual organisers, peer teaching, memory aids, scaffolding, and mind mapping to help learners process and retain information.
- Finally, Information Processing Strategies include memorization, reciprocal teaching, graphic organizing, scaffolding or webbing, etc.

Step 3: Offer a Variety of Engaging Activities

Incorporate digital tools like educational software, interactive whiteboards, e-books, animations, group tasks, and multimedia resources. Activities that encourage collaboration, interaction, and creativity help sustain motivation and support different learning styles.

Choose books and materials that are age-appropriate, up-to-date, and offer varied activities with rich content, exposing learners to multiple text types and information sources.

Step 4: Diversify assessment techniques

Assessment in a differentiated classroom goes beyond traditional testing. Alternative methods include:

- Portfolios
- Rubrics
- Performance-based tasks
- Knowledge mapping

These tools allow learners to demonstrate understanding in ways that suit their strengths and provide teachers with clearer insights into individual progress.

And remember:

Fair is not everyone getting the same thing.

Fair is everyone getting what they need!

This article was originally published on Express Publishing's Teacher's Corner Blog. For more resources on effective teaching and learning, visit expresspublishing.co.uk.

IATEFL 2025 in Edinburgh: A Spring Gathering of Ideas and Adventure

Kai Tammik

EATE representative
English teacher



As the cobbled streets of Edinburgh welcomed spring, the city hosted one of the most anticipated events in the English language teaching calendar – the **IATEFL Annual Conference 2025**. Educators, researchers, and ELT professionals from all over the world gathered in Scotland's capital for a celebration of learning, innovation, and international collaboration. IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) has been linking, developing and supporting English language teaching professionals around the world since 1967. As of **2025**, there have been **58 IATEFL annual conferences** (from 1967 to 2025).

Charmed by Edinburgh

As mentioned before, this year the conference was held in Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland. Edinburgh is a city where history, culture, and education come together in an inspiring harmony. Spring in this city is always beautiful and the historic architecture, from the towering Edinburgh Castle to the medieval Old Town, was inviting both locals and visitors to explore its mysteries. This year, the visitors to the conference were very lucky - a small heatwave was welcoming us and there was no wind or rain. The weather was sunny and warm, and the gardens, parks, and hillsides were blooming with vibrant colors. The well-preserved historic buildings and cobblestone streets, where life flows from morning to night, also give a hint of what it might have been like a few hundred years ago.

If you are a fan of old and mystical stories like me, I definitely recommend visiting The Mary King's Close on the Royal Mile. Edinburgh is built on a big stone basically and "closes" are narrow streets or passages that start at the Royal Mile and run down the slope to Prince's Park. The museum tour will take you for an adventure of wandering through a labyrinth of Old Town buried streets and passageways which hide the stories that are just waiting to be told. The tour expresses very realistically the life and circumstances of the people who lived there in the 17th century. I think it's great that museums offer visitors a modern and interactive approach to exhibiting historical events or places, because it gives you almost a real-life experience. There is just something in that place that I can't explain, and I most certainly suggest taking part in the tour if you are lucky to visit Edinburgh.

The history, culture and food of Edinburgh are very tasty and colorful. And Edinburgh's history has always stood out for its high-quality and long-term advancement of science and education. The University of Edinburgh was founded in 1582, and it is one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in the world. And the city's streets themselves are alive with the stories of thinkers, poets, and revolutionaries. The Royal Mile is living proof of centuries of human ingenuity and progress. Every building and stone can tell the rich history of the town and its people with its beauty and sorrow. So, Edinburgh is a perfect place for educators to have a motivating spring break and to refresh one's approach to teaching, discover new resources, and share ideas with fellow educators.



Dean Ramsay Memorial (A Celtic Cross) and the Edinburgh Castle in the background



The Edinburgh Castle

A Creative and Motivating Week at the IATEFL 2025 Annual Conference

The IATEFL Conference was a 4-day event to celebrate the English language teaching profession with over 500 academic sessions. It was also an exhibition of all that's new in the world of ELT, and a vivid social programme and opportunities to network and to be part of the global community of ELT professionals. As the representative of a member organization EATE, I was required to attend Associates' Day the previous day. So, for me, it was a whole week of collaboration, motivational talks and educational sessions with people from all over the world.

IATEFL Associates Day 2025

The pre-event is a good opportunity to meet with representatives of other English language teacher associations and create opportunities for collaboration. The president of the IATEFL Aleksandra Popovski-Golubovikj gave us a warm welcoming speech and after that introduced the principles of

EVE (Equal Voices in ELT) in her presentation and pointed out its mission to amplify underrepresented voices in the field, and the impact of its innovative mentoring programme. This was followed by four sessions of brief presentations about good practices and experiences in different associations around the world. One of the topics discussed was the use of CLIL learning methods in language teaching, and later during the conference I attended several sessions where this topic was introduced and discussed, because in Estonia we are also trying to practice more of CLIL learning methods in our classrooms.

The chief executive of IATEFL Jon Burton held a session regarding the role of associates and opportunities for associates provided by IATEFL. Being a member of IATEFL offers a wide range of opportunities and benefits for teachers. In my opinion, the sense of belonging to this worldwide ELT family gives support and motivation to develop professionally and personally as well. Membership gives you unlimited access to free webinars, online events and materials. It adds credibility to a teacher's professional profile and provides the opportunity to communicate with professionals all over the world, and to create collaborative projects together as a team. And as I was at the annual conference for the first time, I now believe that every English teacher should attend this event at least once to experience the sense of community and to take part in many educational sessions and workshops for professional development. To become a member of IATEFL is easy, just visit their website (www.iatefl.org) and join the international teaching community.

Something familiar and yet so new?

The four days of the conference covered very important and diverse topics, the various aspects of which were presented by teachers and English language researchers from all over the world. The most popular topic in the educational sessions was the triumph of AI in language learning, teacher education, and the different effects of assessment in the process of language teaching. These are topics that teachers today encounter on a daily basis and seem to know, but different perspectives from all over the world give this knowledge new depth.

Every morning, all conference participants gathered for a plenary session, where speakers presented the latest findings in English language learning based on their research and experience. During the rest of the day, language teachers, lecturers, learning materials developers and colleagues presented and shared their experiences in 45-minute sessions. Quite a difficult choice when there are so many good things to choose from. However, there were suitable topics for everyone, and from time to time, by spontaneously joining a session you gained new and unexpected experience and knowledge. It is impossible to write down the entire general flow of thought from the event, and writing a summary of each presentation would take up an entire book, but I will highlight some of the ideas and questions that resonate with me.

- ◆ How much has changed over time? How often do we think about the past and appreciate the possibilities of the present that the development of science, education and technology has created for us? Should we remember the past or just look straight into the future?
- ◆ One way to help a learner is formative assessment that gives both students and teachers information to adjust strategies and improve learning. Assessment shouldn't just be numbers or symbols or a test we pass or fail.
- ◆ How often do we use the classroom research method in our classrooms? The method is teacher-led but has more student engagement and achievement. It helps us to improve our teaching strategies and offers more collaboration in the classroom.
- ◆ How to help each other by building bridges? The pandemic built up a worldwide collaboration, and we should all take advantage of it. It is also important to support each other. If we all shared one idea, one resource or a strategy - what difference would it make?
- ◆ CLIL method in learning languages expands students' vocabulary and develops critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Even a project based CLIL (modular) could give students some experience, and maybe you find some good colleagues to practise this method.
- ◆ Using AI in language teaching brings a ton of advantages, both for teachers and learners.
- ◆ My toolbox is once again full of wonderful AI tools to enrich my lessons. But do we think about what AI can't do? Do we consider that it lacks human emotions, cultural nuances and the light bulb moment? Emotional intelligence is crucial!?

- ◆ The most important idea is that the teacher is the one who has to change. We need to keep up with the times and constantly develop ourselves professionally, but we should not forget the human aspect of being a teacher.



Kristine Donoyan and me



Ezgi Selcuk Arican and me

Would I Sign Up Again?

The whole experience feels like coming full circle – sort of like returning to familiar ground, but with fresh perspectives, renewed energy, and loads of new friends. The conference and all the sessions I participated in were inspiring and the city is a place that I would visit again anytime. So much interaction, sharing and new ideas in the center of Edinburgh. IATEFL represents a community held together by a single language and how important it is to learn and teach English because it gives you the opportunity to meet and interact with people all over the world.

But a little heartwarming moment came up when I heard a familiar language behind my back, and when I turned around, I saw three English teachers from Tartu, and I immediately felt braver knowing that I wasn't all alone at this grand event.



Estonians

From Estonia to Luxembourg: My Journey into the European Schools System

Kadri Türk

L1 and L2 English teacher in Luxembourg European School I



Last year I shared my novice's perspective after attending IATEFL Brighton. Little did I know that a year from then I'd be teaching and living in Luxembourg. This is to share once again a novice's view and experience after almost a whole academic year in Luxembourg European School I.

How I Got Here

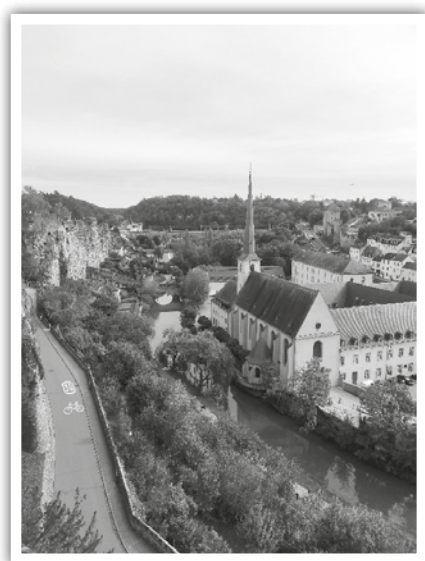
Well, being someone who has been fond of travelling, exploring different cultures and places, I had kept my eyes open about working in a foreign country as an English teacher. After a while, having encountered mainly two problems with foreign teaching job ads – they were looking for native speakers and in many places the remuneration offered was even scarier than the one in Estonia – I had kind of given up. Until one day I saw an ad offering an English teacher position in European School of Brussels. Brussels unfortunately never got back to me on this one, but since one of my colleagues had recently started teaching at the school and as European schools share their open positions among their teachers, she sent me a similar ad to Luxembourg.

