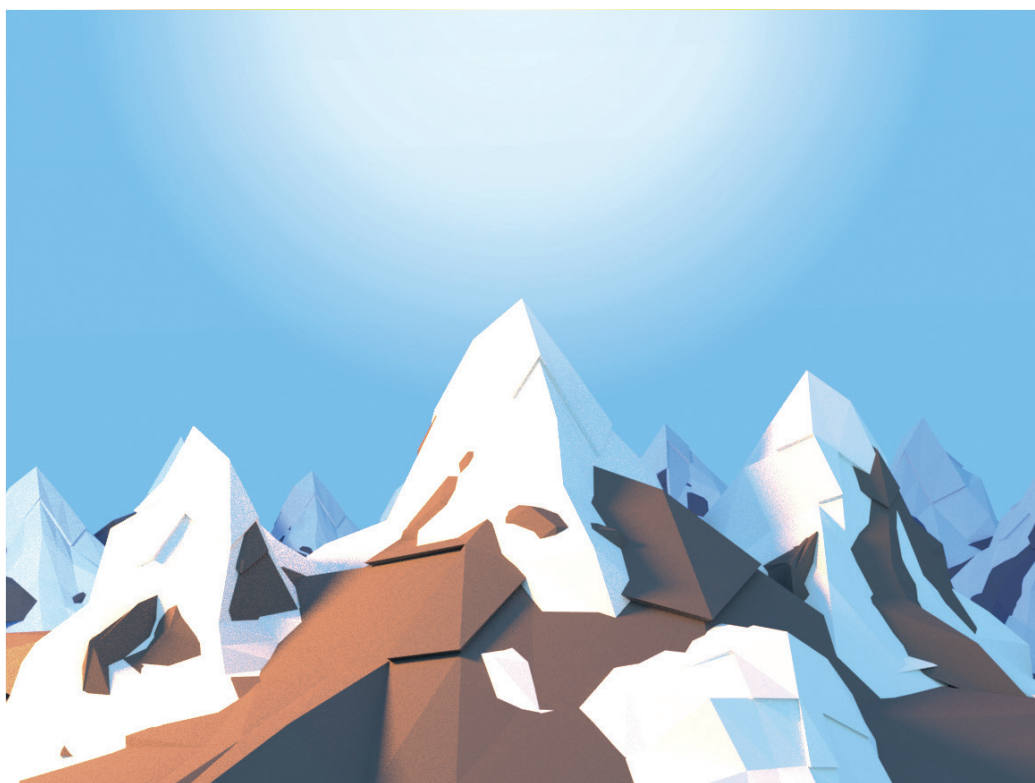


Anna Kyppö

Climbing a Mountain

Learning Slovak in New
Language Learning Environments



JYVÄSKYLÄ STUDIES IN HUMANITIES 322

Anna Kyppö

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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

JYVÄSKYLÄ 2017

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*Up and down
And up again,
The fear of a fall,
The joy of progress.*

*Falling down
You need not fear.
The rock is firm,
The guide is here.*

*Reaching the top -
How far? How high?
One pitch or two?
Oh, to be there!*

*This is the mountain,
You're now climbing.
Enjoy your journey
The top is waiting!*



ABSTRACT

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The aim of this dissertation is to throw light on the development of teaching and learning Slovak in the new language learning environment. New developments in teaching led to the design of an experimental e-learning course in Slovak based on the philosophy of dynamic learning and using the metaphor of climbing a mountain for learning Slovak. The course was grounded in constructivist views of learning and teaching, which emphasize the importance of learning by doing and the process-like nature of learning. The teaching experiment included reflection-on-action research, with the goal of exploring learners' beliefs about themselves as e-learners before the course, and their perceptions and experiences of learning during and after the course. Thematic analysis was used to analyse students' beliefs about themselves as e-learners and their perceptions and experiences of learning during and after the course, accessed primarily from learning diaries, pre-course, on-course and post-course questionnaires, course evaluations, interviews and teacher's observations. The findings show that almost all the learners believed that they learned a lot and perceived themselves as efficient e-learners. The learners' reflections show that they made clear progress in their receptive skills (reading and listening) but had difficulty in developing their productive skills (speaking and writing). New e-learning skills, for example, in doing research, in creating content and in collaboration, were adopted and further developed. The teacher's role in the e-learning environment is viewed from both the learners' and the teacher's perspective and the functionality, clarity, authenticity and learner-centredness of e-learning environments are evaluated. This study seeks to explore how the affordances currently offered by technology-enhanced learning, mobile learning and combinations of various learning environments (PLE - Personal Learning Environments) can be better used in the teaching and learning of less commonly taught languages. The findings of this study may contribute to the development of network pedagogy for other less commonly taught languages.

Keywords: Learning Slovak, learners' experiences, e-learning environment, technology-enhanced learning

Author's address Anna Kyppö
Language Centre
PO Box 35
FI-40014 University of Jyväskylä
anna.kyppo@jyu.fi

Supervisor Professor Hannele Dufva
PO Box 35
FI-40014 University of Jyväskylä
hannele.dufva@jyu.fi

Reviewers Dr. Michaela Mošaťová
Studia Academica Slovaca Centre
Faculty of Arts
Comenius University
Bratislava, Slovakia
michaela.mosatova@gmail.com

Dr. Maggie Kubanyiova
School of Education
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston, Birmingham
United Kingdom
m.kubanyiova@bham.ac.uk

Opponent Dr. Michaela Mošaťová
Studia Academica Slovaca Centre
Faculty of Arts
Comenius University,
Bratislava, Slovakia
michaela-mosatova@uniba.sk

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This dissertation is a tribute to the Slovak language, to students of Slovak and to the work of colleagues who teach Slovak as a foreign language. Above all, it is a tribute to Professor Jozef Mistrik (1921-2000), one of the first applied linguists in Slovakia and founder of the study programme for the teaching and learning of Slovak as a foreign language. It is thanks to him that I became a lecturer in Slovak.

The dissertation is the result of long-term pedagogical research that I have carried out in my teaching. Here, I would like to thank all the people who, directly or indirectly, have contributed to it over the years. In particular I would like to thank the students of Slovak, who have been the source of inexhaustible inspiration and the stimulus for my teaching innovations. Because of them, I have always enjoyed my work and felt that there is sense in what I do. Special thanks go to the participants in the teaching experiment at the Universities of Jyväskylä and Helsinki.

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I would also like to thank Eleanor Underwood, who checked the English of my thesis and suggested ways of making it more readable.

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Jyväskylä 8.8.2017
Anna Kyppö

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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide some insights into the development of the teaching and learning of Slovak in Finland. The Slovak language has been taught in Finland since 1979 and the academic programme of introductory and Bachelor level studies has been offered at the University of Jyväskylä since the 1990s. The University of Jyväskylä is the only academic institution in the Nordic countries with such a long history of offering Slovak studies. After a period of 'traditional' class instruction in the 1990s, Slovak joined the action research programme run by the Language Centre aimed at the enhancement of self-directed, autonomous learning. That was the breakthrough that opened the way for the multimodal, multimedia teaching and learning of Slovak. The result of work done in that programme was the design and implementation of a Slovak e-learning course in 2007-2008. The course takes learning a language to be metaphorically climbing a mountain, which is in line with the ideology of dynamic learning. This, at the time, innovative approach generated teacher research based on the teacher's observations and investigation of two groups of students for two academic years. The study's research questions address the students' experiences of learning Slovak in an e-learning environment, their views on the acquisition of all language skills, how they perceived themselves as learners and particularly as e-learners, and what their approaches to learning were (Chapter 5.2.4). The main focus is on learning Slovak: how the learners learned in the e-learning environment and what they believed that had or had not learned. This study also attempts to explore the role of the teacher in an e-learning environment, especially how the teacher can provide systematic feedback and maintain learners' motivation. Further, it evaluates the e-learning course from the viewpoint of clarity, efficiency, functionality, learner-centredness, relevance and collaboration.

This dissertation consists of 6 chapters and the e-learning material: the Slovak course (<http://users.jyu.fi/~akyppo/virtuaalislovakki/>) designed in 2007 (Version 1, 2007; Version 2, 2008; Version 3, 2010). Chapter 2 contains the introductory part offering basic information about Slovakia, its history, the Slovak language and its teaching and learning. Chapter 3 contains the theoretical

part, presenting the theories and concepts which were used in developing the learning materials (approaches to foreign language learning, technology-based language learning and teaching). Chapter 4 is concerned with students' learning of Slovak in general and, in particular, in an e-learning environment: communicative competence, learner agency, motivation and awareness of learning. Chapter 5 introduces the innovative new course that I produced and which is the subject of this research: the e-learning course, its design, layout and content as well as the demographics of the course participants. It also includes the research questions and the collection and analysis of the data. Chapter 6 presents learners' experiences of learning Slovak and the teacher's experiences of tutoring in an e-learning environment before, during and after the course.

Results of the research have been published as partly independent studies and are included in this dissertation. The six articles were published in Slovakia and Finland in 2008-2016 and they show the development of Slovak over the years. The topics of the articles reflect the stage the development of the course had reached and the state of educational technology and thinking at the time of writing: they are important milestones in both the development of Slovak studies and my professional career.

Article 1 (Kyppö, A. 2002. *Slovenčina vo Fínsku a nové formy štúdia*. (Slovak in Finland and New Forms of Study) In Pekarovičová, J. (ed.) *Slovenčina ako cudzí jazyk*. Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Komenského. Metodické centrum Studia Academica Slovaca, Bratislava) is a report on the new methods of learning and teaching Slovak at the beginning of the millenium. The focus is on autonomous, self-directed learning. The Internet offered the possibility of flexible learning, free of time and place, but it also put pressure on learners, who became responsible for their own learning. In 2001, the University of Jyväskylä began to take part in a national project called the Virtual University, whose goal was the use of information technology for learning and teaching. The period 2002-2007 was of considerable importance, thanks not only to the rapid increase in the number of students of Slovak that followed Slovakia's joining of the European Union, but also to the growing popularity of distance learning and the enormous development of learning materials suitable for independent learners.

Article 2 (Kyppö, A. 2011. *Slovenčina v nových výučbových prostrediach*. (Slovak in New Learning Environments.) In Žigová, L. & Vojtech, M. (eds.) *Slovenčina(nielen) ako cudzí jazyk v súvislostiach I*. Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Komenského. Studia Academica Slovaca - centrum pre slovenčinu ako cudzí jazyk. Bratislava) introduces the design of the Slovak e-learning course, its preparation and implementation. Some results obtained from the analyses of students' learner logs are also presented and the need for more personal learning environments, which would equally enhance all the four learning skills, reading, listening, speaking and writing, is assessed.

The purpose of Article 3 (Kyppö, A. 2013. *Slovenčina vo Fínsku - od tradičného vyučovania k novým výučbovým prostrediam*. (Slovak in Finland - from traditional classroom to new language learning environments). In Pekarovičová, J. & Hargašová, Z. (eds.) *Slovenčina vo svete*. Zborník z vedeckej konferencie.

Ministerstvo školstva, vedy výskumu a športu Slovenskej republiky; Studia Academica Slovaca – centrum pre slovenčinu ako cudzí jazyk. Bratislava) was to provide up-to-date information about the teaching and learning of Slovak in Finland and thus contribute to the dissemination of information about Slovak academic programmes around the world. As the title makes clear, the main focus is on the change from traditional methods of teaching to new methods of learning and teaching. Following the constructivist-cognitive approach to teaching, which emphasizes the learner's role in learning, a combination of formal and informal learning (PLE) has been endorsed.

The main focus of Article 4 (Kyppö, A. 2014. *Learning Slovak in an E-Learning Environment. A case study*. Apples volume 8, Issue 1. Centre for Applied Language Studies, University of Jyväskylä) is on students' approaches to learning and on raising their awareness of learning in an e-learning environment. Learners' agency and their conscious approach to learning is reflected in the development of their communicative competence. An interesting finding related to the development of learning awareness was the challenge of Slovak diacritics. Students' awareness of this challenge rose when they wrote by hand and not through the e-learning environment, as could have been expected. Thus there is a mismatch between the new technologies that allow for distance language learning and the need for more traditional learning styles, a mismatch that poses new challenges for more personalized language learning environments.

Article 5 (Kyppö, A. 2015. *Virtual Slovak: insight into learning Slovak in an e-learning environment*. In Juha Jalkanen, Elina Jokinen & Peppi Taalas (eds.) *Voices of Pedagogical development – Expanding, Enhancing and Exploring Higher Education Language Learning*. Research-publishing.net) provides an overview of the work done to develop the learning of Slovak in an e-learning environment as well as of the research generated by this project. The focus is on the appropriateness of the e-learning environment, and it is based on the metaphor of climbing a mountain. The students' reflections in their learner logs show that such an environment has a positive impact on the development of learners' agency and their learning awareness. Learners' perceptions of their learning or not learning in a technology-based learning environment reflected their attitudes to learning Slovak. They also revealed the consistency of effort needed to study in such an environment, which is in line with the metaphor of climbing, i.e., moving on. Even though my research showed that technology-enhanced learning can be successful, the rapidly growing new educational technologies and the emergence of social networking tools also pose challenges for the instruction of Slovak that may have implications for the teaching of less commonly taught languages in general.

Article 6 (Kyppö, A. 2016. *Slovenčina v multilingválnom kontexte. Prípadová štúdia* (Slovak in the multilingual context. A Case study). In Pekarovičová, J. & Hargašová, Z. (eds.) *Slovenčina(nielen) ako cudzí jazyk v súvislostiach II*. Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave. Studia Academica Slovaca – centrum pre slovenčinu ako cudzí jazyk. Bratislava) presents two multimodal courses aimed

at encouraging multilingual and multicultural communication: a course on multilingual interaction designed to activate learners' overall linguistic repertoires, and a multicultural course providing basic information about Slavic languages and nations. The future of Slovak and other less commonly taught Slavic languages (other than Russian) is seen in the multilingual and multicultural academic programmes. In line with the ideology of intuitive learning, the 'eureka' moment of discovering a new language through knowledge of its culture or history may be the solution to the constantly declining numbers of students of the less commonly taught Slavic languages. On the other hand, a new language may also be discovered within a group of languages, for example, through similarities or differences in languages belonging to the same language family, or within the cultural context of the given language. As Liddicoat & al (2003:4) claim, "this context is not a single culture as both the target language and culture and the learner's own language and culture are simultaneously present and can be simultaneously engaged. Learning to communicate in an additional language involves developing an awareness of the ways in which culture inter-relates with language whenever it is used."

