

TEACHING LANGUAGES AND CULTURES IN THE POST-METHOD ERA

A decade ago, on November 15th 2014, the first one of biennial international conferences under the umbrella title *Teaching Languages and Cultures in the Post-Method Era* was held at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia. The first TLC 2014, themed *Issues and Developments*, looked into the area of teaching and learning language and cultures in the Balkan educational contexts. As pointed out by the editors of the TLC 2014 Conference Proceedings, it aspired to provide a relevant forum for discussing current issues of teaching and learning, bringing together language teacher educators, applied linguistics researchers, and language teaching practitioners, and thus aiming to bridge the proverbial gap between scientific research and classroom practices.

Ten years and four TLC conferences later, we can safely say that these expectations have indeed been fulfilled. Like the first one, being state-accredited teacher-development events, the subsequent two conferences – TLC 2016 *Developing Competencies, Re-thinking Practices* and TLC 2018 *Challenges and Perspectives* – continued to keep the exchange open between academics, scholars, and researchers on one side, and, on the other side, both experienced and novice language teachers from different backgrounds and different educational contexts, as an exciting and fruitful space for idea exchange and networking.

This special issue of *Facta Universitatis: Linguistics and Literature* (Vol. 22, No 1, 2024) offers a selection of papers presented at the Fourth International Conference *Teaching Languages and Cultures in the Post-Method Era: New Insights and Innovations* (TLC 2023), held, after a prolonged post-pandemic hiatus, on October 6 and 7 2023 at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš. The goal of TLC 2023 was to provide, once again, a vibrant arena where current questions can be addressed, and new research findings and views exchanged. As both researchers and teachers witness the changing nature of learning and information gathering, and acknowledge that this has to be reflected in a joint effort of different disciplines to offer teachers new and redesigned means of teaching, one of the challenges particularly addressed at TLC 2023 was how these requirements influence the choices teachers make in terms of their professional development.

The issues discussed ranged from the changing nature of learning, over new technologies and language use in different formats and modes, to challenges of teaching and learning heritage languages. To illustrate this breadth, we present fifteen papers, grouped into five sections.

The first one, focusing on *Teaching*, is opened by Ema Živković Nikolić and Ljiljana Marković who present their analysis of the teaching practicum as an essential part of EFL teacher education. Their paper *Exploring the teaching practicum: Insights from mentors and pre-service EFL teachers* presents a qualitative analysis of the data obtained through two questionnaires based on a well-established model of mentoring for effective teaching. The analysis showed that the main aspects of the practicum were viewed in very similar ways by both teacher-mentors and pre-service student-teachers, with differences in the focus of their attention. This study, thus, informs pre-service teacher education, highlighting the points to address in their preparations for the teaching practicum.

New technologies are discussed in the paper *Insights into the latest innovations: University students' opinions and attitudes on using ChatGPT for educational purposes*, by Milica Vitaz and Sandra Vasković. The authors point out that this tool has a great potential if used appropriately in academic settings, and that it is crucial for both teachers and students to build awareness about the negative effects it can have on students' learning, but also about the ways in which it can be used to enhance and aid learning.

Predrag Niketić presents the *Use of environment-themed cartoons in ESP teaching*, to demonstrate that when used as materials for in-class work such cartoons prove to be a valuable tool for vocabulary acquisition and grammar proficiency building, at the same time contributing to student's understanding of the pertinent concepts in the professional area of study, which is a particularly important aim in ESP teaching.

As an alternative to "traditional", i.e., rule-based grammar instruction, Marta Veličković and Jelena Danilović Jeremić propose an approach based on corpus analysis, presented through the example of definite article teaching. Their paper, titled *Raising awareness of the definite article in the EFL classroom: A corpus linguistics approach*, explores how the analysis of the language content presented in EFL coursebooks for elementary and high schools can be used to develop practical awareness-raising activities that would focus on the most frequent uses of the given grammatical point, in this case the definite article in English.

The next section shifts the perspective to **Learning**, i.e. the learners. In her paper titled *ESP students' metacognitive awareness deployed in making a language learning plan*, Maja Stanojević Gocić investigates students' individual engagement in planning their own learning. The paper presents a questionnaire-based study of how university students studying English for the legal profession use metacognition in planning their learning activities and fulfilling their learning objectives. The author points out that in contemporary student-centered teaching metacognition plays a crucial role, as it enables students to retrieve and deploy the strategies best suited to their particular needs. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to help students become aware of their preferred learning strategies, and to help them claim agency in the learning process.

Milevica Bojović explores the *Relationships between students' anxiety in foreign language learning and communicative language ability in higher education context*. In this study, the quantitative analysis of the data collected by means of three instruments – the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, the Communicative Language Ability Scale, and a speaking assignment – was employed to investigate this relationship, showing a moderate but steady negative correlation between the students' anxiety and their communicative ability, with no significant correlations with grammatical, textual, and functional competence. The ESP context that the author explores calls for more collaborative work to alleviate negative affective factors in oral communication.