Would you be able to give me 5 facts about Luxembourg off the top of your head right now? I sure wasn't back then, nevertheless, having discussed the opportunity with my husband, decided to apply.

Luxembourg

Luxembourg, huh? Somewhere in the middle of Europe? Small? Rich? Yes, but a lot more than that!

So, in order to give some context here: it takes 24 hours to drive from Tartu to Luxembourg without any stops. The country is roughly the size of Saaremaa (2,586 km²), the estimated population is a tiny bit more than adding the populations of Tartu, Tallinn, Pärnu, Võru and Viljandi (660,000), and you can cross all of Luxembourg in under 1.5 hours by car, like driving from Tallinn to Pärnu.



One of many breathtaking views in Luxembourg.



Flags to indicate the languages the cashier speaks.

All true, Luxembourg is a tiny country, bordered by Germany, Belgium and France, making much of Europe easily accessible. It has three official languages – German, French and Luxembourgish – I must say, one can get easily by with only English here, but French is by far the most dominant in everyday use. Luxembourg is multicultural, multilingual and it is fun to see how even at your local supermarket cashiers have little flags by their registers to show which languages they speak. Luxembourg makes for a perfect getaway if one fancies cute little wineries, charming old towns, medieval castles, scenic hiking trails and a glass of Cremant or two. The capital, Luxembourg City seems to have two faces: one steeped in history with cobblestone streets and the other, modern and dynamic with all the EU institutions on Kirchberg plateau. It is lovely!

How I Got Here

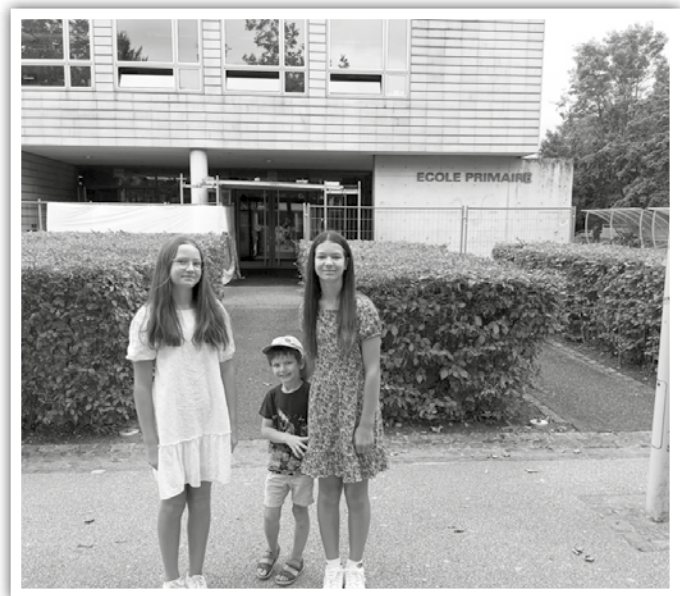
Back to June 2024. The ad, with the applications due around our Midsummer, was looking for a full-time qualified English teacher from any of the EU countries with a clear criminal record. With the attitude of “I’ll send the application, there is no way on earth they’ll pick me,” I wrote my motivation letter and perfected my CV. Around a week later I received a phone call from Kirchberg, Luxembourg with the message that the interview was going to happen the next day. I was through to the interview round! The interview was held over Teams and I was questioned by both the deputy head of the school as well as by the head of the English department. Another surprising phone call a few days later – I was offered the position and I had just 24 hours to make the final decision. The rollercoaster of thoughts in my mind was intense! 2,000 km away from home, my husband would have to quit his job, two children pulled from their schools, one from his kindergarten group, all from their hobbies and friends. An awfully stupid idea? Well, it turned out not to be!

The School

Let me introduce Luxembourg European School I. The “number one” marks the fact that there is another European School in the city (II). Lux I, as we refer to it in our everyday conversations, has around 3,350 students and 350 teachers in total, I work in the secondary part of it, which includes approximately 1953 students and 210 teachers. Is there any point in asking if I know all my colleagues’ names? Definitely not. Do I recognize their faces if I happen to meet them on the street? Maybe!



Me in front of the secondary building, May 2025.



Stina, Ville and Mia in front of the primary building, September 2024. Ready to start their new school.

The school consists of three main parts and buildings: nursery, where 4-year-olds start in a class called M1 and move on to M2 the following year; primary, which begins with P1 and continues until P5; and finally, the most intimidating building - secondary - where students start in S1 and continue until they graduate from S7.

The school has 9 different language sections: English, French, German, Portuguese, Polish, Spanish, Lithuanian, Dutch, Finnish and Swedish. This means that for example if a Tiago comes from Portugal, he will have the opportunity to get education in his mother tongue, which is the reason the system seconds teachers from all EU countries. Nevertheless, there are also students without their own language section (SWALS), for example Estonians, they are free to choose which language they'd like to study their main subjects in. For instance, my daughter in S1 is in the English section, has all her classes in English, gets to study Estonian as her first language and does French as L3 (the second foreign language).

To paint the full picture, it's probably best to focus on the main differences between my job here in Luxembourg and my previous work in Estonia.

School Year's Start

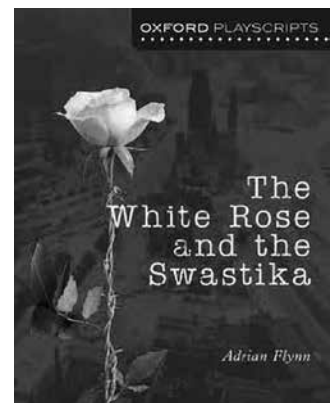
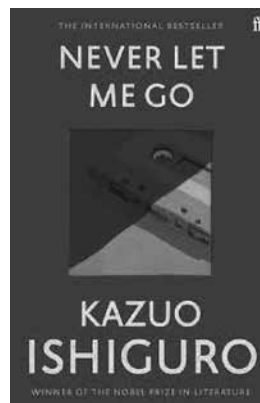
Whereas in Estonia it is quite common to start school right after our Restoration of Independence Day and have a week and a half for preparations, my first day at work this academic year was August 30th, while all classes started on September 2nd. This left me with just two full days - one of which was mainly spent in general and departmental meetings - to organise my new classroom, gather all the necessary materials, and prepare lessons for the first few days. Scary much? Indeed!

L1, L2

Having a vague idea what Language 1 (mother tongue or equivalent level) and Language 2 (mostly the first foreign language) mean, I expected to start preparing similar lessons to the ones in Estonia. Since I was mainly assigned L1 classes, I soon realised that my previous expertise in reported speech, passive voice, and conditional sentence rules suddenly felt irrelevant. It was time to plunge fully into the world of literature!

Each English L1 class has a list of books they are expected to cover during the year, and it's largely up to the teacher's discretion how to approach them - there are no student books or workbooks. "Holy...!" How was I supposed to pull that off? The list was definitely appealing, but my main worry was that it included titles I had last encountered as a student of the respected Tiia-Marike Eiman.

Well, this year presented the opportunity to dig deep into trash and corruption (*Trash*, Andy Mulligan), explore how a German family realises the dangers of Nazi regime and oppose it (*The White Rose and the Swastika*, Adrian Flynn), witness class inequality and propaganda (*Animal Farm*, George Orwell), delve into the roots of human duality (*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Robert Louis Stevenson), follow the inner struggles of a young girl torn between religion and freedom (*Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi), immerse myself in the greatest love story ever (*Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare), watch as a young man realises that higher social class does not guarantee love (*Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens), examine the effects of colonialism and imposed laws on a Nigerian community (*Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe), experience the tragic consequences of mass hysteria (*The Crucible*, Arthur Miller) and finally, question the ethics of creating clones for organ donation (*Never Let Me Go*, Kazuo Ishiguro). In addition, we've explored shorter fiction pieces, poetry, filmmaking techniques, dramatic extracts and the broader arts of persuasion and comparison. It's all been a huge amount of work - definitely far outside my comfort zone - but also incredibly satisfying and endlessly fascinating.



Parent-Teacher Meetings

After a couple of months at school, parent-teacher meetings are held. No, they are not the regular assemblies with class teachers, instead, they offer an opportunity for parents to meet all of their child's subject teachers individually. The aim is to create a time and place where as many teachers and parents can meet as possible for meaningful conversations.

Each teacher is available for 5-minute time slots over approximately 2.5 hours, and parents can book up to five appointments with different teachers. Everyone kept saying the event had the feel of a speed-dating night - and I must admit, I was rather sceptical at first. What on earth could a teacher and parent discuss in just five minutes?

Well, I had to swallow my words. The evening turned out to be surprisingly useful for gathering quick background information from parents and sharing the most important points from my end. Whenever there was a need for further discussion, we simply agreed on how to continue the conversation going forward.

No Re-sits, no After-class Help

Since the timetable is quite packed - lessons can run as late as 16:25 - the school does not expect teachers to stay after classes to provide extra help or organise test re-sits. In fact, all staff are required to leave the building by 19:00. Student absences are fairly rare, likely because the school requires a medical certificate from the third day of absence onward. If a student does happen to miss a test, they usually take it during the next lesson in the classroom or in the hall. Receiving a negative grade does not typically entitle students to a second chance, the expectation is that they come fully prepared the first time around. That said, students who need extra support aren't left behind. Help is provided in different formats - some have assistants next to them in class the whole year, while others may receive an additional lesson during a free period with a support teacher.

No Mobile Phones

According to a new mobile phone policy that took effect at the beginning of this academic year, all S1-S3 students are required to leave their phones in their lockers and are not permitted to use them at any time. S4-S7 students, on the other hand, may have their phones with them but are only allowed to use them during break or free period time either outside (students do spend a lot of time outside even in winter) or in a designated leisure room. Under no circumstances are phones allowed in classrooms. Even for educational purposes organised by the teacher. I used to be a teacher that allowed mobile phones for online dictionaries, occasional Kahoot, Quizlet and Quizizz games and other similar activities, hence I did struggle at the beginning to find replacement ideas. As the cliché goes, "People adapt to everything with time," by now I feel absolutely fine creating other types of activities. In fact, it is incredibly heart-warming to see students reading books!, playing volleyball, basketball, football or table tennis, enjoying card or board games and having genuine conversations during their breaks and free periods.