The teaching and learning of the Slovak language and culture has survived in Finland for almost four decades. To underline the dynamic nature of learning, the e-learning course in Slovak presented in this study is based on the metaphor of climbing a mountain. As with climbing, the circumstances are not always favourable, there are always threats of various kinds, but nevertheless hundreds of students have become familiar with the Slovak language and culture, many of whom have studied in Slovakia and found Slovak friends and life companions thanks to the language.

As a result of the rapid development of educational technologies, Slovak courses are nowadays offered worldwide through various mobile and digital environments, for example, e-slovak (<https://www.e-slovak.sk/>) or the online course Slovake.eu, implemented within the European Union Lifelong Learning Programme. The content of these courses has been developed at the Comenius University Studia Academica Slovaca Centre, The Centre for Slovak as a Foreign Language at the Faculty of Arts, and the Institute for Language and Preparatory Studies, part of the Centre for Continuing Education at the Comenius University in Bratislava. Nevertheless, the only e-learning course in Finland has been developed and is used at the University of Jyväskylä Language Centre (2008-2010).

2 SLOVAKIA, THE SLOVAK LANGUAGE AND ITS TEACHING

This section offers basic information about Slovakia and its history, the Slovak language, and its place in the family of Slavic languages. It also includes an outline of the teaching and learning of Slovak in Finland, based on my many years' experience here.

2.1 Slovakia: country, history and the Slovak language

It is likely that few readers know much about Slovakia, so I will introduce very basic facts about the country, the most important milestones in its history, and the most significant facts about the Slovak language and its place in the family of Slavic languages.

Slovakia is a Central European country covering 48,105 square kilometers. Topographically, the country is dominated by the Carpathian Mountains in the north, with the highest point Gerlachovský Peak at 8,710ft (2,655m) above sea level in the High Tatras, and the densely forested Ore mountains (Slovenské rudohorie) in the central regions. The southern and south-eastern regions are lowlands that descend to the plain of the Danube River in the south.

Slovakia formed the former Czechoslovakia in 1918, together with the closely related regions of Bohemia and Moravia. Slovakia became a separate republic controlled by Nazi Germany in 1938. In 1945, at the end of World War II, Czechoslovakia became a communist state. In 1968, after the collapse of the liberalizing reforms of the Prague Spring, Czechoslovakia was divided into the Czech and Slovak Socialist Republics. With the collapse of Soviet influence in 1989, the name of the country was changed to the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic. After the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, Slovakia became a sovereign, independent state and adopted the name of the Slovak Republic (Slovenská republika). Slovakia's journey to a modern welfare state was not easy, for various historical and political reasons. The rapid change from a cen-

trally planned economy to the modern market economy resulted in an increase in social insecurity, and increasing disparities between the regions (Hetteš 2013). Currently, Slovakia is one of the most successful emerging markets in Europe with a high average growth in GDP. Slovakia is a parliamentary democratic republic with a multi-party system. In 2004, Slovakia became a member of the European Union and NATO, and in December 2007 the country joined the Schengen zone. In 2009, the Slovak Republic adopted the single European currency, the Euro, and thus became part of the European Monetary Union.

The territory of Slovakia has been inhabited since the Palaeolithic era. Celtic tribes settled there at the end of 300 B.C. In 200 B.C. the area was inhabited by both the Romans and Proto Germanic tribes. The first Slavic tribes arrived in the area between 400 and 600 AD, at the time of the Great Migrations. At this stage Western Slavs, called Wends (Venedae) or Slavs (Sclavi) by the Romans, were already politically united, despite being divided into tribes. The first state of the Western Slavs, Samo's Empire (623-658), was established to resist Avarian attacks. The most significant period in Slovak history dates back to the 9th century, when the Great Moravian Empire, called Great Moravia, was formed in 833.

Christianity was introduced into the area by Frankish priests. In 863 King Rastislav turned to the Byzantine Emperor Michael III for missionaries who would preach in a Slavic tongue. Two brothers, Constantin (later Cyril) and Methodius, arrived in Great Moravia. They created and developed the Glagolitic alphabet, which served as the basis for the first alphabet and first Slavic literary language, Old Church Slavonic, which became the basis of literacy among the Slavs. Although Cyril and Methodius spent only a few years in Great Moravia, they managed to accomplish much in the field of education: they translated liturgical books and the Holy Bible into the language, and they established the first Slavic schools and compiled the first Slavic Civic Code to be used in Great Moravia. (Škvarna 2004; Žigo et al. 2004). After the decline of Great Moravia, Slovak territory came under the control of the Hungarian Arpad dynasty. The Slav population was gradually assimilated or driven to the northern mountain area. Many Slavic words, especially those related to agriculture and crafts, appeared in Hungarian, which suggests that there was a good relationship between the Slovaks and Hungarians, lasting some 300 years. Slovakia did not form an administrative unit until the establishment of Czechoslovakia.

The period 1200-1400 was characterized by economic development based on the gold, silver and copper resources in the region, which led to the establishment of towns and the resettlement of Slovak territory. Even though the region of Slovakia was the most urbanized area of Hungary, the majority of the urban population was non-Slavic. Encounters between the Slovak and non-Slovak population often led to disputes. In 1381, for the first time in Slovak history, disputes in the city of Žilina between the German and Slovak ethnic population were solved by the Hungarian king, Louis I the Great. The document *Privilegium pro Slavis* (The Privileges of Slovaks), published in the *City Book of Žilina* (Žilinské listy), guaranteed the rights of Slovaks living in the city and is among the oldest documents written in Slovak.

In the 15th century, Matthias Corvinus (1458-1490), the Hungarian king and the most influential person in Hungary, granted special privileges to the 'Wallachian ethnicity' (Vlach shepherds) who had migrated to Slovakia from Romania. Thus the Slovak language became enriched with its most peculiar domestic words, including the names for sheep's cheese, *bryndza*, sheep's milk, *žinčica*, a shepherd's ax, *valaška*, and an older, experienced shepherd, *bača*.

Influenced by the Renaissance, Matthias Corvinus founded the first university in Slovak territory, in Bratislava, in 1465: the Academia Istropolitana. The fact that Slovak territory was the main war zone between the Ottomans and Habsburgs affected Slovakia in many ways; the territory was devastated and people went to hide in the mountains. Despite the increasing social and political problems, Slovakia became the centre of the Hungarian Empire for 150 years; Bratislava became the Hungarian capital, where coronations and diets were held until 1848.

During the Habsburg Dynasty (1526-1780), humanist ideas spread into what is now Slovakia. As a result, schools, colleges and academies were established and the development of art and literature was encouraged. Slovak identity was strongly affected by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. The language of administration and liturgy was Latin. However, after the Reformation, the linguistic situation changed: Biblical Czech (Biblická čeština), the Czech of the Kralice Bible (Kralická Bible) became the liturgical language of Slovak protestants. Educational and cultural institutions were established all over Slovak territory. The Catholics established two universities there, while the Protestants preferred the German universities. The Catholic Church developed the so-called "Jesuit Slovak" based on the Cultured West Slovak, the western dialect of Slovak (Nuorluoto 2003; Kirschbaum 2005).

The 17th and 18th centuries were most important for the development of national identity, as the first written references to the Slovak nation began to appear. For example, Daniel Sinapius Horčička published a defence of Slovak in his work *Neoforum Latino-Slavonicum* (A New Latin-Slavic Market) in 1678, and Juraj Papánek (1738 -1802) published the first history of the Slovak nation, *Historia Gentis Slavae*, in 1728. The first comparison of Slovak with other European languages was conducted by the polymath Matthias Bell (1684-1749) in his foreword to Doležal's *Czechoslovak Grammar*, published in 1745. The first political, cultural and national defence (apology) of the Slovak language was published by Ján Baltazar Magin (1681-1734) in 1728. These were among the works that had an impact on the formation of Slovak identity and the raising of a national consciousness.

The birth of Slovak national revival can be traced back to Anton Bernolák's codification of the literary language in 1789. As Bernolák's literary language was based on the West Slovak dialect, it was not accepted by Slovak Protestants, who remained faithful to the traditions of the Czech biblical language. Nevertheless, several books were published in Bernolák's language and the first Slovak national institutions, among them The Slovak Society for the Fostering of the Slovak Language, were established.

In the 1860s Hungarian became a compulsory subject at all levels of schooling and assimilation of the Slovaks into the ruling Magyar nation was openly advocated. The rise of Slovak was strongly influenced by Pan-Slav ideas and also by European Romanticism. To encourage the sense of being a nation and to strengthen Slavic togetherness, Ján Kollár (1793-1852), one of the greatest Slavic poets, philologists and ideologists of Pan-Slavism, put forward his ideas of Slav reciprocity. In his work *O literárnej vzájemnosti medzi kmeny a nárečiami slavskými* (Concerning Literary Reciprocity between Slav Tribes and Vernaculars, 1836), Kollár points to the linguistic and cultural similarities between the Slavic languages and foresees the future of Slavs in their 'togetherness'. Kollár's contemporary and one of the greatest Slav historians, Pavol Jozef Šafárik (1795-1861), in his work *Geschichte der slawischen Sprache und Literatur nach alle Mundarten* (1826), attempted to produce a comprehensive history of the Slav languages and alphabets. In addition, his work *Slovanské starožitnosti* (Slav Antiques, 1836-37) presents the oldest Slav history. *Slovanský národopis* (Slav Ethnography, 1842) described the Slavic nations, their settlements, languages and literature. Both the Pan-Slav writings and the disputes between the defenders of Biblical Czech and Catholic promoters of the Slovak language paved the way for the codification of present-day Slovak in 1843 by Ľudovít Štúr (1815-1856). The basis for Štúr's language was the Central Slovak dialect. The first grammar of codified Slovak was published in 1846. (Škvarna in Žigo et al 2004; Kováč 2011).

Štúr was not only a linguist but also a poet and politician. He was a member of the Hungarian Parliament, the representative of the Slovaks and the organizer of the meeting held in 1848 in which Slovaks made their first political demands and established their first political programme, the Slovak National Council. Slovaks demanded national parliaments for all the nations of Hungary, the use of Slovak in schools, and freedom of the press, organization and congregation. However, their demands were not met, and an arrest warrant was issued for Štúr and his companions. Nevertheless, in 1861, Slovaks succeeded in introducing Slovak as the official language in the lower ranks of the civil service and in schools and Three grammar schools and the Centre for Promotion of the Slovak Language (Matica slovenská) were established.

After the Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867, Magyarization became more severe, which led to the abolition of the newly established Slovak grammar schools and the Matica slovenská. The political and economical situation then became unbearable for many Slovaks, and between 1871 and 1914, half a million Slovaks left for the United States (Bakke, 1999). Similarly, a huge population of Czechs settled down in the United States. The American Slovak and Czech community played an important role in the later formation of the independent republic: in 1915, the Czech and Slovak association in Cleveland decided to set up the Czecho-Slovak federation, and in May 1918, the agreement on the Czecho-Slovak state and Slovak autonomy was signed in Pittsburgh. Finally, the Czechoslovak Republic was established on October 28, 1918.

At the beginning of the shared Czechoslovakia, both the Czechs and Slovaks benefited from their unity. However, the ideology of the so-called 'Czech-

oslovakism', the ideology of one Czechoslovak nation with two branches, one Czechoslovak language with Czech in the dominant role, and the idea of a centralized economy, as well as Hungary's attempts to regain Slovak territory, all made Slovakia's situation difficult. On the other hand, cultural life was flourishing – the *Matica slovenská* was reopened and in 1919 the Comenius University in Bratislava was founded.

The idea of an autonomous, independent Slovakia became a reality when, in October 1938, after the Munich Agreement, by which Germany annexed the Sudetenland, in the western part of Czechoslovakia, Slovakia declared its autonomy. The Slovak Republic was established in March 1939, its totalitarian system based on collaboration with Nazi Germany. An anti-fascist movement in the Slovak state was ideologically linked to the Czechoslovak political exiles in London and Moscow. By 1943, the resistance movement had grown strong enough to believe that they could overthrow the existing regime, and they organized the Slovak National Uprising on August 29, 1944, the largest anti-fascist uprising in Central Europe. Its aim was to liberate Slovakia from fascists and re-establish Czechoslovakia. Even though the uprising was defeated and Slovak resistance was ruthlessly punished by Nazi Germany, the foundations for the new democracy were laid.

After the war, the Czechoslovak Republic was reconstituted as a joint state of two equal nations. The year 1948 brought the communist dictatorship, which lasted for 40 years. In 1968, the attempt to liberate Czechoslovakia in the spirit of Dubček's 'socialism with a human face' was suppressed by the invasion by member states of the Warsaw Pact. However, one positive outcome of this political initiative was the constitutional law of federation. The hyphen in the name of the country, Czecho-Slovakia, was of great importance not only in 1968 but also 20 years later when, after the Velvet Revolution of 1989, a law was passed to abolish the supremacy of the Communist Party and Václav Havel, a writer and dissident, became president of the new Czecho-Slovakia. In 1990, the name of the country was changed to the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic. Finally, with the proclamation of the Czech and Slovak constitutions in the autumn of 1992 and the subsequent dissolution of the state, the Czechs and Slovaks formed their own independent states (Rychlík 2009; Kirschbaum 2005).

2.2 The Slovak language: past and present

Although Slovakia has always been part of other multilingual states (the Hungarian Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Czechoslovakia), the Slovak language has always been a feature of the history of the Slovak nation.

Slovakia has the reputation of being ethnically one of the most heterogeneous countries in Central Europe (Ondrejovič 2009). According to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2017), the ethnic composition of Slovakia is Slovak 80.8%, with the largest minority groups being Hungarians (8.5%), followed by the Roma (2.0%) and Czechs (0.6%); other minorities - Ruthenian,

Ukrainian, Russian, German, Polish and others – together represent 8.2%. According to the Law on the State Language passed in 1995, Slovak is the official state language in the Slovak Republic. According to the amendment to the Act passed in 2009, Slovak should be guaranteed in all areas of public communication but without reducing the possibilities of communication in the minority languages. The new act introduced several changes in favour of the minority languages used in the Slovak Republic, thereby increasing opportunities for their lawful use and enforcing the multilingual nature of the country.