In their paper *The use of metadiscourse markers in achieving persuasion in short advertisements written by ESP students* Tijana Vesić Pavlović and Danijela Đorđević investigate the use of English as a foreign language in the professional context, focusing on the use and importance of discourse markers enhancing the coherence and cohesion of the written expression, in this case particularly used for the purpose of persuasion. The analysed corpus of student-written advertisements showed that the most frequently used metadiscourse markers were from the categories of engagement and attitude markers, indicating that the students were aware of their crucial role in capturing the audience's attention, maintaining their interest, and ultimately influencing the audience's decisions.

Therefore, the authors point out the need for targeted practice enhancing students' pragmatic competence.

The third section broadens the perspective to different *Languages* learned and taught as foreign. To illustrate this, Danijela Vranješ presents a case study aiming to explore the development of the skill of writing in German as a foreign language. In her paper *Impact of writing strategies on text quality: A case study*, she investigates to what extent and in which ways an individual adjusts their writing process to the complexity of the writing task. The aim of this case study was to gain detailed insight into the students' individual writing process, so as to inform the teaching of this specific language skill in the foreign language classroom. The author foregrounds the focused practice of the choice of writing strategies to meet the task requirements as a way to both facilitate the writing process and improve the quality of the students' text.

Serbian taught and learned as a foreign language is addressed by Jelena Marković Nikolajeva in her paper *Synonymy in textbooks for Serbian as a foreign language*. The paper presents an analysis of textbook language materials aiming to highlight the problem of synonymy, which is present from the beginner level of studying Serbian as a foreign language. The author points out the often very complex relation between synonymous lexemes, which makes them difficult for the students to acquire. This is why it is necessary for teachers to be very well informed about the different types of synonymous relations, as they require different types of explanations and tasks, in order to provide an adequate approach to this paradigmatic relation in teaching.

A different view of Serbian, taught and learned as a heritage language is presented by Kristina Petrović in her paper *Teaching heritage language – Why so different? Issues in Teaching Serbian as a Heritage Language*. Defining the notion of heritage language, the author highlights the challenges and specificities of teaching bilingual and bicultural students and meeting their needs beyond just speaking the language, as this particular learning situation involves the issues of identity, interculturality and an array of psychological and social factors. Therefore, the author points out, it is essential for teachers to create, with the support of the language policy makers, a 'community-based curriculum' which would take into account students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral needs. The paper also describes some successful practices in a language school teaching Serbian as a heritage language.

The fourth section, titled *Language Use Contexts*, offers three studies relevant for teaching languages and cultures because they highlight specific contexts of contemporary language use, which need to be considered with respect to students' needs and teaching aims and objectives. Andrijana Kjose and Mira Bekar present a qualitative study of abbreviations and emojis as used by speakers of English as a foreign language in various social media. Their paper *Language economy: Abbreviations and emoji in social media* presents the results of a qualitative corpus study which showed that abbreviations and emoji were used by the exchange participants for the purpose of language economy, but also to enrich the emotional expression of their language, and to express emotional states.

Zorica Trajkova Strezovska and Milan Damjanoski investigate *Pragmatic and sociocultural adaptation in literary translation*, focusing on English as a foreign language for native speakers of Macedonian. Their study involved a pragmatic and rhetorical analysis of the pragmatic and sociocultural adaptations in student translations, as well as a questionnaire asking the students to reflect on the challenges of choosing the suitable translation. The authors point out that students need to develop an awareness of the differences between context-based and language-based problems, which is why explicit instruction is necessary in this area, too.

Lastly, in the paper *The use of metaphors in political speeches: Metaphors in the speeches of Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump* Anja Petrović investigates how metaphors are used as a linguistic tool for pragmatic and strategic reasons in political speech. The study explores how politicians convey their messages through the use of different types of metaphors – ontological, structural, and orientational, for the purpose of making complex concepts easier to understand by explaining them via bodily experiences and physical senses. The author points out that metaphors thus contribute rhetorically to mental representations, which makes them a relevant element in foreign language learning and teaching, as well.

The last section, titled *Teaching practice experiences*, offers two review papers which focus on specific issues and characteristics of particular learning/teaching contexts, presented from the perspective of teaching practitioners.

In their paper titled *Small group language teaching at tertiary level*, Elena Kitanovska–Ristoska and Natasha Petrova–Popovski combine a qualitative analysis and reflection to describe their experiences with teaching English to a cohort of English majors at the Faculty of Education in Bitola. They point out that teaching language and literature in small groups creates an interactive and engaging learning environment which promotes critical thinking, active learning, collaboration, and opportunities for individual expression.

Lastly, in a review paper, Dana Vučković describes the challenges of her experience with teaching English oral practice to first-year students at University Paris Nanterre (France). Titled *The subtle art of intentional improvisation: Teaching oral English practice at University Paris Nanterre*, her paper focuses on the main problems and issues that arose in this teaching context – both formal, regarding the syllabus constraints, and content-wise, regarding academic register, the interplay of oral and written proficiency, motivation and speaking anxiety. The author also describes the successful methods and practices that helped students overcome their difficulties, for instance, contextualizing topics in familiar settings, and preparing for oral presentation through different tasks.

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With the wide array of topics presented here, our aim in this special issue is to present to a wider audience the variety of TLC conference topics, and to present empirical research discussed from various methodological, theoretical and pedagogical perspectives. We hope that in this way we may incite broader interest in this kind of academic exchange, and motivate a wider circle of colleagues to take part in the TLC events in the future.

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