Long Tests, Class Sizes and SMS

In Estonia, I was used to adding summative tests to Stuudium at least a week in advance, as long as there was still space on the schedule and students weren't overwhelmed with assessments. The system works a bit differently here. The management sets the schedule for long tests. For example, with my S2 students, I'm allowed to hold long tests during certain weeks, up to five times a year. This system helps spread the tests out over the course of the year, but it also means I can only test students on the material we've covered by that point, which may not be the end of a book or topic.

We're rather accustomed to having smaller foreign language groups in Estonian schools, right? Most of my classes here have 26-29 students, which took me by surprise at first. Grading 29 essays instead of 15 is a whole different time commitment! But again, one gets used to almost everything.

Can I complain a bit as well? Or..let's turn it around, can I actually praise Estonia for a moment? Stuudium, as an online diary, is fantastic! Here, we use SMS, which in my opinion lacks many important

functions, for example there is no section for individual feedback, where I could write something like: "You showed great collaboration skills today, well done!" or "Next time, try to avoid chatting with your desk mate." Additionally, the file sharing and storage system is so limited that Teams is used as a supplementary tool, which sometimes results in teachers needing to duplicate information.

Students

My students are quite different from the ones I had in Estonia to generalise. Whereas the average Estonian student tends to have their eyes fixed on their desk when the teacher has asked for volunteers to explain something, I see at least 10 hands raised here. I literally need to limit their answering time to give others a chance too. They are multilingual (very often come from mixed-nationality families) and well-travelled, which makes their minds broad, which in turn makes them rather adaptable to different situations. I have a feeling that their mentality does include the idea that differences enrich us.

At the beginning of the year, actually a couple of weeks in, due to various circumstances, I was assigned a new class of S4 students (equivalent to 8th or 9th graders in Estonia). The last two lessons of the day, quite late in the afternoon, I had not received proper information on what they had been doing over the first two weeks, I had prepared a general "Let`s get to know each other" class, which involved a guessing game about me. This turned out to be a total mayhem. The boys were loud, shouting answers, making jokes between themselves, laughing uncontrollably and generally yelling. At the beginning of the second class, I was very firm, said that this kind of behaviour would not be tolerated and gave them writing task. I may have been a bit firmer than my usual self and was thinking to myself that most likely, there will be problems, they won't like me. But the girls, they thanked me for a nice lesson as they were walking out at the end of it! This actually is quite common among many students, they seem to be genuinely grateful and wish teachers the best.

Colleagues

The mentality among my colleagues seems very positive. The majority have a great deal of experience, and many have also worked in other European schools in different countries. Like the students, my colleagues are also multicultural (being Estonian is actually a bit exotic - there are only three of us for the whole school), and each day offers an opportunity to learn something new about cultures and countries when having a conversation over lunch. What is new to me, is the fact that the majority are driven by huge enthusiasm and all the projects they participate in are volunteer-based. Some are a part of KIVA or Erasmus teams, some organise annual trips for students, some coach training sessions for teachers and some organise after work get-togethers. A really nice way to get to know different cultures is to participate in celebrations of independence days where usually national food and drinks are offered in the teachers' room.

So, all in all, it's been a whirlwind of new experiences, from students with endless enthusiasm to colleagues who make you feel like you're in a cultural melting pot. It's definitely a change of pace, but one I'm enjoying every step of the way. I never imagined teaching would take me on such a global journey, but I'm grateful for every moment of it.

TAKEAWAYS FROM THE SEMINAR ENGLISH 365: LEARNING IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

*Natalja Zagura and students of MA programme Teacher of Foreign Languages
Department of English Studies, University of Tartu*

On 26 April 2025, the Department of English Studies of the University of Tartu had the honour and pleasure of hosting the seminar *English 365: Learning In and Out of the Classroom*, which was organised with the help of Jennifer Uhler, Regional English Language Officer at the U.S. Department of State and Tiiu Vitsut from the Embassy of the U.S. in Estonia. We had three excellent workshops conducted by Stephen Schuit, who is currently an English Fellow at Daugavpils University, Latvia; English Language Specialist Tamrika Khvtisiashvili, who teaches linguistics, methodology and anthropology; and Angela Dadak, who is currently teaching courses in academic, legal and professional English at the European Humanities University in Vilnius, Lithuania.



Students of the MA programme Teacher of Foreign Languages, majoring in English were among the numerous participants of the seminar and we decided that it would be interesting for the readers of *Open!* to learn about the main messages of the three workshops from their colleagues, our MA students. Each MA student could attend two workshops, took some notes, sharing these online with their group mates, and later participated in a collaborative writing activity, contributing to one part of the present article. As a result, the three central sections of this article have been written by three teams of MA students, totalling in 22 co-authors! With the instructor, Natalja included, the number of authors of this article is 23, which is probably the absolute record for *Open!* We will see how long we can hold this record in authorship and whether any team of contributors to the journal manages to break it.

Below, the content of the three workshops by Steve, Tamrika and Angela is introduced, accompanied with the impressions and thoughts of our MA students. Hopefully, these will be useful for the readers and will inspire you to apply some of the ideas in your lessons. At the end of the article, the meta-level is addressed: some conclusions are drawn on the basis of our MA students' experience with this collaborative writing project. As every participant was asked to fill in a feedback questionnaire, reflecting on the experience of writing with their team mates and assessing their contribution, some implications can be pointed out for the teachers interested in applying this form of collaborative writing in their classes.

Workshop by Stephen Schuit: *The Emotional Values Auction: A New ESL Teaching Methodology, Where Skills Meet Emotions*

The first workshop addressed a new technique developed by Steve Schuit that makes it possible to develop a number of language skills, combining them with the focus on the topics of values, emotions and generosity. Nine MA students chose to reflect on this workshop in this article: Helena Lee, Kerim Çalıřır, Joosep Roald Vörno, Diana Gurova, Marina Leřtenko, Külli Kaljulind, Margot Liivaleht, Heilika Ventsel and Anna Mazepa.

In foreign language classrooms, where developing linguistic proficiency goes hand in hand with fostering meaningful communication, activities that blend emotional engagement with language use can be transformative. The Emotional Values Auction, developed by Steve Schuit, is a good example of the technique that bridges the gap between language learning and the development of emotional intelligence. Inspired by his own experience attending an Emotional Values Auction at an art museum, Schuit crafted an ESL activity where students bring personal items of emotional value, introduce them in

class and “auction” them off in exchange for personal, reflective notes written by their group mates. The objects are not auctioned away for money; instead, the donor of the object receives a series of personal notes detailing why prospective new owners would be the best steward for the object in the future (Schuit 2025). Having collected the notes, the present owner of the object reads them privately at home and selects the new owner for their object; the auctioned objects are handed over to the new owners at the next class. This activity is simple in structure, similar to the traditional auction, but rich in meaning, allowing learners to express their feelings and experience, build vocabulary around emotional concepts, and connect deeply with one another. As such, the activity provides a powerful way to teach essential values like generosity, kindness, and loss while advancing communicative competence in English.

From the perspective of language teaching, Schuit’s activity offers enough flexibility to be adapted for most language levels. At its core, it is a “Show and Tell,” a classic primary school activity of young learners bringing with them a meaningful object and talking about it, but Schuit’s auction adds a dimension of learning kindness through the act of giving the object away. With more mature groups, it is possible to increase the complexity of the activity by framing it around a particular emotional value. For instance, in one of his groups of college-level language learners, Schuit asked to bring to the auction the emotionally valuable objects that in some way represent loss for them and it resulted in an enriching class. To inspire learners and provide some model for justifying one’s choice of an auction item, a short video *These People’s Generosity Will Give You All The Feels* available on YouTube can be watched. Although the video has been produced by a food storage container company Glad, it does not focus excessively on the containers and does convey the important message of giving.

Other universal human emotions would certainly also do, but loss is an excellent one to elucidate by grounding the emotion in a mundane object; an act of universal meaning is practised through the presentation and exchange of highly specific personal stories. What comes to mind is the Museum of Broken Relationships in Zagreb, Croatia. The museum displays donated objects from people, alongside a note explaining how the object in question represented a breakup they had experienced. These notes range from hilarious to gut-wrenching but are all uniquely personal and yet relatable. Miklošević and Babić (2018) suggest that through the process of reading these notes and observing the objects on display, these personal stories are rendered into testaments of a universal experience. In essence, the Emotional Values Auction does the same, but with the added opportunity of bringing a memento home to remind the student of the experience.

It should go without saying that it is not actually about the exchange of objects. In fact, it would be cliché to suggest that the real gift is the friends we made along the way, but there is a lot of truth to it. Schuit’s auction does not hide the fact that most acts of gift-giving are acts of building or strengthening a relationship due to an expectation of reciprocity. As a result, the most valuable aspect gained from carrying out an Emotional Values Auction in one’s own class is the strengthening of ties among the class members. In fact, if each of the offers in the auction is considered a kind of gift in itself, then one may begin to visualise a vast network of reciprocal gift exchanges, each of which helps to build a stronger sense of community within the class. In doing so, the Emotional Values Auction, as a community-building activity, surpasses both the Secret Santa and the Yankee Swap.

The Emotional Values Auction stands out as a very adaptable ESL teaching tool that intertwines emotional reflection with language practice. It allows learners to ground abstract feelings like loss, kindness, and gratitude in personal stories, giving authentic purpose to language use. The success of this activity, however, depends on thorough preparation, which guides discussions, provides contextual input, and encourages open-mindedness among students. Pre-discussion prompts, multimedia resources, and a respectful classroom environment help ensure that students can connect with the emotional themes and participate meaningfully. What makes Schuit’s approach especially powerful is its ability to make the learning process more personal. By encouraging learners to let go of emotionally significant objects and engage in reciprocal gift-giving, the activity strengthens language skills while also building empathy, trust, and a strong sense of community among classmates. The Emotional Values Auction is more than a language lesson — it is an experience where personal expression meets collective understanding and where language becomes a bridge for emotional growth.