Slovak is an Indo-European language and belongs to the group of West Slavic languages, together with Czech, Polish and Sorbian (Lower and Upper Sorbian). The linguistic and historical evidence points to Proto-Slavic as the basis of Slovak, which has both West Slavic and non-West Slavic features. Krajčovič (1988; 16) distinguishes three phases in the development of Slovak. Firstly, there was the post migration period (5th -7th century), when the Slavs migrated to present-day Slovakia from various directions. The people, who settled in Western and Eastern Slovakia spoke the Northwestern Proto-Slavic dialect, while those, who settled in Central Slovakia, spoke the Southeastern dialect. During the second phase, the integration period, in the 8th-9th centuries, several West and non-West language features spread over the linguistic region and further affected the linguistic character of the dialects. Finally, in the constitutive period (10th -11th century), a separate Slovak language began to evolve.

At the time, Latin was widely used as the language of administration and liturgy in the area that is now Slovakia. However, after 1300, a strain of Czech that contained a lot of Slovak elements, so-called Slovakized Czech (*slovakizovaná čeština*), was imported into Slovakia by Slovak students who were studying at the Charles' University and by the Hussite movement in Slovakia. Later on, in the 16th century, exiled Czech scholars escaping the forces of the Counter Reformation also brought the Czech language to Slovakian territory. One of the most famous of the exiles was Jan Amos Comenius (1592-1670), a theologian and educational reformer, and the father of the present-day educational system in Europe. Thus, from the 16th century, Czech became the standard written language of the Slovak Protestant liturgy and literature. However, Czech was used only in the written form, and despite its widespread use amongst Protestants, it was never considered to be the Slovaks' language.

As for the development of standard Slovak, in the 16th century, the Western Slovak Cultural Dialect/ *kultúrna západoslovenčina* (Žigo 2004; Nuorluoto 2003; Bakke 1999) emerged in the western Slovak regions. This language served as the basis for the first codification of standard Slovak in 1787 (Bernolák's Codification). The Central Slovak Cultural Dialect, or Culture Central Slovak / *kultúrna stredoslovenčina* (Žigo 2004; Nuorluoto 2003; Bakke 1999) emerged in the 17th century and became the basis for the current Slovak language, which was codified by Ľudovít Štúr in 1843. The Štúr's language was finally codified in 1852 by Martin Hattala and Michal Miloslav Hodža, who introduced the etymological basis of Slovak and presented the Slovak language in almost the form that it has today.

In 1918, after the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic, the concept emerged of a common Czechoslovak nation and a Czechoslovak language with two variants, Slovak and Czech. After the Second World War, Slovak was gradually developed into a fully functional language. The period of Czechoslovakia was marked by so-called 'semi-communicativeness' or 'passive or receptive bilingualism', which meant that everyone could use their own mother tongue (Czech or Slovak) and everyone was understood (Nábělková 2008; Musilová 1999; 2000; Buzzásyová 1995). In practice, Czechs and Slovaks speaking their own languages can understand each other without any difficulty. Mutual comprehension of this type has survived up to the present. However, the greater flexibility of the Slovak language has meant that Slovaks have always demonstrated a higher degree of understanding, that is to say, they have understood Czech better than Czechs have understood Slovak (Nábělková 2007, 2008; Sokolová, Musilová & Slančová 2007).

After the establishment of the independent Slovak and Czech Republic in 1992, Slovak and Czech became its official languages. Thus, the unique, receptive bilingualism was replaced by monolingualism. Nevertheless, despite the various socio-political problems that have arisen and are generally reflected in the language, and despite the impact of other languages, Slovak survived, and after the country joined the European Union in 2004, Slovak became one of its official languages.

2.3 Teaching Slovak as a foreign language in Slovakia and Finland

In this section about teaching Slovak as a foreign language in Slovakia and Finland I will introduce the most important institutions that offer the study of Slovak as a foreign language in Slovakia itself. Slovak is considered to be one of the less commonly taught languages (LCTL). Then I will present the programme of Slovak language and culture offered at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Currently, Slovak is offered at 23 universities around the world. Programmes offered by lecturers in Slovak language and culture subsidized by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic are coordinated by the Studia Academica Slovaca - The Centre for Slovak as a Foreign Language at the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava. The focus of the Centre's pedagogical and research activities is on teaching Slovak as a foreign and/or second language to foreign students of Slovak, the dissemination abroad of information on Slovak science, culture and art, the implementation and coordination of research conducted in the field of Slovak as a foreign language, and the publishing of academic publications and textbooks of Slovak as a foreign language. The Centre offers annual summer schools on Slovak language and culture and various methodological seminars for teachers of Slovak as a foreign language.

The activities of the Centre are closely connected with the work of former scholars, experts in the area of teaching Slovak as a second and foreign language: Professors Paulíny, Ondruš, Baláž, and particularly Professor Jozef Mistrík, one of the founders of the Studia Academica Slovaca Summer School and the author of the first audio coursebook of *Slovak as a foreign language* (Basic Slovak, 1985). His successors, Professor Mlacek, Dr. Pekarovičová, the current head of the Centre, and others, have made significant contributions to the development of programmes for the teaching of Slovak as a foreign language using the latest trends in technology-based learning and teaching, such as the online course e-slovak (<https://www.e-slovak.sk/>). In addition to the design and implementation of numerous Slovak learning materials, textbooks and methodological handbooks for teachers of Slovak, the Centre provides the overall didactic and methodological framework for teaching Slovak as a foreign language.

In addition to the Studia Academica Slovaca Centre, the Institute for Language and Preparatory Studies, which is part of the Centre for Continuing Education at the Comenius University in Bratislava, also offers programmes in Slovak as a foreign language and participates in the development of technology-based Slovak courses such as the online course slovake-eu, developed within the European Union Lifelong Learning Programme (<https://slovake.eu/sk/>). Other centres offering instruction and participating in the development of Slovak as a foreign language in Slovakia can be found, for example, in the Department of Slovak language and Communication in the Faculty of Arts at the Matej Bell University in Banská Bystrica, the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, the Košice University of Pavol Jozef Šafárik, as well as in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Prešov.

After that brief survey of the situation in Slovakia, let us now turn to the teaching of Slovak in Finland.

Both Slovak and Finnish are recognized languages of the European Union, and they both belong to the group of less commonly taught languages (Brecht & Walton 1994) and have approximately the same number of native speakers. Following Brecht and Walton's (1994) classification of the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs), Slovak, together with approximately 30 other non-European and non-North American languages, is one of the much less commonly taught languages: Thai, Turkish, Hebrew, Czech, Swedish and Finnish all belong in the same group. Interestingly, Lauersdorf (2000) considers all Slavic languages apart from Russian to be 'less commonly taught Slavic languages'. Brecht and Walton's (1994) classification is partly at odds with the categorization used for the so-called Lesser-Used Languages (LULs) adopted in the European Union, which comprises any other than the 23 official languages of the Union. In this categorization, for example, Finnish, Czech and Slovak together with the other "official languages of the European Union" are classified as 'commonly used/commonly spoken languages' while being at the same time 'less commonly taught'.

A survey carried out by the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota, USA to explore why people study LCTLs found that students who learn the less commonly taught lan-

guages want to discover more about their own ethnicity or are interested in some aspects of the target culture. For some, learning a LCTL may be a means of career enhancement, self-development or a way to learn more about a quite new culture, often the result of pure curiosity.

When Bao and Lee (2012) investigated how motivation and language attitudes affected the study of LCTLs, they found that students of LCTLs were more focused and motivated than those who study commonly taught languages. Students of LCTLs also showed a more 'integrative orientation' and a more positive attitude towards the learning environment (Bao & Lee, 2012). The results of their research suggested that while students initially study a LCTL because they are attracted to a new, uncommon language, after some time they become intrinsically motivated and learn the language with evident pleasure and satisfaction. This has been the case of the Finnish students of Slovak (Chapter 5).

The history of Slovak teaching in Finland dates back to the 1970s at the University of Helsinki and continues at the University of Jyväskylä up to this day.

In 1978, the first lectureship in Czech was offered at the Department of Slavic Languages (formerly the Department of Historical Linguistics) at the University of Helsinki under the terms of a bilateral cultural agreement between Finland and the former Czechoslovakia. At the time, the official languages of what was then the Czecho-Slovak Federative Republic, Czech and Slovak, had the same status. The visiting lecturer at the University of Helsinki was therefore expected to teach both Slovak and Czech. The outcome of this 'Czech(o)-Slovak' lectureship was the first and only handbook of Slovak for Finnish learners, *Slovakin kielen oppikirja* (Kušnieriková & Kolari 1980).

Basic courses in Slovak were part of the curricula at the University of Helsinki until 1980. At around the same time, in 1979, Slovak was first offered by the Department of Russian in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Jyväskylä, under the terms of another bilateral cultural agreement. The lectureships set up by such bilateral cultural agreements in 1979-1993 were to provide basic language courses and introduce Slovak culture to Finnish learners. A breakthrough came in 1993, when substantial changes were made in the Finnish system of higher education, including increased university autonomy in decision-making. As a result, the programme of introductory Slovak studies in Jyväskylä was officially recognized. The programme was extended by the Faculty of Humanities in 1997 to include subject (that is, further) studies. Nonetheless, the current academic programme of Slovak language and culture was fully developed only when the post was transferred to the University Language Centre and the programme for Slovak was included in the work on pedagogical development being carried out at the Language Centre in the early 2000s.

The first lectureship in Slovak to be independently established in Finland was set up on the initiative of the Finnish Board of Education and was the result of a bilateral agreement between Finland and Slovakia after the first official visit of Finland's President Tarja Halonen to Slovakia in 2005. Thus validation of the long-term practice took place in 2007, when the lectureship in Slovak was estab-

lished 'de juris' at the University of Jyväskylä. The lectureship is based in the University Language Centre. The study of Slovak is open not only to students of Jyväskylä University but also to students from all of Finland's universities.

The academic programme of basic (that is, introductory) studies (32 ECTS) was approved by the Faculty of Humanities, University of Jyväskylä, in 1993. The programme offers courses aimed at the development of basic language and communication skills (Slovak 1, Slovak 2, Slovak Grammar), a text workshop aimed at the enhancement of reading and writing skills, spoken communication, translation from Slovak to Finnish, and courses (in Finnish) in Slovak geography, history and literature.

The academic programme of introductory studies (32 ECTS) was approved by the Faculty of Humanities, University of Jyväskylä, in 1993. The programme offers courses aimed at the development of basic language and communication skills (Slovak 1, Slovak 2, Slovak Grammar), a text workshop aimed at the enhancement of reading and writing skills, spoken communication, translation from Slovak to Finnish, and courses (in Finnish) in Slovak geography, history and literature.

The academic programme of Slovak subject (that is, further) studies in language and culture (39-40 ECTS) was adopted by the university's Faculty of Humanities in 1997. Table 1 shows the curricula of the academic programmes (February 2015).

Table 1 Studies in Slovak language and culture

BASIC STUDIES IN SLOVAK LANGUAGE AND CULTURE	SUBJECT STUDIES IN SLOVAK LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
Slovak 1, 4-5 ECTS	Internship in Slovakia, 6 ECTS
Slovak 2, 4-5 ECTS	Oral Communication skills 4 ECTS
Grammar, 4 ECTS	Written Communication Skills, 4 ECTS
Text Workshop, 4 ECTS	Text workshop / Proseminar, 5 ECTS
Text Skills 1: Slovak - Finnish, 4 ECTS	Text Skills 2 : Slovak - Finnish, 4 ECTS
Practical language skills, 2 ECTS	Text Skills: Finnish - Slovak, 4 ECTS
History and Culture 1, 4 ECTS	History and Culture 2, 4 ECTS
Literature 1, 4 ECTS	Literature 2, 4 ECTS
	Optional Course: Language and Culture, 4 ECTS

The expected learning outcomes of the Slovak basic programme (30-32 ECTS) and Bachelor's level programme (40 ECTS) correspond with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and meet the department's curricula requirements (Language Department, University of Jyväskylä).

The programme of basic Slovak studies offers both the language and culture studies (geography, history and literature). The Text workshop and the seminar called Text skills, which works on translations from Slovak to Finnish, have a special place in the programme; the seminar has been very popular with the Finnish students of Slovak. Course participants as long ago as the late 1980s started translating Slovak literature into Finnish. Two students of Russian and Swedish, Aino Ahonen and Mervi Vyyryläinen, have translated eight Slovak children's books into Finnish, all of which were published in Slovakia. There was a revival of interest in translation in 2005, when Jarmo Vanhanen, a student of physics and Slovak, translated Milan Rúfus's (1928-2009) book of poems, *Modlitbičky, Pienet rukoukset. (Small Prayers)* (Kampus Kustannus 2005), the first book of student translations published in Finland. A year later, an anthology of Slovak literature, the result of a translation project conducted within the text seminar, was published. Students were free to choose the original works they translated, so the anthology offers samples of various genres, from a fairy tale to novels and poetry. The title, *Siellä jossain. Tam a tam, (Somewhere there. Here and there)*, points to the very little knowledge of Slovakia that students had at the time (Slovakia - a country 'somewhere there...'). The title is borrowed from a short story by Dušan Dušek (1946), which is included in the anthology. The book offers the original Slovak works on one page and the translations on the next page, which facilitates reading (*Siellä jossain, Tam a tam*. Ed. Anna Kyppö, Kampus Kustannus 2006). The next translation was a tribute to the best Slovak modern poetry: Miroslav Válek's (1927-1991) collection *Dotyky. Kosketuksia. (Touches)*, translated by Jari Aula, a former distance student of Slovak (Kampus Kustannus 2009), is a tribute to Slovak modernism. The translator's enthusiasm for the author and his passion for translating led to the translation of two further books of Válek's poetry - *Nepokoj (1963), Rauhattomuutta, (Unrest)* and *Milovanie v husej koži (1965), Rakasteleminen kannalihalla (Love-Making with the Goose-Flesh)* published as one book. (*Rakasteleminen kannalihalla*, transl. Jari Aula. Kampus Kustannus 2015). Translations of Slovak literature are generally carried out within the Text seminar as small projects. The ongoing translation project will offer two books of reflective poetry written by Slovakia's multiple nominee for the Nobel prize for literature and the winner of the international Crane Summit Award for poetry 2008, Milan Rúfus: *Ako stopy v snehu (2001), Like the traces in the snow*, and *Čas plachých otázok (2009), The time of fearful questions*, again translated into Finnish by Jari Aula. More about the motivational orientation of Slovak students can be found in Chapter 6.1.1.

2.4 Developing Slovak teaching: Teacher research

In what follows, I will provide some information about the Language Centre and the action research conducted there (Räsänen 2007; Jalkanen, Jokinen & Taalas 2015). I will also briefly introduce my research based on reflection-on-action (Rudduck 2006), an important means of sustaining my professional curiosity, conducted within action research.

Slovak teaching and learning has been subjected to various developmental changes. Nevertheless, the most significant transformation of Slovak teaching and learning took place after Slovak became part of the University Language Centre programme of action research in the 2000s, with the arrival of technology-based learning and teaching and the promotion of self-directed, independent learning.

Language and communication studies focused on developing general and specific skills for study and professional purposes are an obligatory part of university degree programmes in Finland. These studies are organized by independently functioning language centres. Their primary task is to provide the university's students and personnel with discipline-specific language and communication teaching, study counselling, and training in language learning. Apart from language and communication studies in the mother tongue and second national language, which is usually Swedish (scientific writing and speech communication), language and communication studies may also be taken in one or two foreign languages. In addition to contact teaching in over 30 languages, Jyväskylä University Language Centre offers self-access learning options in 12 languages. Special academic programmes in language, communication and culture are offered in French, German, Japanese, Spanish and Slovak. Tailor-made programmes for doctoral students aimed primarily at academic writing and presentation skills, as well as special language courses for the university staff, are also available.

The vision of the Jyväskylä University Language Centre is to offer students a language-learning environment that will enhance their multilingual and multicultural competences and challenge them to develop their knowledge and skills as part of their personal expertise.

Systematic action research has been departmental policy since 1993. Action research may be perceived as "a process of deep inquiry into one's practices in service of moving towards an envisioned future, aligned with values.... it can be seen as a systematic, reflective study of one's actions, and the effects of these actions, in a workplace or organizational context. As such, it involves deep inquiry into one's professional practices.... This form of research then is an iterative, cyclical process of reflecting on practice, taking an action, reflecting, and taking further action." (Riel 2014). The focus has been on the development of learner autonomy and the integration of new language learning environments as well as the promotion of mobility and internationalization through specially designed support programmes. The present challenges facing the

Language Centre revolve around developing instructional designs for students' language learning career and paths within the new degree structure (<https://kielikeskus.jyu.fi>).

The aim of the first cycle of action research (1994-1997) was to increase students' and teachers' reflective practices and learner autonomy, while the second cycle (1997-1999) sought to promote self-directed learning and the establishment of a Learning Centre. The purpose of the third cycle (2000-2004) was to develop the system of internal and external feedback and evaluation and pave the way for multimedia teaching and learning approaches and the use of new learning environments. Student counselling and independent learning in the new degree system following the language and communication needs of the labour market led to the further development of technology-based learning and teaching during the fourth cycle (2004-2007). And finally, the core of the last cycle (2007-2009) was the development of network pedagogy from the viewpoint of community building and the use of social media. Mentoring practices and the assessment system as well as recognition of the informal learning of languages and communication were also emphasized. While in the 1990s the main focus was on the design of course materials – books, exercise books, CD-ROMs, etc. - the challenge of the new millennium was the design of new learning environments for language learning, and experimenting with the versatile ICT-enhanced approaches and resources (Warschauer 1996; Salmon 2002; Kyppö 2007; Jalkanen, Jokinen & Taalas 2015). The development of new course content and learner training modules was also foregrounded. The ongoing development work is aimed at supporting the process of internationalization and mobility through special, tailor-made programmes, although the main challenge at the time of writing is the integration of language and communication studies into the different stages of Bachelor-level studies (Jalkanen, Jokinen & Taalas 2015)

I will now briefly describe my teacher research as part of the Language Centre's action research.

Slovak was included in the Language Centre's action research in 1999, when the focus was on exploring learner autonomy and the enhancement of self-directed learning. The objective of the teacher research was to create a learning environment that would motivate learners and promote their self-directivity in learning, and the main focus was on increasing learners' language and communicative competence. Collaborative practices (teacher-students) aimed at increasing efficiency and the multimodality of learning materials prompted the idea of creating a new learning environment that would improve the learning of Slovak.

Ellis (1997) emphasizes five features of teacher action research. First, it is always content specific, i.e. the problem or research question is related to the teacher's teaching and is designed to improve the teaching (in this case, the Slovak e-learning course). Secondly, when the learner's viewpoint is considered, action research is expected to facilitate and evidently improve learning, which may finally be reflected in an improvement in the learning results (that is, an

increase in the learners' communicative competence). Thirdly, it is systematic, i.e., it should be related not only to teaching, but also, for example, to the teacher's data collection and analysis (teacher research – collecting and analysing data – learners' experiences and perceptions of themselves as (e-)learners; Chapter 5). Fourthly, action research is reflective, i.e., it requires the teacher's continuous evaluation of possible solutions or answers to questions. And finally, it is cyclical, which underlines the iterative character of the individual phases of action research (identifying a problem or question relevant in the given pedagogical context, collecting information, searching for possible solutions / answers, piloting the solution(s) in the given context, and finally revising the action research plan (the ongoing research; Chapter 6 and 7).

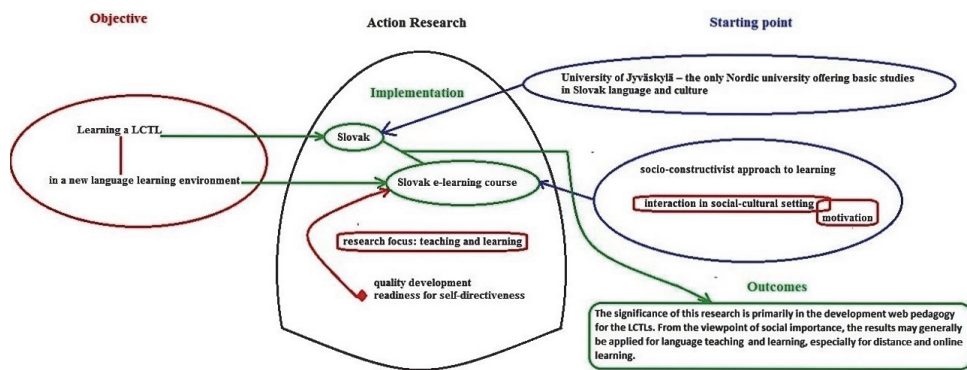


Figure 1 Action research: Slovak in the new language learning environments

In accordance with Ellis's five features of teacher action research, the objective was clear: the goal was to design and implement a new environment that would enhance learners' self-directed learning and raise their motivation to learn Slovak. The solution was the design of an e-learning course during the fourth cycle of the Language Centre's action research. The course was piloted in 2009-2010, partly during the last phase of the research. The results of the pilot study were expected to provide more information on the development of web pedagogy and the pedagogy of teaching less commonly taught languages. Thus the teacher research was aimed at developing both learning and teaching, which in design based research (DBR)¹ may be perceived as a unified entity (Lund & Haug 2011; see also Chapter 5.4 in this study).

To comply with the aims of the Language Centre action research, the research was based on the socio-constructivist approach to teaching and learning

¹ Design-based research is "a systematic but flexible methodology aimed to improve educational practices through iterative analysis, design, development, and implementation, based on collaboration among researchers and practitioners in real-world settings, and leading to contextually-sensitive design principles and theories (Wang & Hannafin 2005, pp. 6-7)

(Chapter 3.1.1), which views learning and teaching as an ongoing process, a dialogue between the learners and the teacher, and finally, a dialogue between the learner and the real world. Figure 2 shows the development of Slovak in the framework of the Language Centre's action research plan.

From traditional learning to e-learning

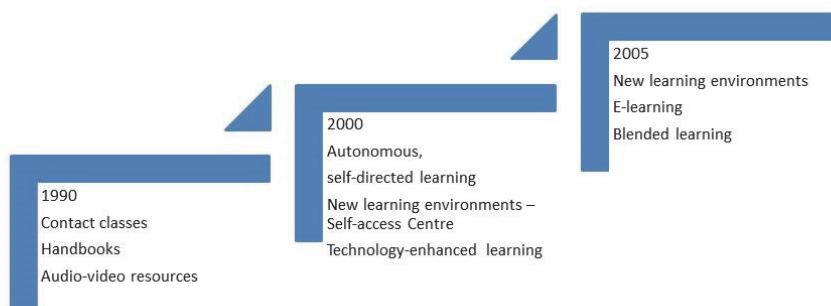


Figure 2 From traditional learning to e-learning

3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section, I will introduce some of the theories and concepts that have influenced the development of my teaching and led to the design and implementation of the Slovak e-learning course. The design and implementation of the e-learning course generated teacher research built on reflection-on-action (Rudduck 2006). The pedagogical experiment – the e-learning course, its design, layout and learning activities – is based on various theories of language learning: the socio-constructivist theory, activity theory, task-based learning (TBL) and teaching (TBT), as well as some key concepts related to computer-assisted language learning (CALL). As regards learners, the concept of learner agency, language learning awareness and motivation are introduced, as these concepts are of key importance for further development of the language skills and competences one has already acquired. As the aim and desired outcome of any learning approach and pedagogy is the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately in order to accomplish the communication goals set up in the learning outcomes, learners' approaches to learning Slovak as well as the concept of communicative competence are viewed from both the learners' point of view, as a learner's personal learning outcome, and from the teacher's point of view, as part of the curriculum, a learning outcome of the course.

The graph below presents the theoretical background of the teaching experiment. The pedagogical basis of the Slovak e-learning course is the socio-constructivist approach to teaching and learning, which emphasizes the learners' active participation in constructing and reconstructing knowledge according to the learners' own experiences, and then reflecting on that.

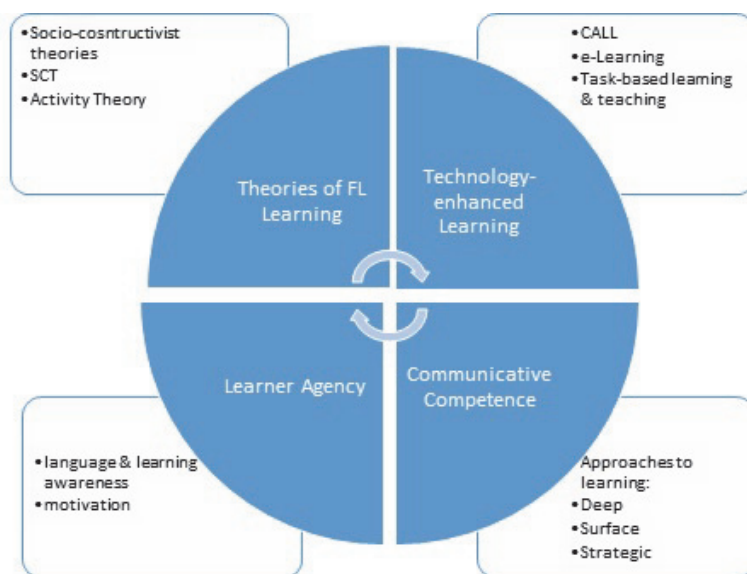


Figure 3 Theoretical background

Below follows some discussion of the theories and concepts related to foreign language learning: Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Activity Theory, Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL), Task-based learning (TBL) and teaching (TBT). The concepts of learner agency, language and learning awareness, motivation, and communicative competence reflected in the learners' approaches to learning are also reviewed.

3.1 Pedagogical development: Approaches to foreign language learning

This section introduces the pedagogical basis of the Slovak e-learning course - different approaches to teaching and learning, such as the socio-constructivist, sociocultural and activity theoretical orientations. I also introduce here the core elements of the SCT that I used in formulating the pedagogical framework of the teaching material, as well as the concept of context-based and task-based learning (TBL), including Willis's model for task-based learning lessons (1996). I shall attempt to explain the underlying principle behind my choice of social constructivism and sociocultural theory and activity theories and show how they complement each other.

In my opinion, learning always takes place in a context and is always the sum of various inputs. According to van Lier (2004), language is "a meaning-making activity that takes place *in a* complex network of complex systems that are interwoven amongst themselves as well as with all aspects of physical, so-

cial and symbolic worlds" (2004: 53). This definition underlines van Lier's concept of ecological linguistics, where everything is in a relationship with something else – the language with the physical, social and cultural environment and with other languages, and learners in a relationship with the context (the learning environment). Language is viewed as action, part of the physical artifacts and actions of others, providing learners with multiple resources. Thus, the inter-relatedness and dynamics of learning and teaching, the external context of learning – the Slovak language, the students of Slovak, me as a teacher, the curriculum, and the learning environment - are perceived as essential for ecological learning.

3.1.1 The socio-constructivist approaches

The Slovak e-learning course is based on constructivist theories of learning, which emphasize the importance of learning-by-doing. Constructivist learning theories view learning as an ongoing process in which knowledge is alternately constructed and reconstructed on the basis of the learner's personal experiences and their reflections on them (cognitive constructivism; Marlowe & Page 1998). In brief, learners themselves are the constructors / active creators of their own knowledge.

A constructivist approach to education can sometimes be at odds with cognitivist viewpoints. While cognitivist teaching methods aim to help students assimilate new information into the framework of their existing knowledge, enabling them to make the appropriate modifications to their existing intellectual framework to accommodate the new information, social constructivist teaching methods emphasize the collaborative nature of learning and the importance of the cultural and social context (Vygotsky 1962, 1978). Social constructivist scholars (Bruner 1960; Bandura 1971; Vygotsky 1978) view learning as an active process in which meaning is made through the learners' interaction with each other on the one hand and learners' interaction with their environment on the other hand (hence, van Lier's concept, mentioned above, of interrelatedness and dynamics). The interplay between learners, instructor (teacher) in the role of facilitator, and the learning task itself creates a dynamic interaction. The interactive, dynamic character of social constructivism puts the emphasis on collaboration between the learners, including peer or group collaboration, and reciprocal teaching (teacher as student and student as teacher). It also means problem-based instruction and the sharing of information. Further, social constructivists emphasize the importance of the context, i.e. the learning environment (van Lier 2004; Johnson 2004), as well as of the learners' and teacher's background, as that has a significant impact on the learning process.