Workshop by Tamrika Khvtisiashvili: *Assembly of All Beings: Teaching Empathy in a CLIL English Classroom*

The second workshop introduced some techniques for a CLIL classroom and it inspired Nele Aiaots, Rene Kurm, Kairi Sepp, Erika Duncan, Eve Leola and Olga Remizov to share some impressions and thoughts below.

These days, empathy is more essential than ever. People are increasingly connected digitally, taking in the world's challenges through a digital lens. It makes challenges such as environmental issues distant and abstract, and therefore harder for people to fully grasp their depth or urgency. Teaching empathy is important because it helps learners understand others better and build stronger relationships and caring communities. Teaching empathy in a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) classroom effectively develops students' emotional intelligence alongside their language learning in specific fields.

The workshop by Dr. Tamrika Khvtisiashvili integrated teaching empathy and the topic of climate change. The workshop used the tale of *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein, read by Keith Carradine (2023), as a stepping stone for the learners to engage with the topic. This story is available on Storyline Online, which is a generous resource worth looking into for lead-in activities on a range of issues. *The Giving Tree* was a touching and, at the same time, a thought-provoking story about the tree and the boy—a perfect introduction to the topic! It enabled a discussion on the perspectives of the tree and the boy, the themes of gratitude and selfishness, and the developmental stages of a person.

One of the main takeaways from the workshop was that the more emotions you evoke in students, the more meaningful the learning experience becomes, even if it sometimes leads to uncomfortable moments. CLIL is a powerful approach because it allows teachers to connect language learning with their students' passions, making lessons more personal and engaging. English, taught through different topics like environmental issues, makes language practice more authentic. Tamrika Khvtisiashvili included activities like creating an environmental alphabet (one life form or natural element (starting with a certain letter) per each letter of the alphabet), which students used as the basis to choose one living being they could research and then present to the rest of the group as the ambassador of similar living things, their concerns, and gifts to the rest of the ecosystem. Green yarn was used to symbolically connect the different living beings and through this web to symbolise the interconnection of all the members of an ecosystem. It was also questioned whether the human being plays the central role in this web and whether it should be so. This activity is an excellent way to encourage learners to assume a different perspective (that of another living being) and build empathy, critical thinking, and emotional connection in a classroom focusing on environmental issues. The workshop also highlighted how important it is for English teachers to use their freedom to explore real-world issues and help students develop both language skills and a sense of global responsibility.

The activities carried out by Tamrika Khvtisiashvili are easily adaptable for learners at different levels. It was an excellent example of a lesson that could be carried out at school — it included emotional development, a clear demonstration of how every part of the ecosystem depends on each link, and functional practice of English language skills and sub-skills. The bonus of the workshop was the CLIL climate change lesson framework proposed by Dr. Tamrika Khvtisiashvili. The framework included engaging web pages suitable for students, recommended subjects and key points for discussion. Our colleagues could, for example, explore Climate Action Superhero resource at the United Nations web site or Ecological Footprint Calculator resource.

English is a wonderful subject to teach because we, as teachers, can teach virtually any topic or subject in our English classes. At the workshop, we were given an opportunity to experience a part of the lesson in a CLIL classroom where environmental issues, English, and teaching empathy were professionally and naturally combined.

Workshop by Angela Dadak: Slang in English Language Learning: Rizz or Skibidy Ohio Rizz?

The third workshop focused on the issue of slang – its value and position in foreign language teaching. Our MA students Maria Pacheco, Gajane Veeroja, Elina Prints, Kadi-Ly Jaansalu, Helina Kitsing, Sandra Kaldasaun and Merlyn Helen Kaurit undertook the journey to explore the world of slang.

Slang is commonly seen as impoverishing language that should be banned from decent environments. However, any language is in constant contact with other languages, with words transforming over time and enriching the lexicon. Slang is as old as language itself and has been used by every generation not only to reflect historical events but also to make a statement: “We are who we are and this is our identity.” In finding identity, we also find a community.

Slang allows each generation to express its identity and distinguish itself. Language constantly evolves, with spoken language changing faster than written forms. Words shift in meaning, and language reflects belonging to specific groups. Many slang expressions come from marginalized communities, emphasizing these groups’ creative and influential role in shaping language.

Should slang be allowed in the classroom? Language reflects a speaker’s background and can perpetuate social injustice. Standard English is just one variety and is not inherently superior to others, although it holds socioeconomic prestige. Its prestige is assigned by society. Slang, therefore, should not be considered inferior but linguistically equal. Language is not static, and even slang has a life cycle, with words changing meaning, gaining popularity, fading, and sometimes becoming part of informal or formal language. Slang deserves a place in the EFL classroom to raise students’ sociolinguistic awareness and help them use it appropriately.

An important takeaway from the workshop is the need to teach register switching – the ability to adjust language use based on social context. It enables learners to communicate appropriately in a range of situations, from formal job interviews to casual conversations with peers. Teaching this skill helps students understand not just vocabulary and grammar, but also cultural and pragmatic aspects of language use. Therefore, instead of excluding slang from the classroom, incorporating it into the ESL setting is a great way to expose students to informal, everyday language they are likely to encounter outside the classroom and to help them understand the difference between formal and informal registers. By practicing both formal and informal registers, including slang, students become more confident and competent communicators, better prepared for real-world interactions in diverse social and professional settings.

During the workshop, we explored various creative activities to integrate slang into English lessons meaningfully. One idea was vocabulary mapping, where students link slang to formal equivalents, synonyms, and antonyms. Another idea involved matching slang with formal counterparts to build awareness of context and register. Engaging tasks like rephrasing memes or short media into academic language – and vice versa – were suggested to encourage linguistic flexibility. Role-playing conversations between generations was proposed to highlight how slang use varies over time. A particularly fun activity involved students creating videos, such as “Gen Z writes the marketing script,” using slang to retell stories or news creatively. To start with, students can watch an example video, “Zen Z Shakespeare – Romeo and Juliet Edition” (Franks 2024), for instance, and attempt to understand/guess the meaning of slang words and discuss why the use of slang is weird or funny in this context. These activities make learning relatable and dynamic while teaching critical sociolinguistic skills in a supportive environment.

The workshop emphasized why and how slang can and should be used in classrooms. It reminded us that Standard English, while prestigious, is only one variety and not better than others. Teachers can incorporate slang into lessons to study it with students, helping them learn when and how to use it. Slang enriches vocabulary and supports register switching, thus developing learners’ sociolinguistic competence. Angela Dadak also noted that slang has a life cycle; every generation has its own slang, and some slang terms eventually become informal or formal usage. Including slang in classrooms also

opens opportunities to discuss the marginalized communities and subcultures from which many slang terms originate, broadening students' understanding and awareness.

Final thoughts

Our MA students were impressed and inspired by the workshops and several participants who already work as teachers have mentioned that they are determined to try out some of the new techniques and materials in their classes. Moreover, having to reflect on the material learnt in order to write about it has certainly contributed to better understanding of the new techniques. We hope that the readers of *Open!* would also be interested in exploring the resources shared in this article.

When reflecting on the experience of writing the different parts of this article as a collaborative project, our MA students have pointed out that it is important to organise the collaborative process properly. To guarantee more or less equal participation, team members need to agree on their roles and responsibilities and cooperate in completing different parts of the assignment. Experience shows that when a team member just needs to complete their part, for example just write one paragraph in a text, they fail to relate to the end-product of the group work, have a feeling that their opinion does not count and, as a result, leave the project with negative feelings. However, if a suitable communication platform is selected from the very outset, roles and responsibilities are distributed and communication goes smoothly, the team members feel that their opinion and contribution matter. As a result, they have a considerably more positive opinion of the collaborative writing experience and feel that they have gained a lot from this process.

The role of the instructor is to organise the process of collaborative writing and to edit the contributions so that they would form a naturally flowing text; however, the task of editing can also be delegated to some of the students. As the very last step, a helpful colleague can be asked to read the resulting text critically, suggesting possible changes and improvements. Thus, we have even managed to get 23+1 co-authors for this article! We sincerely hope that the number of readers will be more than 24 and the readers will appreciate our effort.

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EATE Open Speaking Competition 2025

Kristi Vahenurm

On 2 April 2025, Tallinn French School hosted the inaugural national round of the EATE Open English Speaking Competition. A total of 42 speakers participated, representing 25 schools, including those from Saaremaa and Valga. This marked the first-ever public speaking competition organised and conducted entirely by the EATE.

The EATE Open Public Speaking Competition was created as a platform for Estonian secondary school students to enhance their English language skills, build confidence, and engage with pressing global issues. The event fosters critical thinking, effective communication, and provides invaluable public speaking experience in a supportive environment.

The winners of this first competition were Johanna Saska from Tallinn 21st School and Andreas Simson from Pärnu Sütevaka Gymnasium. The Jury, chaired by Phillip Marsdale, featured distinguished members, Ify Agboola from the British Embassy, Leeza Fernand from the US Embassy, Zinaida Jevgrafova from ESU Estonia, Ülle Türk from the University of Tartu, and Paul Rüsse from Tallinn University.

The competition follows a format established by the International English Speaking Union, consisting of two stages to test participants' prepared and impromptu speaking skills. In the prepared speech round, each participant delivers a five-minute presentation on one of eight preselected global themes, such as climate action or sustainable cities. This is followed by a three-to-four-minute Q&A session, allowing judges to evaluate the speaker's critical thinking and responsiveness.

Semifinalists advance to the impromptu speech round, where they are given a topic on the spot and have 15 minutes to prepare a three-minute speech. During this time, participants are allowed to use an English-English dictionary, along with a pen and paper, to formulate their response. The competition



emphasises both content and delivery, encouraging participants to demonstrate their language proficiency, critical thinking, creativity, and public speaking skills under pressure.

The large number of participants, coupled with positive feedback from the jury, mentors, and speakers, underscores the competition's popularity and value. It also serves as a refreshing and meaningful break from everyday school routines. Let us hope that the EATE has laid the foundation for a long-lasting tradition.

HOW TO READ

Erika Puusemp

MHG, EATE, DKG

I have been quiet in the realm of OPEN! for quite some time but I can't anymore. I'm worried and frustrated, and this feeling is growing by the minute.

Having recently read the writing tasks of 100+ 9th-formers taking the test run of e-exams in English, in which they had to write an email and a story, I started wondering about this weird phenomenon how students who have been reading all kinds of texts in their mother tongue for at least eight years and in English for at least six years can still not read and interpret instructions properly, and cannot copy words that are right in front of them without spelling mistakes.



Let me exemplify. One of the tasks for the 9th-formers was to write an email to an Irish friend who was hoping to spend five days in the summer of 2025 taking a course organized by Columbus Club at University College Dublin together with the person writing the email at the exam. This task was accompanied by an advert for four different courses from which to choose, and read as follows:

Here is part of an email from your Irish friend Sam who is inviting you to take a course together with him next summer. Read the email and the advertisement he has sent you below.

Write an email back to Sam. In your email:

- answer his questions and explain your choices,
- ask two questions of your own.

Write about 120 words. Use the pen name Mari/Mart for yourself.

Which course should we take together? What are the best dates for you?

Let me know.

All the best,
Sam

Summer visit

sam@gmail.com

Summer visit

Write your email here

0 word(s)

Columbus Club
developing your potential

5-DAY SUMMER COURSES & WORKSHOPS FOR 15-18-YEAR-OLDS

Photography Creating an App

Film & Cinematography Baking & Cookery

DATES: Tuesday, 4th June - Friday, 16th August
Choose your starting date!

LOCATION:
University College Dublin, Ireland

What many students did instead of carefully reading the task and responding effectively was either 1) suggest only one day, and that not as the starting date for the course but as the ONLY date, or 2) suggest any single day in the whole summer as a possibility, ignoring the fact that they are based in Estonia and should also allow some time for travel. Many also ignored Sam's question about which course they would like to attend, and threw the decision back to Sam without any explanation.

They were also supposed to ask their friend two questions. Many seem to believe that "What about you?" is a legitimate question. Unfortunately, such a question (especially when asked multiple times) does not really show the student's ability to use language creatively, which is how exam situations are a little different from real life – a person must show off their language while in real life they might (sometimes) get by with the barest minimum. To do the best in an exam situation, just copying the questions in the input text is not advisable either.

According to the task they were also supposed to use a pen name for themselves but unfortunately many did not, most probably providing their own name instead. Some cleverer students used Sam's email as a model for their sign-off but many just ignored the fact that there should be suitable opening and closing salutations and a short block text is not good style either – logical paragraphing makes any text easier and pleasanter to read.

As to the story-writing task, the students were provided with a prompt in the form of a picture (of a duck standing on a seat in a subway train), and the task read as follows: Your friend sent you the picture below. Write a short story about what happened that day on the train. Start with the words in the box (It was an early morning...). *How did the duck get on the train? What happened next?* You should write about 100 words.

Since the word "duck" was there in plain sight, why would some students write "duc" or "duk" or "turkey" or "goose"?

Another conundrum for me is the following: when the task specifically says that a friend has sent the picture, how can the story be told from the first-person perspective?

Unfortunately, none of these issues is limited to 9th-formers or single schools but also occur in the papers written during the national exam in English at the end of form 12, and in tests written by students aiming to pass some C1 language level exams.

What should we as teachers do to alleviate this problem of oversight, neglect, inattentiveness (whatever we might call it)?

Some suggestions (not a definitive list):

- insist on reading instructions and underlining key words in every lesson,
- brainstorm (as a class) synonyms for key words,
- insist on planning both the content and layout before writing the text (not writing the same text twice, as a rough copy and clean copy), and on saving some time for reading their text through with the aim of locating and correcting any mistakes before handing it in,
- give students spelling tests, e.g. based on the words misspelled in their previous writing task or test,
- make students correct and comment on each other's writing tasks,
- correct tests and add comments to writing tasks together in class,
- make students correct and grade their own writing while extensively commenting on what they should look for,
- provide students with model texts,
- ask a colleague what they do and try some of their suggestions out.

NORA TOOTS 95

Nora Toots, our honorary member, celebrated her 95th birthday on 19 March 2025.



Nora's life has been related to languages and language teaching from early childhood to the present. As early as at the age of 12, she acted as a *Dolmetscherin* in her hometown Petseri during the German occupation. She studied English at the University of Tartu, but as she could find no employment in her speciality, started working as a teacher of Russian in Tartu as she was fluent in this language having grown up in the bilingual environment of Setomaa. Later, an opportunity opened for her to teach English at Tartu Secondary School No 8 (the present Forselius School) and, thereafter, at the University of Tartu where she specialised mainly in teaching of phonetics. It was a great blow to her when she was forced to retire from the university at the age of 65, being still full of energy and desire to work. She did not surrender, however, and became a teacher of business English at Tartu Secondary School of Commerce. Although she retired from that school several years ago, she has not given up teaching even now. Private students visit her at her home and her Longman Dictionary is still in active use.

EATE sends Nora our warmest congratulations. With her inexhaustible energy, she sets a model to all of us. We wish her good health and continuing endurance in the years to come.

Photo by Natalja Zagura.

In Memory of Meeri Sild

The Estonian education community is mourning the loss of one of its most dedicated and influential educators. Meeri Sild, an esteemed English teacher, educational technologist, and author of textbooks, has passed away. She was a founding member of the Estonian Association of Educational Technologists and served for many years at Tallinn Lilleküla Gymnasium, where her contributions shaped the daily life and direction of the school.

Meeri's impact reached far beyond the classroom. As both a language teacher and innovator in digital education, she combined a deep understanding of pedagogy with a passion for technology. Her work laid the groundwork for the development of educational technology in Estonia, and she was a central figure in establishing the profession nationally. Her innovative spirit, generous mentorship, and unwavering dedication made her a role model for educators across the country.



With her calm but sparkling handling of different topics, she has inspired many English teachers by sharing her expertise at EATE conferences.

Meeri played a vital role in nationwide initiatives, including the Tiigrihüpe (Tiger Leap) project, which introduced digital tools into Estonian schools. Later, she continued this mission with HITSA and HARN0, helping teachers adopt technology in ways that supported meaningful, student-centered learning. Her leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic was especially impactful, as she provided round-the-clock support to colleagues navigating the transition to remote learning.

Internationally, Meeri was known through her two decades of active involvement with eTwinning, a European platform for school collaboration. She trained and encouraged countless teachers to take part in cross-border educational projects, helping to create rich and diverse learning environments for students. For Meeri, this was never just project work — it was a way to build bridges between people and make education more engaging and inclusive.

At Tallinn Lilleküla Gymnasium, Meeri was not only a teacher and technologist but also a respected leader and mentor. Colleagues remember her as calm, humble, and deeply supportive — someone who always found time to help, who quietly made things better, and who never sought the spotlight. She authored materials and guides that continue to support teaching practices today and was honored multiple times as “Teacher of the Year” and “Tiger Award” recipient.

Although her life was tragically cut short by a sudden illness, Meeri Sild leaves behind a legacy of warmth, wisdom, and unwavering dedication. Her voice, ideas, and spirit live on in every classroom shaped by her work, and in the hearts of those who had the privilege to know her and learn from her.

Experienced Educator

AN INTERVIEW WITH ERIKA PUUSEMP



You’ve combined an active professional life with raising a family and now enjoy being a grandmother. How has your family life shaped or supported your work as a teacher and leader over the years?

My reality living in Tartu means that my home, my workplaces, my parents’ home and their workplaces have always been in close vicinity, and my grandma lived with my parents during winters when my children were small, so, having their support, I never had to stay at home from work due to anybody’s illness. My children’s kindergarten was practically across the street and at that time children were allowed to go to kindergarten unsupervised, which mine did when necessary. Any schools they attended were also quite close.

Now, as a grandmother, I don’t have to be available 24/7 and can easily combine work and personal life, although, as life often has it, sometimes needs and wishes tend to collide...

After more than 30 years of teaching, what keeps you motivated and excited about being in the classroom?

Young people are inspiring. Working with them makes me look investigate themes that I wouldn't necessarily otherwise.

Could you share one classroom activity or approach that has stood the test of time and consistently worked well with your students?

In senior classes, give them some guidelines and allow them to talk in pairs or small groups, seemingly unsupervised...

How have students' attitudes toward learning English changed during your career?

I have been blessed with the opportunity to teach rather motivated students all the time (with some rare exceptions), so the main difference is more to do with the availability of English outside the school context, which means that students' knowledge very much depends on what they are interested in and how they spend their time when they are not doing what the teachers tell them to. Unfortunately, this also means that there is quite a widespread view in the society at large that English is a contagious disease and studying it in depth is not that necessary. Which is obviously not true, especially since the kind of language that is necessary for university studies and academic research and writing cannot be just picked up from social media, for example.

How do you keep your students motivated?

Allowing them choices from time to time.

What role do you think literature and culture should play in language lessons today?

The more a person reads, the better, of all kinds of texts, literature included. Literature specifically allows them to "live" multiple lives in addition to their own, and hopefully also learn from the experience.

Knowledge about other cultures generally helps people to avoid all kinds of blunders in the globalising world, and with today's travel, study, and work opportunities this is vital.

How do you build meaningful connections with your learners?

I do not pretend to be, I am, and I expect the same from my students.

If you could go back in time and give one piece of advice to yourself as a beginning teacher, what would it be - and why?

Chill. What will come will come anyway.

How do you think the Association can best support English teachers today, especially with the growing presence of AI, digital tools, and changing curricula?

Foster sharing competences and experience. Inspire them to present at the summer seminars, to write for OPEN!, to apply for Erasmus+ scholarships...

What kind of advice would you give to young teachers today?

If you like teaching, stick with it. Try to say no to extra tasks that do not inspire you. Be honest with yourself and your students. Be yourself, your students will only gain from this.