According to Vygotsky's social constructivist approach, learning is a collaborative activity and occurs in an environment that is close to the real world (Vygotsky 1978; Johnson 2004). As social constructivism in learning emphasizes problem-based instruction and peer collaboration between the learners, the focus is on student activities and the development of their communicative, i.e. linguistic and pragmatic, competence.

For Mayes and de Freitas (2013), the main emphasis of constructivism is on learning-by-doing. They also emphasize the importance of feedback, which partly places constructivism in the behaviourist tradition (input followed by immediate feedback).

Duffy and Cunningham (1996) distinguish between the cognitive constructivism derived from the Piagetian tradition, which is based on the hypothesis that learners do not imitate ideas from the external world but construct their own concepts through personal experimentation and observation, and the sociocultural constructivism derived from the Vygotskian approach, according to which development is preceded by social interaction and conscious knowledge construction as the result of social behaviour (socialization). Thus, the basis of effective learning is learners' interaction with material systems and concepts as well as with each other. Mayes & de Freitas (2013: 16) have summarized the constructivist view of learning as follows:

Table 2 Constructivist view of learning (Mayes & de Freitas (2013: 16)

Constructivist view of learning
• The learner actively constructs knowledge, through achieving understanding
• Learning depends on what a learner already knows, or what he / she can already do
• Learning is self-regulated
• Learning is goal-oriented
• Learning is cumulative

Table 3 Design principles for constructivist teaching and learning (Mayes & de Freitas (2013: 16)

Design principles for constructivist teaching and learning
• ownership of the task
• coaching and modelling of thinking skills
• scaffolding
• ill-structured problems

In short, the areas of special focus in constructivist learning are the design of student-centred methods and environments, reflection and feedback, and task-based learning. Mayes & de Freitas (2013) see the emphasis on task-based learning as a reaction to the rapid growth in multimedia in the 1980s -1990s, when the focus was on the delivery of materials; nowadays the main focus is on the task and the social context. They see an increasing trend towards the design of learner-centred methods and approaches, such as problem-based, project-based and enquiry-oriented pedagogies. They aim at a 'true learner-centred approach' - individualized, 'tailor-made' instruction designed for learner-specific needs. However, even though the design of learning activities may and should match the profile of individual learners, the idea of individual(ized) learning may

partly contradict the concept of context-bound learning, as learners display different preferences of learning and employ different learning strategies and styles. Nonetheless, the authors believe in the effectiveness of a pedagogy based on the cognitive perspective - learning in constructivist learning environments and activity systems, which enables learning and learners' assessment at each level of an activity system - at the level of an 'activity, action or operation' (Mayes & de Freitas 2013; Cole & Engeström 1993).

3.1.2 Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and dialogical thinking

In this section, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Bakhtin's dialogized heteroglossia are discussed in the context of second language learning. The relationship between Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and SCT is captured by Lantolf & Thorne's (2006) principles. To explain the dynamic design of the Slovak e-learning course, I shall briefly introduce the dialogical, interactional character of language learning as viewed by Bakhtin (1993), van Lier (2004), Dufva (2004, et al 2011) and Lantolf & Thorne (2006).

Dufva, in her study on language and cultural awareness (1994), points to the dialogical character of learning, which is in accordance with Bakhtinian dialogism in its emphasis on the interactional and dynamic aspect of language. Language learning is perceived as a continuous dialogue between the language and the external world, the language learner and his/her inner world, between the language learners themselves, and between the learners and the teacher. The ideology of language learning as a dialogue between the learner and the context (the learning environment) emphasizes the importance of including the learning context in the design of the learning environment (van Lier 2004; Johnson 2004; Dufva et al 2011). According to the dialogical philosophy of language (Bakhtin 1993; Dufva 2004; Dufva et al 2011), language is multi-layered: there are various 'layers' of language, depending on the contexts in which the language is used (heteroglossia; Bakhtin 1981). Every word indicates a particular context. Heteroglossia, sometimes called linguistic diversity (Dufva et al. 2011), means the understanding of linguistic and semiotic resources, as well as appropriately situated and modality-specific usage of the language (Dufva et al. 2011). The dialectic relation underlines not only the interdependence and interconnectedness of a person's mental and social processes, but also the interrelation of the language and context (the learning environment). A dialogical perspective on the language emphasizes its dynamic nature and language use in actual life environments. Language is seen as constantly varying and changing depending on place and time. The authors argue that language itself is 'multilingual' and is open to various social and functional usages (spoken, written, dialect, jargon, etc.), which means that language learners have to be able to respond to constant changes in language use. In practice, language learners are often exposed to language accessed through the media, for example, chat, email, SMS messaging, etc., where elements of other languages may have to be taken into consideration as well as the various affordances and constraints of the target (Dufva et al. 2011:116). As a result, language learners' linguistic repertoires

are constantly being developed, changed and modified. The dynamic nature of language learning emphasizes not only what is learned, but also how it is learned (Dufva et al. 2011:117). Hence the importance of a new language learning environment, in the context of this study, an e-learning environment, which requires new learning styles and strategies (Chapter 6. 2).

The dialogical nature of language learning is reflected in 'learning by doing', where learners as active agents participate in various communities of practice (Lantolf & Thorne 2006; Dufva et al. 2011). The dynamic nature of language learning might also be evoked by the metaphor of 'learning as moving' (Dufva et al. 2011), related to the idea of the mobility of both language usage and language users, for example, on the level of modality (speaking vs. writing), of genre (various genres of spoken or written language), on the social level, etc. In this context, the metaphor of climbing a mountain emphasizes the idea of 'learning as moving', dynamic language learning, promoting mobility on all levels of language use and among the learners themselves.

The e-learning course in Slovak was designed and implemented within the framework of an ideology of language learning which perceives learning as a dialogue between the learner and the context. As mentioned earlier, van Lier's ecological perspective on language learning underlines the importance of the context (the learning environment), as it offers the learner affordances, "relations between the active learner and elements in the environment" (van Lier 2004: 53), or in other words, "natural or cultural, direct or indirect relations of possibility between language users" (van Lier 2004: 95). Van Lier's ecological views are reflected in the design of the learning context, a 'climbing' learning environment. The learning context is not only the physical or virtual learning environment, but is a complex of various 'environments', situations promoting the learners' dialogue with each other and the teacher, dialogue between the learners and surrounding environment, the overall context that offers affordances and thus promotes their learning.

Next, I shall frame the pedagogical experiment within Sociocultural Theory, which is composed of several core constructs: the concept of mediation, imitation, internalization and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). According to Lantolf & Thorne's description of the relationship between SLA and SCT (2006), the unifying principle of SCT is mediation: a person's cognitive and material activities are conveyed by "symbolic artifacts (such as languages, literacy, numeracy, concepts, and forms of logic and rationality) as well as by material artifacts and technologies" (Lantolf & Thorne 2006: 216). Cognitive processes in SCT are the results of a person's participation in social activities. In the case of L2 learning, learners' mental worlds (ideas) are mediated through or by the target language(s). Mediation can lead to internalization, i.e. to the processes through which interpersonal interaction and the interaction of individuals with the environment leads to the formation and transformation of a person's internal (mental) functions. According to Vygotsky, "the key to internalization resides in the uniquely human capacity to imitate the intentional activity of other humans" (Lantolf & Thorne 2006: 203). Vygotsky believes that this imitation is

reflected in development based on collaboration and is the source of all the specifically human characteristics of consciousness (Vygotsky 1987).

The last construct that I want to introduce is the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which may be used as a conceptual and pedagogical tool for understanding learners' capacities at various developmental stages and may be visible through learners' participation in collaborative activities. ZPD is "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky 1978: 86). In other words, as a learner's performance in the L2 grows, his/her development may be observed on two levels – on the level of independent performance and on the level where someone else mediates the performance. Thus, different learners at the same level of development may show different levels of ZPD, depending on their degree of need for assistance. This implies the need for different types of support (feedback) in different contexts, according to the level of appropriateness. Implicit feedback is regarded as more self-regulatory than explicit feedback and therefore as more significant for learners' cognitive and linguistic development (Johnson 2004).

The process of exploiting ZPD is best conceived through the concept of scaffolding: the process of teacher or tutor guidance aimed at growth in a learner's cognitive and metacognitive activities (Hannafin, Hill & Land 1994). The teacher/tutor is responsible for coaching and ensuring shared understanding of the learner's views. Duffy & Cunningham (1996) emphasize the teacher's coaching role in collaborative groups, where the focus should rather be on the promotion of dialogical reflexivity than on strategies for learning. The role of the teacher as coach in the Slovak e-learning course, which is based on the metaphor of climbing a mountain (see Chapter 5), is captured in the metaphor of 'teacher as mountain guide', someone who is responsible for 'safely reaching the top of the mountain'. In other words, the teacher does everything possible to promote mutual understanding among the learners, making sure that everybody knows what his/her role is in the learning (metaphorically 'climbing') process. Meeting the learners' needs in problem situations, building scaffolding in the literal and metaphorical sense, is in line with the concept of scaffolding as enhancing learners' cognitive and metacognitive activities.

Johnson's model of Second Language Acquisition (2004), partly based on Vygotsky's (1896–1934) Sociocultural Theory and Bakhtin's (1895–1975) dialogized heteroglossia, puts the emphasis on interaction between language competence (knowledge of the language) and performance (the skills needed to use the language in real life or almost-real life contexts). From the viewpoint of monolingual and multilingual conceptualization of the language (Dufva et al 2011), it is knowledge about the language, in this context Slovak, its morphology, structures, lexicology, etc., and the use of the Slovak language and variations of Slovak. One of the implications of this model for teaching is the need to reshape the sociocultural setting of the learning environment to make it more favourable and motivating; interaction can then take place in a space that is fa-

avourable for collaborative or knowledge-building dialogues with peers, possibly using online resources and/or 'real life' simulations.

3.1.3 Activity Theory

The pioneer of Activity Theory, A.N. Leont'ev (1921-1978), who was also inspired by Vygotsky's ideas, developed his own theory, in which he emphasized the importance of collectivity and community. Leont'ev (1977) viewed human processes from the perspective of three different levels of analysis: the level of activity and motive, the level of actions and the goals associated with them, and the level of analysis of operations, which serve as the means to achieve the goals. His analysis is partly based on Vygotsky's famous triangle model of "a complex, mediated act" known as the set of subject, object and mediating artifact (Engeström 1999).

The focus of the third generation of activity theory (Engeström et al 1999) has shifted towards the development of conceptual tools for understanding the networks of interacting activity systems and a new type of learning - expansive learning (Engeström 1999; Chapter 3.2.2) Expansive learning is "a method of grasping the essence of an object by tracing and reproducing the logic of its development, of its historical formation through the emergence and resolution of its inner contradictions" (Engeström 1999: 11). In practice, a simple idea, when enriched and further developed, may be transformed into a new practice. Transformation of the abstract idea into the concrete practice takes place by means of specific epistemic or learning actions, which form an expansive cycle or spiral. The process of expansive learning may be understood as the process of constructing and resolving the successively appearing inconsistencies ('contradictions') in the activity system (Engeström 1999). Engeström himself perceives the cycle of expansive transformation as a "collective journey through the zone of proximal development of the activity" (Engeström 1999: 4). Chapter 3.2.2 of the present work explores the similarity between activity theory and spiral learning (Andrade 1999).

Table 4 Engeström's five principles of Activity Theory (Weibell 2011)

1. Prime unit of analysis: "A collective, artifact-mediated and object-oriented activity system, seen in its network relations to other activity systems, is taken as the prime unit of analysis" (Engeström 2001: 136).
2. Multi-voicedness: "An activity system is always a community of multiple points of view, traditions and interests" (Engeström 2001:136).
3. Historicity: "Activity systems take shape and get transformed over lengthy periods of time. Their problems and potentials can only be understood against their own history" (Engeström 2001:136).
4. Contradictions: Contradictions play a central role as "sources of change and development...[They] are historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems" (Engeström 2001:137).
5. Expansive transformations: "An expansive transformation is accomplished when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualized to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of activity" (Engeström 2001: 137).

The first principle emphasizes that an artifact-mediated and object-oriented activity system serves as the prime unit of analysis. This principle emphasizes the goal-orientedness of the individual's and group's actions. The second principle emphasizes the multi-voicedness of activity systems, as an activity system is always represented by multiple viewpoints, interests and traditions. The third principle expresses the historical viewpoint (local history and history of the ideas and tools that have shaped the activity). The fourth principle points to contradictions as the main sources of change and development, and finally, the fifth principle aims at expansive transformations in the activity systems. In the light of this theory, learning occurs in long cycles of qualitative transformations and is driven by inner contradictions within the activity system, which lead participants to question the established norms (Weilbell 2011).

According to Engeström, "contradictions are historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems" (Engeström 1999: 3). Activities are open systems, thus when a new element is adopted by the system, it may contradict or be in conflict with an old element (or object). The conflict may generate change(s) in the activity, and this often leads to development. When the contradiction leads to conflict, the outcome might be the collaboration of some previously 'doubting' individuals. Thus contradictions may result in transformations that in turn lead to new forms of activity (Engeström 2001; Blin& Jalkanen 2014).

In the context of this study, contradictions are very significant for the development of technology-enhanced language learning: on the one hand we have the rapidly expanding educational technologies and on the other hand, the effort to keep pace with the latest trends, while also meeting the need for more personal learning environments and more 'physical' support. The result of this contradiction may lead to a new learning experience and the adoption of new learning strategies. In the case of the Slovak e-learning course, the result was a compromise: blended learning (Chapter 3.2.3). The development of Slovak learning and teaching has been a long, ongoing process of adopting new practices and keeping up with the mainstream of technological advances while still preserving a personal, user-friendly learning environment, one that can increase learners' agency and thus increase their motivation to learn. The history of learning and teaching Slovak at the University of Jyväskylä has been a history of tensions of various kinds - between environments, between the learners themselves and between learners and the teacher, coping always with the challenges posed by the new educational technologies as well as by institutional changes.

At the beginning of the teaching experiment, not only some of the students but also the teacher were somewhat sceptical about the potential of e-learning. Students asked whether it was really possible to learn a new language properly online (Chapter 6.2.1.3). The answer to this question is one of the findings of this study (Chapter 7).