How do you keep yourself motivated and take care of your well-being?

At school, I teach senior classes only. I believe students at the age of 16-19 should be responsible for their own work, so I do not contact any parents unless absolutely necessary. I cooperate with likeminded teachers in my own school and outside. I'm also an item-writer and examiner/assessor for the Year 12 National Exam in English, and invigilator/interviewer/assessor for Cambridge C1 Advanced, which provides variety, and the expertise gained also spills into my everyday schoolwork.

On a more personal level, I make time for my children, grandchildren, and best friends. I read a lot, I try to get enough sleep, I go hiking from time to time, and to the theatre.

Some might say that for a literature teacher, reading is also work. It is, but not solely – I read for pleasure but keep pen and paper at hand for ideas that might develop into something useful in class. The same with social media – I am on the lookout for interesting takes on literature, speaking tasks, exam preparation, etc.

What do you like most about teaching at school?

The variety. The combination of old and new. The spark.

What motivated you to become a language teacher?

Having started reading at the age of three, learning English since the age of seven, having a couple of inspiring English teachers at school, not being too good at maths and physics and the like, the university not admitting psychology students that year (although this might actually be something I have wrongly convinced myself since).

What are the most vivid memories from your university studies?

Although taking tens of pages of handwritten notes during many lectures, exchanging messages with my best friend of the time at the same time.

The first September of my university studies on a collective farm in Värskä. Some inspiring lecturers.

Typing my diploma thesis on a typewriter when my oldest daughter had just learnt to walk and could land all her ten little fingers on the typewriter at any moment so that I had to start the page all over again...

Would you choose your profession as a teacher all over again if you had a chance?

Yes.

What are the greatest moments in your life as a teacher that you are really proud of?

Any time I hear a student say they are happy that I was their teacher. When they smile years later when we happen to meet whenever wherever.

Interviewed by fellow committee member Taivi Õigus.

Reading Recommendation

HOW THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TARTU WAS WRITTEN

Ilmar Anvelt

Free-lance translator, Tartu

Ilmar Anvelt, Pilvi Rajamäe. **Kakssada kakskümmend aastat anglistikat Tartu Ülikoolis**. Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 2024.

Our six and a half year's work is ready. This is greatly a book of memories, a book about the personalities of the people who have taught English at the University of Tartu at different times. Our aim was not to assess the research papers written more than a hundred years ago or to evaluate the curricula of the past from our present-day point of view. Naturally, our memories of different times are of different kinds.

In 1803, when the first English lecturer Benjamin Beresford started his work, even the construction of the main building of the University of Tartu had not started yet. Photography had not been invented either. It is possible that there are some paintings and drawings of him; these have more probably been made in Germany rather where he stayed for a longer time. With good fantasy, we might imagine that Louise, the Queen of Prussia, painted his English teacher, but, naturally, there is no proof of it. It is inevitable that the description of his life and work and of the other lecturers who worked in Tartu when Estonia used to be part of the Russian Empire is entirely based on indirect sources – archive documents and printed materials published earlier.

The materials about the lecturers at the national university of the Republic of Estonia, which opened in 1919, are considerably richer – there are more detailed materials about them in the archives and printed sources and photos of all of them. Unfortunately, none of the students of the pre-war University of Tartu are alive anymore; therefore, we could not collect any direct impressions of what it was like to be a student of English in those days. Felita Viikna, a renowned teacher of English who lived to the honourable age of 104 years, died just a few weeks before we started work on our book.

Connecting links between the periods before and after World War II are Johannes Silvet and Ants Oras – the former continued his work at the Soviet university when the war was over, but the latter fled Estonia during the war and worked in the University of Florida in the US.

The lecturers who worked at the postwar Tartu State University are already within the living memory of the authors of the book and our colleagues. Ilmar Anvelt's first exam at the university was with Arthur Hone; he has visited Johannes Silvet at his house in Elva and worked as Oleg Mutt's assistant for several years. Pilvi Rajamäe was also a student of Oleg Mutt.

There are lots of people from this period who used to be our teachers or colleagues, but who passed away before even the idea of the book was conceived – Amanda Kriit, Gustav Liiv, Hella Laan, Laine Hone, Helgi Susi – to mention just a few.

The following part of the book, however, differs greatly as it is mainly based on interviews with our past and present colleagues. We had long and frank face-to-face talks with them, usually for about two hours,

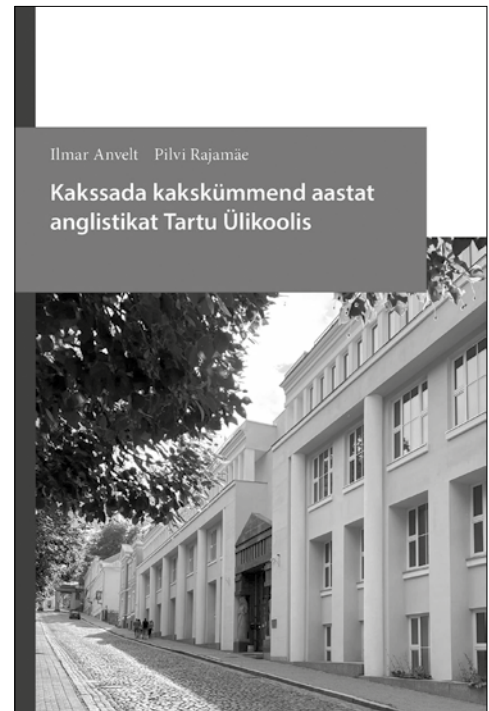


with some even for several times. The first of our interviewees was Urve Hanko, with whom we talked on 11 April 2018; talks with Heino Liiv and Mall Tamm followed soon. Unfortunately, none of them could see the publication of the book with their own eyes. Neither could Reet Sool. We had planned to speak to her, but, unfortunately, her health was already too frail by that time.

The following group includes our pensioners, the oldest of whom, Nora Toots, celebrated her 95th birthday not long ago. We also talked to several former colleagues who have left our department and are now pursuing different careers, e.g. Berk Vaher, former chairman of the Tartu department of the Estonian Writers' Union; Piret Kärtner, director of academic affairs at Narva College of the University of Tartu; Indrek Õis, translator at the European Commission who was the first to translate a novel directly from Irish into Estonian. There are many more of them than included in the book; we did not make an attempt to contact everyone who had worked at our department for shorter periods.

Last but not least, the book includes interviews with our current colleagues. We always started our interviews with the question how our interlocutors had become interested in the English language. Initially, this was meant as a warm-up, but we were surprised to get so many different answers. We are sincerely grateful to everyone who took their time to answer our questions.

The final pages of the book describe various locations where the Department of English Studies has been housed, from the Old Languages Building which was our home in the 1960s to our present accommodation in Lossi Street. The book is richly illustrated with photos.



Come and Share

Emotions. Pictures. Words.

Ülle Ottokar, Anne-Mai Tevahi

Pictures: Ülle Ottokar

Words: Anne-Mai Tevahi

Translation into English: Maarja-Liis Loo

English editor: Erika Puusemp

Cover design: Lauri Rahu soo

Printed by Just Print OÜ



“Emotions. Pictures. Words.” is a collection of poetry and art, where poetic expressions are combined with emotions depicted in pictures.

This deck of cards is designed to support self-expression, offer inspiration, and to encourage individual thinking.

The publication consists of 81 different cards that describe various emotional states. The cards are divided into three categories: light, moderate, and heavy, by the authors’ perception.

The collection of art and poetry serves as a source of inspiration for personal reflection, creative or group work, and is a tool for exploring the nuances of language and poetry.

It is a means for introspection and a companion in therapeutic processes.

A book of poetry and images in the form of a card deck, capable of offering a thought-provoking moment every day.

The card deck has an Estonian sister-deck “Lootustuuline eneseleidja” (Hope-Swept Inner Alchemist). The English version “The deck of cards: Emotions. Pictures. Words” is a translation from Estonian. The delicately nuanced translation is made by Maarja-Liis Loo.

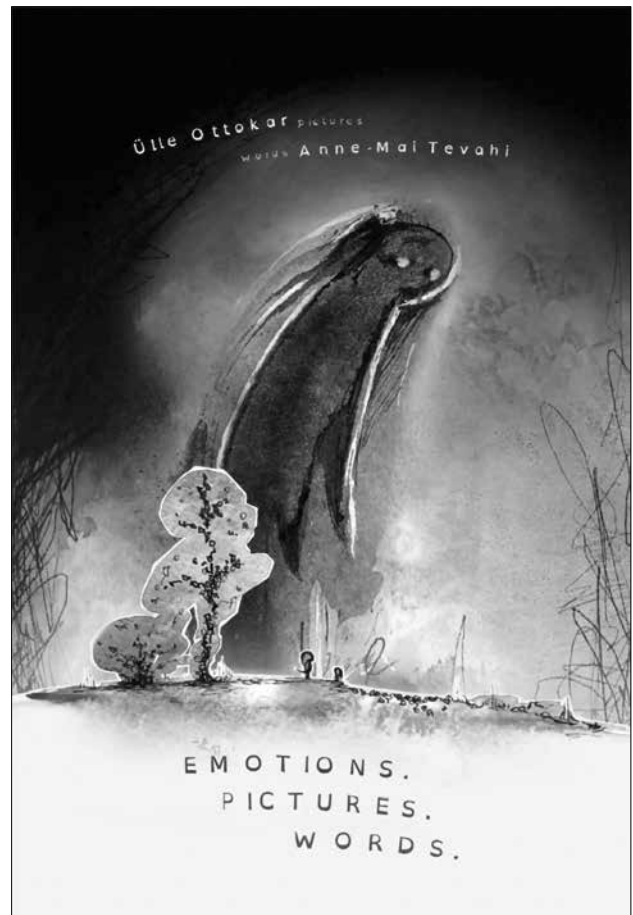
“Poetry may often feel distant for many people, for various reasons. One effective way to spark interest in poetry, support its understanding, and enrich vocabulary is to use this card deck. It can be used for various engaging activities to guide one’s journey into deciphering poetry. Alongside beautiful words, the enchanting artworks on each card offer support and inspiration. Everyone should try picking up the deck and giving it a go! Especially in literature classes, these cards could add a refreshing layer to the learning experience”

— Kristina Kutsar, Special Education Teacher

“The words in this unique collection stand apart from everyday language. It’s the subtle richness that makes them work. What makes these cards especially captivating is that, in addition to intriguing words, they include compelling visuals. This activates a person’s inner sense and curiosity. Questions and insights arise: what is visible and what is hidden?”

This kind of depth brings the entire collection to a new level, placing it in a category of its own, unlike any other emotion cards.”

— Piret Hallast, Family Therapist





LESSONS BEYOND THE CLASSROOM IN BRIGHTON AND HOVE

When I first arrived in Brighton and Hove, the vibrant coastal city on the south coast of England, I had a mix of excitement and nerves. Moving to a new country as a student, even for a week, felt like a leap into the unknown. This was my first adventure as an exchange student.

In the following week, I attended classes at ISE Hove, which stands for Intensive School of English. We were organized into classrooms based on our language level, alongside another student group from Switzerland. Throughout the lessons, we practiced our writing, reading, and listening, but most importantly, we focused on our speaking. We worked in groups, engaging in open discussions, and expanded our vocabulary. One of the most challenging yet fascinating tasks involved approaching locals on the street for interviews. I managed to speak with about a dozen individuals about their experiences living in Brighton and Hove, gaining valuable insights into local life and culture while feeling a strong sense of their community pride. The locals were welcoming and eager to share their favorite places and hidden gems.

Outside of school, Brighton's diverse spirit came to life. Walking along the famous pebble beach, exploring the narrow alleys of the Lanes, and tasting my first traditional fish and chips gave me a new understanding of English culture. I also became familiar with the local expressions, like "cheers" for thank you and "knackered" for tired—little words that made me feel like a local.

By the end of my stay, Brighton and Hove had become more than just a temporary home; it was a place where I had grown, learned, and made connections that would last a lifetime. The memories of my time there, filled with laughter, learning, and adventure, would always hold a special place in my heart.



Some Thoughts On British Food

Kärt Roomäe

PhD student, University of Birmingham

In the last *Open!* I wrote about British desserts. A year has passed and while I haven't been able to go on as many adventures as earlier in my PhD, the number of photos taken over the last few years will hopefully keep the readers entertained for quite a while. Like in the previous instalment, I will rely on personal experiences interlaced with advice from locals. It will be an eclectic selection, but looking back, as delicious as at the time of polishing off those plates. In what follows you'll be able to read about some traditional savory British dishes that often feature both at home and in eateries.



To start off with some lighter meals, Brits love soup. A warm and comforting bowl of soup to slurp in those high-ceiling, often fairly cold houses – at least for people from the continent – has become one of my favorite meal options too. And while nothing beats a homemade, veggie-packed soup, one can buy lots of different varieties in tins from the supermarket as well. Interestingly, many soups are puréed before serving here, unlike Estonian soups that are rather chunky. The photo attached shows potato and leek soup I enjoyed in the coastal Southport as a case in point. Broccoli and stilton would be my top pick though. It's moreish and tangy, full of nutritious veg and cheese, which is always nice.

Another light meal option, particularly for warmer weather, is a sarnie with some sides. Locals sometimes use the word 'sarnie' to denote sandwich triangles that are full of tasty fillings. You can even buy what Brits call 'deli fillers' in the shops to replicate what you can see in the photo I have included. Coronation chicken, cheese & onion, chicken & sweetcorn, tuna & sweetcorn, egg mayonnaise, prawn cocktail... The list can go on. Sandwiches as a main, accompanied by a small bag of crisps and fruit is one of the most popular office lunches I have seen. Perhaps that's also why the bread loaves are massive here, sometimes too big for even popping in the toaster.



Continuing with the meal options for warm weather, even though not limited to it, fish and chips is one of the most famous British dishes. As seen from the photo, it's a greasy affair but scrumptious, often sold in takeaways. Some also add salt and vinegar to the dish. That particular – massive! – portion of fish and chips I indulged in at the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley. The museum resembles the Estonian Open Air Museum conceptually but is significantly larger. Well worth a visit when you find yourself in the West Midlands!

Next, another easy fix that students especially tend to prepare as it can be low in cost. Jacket potato involves a big potato – 'spud', informally – being poked full of holes before it's nuked in the microwave for a few minutes, followed by a fairly long wait while the spud is becoming proper crispy in the oven. It's worth it though and is a very versatile dish as well.

After smothering the steaming insides with butter, one might want to fill it with baked beans and cheese, mushrooms, coronation chicken (as seen here), or tuna, to name a few.



Now there was one dish I associated with France more than the UK before moving here. That's quiche. Served with plenty of greens and lovely roast potatoes in the example provided here, it's often an explosion of tastes on the tongue. Supermarkets too sell an abundance of quiches that can be eaten hot or cold. One might enjoy a cold quiche on a picnic, but I personally prefer it served hot, alongside coleslaw and boiled baby potatoes. Quiche is not too difficult to make on your own either, I do recommend. The dish hailing from France tastes luxurious yet healthy.

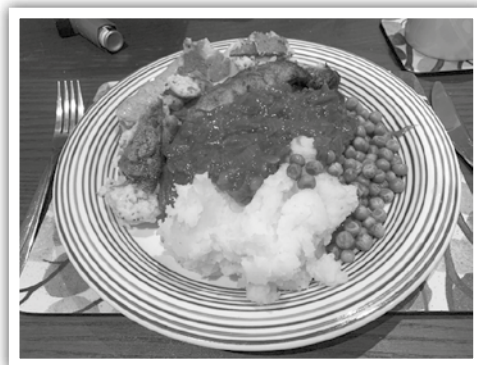


Slowly reaching the end of this overview, I cannot bypass pies. The meal shown here was enjoyed at Pieminister in central Birmingham. Inspecting it now, I see the error made when placing an order. There are no peas on the side! Peas and mash are salient in the British cuisine, and so is gravy. The small boat of gravy is meant to be poured over the pie, keeping the dish from being too dry. The number of fillings is too long to comprehensively present here, but most are delicious.



Last but not least, let me present to you the showstopper. Prepared by a dear friend, you will first recognize mash and peas as is proper. They share the plate room with toad in the hole, a traditional English dish. Consisting of Yorkshire pudding batter and sausages, it is often served with onion gravy. The gravy seen here has been made from purple onions, that's why the slightly odd color. I did not manage to finish everything on the plate, so it turned into two servings at the end, but this made the experience even better.

I appreciate that this overview barely scratches the surface of savory dishes one should enjoy while in the UK. I do hope that you learned something new from reading this though. As mentioned previously, the various cultures combined in Britain have played a part in what we enjoy today. Fish and chips, while English, used to be separate dishes introduced by the immigrants and I wrote a bit about quiche above; same with curry which Birmingham is famous for. With that in mind, eagerly await more musings on British food and beverages.



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EATE Public Speaking Contest – from the participant’s perspective

Adrian Georg Zurbuchen

On April 2nd, I participated in a public speaking competition organized by the Estonian Association of Teachers of English.

The competition began at 12 o’clock, when we, the participants, moved into classrooms to which we had previously been assigned. There were five participants in each classroom. This was the first round, where we delivered pre-written and prepared speeches. In my opinion, this system was very good. Presenting a previously memorized speech to a smaller audience was a nice way to start, especially since I had never taken part in such a competition before. I also liked that there were relatively few participants per classroom. Limiting the number of participants in each room to five was beneficial because it kept the students, the waiting participants, and the judges from getting too tired.

After the round ended, we were taken on a school tour led by 10th-grade students of Tallinn French School. Since I also study at Tallinn French School, I was able to contribute, and the tour helped me get to know the other competitors, which was a great opportunity to make new acquaintances. After the tour, lunch was served in the cafeteria.

Unfortunately, we had to wait an hour and a half to get the results (who had made it to the next round and who hadn’t), which felt like a long wait. However, it’s understandable, as there were many participants and judges’ decisions always take time. Luckily, I made it to the next round.

The semifinal of the competition was a so-called impromptu speech. This meant that each participant drew a random topic and had fifteen minutes to prepare a three-minute speech. Afterward, we delivered our speeches in the large hall. I really enjoyed both preparing and delivering the impromptu speech. It was a completely new experience for me (even though I had practiced with my teacher beforehand, the feeling during the actual competition was completely different). I especially liked that the impromptu speeches were presented in the large hall to a bigger audience and the judges, as this added some adrenaline — I hadn’t expected so many faces to be looking at me when I stepped into the hall. It was definitely an encouraging experience that taught me a lot about myself.

The announcement of the finalists came quicker, and just 15 minutes later we were back in the hall to listen to their pre-prepared speeches. Fortunately, I was also one of the speakers. I really enjoyed how the other competitors approached their topics. I learned a lot from my own performance as well and now know what to improve next time.

In summary, I think the competition was very well structured and executed. I learned a lot about myself, as well as about the English language, rhetoric, and speech composition. The prizes were also a lot of fun. For me, participating in the competition was a very enjoyable and successful experience, and I definitely plan to take part again next year.

On reading Claire Keegan

Ülle Türk

Institute of Foreign Languages and Cultures, University of Tartu



In October there were yellow trees. Then the clocks went back the hour and the long November winds came in and blew, and stripped the trees bare. In the town of New Ross, chimneys threw out smoke which fell away and drifted off in hairy, drawn-out strings before dispersing along the quays, and soon the River Barrow, dark as stout, swelled up with rain.

Thus starts *Small Things Like These* – the one-hundred-and-ten-page novella by the Irish writer Claire Keegan that, in 2022, became the shortest ever book shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Claire Keegan's writing has been praised for its simplicity and subtlety. She does not explain but draws pictures with her words. When reading her stories, everything seems shrouded in a fog to start with. Slowly, images begin to emerge and become clearer, but even by the end of the story, a thin mist is still covering the landscape, and the reader can use their imagination to complete the picture.