Activity theory and e-learning environments

Socio-anthropologists Lave & Wenger (1991) see learning as the learning of practices: as “processes of participation in which beginners are initially relatively peripheral in the activities of a community and as they learn the practices, their participation becomes more central” (Mayes & de Freitas, 2013: 10). This conforms to the ZPD (Lantolf & Thorne 2006), where learning is distributed and can be viewed at all levels of an activity system – activity, action and operation. The ZPD concept had a direct influence on the design of e-learning environments, as can be seen in Peal & Wilson’s summary of the design of learning environments as ZPDs (2001), presented here in Table 5.

Table 5 Features of web-based learning environments as ZPDs (Peal & Wilson 2001)

Learning activities are part of real or simulated activity systems, with close attention to the tools and interactions characteristics of actual situations.
Structured interaction among participants.
Guidance by an expert.
The locus of control passes to the increasingly competent learners.

The authors claim that the connection to a particular activity system is weaker at the lower level of learning, although skills are more transferable than since activities may be perceived as unique to particular systems. E-learning can be seen as both “a tool and as a simulated activity system within which participants are introduced to and learn to perform the actions and operations.” (Mayes & de Freitas 2013: 19). In addition to the importance of the activity, the authors’ focus has also been on learner identity - how it is shaped by the relationship with others (the community). The basis of a community of practice is engagement in an activity followed by the development and sharing of practices, which may involve the development of beliefs, attitudes, values and specific knowledge. Such a community may be formed by the members of a learning group, as almost all learning takes place in a social context. This type of ‘knowledge-sharing for continuous professional development’ has been described by Goodyear (2002) as networked learning in communities of practice. The learning cycle is described as “moving through phases of externalization (of tacit knowledge), sharing, discussion, refinement and then internalization” (Mayes & de Freitas 2013:21), which clearly corresponds to the phases of externalization of knowledge building in collaborative learning (Vygotsky 1987; Lantolf & Thorne 2006). Goodyear (2002) emphasized the impact of the design of the online learning environment on the learning process. The design of a learning environment is one of the affordances of learning, and this was kept in mind when designing the e-learning environment in the teaching experiment reported in this study, using the mountain-climbing metaphor for learning Slovak (Chapter 5.1).

I have always seen learning as a dynamic process. Even though climbing is generally understood as moving vertically, upwards, it often takes place in

zigzags – a traverse to the right or left, then upwards and then again a traverse. The idea of zigzagging may be similar to the theory of expansive learning (Engeström 1999): an idea, when transformed into actual practice through specific learning actions, may form expansive cycles and result in a new structure. Learning is perceived as ‘recurrent and cyclic activities’, which may be explored through the formation and resolution of internal contradictions in activity systems (Engeström, 1999: 33). Similarly, the core of the curriculum for spiral learning, also called a Learning Spiral (Andrade 1999), is scaffolding and activities enhancing thinking skills.

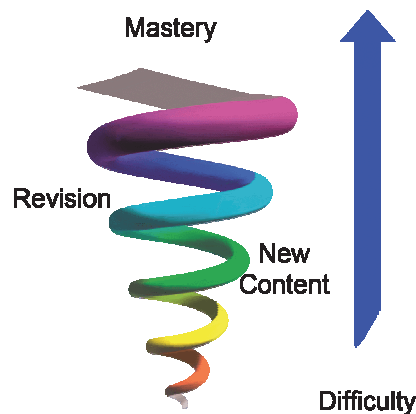


Figure 4 Spiral Learning ²

With each learning session, learners expand their skill level and build a new understanding (new content). A brief exposure to the new content followed by a recap allows learners to construct their own understanding and encourages them to strive to reach the top of the spiral. In the context of the idea of learning as climbing, the new content is the new rope length, revision is the reassessment of the situation after each camp, and reaching the top of the mountain is mastery of the language (Chapter 5.1).

3.1.4 Task-based learning (TBL)

This section offers a brief outline of task-based learning (TBL), including Willis’s model for task-based learning lessons (1996). To update TBL, a brief description of Ellis’s task differentiation is included (2009). Since TBL is aimed at increasing learners’ activities and through that enhancing their language skills, Blin’s five-step activity theoretical design model (Blin 2010) for learning, inspired by cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström 1978; 2001; 2008; Lund & Hauge 2011), is briefly introduced.

Task-based teaching (TBT) poses a challenge to the teacher’s imagination and creativity. The teacher is responsible for providing learners with a whole

² (<http://www.skoolbo.com/img/about/spiral.png>)

range of different tasks that might motivate them to experiment with the language and use it spontaneously, as in “real life”. The teacher is responsible not only for the design of the curriculum and the tasks, but also for raising the learners’ language awareness: trying to make them sensitive to the various similarities and differences between languages and thus deepen their overall perception of foreign languages. Language awareness is raised either implicitly, on the teacher’s initiative, or explicitly: learners themselves may perceive some similarities and/or differences between the languages and thus construct their own knowledge and develop their own language awareness.

The primary focus of a task-based learning activity is, as the name would suggest, the task: a task in which students use the language to achieve a specific outcome. Willis (1996) defines tasks as “activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome” (POOLS-m: 4). Generally, the task – the activity – reflects real life and the learners’ primary focus is on meaning, not on the correctness of the language. Language is the tool, the instrument, which learners use in order to achieve the outcome. The framework of task-based language teaching (TBLT) designed in compliance with TBL holds the task to be the primary unit for designing a language programme (e.g. a language course). The task should fulfil the following criteria (Ellis 2009):

Table 6 Task criteria (Ellis 2009)

Task-based learning and teaching. Task criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • primary focus should be on the <i>meaning</i> (semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a <i>gap</i> should be left for the learners to be able to express an opinion or infer the meaning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learners should primarily employ their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the outcome, other than the use of language, should be clearly defined.

Ellis further differentiates between focused and unfocused tasks: unfocused tasks are designed for general communicative use of the language, while focused tasks are designed for communication using a specific linguistic feature, which may be ‘hidden’, i.e. the learners are not explicitly told about the feature (hence, the difference between a focused task and a ‘situational grammar exercise’, where the learners are aware of the specific features; Ellis 2009). The distinction between a ‘task’ and a ‘situational grammar exercise’ underlines the distinction between ‘task-based’ and ‘task-supported’ language teaching (Ellis 2009). Task-based teaching is generally based on the syllabus, which consists of unfocused tasks, while task-supported teaching uses the syllabus, which includes the ‘three p’s’, “PPP”: Presentation, Practice and Production (Ellis 2009). According to Ellis, tasks may also be ‘input-providing’, engaging the learners in listening or reading (receptive skills) or ‘output-prompting’, engaging them in speaking and writing (productive skills). However, the evidence showed that in addition, learners can also develop their speaking and writing skills with input-

providing tasks. The tasks may be integrative, aimed at more than two, even all, of the four language skills. Because TBLT represents both the design and the methodology, it is crucial to decide which tasks to choose, of what content, and finally, how to sequence them in order to facilitate learning and thus achieve optimal learning results. The Slovak e-learning course presented in this study offers both focused tasks meant for practising certain lexicological or grammar tasks, for example, the use of certain expressions or lexical items in a given situational context, and unfocused tasks, for example, writing tasks or a simulation of real life situations.

Some scholars do not believe in the teacher-centredness of the TBLT approach (Swan 2005; Prabhu 1987; Ellis 2009). They claim that the teacher's role is limited to managing and facilitating learners' performance of tasks, or they place the teacher in the role of a "skilled communicator" (Prabhu 1987). Nevertheless, Ellis believes that the teacher is far more than that – he/she is both an 'engager' and a 'responder'. The teacher's role may vary at various stages of the teaching: for example, when teaching some specific language items, TBLT may be more teacher-centred, but when employing implicit corrective strategies, it may become more learner-centred.

I have a lot of sympathy with Ellis's views on teaching grammar at the beginning stage. Ellis claims that the early stages of L2 acquisition are generally non-grammatical. Production at the beginner level consists mostly of scaffolded utterances and is context dependent (Ellis 2009). Hence the connection with sociocultural theory and activity theory (Lantolf & Thorne 2006; Engeström 2001). The acquisition of grammar is a gradual, but dynamic process. From the TBLT perspective, explicit grammar teaching may be useless unless the purpose is to develop the learners' awareness of some particular grammatical items (rules). This strengthens the claim that TBLT may be more appropriate in 'acquisition-poor environments' with a lack of communicative opportunities than in 'acquisition rich environments', where learners have access to the target language within larger communities and grammar may be (and often is) taught implicitly in everyday situations (learning by doing; the social constructivist approach to learning; Vygotsky 1978).

In Willis's model for task-based learning lessons (1996), TBL is divided into three stages. The first is the pre-task stage, when the task is introduced and learners are engaged in preparatory activities that may facilitate completion of the main task, for example, vocabulary exercises. The second stage is the task cycle. At this stage, the learners carry out the task in pairs or small groups. After completing the task, they report on their performance to the class (a topic-related report) in spoken or written form, as well as reflect on their performance (learning-related reflection). The third stage is the language focus stage, or the post stage, during which the learners work on the specific language features that have emerged from the task. Teacher and peer feedback on learners' performance at the reporting stage can be incorporated into the third stage.

One of the main advantages of TBL is that language is used as in a real or almost real context. The enormous variety and range of tasks (reading, listening,

problem solving, quizzes, questionnaires, role play, etc.) accompanied by the use of authentic language sources (videos, music, YouTube, etc.) results in an increase in learners' awareness of their learning and in their motivation.

TBL has been criticised for the fact that when learners make use of their current language skills, they do not necessarily expand them, i.e., their language skills do not increase. TBL does undoubtedly pose a challenge to the teacher, especially in relation to timing and teaching techniques. However, if used appropriately and at the proper time, learning can result in the interest in the target language and an increase in learners' motivation. Furthermore, the reflection stage, in which learners reflect on their own learning process, can contribute to an increase in learners' learning awareness and through that to an increase in their communicative competence.

Learners' activities in the Slovak e-learning course are authentic tasks in which, in accordance with task-based learning methodology, "the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome" (Willis 1996: 4). The learning outcomes and proficiency levels correspond to the Common European Framework levels A1-B1 (CEFR 2009). In accordance with the framework of task-based learning (Willis 1996), the tasks at the A1 level (CEFR 2009) generally consist of listing, describing and comparing, while the tasks at the A2-B1 level (CEFR 2009) include problem solving, sharing personal experiences, storytelling and simulations (Chapter 5.1).

From the cultural-historical perspective, "language learning is connected with cultural, social, institutional and discursive forces, where language is considered a cultural artefact that mediates thinking and communication between people and within an individual" (Bernat 2006: 3). Blin's design model for learning (2010) was initially developed to promote learner autonomy. Four principles emphasize the object-centredness of learning activities and encourage learners' collaboration. At the same time, the focus is on the enhancement of digital literacies through "carefully thought-out shifts built into the syllabus" (Blin & Jalkanen 2014:158), which should ensure efficient learning without any unnecessary interruptions. According to cultural historical activity theory, contradictions are fundamental to development (Engeström 2001; Chapter 3.1.3). Therefore they should be built upon. Through questioning and doubting of the practices used, new forms of activity might emerge (Blin & Jalkanen 2014: 158).

Although the Slovak course is designed for self-study and is based on autonomous learning, the role of the teacher as a course designer, knowledge constructor and tutor is evident. However, in a technology-enhanced learning environment, learners themselves may and should become engaged in the process of knowledge building: they may become both the designers and presenters of their own personal knowledge, agents of their own learning (Nanjappa & Grant 2003; Blin & Jalkanen 2014). This is one of the most significant characteristics of contemporary TBL, particularly in computer-assisted language learning (CALL). TBL and CALL are revisited in Chapter 7.

3.2 Pedagogical development: Technology-based language learning and teaching

This section introduces the technology-based language learning (TBLL) over the period of time during which I have developed the e-learning course in Slovak. TBLL often encompasses such related terms as online learning and web-based learning, which only include learning through the Internet. The term e-learning is synonymous with the term technology-based learning and has in fact now replaced it.

Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL), which is sometimes referred to as technology-enhanced learning, or e-learning, is the main focus of attention in this section. After an attempt to define CALL, I will briefly present Warschauer's 'Three Waves of CALL' (three types of CALL), as well as the Fourth CALL. To illustrate the constructivist-cognitive principles of e-learning, I will present some theories of e-learning: Koohang & Hartmann's definition (2005), followed by Mayes & de Freitas' (2013) curriculum design model for e-learning and Koohang's constructivist model of learning (2009), developed specifically for e-learning environments. Finally, the section will conclude with Hrastinsky's description of synchronous and asynchronous e-learning and their combination, blended learning.

The new technologies developed at the beginning of the millennium have significantly influenced people's personal and professional lives. Especially new educational technologies have substantially changed traditional concepts of learning and teaching (Taalas 2004). They have transformed the delivery of learning and teaching by fostering access to learning anytime and anywhere, which has put pressure on teachers and tutors to continually update their learning materials and resources. Technology-based learning may be defined as language learning through electronic technology, for example, the Internet, intranets, satellite broadcasts, audio-visual resources (tapes, conferencing), chat rooms, e-bulletin boards, webcasts, computer-based instruction, and CD-ROM (Koller et al 2001). As mentioned above, the terms online or e-learning may be used interchangeably. However, the term web-based learning, which also occurs in the context of technology-based learning, is restricted only to learning through computers. The term 'technology-enhanced learning' (TEL) refers to a methodology in which technology is used only to enrich a traditional face-to-face classroom (Koller et al. 2001).

3.2.1 Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is the use of technology (primarily computers) in the context of language learning. It offers learners the possibility of personalized learning, authentic input, immediate feedback, and other benefits that often result in an increase in learners' engagement and motivation. The term Computer-Assisted Language Learning dates back to the 1980s, when

the term was used to emphasize a student-centred focus on learning rather than teaching. The term was used by a group of scholars in the United Kingdom (Davies & Steel 1981 in Thomas et al 2014). An alternative term for CALL is technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), which is open to a broad range of interpretations as it is not restricted to any one type of technology or pedagogical approach. Technology-enhanced learning is often associated with, for example, computer-assisted instruction (CAI), computer-aided learning (CAL), networked/online learning or e-learning. According to Goodyear & Retalis (2010), the term may be used in any circumstances where technology plays a significant role in making learning more effective, efficient and pleasant.

In this study, I refer to technology-enhanced learning when referring to learning through the use of computers in a broad sense, and the term computer-assisted language learning (CALL) when referring to the particular theories of CALL. Otherwise I use the term e-learning (Chapter 3.2.2).

Levy (1997:1) defined CALL as the exploration and study of the applications of computers in language teaching and learning. Despite the continuous development of CALL, which has resulted in the design of numerous pedagogical approaches employing ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in language learning, this definition continues to be generally accepted.

In the 1990s, when CALL became widely used, Warschauer (1996; also Warschauer & Healey 1998 in Thomas et al. 2014) identified three phases of CALL: Behaviouristic CALL, Communicative CALL, and Integrative CALL. In the literature, they may be referred to as the Three Waves of CALL (Warschauer 1996). The fourth wave of CALL, Social CALL, emerged from the use of multi-media in language learning.

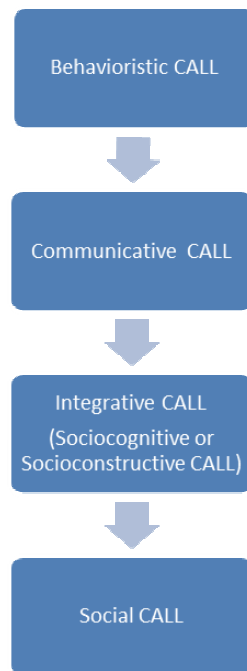


Figure 5 Four Waves of CALL

Behaviouristic CALL, which is based on behaviourist theories of learning, dates back to the 1960s and 1970s. Language programmes were generally built on the principle of “drill and practise”. Educational courseware was installed on the model of computer as tutor (Taylor 1980 in Warschauer 1996). Despite the criticism of Behaviouristic Call, Warschauer points to some benefits of this phase, for example, the availability of the same learning material to all students and immediate, non-judgmental feedback.

Cognitive approaches to learning claim that understanding is acquired through “an active process of creating hypotheses and building new forms of understanding through activity” (Mayes & de Freitas 2013: 8). From the cognitive viewpoint, performance becomes more expert-like as the basic skills become more automatized. The computer tutors of Behaviourist CALL developed by Anderson in 1995 are based on this ‘expertise’ view of learning (Mayes & de Freitas 2013).

The second phase of CALL, Communicative CALL, is constructed on the communicative approach to learning and teaching that became popular in the 1970s and 1980s. The focus of Communicative CALL is on using the forms, rather than on the forms themselves. Grammar is taught implicitly, through various language activities. Communicative CALL encourages learners to generate language of their own and allows them to use the target language creatively. This calls for the design of the best possible learning environments for this kind of language use. This type of CALL is based on the model of computer as stimulus (Taylor & Perez 1989). Students’ activities are designed to stimulate

discussion on a given topic and thus develop students' critical thinking. Computer software may be used with a variety of programmes not specifically designed for language learning, such as, for example, Sim City (Healey & Johnson 1995). Another model of Communicative CALL involves the computer as tool (Brierley & Kemble 1991; Taylor 1980). Even though this model does not provide any language materials, it includes word processors, spelling and grammar checkers, desktop publishing programmes and concordances, which are still essential tools for many scholars.

The development of language learning and teaching towards a more communicative approach led to the integration of various aspects of language learning and the creation of more authentic language learning environments. The arrival of multimedia technologies and the Internet led to the design of Integrative CALL. As Warschauer claims, the use of multimedia may involve the integration of various language skills, e.g. listening and reading or speaking, but it seldom involves the integration of meaningful, authentic communication into all aspects of the language-learning curriculum (Warschauer 1996). Integrative CALL has also been called Sociocognitive or Socioconstructive CALL, as it has been developed in social interaction through discourse communities. The basis for the two important technological and social developments – computer mediated communication (CMC), which enables either synchronous or asynchronous communication (one-to-one, one-to-many or many-to-one communication), and globally linked hypermedia, at the time a revolutionary achievement enabling rapid access to low cost informational resources and the integration of learners' creative use of the language and critical thinking (critical literacy) - is computer networking.

This classification of CALL into three phases was questioned by Bax (2003), who offered a slightly different description and a reassessment of the three approaches. He used the term Restricted CALL to refer to CALL's historical period, when CALL's features were restricted but not all of them were behaviourist. He used the terms Open CALL, referring to its openness in all dimensions (student feedback, teacher role, software, etc.), and Integrated CALL, which differs from Warschauer's and Healey's concept in that it was still only an objective and not yet reality. (Note, Bax's critique was written in 2003. In his opinion, the CALL of 2003 was Open CALL). CALL technologies have been constantly developing for the last 30 years. CALL pedagogies have been adapted accordingly: from behaviourist principles (Behaviouristic CALL) to communicative pedagogies that encouraged highly interactive and collaborative learning (Communicative CALL). Recently the use of digital media and the shift toward social technologies enabled by portable digital devices has resulted in the promotion of collaborative learning on the social Web (Thomas, Reinders & Warschauer 2014). At present, the main goal of language learning is communicative skills, and students become active agents rather than passive users of the target language. Learning takes place in the authentic learning environments drawn on by multimedia technologies (Social CALL, the fourth 'Wave' of CALL). Learning activities are mostly task- and problem-based and are designed to enhance

learners' engagement, collaboration and motivation. Social CALL promotes primarily pedagogies encouraging learners' critical thinking, which is reflected in the application of research-based and project-based activities, and of creative practices and the development of skills "incorporating collecting and analysing data; evaluating results and solving problems as well as collaborating, sharing and disseminating information in ways that will be productive for others." (Thomas, Reinders & Warschauer 2014: 7).

Whereas, earlier, CALL was often threatened by financial constraints, by the pressures of keeping pace with the ever-evolving educational technologies and the continuous curriculum development, contemporary CALL may be characterized as benefiting from the contemporary digital media (portable digital devices). It maintains constructivist principles, which promote collaborative learning on the social Web (Thomas et al 2104). Contemporary CALL promotes the use of multiple types of target language input and the design of authentic learner-centred learning environments, which enhance learners' self-directedness and agency in learning. These environments may become personalized (Personal Learning Environments, PLE) and they may provide learners with facilities that enable them to take control over their own learning in terms of both content and process, to integrate their personal and professional interests, and to combine formal and informal learning, and in so doing connect them with other social and personal spaces (Chapter 7).

3.2.2 E-learning

In this section we will look at e-learning. I will introduce Mayes & de Freitas' curriculum design model for e-learning (2003), their pedagogical framework for the design of e-learning based on the associationist, cognitive and situative perspective (2003), as well as Biggs's concept of constructive alignment (2003) and Koohang's constructivism model of learning (2009). In addition, we will look at e-learning viewed as a simulated activity system (Engeström 1999) and as such compare it to spiral learning (Andrade 1999).

E-learning, often called 'online learning' or 'web learning' (Chapter 3.2.1), became popular in the late 1990s as a result of its major characteristics, learner-centredness and freedom of time and space. It is generally seen as less expensive to support than traditional classroom instruction, and as not being constrained by geographic considerations so, unlike traditional classroom education, it works in almost all contexts - anywhere and everywhere.

Koohang defines e-learning as "the delivery of education (all activities relevant to instructing, teaching and learning) through various electronic media" (Koohang & al. 2005:92). Even though e-learning embraces several theories of learning, the authors claim that the constructivist learning theory is most appropriate. The constructivist learning theory underlines the learner's active participation in learning through actively constructing new knowledge based on his/her prior experience; in order to enhance learners' performance it favours collaborative and cooperative learning, authentic assessment and scaffolding.

Hrastinsky's approach to e-learning emphasizes the online aspect of e-learning and teaching (Hrastinsky 2008). Learning may be implemented either asynchronously or synchronously (Chapter 3.2.3). This is in line with the design of open source virtual learning environments (VLE), which offer teachers appropriate tools for the design of online courses and facilitate teacher-learner and peer-to-peer communication.

With the expansion of the Web, various applications for language learning have been created, for example, MOOs (Multi-user domains object oriented), MUVes (Multi-User Virtual Environments), three-dimensional virtual environments known as virtual worlds, etc. From the beginning of the 2000s, with the arrival of Web 2.0, "a social platform for collaboration, knowledge sharing and networking", as Davies & Rüschoff (2014) define the Web's potential, there has been a phenomenal increase in the number of web-based communities and social networking websites, virtual worlds and environments. According to the authors, the diversity and flexibility of digital media, the communicative, interactive multimedia, the networking potential of computers and the relatively easy exploitation of the internet have all meant that the methodology of foreign language learning has moved towards the construction of collaborative knowledge, authenticity and task orientation (Davies & Rüschoff 2014:33).

The tracking tools of web platforms like Moodle and, in the context of this study, of the electronic resource-based platform Optima, have opened up new opportunities to explore the actual processes of language acquisition. In practice, learning processes and their products are traceable through, for example, learner logs and learning journals. New ways of publishing texts and other media products (e.g. YouTube) have also become possible. 'Output-oriented project work in language learning' (Davies & Rüschoff 2014: 33) exploiting the digital media fits into current practices of 'stimulating meaning negotiation and output-oriented production at the grassroots level'. The authors believe that the two greatest challenges facing the teachers are the integration of digital media into language learning and the choice of appropriate frameworks for participation in learning.

Curriculum design models for e-learning

I will now introduce the two models that were partly adopted in the pedagogical experiment described in this study.

Mayes & de Freitas (2013) claim that there are no particular models of e-learning, only the implementation of various e-learning approaches. Nevertheless, they offer a pedagogical framework for e-learning design based on the *associationist, cognitive and situative perspectives*. In the *associationist* or *empiricist* approach, knowledge is perceived as an organized accumulation of associations and skill-components. Learning is the process of connecting elementary mental or behavioural units through sequences of activity (Mayes & de Freitas 2013). Learning tasks are arranged in sequences according to their relative complexity: tasks with simple components serve as the prerequisite for more complex tasks.

The focus of the *situative perspective* is primarily on the social distribution of knowledge. Barab and Duffy (1999) emphasize the importance of context-dependent learning in informal settings and the design of authentic constructivist learning activities, for example, in problem-based learning (Savery & Duffy 1996). Their emphasis is on the relationship between the learning task (activity) in a learning environment and its nature in the real world (practice). What is important is the learner's relationship with a group of people in the real life context (the community of practices), the learner's active participation in any particular practice, the authenticity of practice, and peer assessment.

A constructivist pedagogical approach is always focused on doing: learning and teaching activities are placed in the very centre of the process. Mayes & de Freitas (2013: 4) emphasize the importance of the 'e' in front of 'learning': it is very important "to demonstrate on what pedagogic principles the added value of 'e' is operating". The curriculum design model for e-learning includes descriptions of the intended learning outcomes, how to design teaching and learning activities aimed at those learning outcomes, assessment of the achieved outcomes, and evaluation of the curriculum. The curriculum is 'aligned' according to a 'constructive alignment', in which all the elements of teaching, the design of the curriculum, expected learning outcomes, teaching methods, tasks, assessment procedure, are aligned to each other and turned into learning activities (Biggs' constructive alignment' 2003). The term 'constructive alignment' indicates that the guiding assumptions about learning are based on constructivist theory.

Another model based on constructivist learning theory specifically for e-learning environments has been developed by Koohang (Koohang's constructivism model of learning 2009). This model consists of three constructivist categories: The Design of Learning Activities, Learning Assessment, and Instructor's Roles, which involve coaching, guiding, mentoring, acknowledging, providing feedback and assessing learning. The design of learning activities includes collaboration, cooperation, multiple perspectives, scaffolding, self-reflection, the multiple representation of ideas, and social negotiation. Learning assessment includes the instructor/ teacher assessment, collaborative assessment (peer assessment) and self-assessment. The aim of Koohang's model is to fully engage learners in the knowledge construction process, supporting the development of their goals through problem-solving activities and encouraging them to take control of their own learning process. An essential part of the design is self-reflection. Reflecting on one's own learning process results in taking responsibility for learning and promotes self-directed, autonomous learning.

3.2.3 Asynchronous, synchronous and blended e-learning

I will now discuss asynchronous and synchronous e-learning and their combination, blended, or hybrid learning, in more detail.

Asynchronous e-learning (e.g. using emails, participation in discussion boards) is a learner-centred teaching and learning method that makes use of online learning resources to facilitate the sharing of information, involving various tasks

and learning activities free of time and place. Asynchronous e-learning is considered to be a key component of efficient e-learning due to its flexibility, and it is essential for collaboration and teamwork. Because of the possibilities it offers of combining learning with other activities, for example, work and leisure, this type of learning has been very popular with learners. Robert & Dennis (2005) believe that asynchronous communication supports learners' cognitive participation. The receiver of the information has more time for comprehension of the message and therefore for task completion and this results in increased interest in the task completion. This kind of learning resembles, for example, reading literature in traditional study.

On the other hand, *synchronous learning* (e.g. using chat or videoconferencing, or face-to-face learning) takes place in a learning environment in which everyone participates at the same time. Synchronous e-learning is perceived as a more social activity, in which the learners are participants rather than isolated learners, and this often results in an increase in commitment and motivation. According to Kock's *media naturalness hypothesis* (Kock 2008), synchronous communication often results in increased psychological arousal. Similarly, Robert & Dennis (2005) see the impact of synchronous communication as lying in an increase in motivation due to the 'naturalness' of the media, e.g. the access to and use of facial expressions and body language. In this, synchronous communication resembles face-to-face communication. Monitoring the receiver's reactions to the message generally increases the sender's excitement and commitment. Hrastinsky's empirical study found that e-learners perceived synchronous communication to be more like talking. Thus, the atmosphere was generally more relaxed and the topics discussed were less 'complex' (2008).

While synchronous e-learning primarily supports the learner's personal participation, asynchronous e-learning supports the learner's cognitive participation. Characteristic of personal participation in the context of e-learning is the less complex information exchange, the planning of tasks, and social support, while characteristic of cognitive participation is the more complex exchange of information, a lack of planning, and more time for individual and group sharing of reflections. To reflect on the learning process, individually or within a group, students are asked to keep a learning journal or blog.