I discovered Claire Keegan accidentally, through the movie based on the above novella that reached our cinemas at Christmastime 2024. The movie had received quite an enthusiastic reception worldwide, at least partly because the main role is played by Cillian Murphy for whom it was the first cinema role after he had won the Oscar for his performance in *Oppenheimer*. Having watched the movie, I wanted to read the book and remembered suddenly that I had bought it earlier in the year when attending a conference in Belfast. Having read a couple of pages, I was hooked.

The book is set in a small Irish town, New Ross, in the weeks leading up to Christmas in 1985. It is centred on the character of Bill Furlong, a coal and timber merchant (played in the film by Cillian Murphy), and follows him on his rounds and through the evenings spent with his family – his wife and five daughters. Nothing much is happening outwardly; the focus is on Bill's inner thoughts, concerns and reminiscences. Nevertheless, the tension keeps the reader enthralled until the very end of the slim volume and long after, as small details keep coming back to mind and make one re-think of what the story was all about.

Since reading *Small Things Like These*, I have also read *Foster* (2010) – another longer piece made into the movie *The Quiet Girl* (Irish: *An Cailín Ciúin*) – the first Irish-language film to be nominated for the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film in 2023, which affected me even more deeply. Based on these two books, I can assume that the features that attracted me to the *Small Things Like These* are characteristic of Claire Keegan's writing in general: a simple, seemingly straightforward plot slowly uncovered in a precise and nuanced language that leaves enough room for the reader's imagination.

Claire Keegan is not a prolific writer. In addition to the two longer stories mentioned, she has published just four short-story collections – *Antarctica* (1999), *Walk the Blue Fields* (2007), *The Forester's Daughter* (2019) and *So Late in the Day: Stories of Women and Men* (2023) – and I look forward to reading them all. I recommend her writing to anyone who would like to while away a couple of hours musing on the hard choices that could face us all and the decisions we might make under these circumstances.

Assessment for Learning in English Language Teaching: Enhancing Student Growth and Achievement

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Annie Altamirano (MA ELT & Applied Linguistics, University of London) is an independent teacher trainer, author, and international speaker. She collaborates with major publishers and provides training globally. A mentor with EVE and a trainer for Pilgrims and Cambridge University Press, her expertise includes formative assessment, differentiated instruction, and teaching values through storybooks. Annie leads Empowering Teachers Worldwide, offering training, consultancy, and authoring services. Contact: info@anniealtamirano.com | Website: anniealtamirano.com. Abstract This article explores the implementation of Assessment for Learning (AfL) approaches in English Language Teaching contexts. It examines how formative assessment practices can enhance student engagement, motivation, and achievement compared to traditional summative methods. The paper discusses the theoretical foundations of AfL, practical strategies for implementing self-assessment and peer assessment, challenges teachers may face, and solutions to overcome these barriers. By integrating AfL with current educational frameworks such as competency-based education and project-based learning, teachers can create more student-centred environments that promote learner autonomy and continuous improvement. The findings suggest that when properly implemented, AfL approaches not only align with curriculum standards but significantly improve learning outcomes and foster positive attitudes toward language learning among students.

Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, it's imperative to adapt assessment methods to meet the diverse needs of learners. Assessment for Learning is an approach to assessment that emphasizes using assessment as a tool to promote and enhance learning. It is a shift from traditional assessment methods in several ways.

- Assessment for Learning is formative, while traditional assessment is often summative. Formative assessment takes place during the learning process to provide students with feedback and help them track their progress. Summative assessment, on the other hand, takes place at the end of a learning period to measure what students have learned.
- Assessment for Learning is student-centred, while traditional assessment is often teacher-centred. Assessment for Learning empowers students to take responsibility for their own learning by providing them with opportunities to self-assess and peer assess. Traditional assessment, on the other hand, is often focused on evaluating students' performance against external standards.
- Assessment for Learning is focused on the process of learning, while traditional assessment is often focused on the product of learning. It encourages students to reflect on their learning and identify areas for improvement. Traditional assessment, on the other hand, is often focused on measuring students' mastery of specific content or skills.

The role of self-assessment and peer assessment

Self-assessment and peer assessment are integral components of Assessment for Learning, encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning and develop critical evaluation skills. Effective implementation of these methods involves providing clear assessment criteria, rubrics, and guidance. Students assess their work against these criteria and provide feedback to their peers, promoting reflection and collaborative learning.

To effectively implement self-assessment and peer assessment in the classroom, teachers should consider several key strategies:

- Clear assessment criteria: Provide students with explicit assessment criteria and rubrics that outline expectations. Clear guidelines ensure that students understand the standards they need to meet.
- Modelling and training: Before diving into self-assessment and peer assessment, it's essential to

model these processes and provide explicit guidance. Teachers can show students how to assess their own work and that of their peers.

- **Feedback protocols:** Teach students how to provide constructive, specific, and respectful feedback. Ensure that feedback focuses on strengths as well as areas for improvement.
- **Reflective activities:** Encourage students to reflect on the feedback they receive, setting goals for their growth. This reflective process deepens their understanding of their learning.
- **Regular practice:** Incorporate self-assessment and peer assessment into the regular classroom routine. Consistent practice allows students to build these skills over time.
- **Teacher Monitoring:** Teachers should monitor the self-assessment and peer assessment process to ensure it remains constructive and respectful. This includes providing guidance when conflicts or challenges arise.

Challenges and strategies for implementing Assessment for Learning

Implementing Assessment for Learning strategies can pose some challenges such as time constraints, resistance to change, limited resources, managing data, and addressing diverse needs. These challenges can be addressed through various strategies:

- **Time Constraints:** Integrate formative assessment into existing activities to manage time effectively, such as using exit tickets or reflective journals.
- **Resistance to Change:** Build confidence in Assessment for Learning by providing professional development and sharing success stories to encourage educators to embrace the change.
- **Limited Resources:** Seek low-cost or free resources and adapt strategies accordingly, ensuring that a lack of resources does not hinder implementation.
- **Managing Data:** Use technology and tools to automate data collection and analysis, making the process more manageable.
- **Addressing Diverse Needs:** Collaborate with colleagues, use differentiation strategies, and seek professional development to tailor instruction for diverse learners.

How Assessment for Learning aligns with educational standards and curriculum requirements

Assessment for Learning aligns well with educational standards as it focuses on the continuous improvement of students' skills and knowledge. It is often mandated in many standards-based educational systems, as it encourages teachers to continuously assess students' progress and understanding while adjusting instruction accordingly.

For instance, if a curriculum emphasizes a specific language skill like reading comprehension, teachers using Assessment for Learning might implement regular quizzes, peer assessments, or self-assessments to gauge student progress. The data collected from these assessments can inform adjustments to instruction to better meet curriculum requirements.

Balancing Assessment for Learning and curriculum requirements can be achieved through effective curriculum mapping and lesson planning. Teachers should break down the curriculum into manageable chunks, set clear learning objectives, and design assessments that align with those objectives. Regular communication and collaboration with colleagues can help ensure a unified approach to assessment and curriculum delivery.

Impact on student motivation, achievement, and attitudes

Assessment for Learning has been shown to have a positive impact on student motivation and achievement. When students receive constructive feedback and have a clear understanding of their progress, they are more likely to stay engaged and take ownership of their learning. This can lead to improved attitudes towards learning and increased achievement.

Research, such as the work of Black and Wiliam (1998), has shown that Assessment for Learning practices lead to substantial improvements in student achievement. When students receive timely feedback and have opportunities to make improvements based on that feedback, their learning is enhanced.

Moreover, the positive effects of Assessment for Learning extend to students' attitudes towards learning. Students who experience a supportive, formative assessment environment tend to develop a growth mindset. They view challenges as opportunities to learn and are more likely to persevere when faced with difficulties.

Supporting teachers in adopting Assessment for Learning practices

Schools and educational institutions can support teachers in adopting Assessment for Learning practices through the following means:

- Professional Development: Offer workshops and training sessions specifically focused on Assessment for Learning strategies and best practices.
- Mentoring: Pair experienced Assessment for Learning practitioners with newer teachers to provide guidance and support.
- Resource Sharing: Create a repository of Assessment for Learning resources, such as assessment tools, rubrics, and lesson plans, for teachers to access and adapt.
- Feedback Culture: Encourage a culture of feedback and reflection within the institution, so teachers can continuously refine their Assessment for Learning practices.
- Administrative Support: Ensure that assessment for learning is integrated into institutional policies and practices.

Some pitfalls and misconceptions

Educators should be aware of potential pitfalls and misconceptions when implementing Assessment for Learning:

- Overemphasizing testing: Assessment for Learning is not about constant testing; it's about gathering diverse types of evidence of learning.
- Not providing enough guidance: Students may need guidance to self-assess effectively, and teachers should provide this support.

Integration into broader educational frameworks

Assessment for Learning can be seamlessly integrated into broader educational frameworks, such as competency-based education and project-based learning, to enhance student-centered and adaptable learning:

Integration into Competency-Based Education (CBE):

- Teachers can use formative assessments, such as quizzes, self-assessments, and peer reviews, to track students' progress towards mastering specific competencies.
- Teachers can provide timely and specific feedback to students based on their formative assessments, helping them identify areas for improvement and develop a plan for mastery.
- Teachers can use the data from formative assessments to create individualized learning paths for students, ensuring that they are challenged at the appropriate level and receive the support they need to succeed.

Integration into Project-Based Learning (PBL):

- Teachers can use performance assessments, such as presentations, portfolios, and rubrics, to assess students' performance throughout authentic projects.
- Teachers can encourage students to reflect on their project work and self-assess their progress.
- Teachers can provide formative feedback to students at various stages of the project, helping them to revise and improve their work.

Conclusion

Assessment for Learning is a transformative approach to assessment that can have a significant impact on ESL students' motivation, achievement, and attitudes towards learning. ESL teachers who implement Assessment for Learning in their classrooms can provide students with the support they need to succeed in their language learning journey. Assessment for Learning is a journey, not a destination. It takes time and effort to implement effectively. However, the benefits for ESL learners are well worth the investment.

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