The combination of face-to-face classroom instruction and computer-mediated activities, either asynchronous or synchronous or both, with the aim of forming an integrated instructional approach, is *blended or hybrid learning*. Blended learning is often perceived as an add-on to teaching or a supplement to the course design. Nicholson, Southgate and Murphy (2011 in Thomas et al. 2014: 144) perceive blended learning as a "combination of forms of instructional technology, including traditional forms of learning used in conjunction with web-based, online approaches." Vaughan (2010) suggests that blended learning should be viewed as a brand new opportunity to redesign teaching. In blended learning, both modes of e-learning, the asynchronous (for example, a course management system, the e-learning environment) and synchronous learning (the virtual classroom), can be used, accompanied by face-to-face sessions. If

skilfully designed and used the result can be a clear increase in learners' self-directed learning and evident development of their communicative competence.

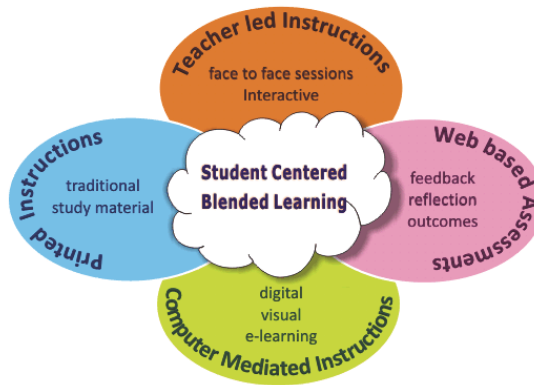


Figure 6 Blended Learning ³

Andrews (2011: 108) describes e-learning in his article on the necessity of a new theory for e-learning as “dynamic, changing and adapting itself to new social situations, new politics, new technologies and new forms of learning.” Interestingly, in his opinion, e-learning includes synchronous and asynchronous learning via electronic means only; it does not include the blend of e-learning with face-to-face or other kinds of non-electronic learning.

At the time of this study, in 2008-2010, attitudes towards e-learning varied. Some scholars and students believed that the process of language learning could be enhanced by technology, while others were convinced that better results could be achieved in face-to-face classroom interaction. Hrastinsky (2008) referred to the results of a review of 355 comparative studies of learning outcomes in both traditional and e-learning modes of delivery, which showed no significant difference between them.

Numerous discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of asynchronous and synchronous learning resulted in the increased use of blended learning. Hrastinski (2008) suggests that instead of arguing about the benefits and limitations of asynchronous and synchronous e-learning, attention should be paid to when, why and how to use the different types of learning. Table 7 offers a summary of the features of both types of e-learning, accompanied by some examples.

³ <https://sites.google.com/a/lex2.org/williamsushistory/blended-learning-information>

Table 7 When, Why, and How to Use Asynchronous vs. Synchronous E-learning (Adapted from Hrastinsky 2008:54)

	Asynchronous E-learning	Synchronous E-learning
When?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflecting on complex issues • When synchronous meetings cannot be scheduled because of work, family, and other commitments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing less complex issues • Getting acquainted • Planning tasks
Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students have more time to reflect because the sender does not expect an immediate answer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students become more committed and motivated because a quick response is expected.
How?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use asynchronous means such as e-mail, discussion boards, and blogs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use synchronous means such as videoconferencing, instant messaging and chat, and complement with face-to-face meetings.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students expected to reflect individually on course topics may be asked to maintain a blog. • Students expected to share reflections regarding course topics and critically assess their peers' ideas may be asked to participate in online discussions on a discussion board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students expected to work in groups may be advised to use instant messaging as support for getting to know each other, exchanging ideas, and planning tasks. • A teacher who wants to present concepts from the literature in a simplified way might give an online lecture by videoconferencing.

The difference between asynchronous and synchronous e-learning may sometimes be minimal; for example, when e-mail is used continually, as was the case in this study, it may easily turn into a chat. Alternatively, when working in groups, especially at the stages of planning and activity, synchronous e-learning, for example, chat, can easily turn into discussion boards or blog writing (learning journals).

The Slovak e-learning course may be used either asynchronously as a self-paced course or synchronously as a virtual classroom (hence the students' name for the course: 'Virtual Slovak'), or it can be used in both ways at the same time, in so-called 'blended learning'. At the time of conducting this teaching experiment, all three types of learning – synchronous, asynchronous and blended – were employed. However, blended learning was regarded as the most efficient form of learning (Chapter 6.3.2; Chapter 7.3.4).

4 PEDAGOGICAL DEVELOPMENT: CONSIDERING THE LEARNERS' POINT OF VIEW

This chapter introduces the concepts which were most significant from the point of view of curriculum development and most relevant from the learners' point of view. These concepts, revisited in Chapter 5 of the present study, represent my 'teacher ideology'. They refer to students' approaches to learning: how they experienced their learning, how they perceived themselves as e-learners and how these perceptions affected their learning. As the focus is on the development of learners' communicative competence, this section also offers some thoughts on the concept of communicative competence.

In the light of activity theory (Engeström 1999; Chapter 3.1.3), according to which the main force for engaging in learning is the motives, the primary focus is on learners' motivation throughout the entire learning process. Learning is not successful without learners' commitment, without their engagement in learning, often referred to as agency. Here, therefore, I will also discuss the concept of learner agency and students' approaches to learning, which are evidently interrelated, explored through Entwistle's model of Approaches to learning (2001). The chapter will conclude with two of the most interesting concepts in the context of this study - language awareness, and language learning awareness. In my opinion, effective learning depends on learners' agency as manifested by motivation, and language learning awareness. To maintain and even raise agency and thus to enhance learning, the affordances, the preconditions for actions, must be created. In this context, the affordances are the learning environment, the option of e-learning (synchronous, asynchronous and blended) and the 'always present' teacher.

4.1 Communicative competence as a learning outcome?

One of the main aims of my teaching was to develop learners' communicative competence. The concept of communicative competence may be viewed from

both the learner's point of view, as the learner's personal learning outcome, a goal to be reached, and the teacher's point of view, as part of the curriculum, a course learning outcome. The aim and desired outcome of any learning approach and pedagogy is undoubtedly the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately in order to accomplish the set communication goals. Various definitions and descriptions of communicative competence, some of them more theoretical, some more grounded in applied linguistics, are offered in this section.

The US National Capital Language Resource Center (2007), whose goal is to support teachers' professional development and the dissemination and development of resources to enhance teacher expertise, defines communicative competence as "the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals" and states that communicative competence "may be regarded as the ultimate goal of language acquisition". According to the NCLRC, "the desired outcome of the language learning process is the ability to communicate competently, not the ability to use the language exactly as a native speaker does". Generally, communicative competence is seen as consisting of competence in four or five different areas. If four, then linguistic (knowing how to use the grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of a language), sociolinguistic (knowing how to use and respond to language appropriately), discourse (knowing how to interpret the larger context and how to construct longer stretches of language) and strategic (knowing how to recognize and repair communication break-downs and how to learn more about the language and the context). Thomas & Collier (1997) recognize four elements in communicative competence: grammatical competence, aimed at the structure of the language; sociolinguistic competence, which involves the use of the language for different audiences and different communicative purposes; discourse competence, which refers to connecting spoken and written utterances; and strategic competence, which means the use of the language for various communication goals. Communicative competence, then, is viewed as learners' linguistic and pragmatic knowledge about the language and their ability to create meaning in the target language (language performance). The concept of communicative competence in the context of this study may be equated with the concept of language proficiency (and language performance): it is the ability to communicate, to create meaning in the target language.

Newby (2011) distinguishes three hypotheses referring to the definition of competence. The first hypothesis is based on general acceptance of the view that language is a cognitive phenomenon and that use of a linguistic code (performance) is stored in the speaker's mind. This view also includes the Chomskyan language-specific view of competence and the theories of cognitive linguistics. The second hypothesis is based on recognizing a language not only as the subject of linguistic description but also as part of a speech community and culture. The third hypothesis offers a view of language as a chain of interactional processes by which human discourse is created and maintained (language use). In his article on competence and performance in learning and teaching, Newby (2011) refers to communicative competencies, which include intercultural

awareness and intercultural skills as well as cognitive categories of schematic knowledge. In his opinion, the action-oriented view of language is strongly focused on how competence becomes performance, so communicative activities are also performance activities.

Similarly, Pennycook (2010) views language as a social practice. He claims that “it is not language form that governs the speakers of the language but rather the speakers that negotiate what possible language forms they want to use for what purpose.” (Pennycook 2010: 129). In this light, he refers to competence as the “strategic capacity to use diverse semiotic items across integrated media and modalities” (Pennycook 2010: 129).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) defines communicative competence as “the sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions” (CEFR 2001: 9). In these terms, learners’ communicative competence consists of sociolinguistic, pragmatic (discourse and functional) and language (lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic) competence. The table below presents the descriptions of general language competencies in the CEFR.

Table 8 General language competence in the CEFR (2001)

Communicative language competence (CEFR 2.1.2, p.13)	
Linguistic competences: (subdivided into)	‘lexical, phonological, syntactic knowledge and skills and other dimensions of language as system’ (13).
Lexical competence (CEFR 5.2.1.1)	‘knowledge of, and ability to use, the vocabulary of a language, consists of lexical elements and grammatical elements’ (110)
Phonological competence (CEFR 5.2.1.4)	‘a knowledge of, and skill in the perception and production of: the sound-units (<i>phonemes</i>) of the language and their realization in particular contexts (<i>allophones</i>), etc. (116)
Orthographic competence (CEFR 5.2.1.5)	‘a knowledge of and skill in the perception and production of the symbols of which written texts are composed’ (117)
Sociolinguistic competences	‘refer to the sociocultural conditions of language use’ (...) ‘rules of politeness, norms governing behavior between generations, sexes, classes and social groups, linguistic codification of certain fundamental rituals in the functioning of a community’ (13)
Pragmatic competences: (subdivided into)	
Functional competences, (p.123)	‘relating to the communicative function of utterances’ (production of language functions, speech acts)
Discourse competences	‘the mastery of discourse, cohesion and coherence, the identification of text types and forms’ (13) ‘relating to the organizing and structuring of texts’ (...) ‘drawing on scenarios or scripts of interactional exchanges’ (123)

Communicative competence as described in the CEFR comprises three basic components: language, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence. The sub-components of these basic components, e.g. the lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competences as sub-components of language or linguistic competence, are defined explicitly, according to their contents and their applicability (Bagarić & Mihaljević Djigunović 2007). Sociolinguistic competence refers to the knowledge and skills needed for appropriate language use in a certain social context, with special emphasis on social relationships, rules of appropriate behaviour, differences in register and dialects. And finally, pragmatic competence includes two sub-components: discourse, and functional competence. In addition, Bagarić & Mihaljević Djigunović (2007: 99) introduce what they call planning competence, which refers to the “sequencing of messages in accordance with interactional and transactional schemata”. According to the CEFR, with planning competence the emphasis is on the appropriate employment of all types of communication strategies. The use of strategies may be compared to the application of metacognitive principles for various linguistic activities, for example, reception, interaction, production and mediating (Bagarić & Mihaljević Djigunović 2007).

If the perspective of social interaction is included, the most efficient learning occurs during ‘community development’ (Byram 1997; van Lier 1996), which is connected with the development of intercultural communicative competence (Basharina 2009; Žigová 2011; Pekarovičová 2002). Pekarovičová refers to intercultural or multicultural competence, which in addition to sensitivity to other cultures involves knowledge of the social-cultural background and historical experience reflected in the national / folk customs and traditions of the target language. She claims that in connection with the acquisition of Slovak as a foreign language, it is essential to acquire cultural competence - relevant cultural information (1997, 2002). Intercultural competence involves both relating to one’s own culture (positive self-representation) and relating to other / foreign culture(s). This calls for respect for other culture(s) and the ability to maintain intercultural contact through problem-solving skills and interactive, cooperative and tolerant behavior (Pekarovičová 2002: 21-22). Similarly, Newby (2009) and Bagarić & Mihaljević Djigunović (2007) also refer to the communicative competencies, which may include intercultural awareness and intercultural skills. In addition, they include the cognitive categories of schematic knowledge in their concept of communicative competence. Whatever definition or theory one accepts, learners’, communicative competence should be assessed by observing and testing learners’ communicative performance, but not all the components of communicative competence can be measured (Bagarić & Mihaljević Djigunović 2007).

According to Johnson’s model of SLA (2004), the foundation of second language competence lies in language use which takes place in a real social context, in the interaction between language competence (knowledge of the language) and performance (the skills of using the language in real or almost real life contexts). If this is the main goal, then the key question with e-learning is,

“How can computers be used effectively to promote the development of communicative L2 ability?” (Chapelle 2001 in Basharina 2009: 393). For Chapelle (2001:42), communicative competence includes “control over both form and function of the L2”. If the perspective of ‘social interaction’ is included, the most efficient learning takes place during ‘contingent interaction’ (van Lier 1996), when reaching the utmost symmetry of communication as to the geometry of turns and roles, familiar and less familiar topics or subjects of interaction, and the full participation and engagement of all participants. This ‘symmetry’ is sometimes referred to as ‘community development’ (Byram 1997). It is connected with the development of intercultural communicative competence and is manifested “in having knowledge and attitudes to sustain sensitivity to others with different origins and identities and using the skills of discovery and interpretation.” (Basharina 2009: 394).

If a language is perceived to be a result of semiotic activity, which enables learners to engage in meaning-making activities through which they may organize and control their behaviour, then the concept of competence may be seen as the tool of social or semiotic mediation (Holland & Lachicotte 2007).

In contrast to the generally accepted concept of competence and performance, Tarone (1987) offers the model of variable competence, which does not differentiate between competence and performance. Tarone claims that “capability” underlines performance and that this heterogeneous “knowledge”, which is internally consistent and describable, varies by speech style. This in turn is related to the nature of the task being undertaken by the student, the interlocutor, and the topic (Tarone 1987: 35-40 in Fulcher 1995: 26). In other words, there is no “homogenous competence” comprising all of language performance, but one “heterogeneous” competence (the term ‘capability’ used by Tarone), which refers to the specific manifestation of language performance in the real world (Tarone 1987; Ellis 1986).

To sum up, in the context of this study, the achievement of communicative competence by students of Slovak set up as a learning goal fits into a concept of communicative competence based on interaction between language competence (knowledge of the language) and performance (the skills needed to use the language in real or almost real life contexts). Slovak students’ communicative competence was one of the main pedagogical goals of the development of the teaching material discussed in this study. Discussion of the communicative competence from the viewpoint of the learners’ and teacher’s experiences continues in Chapter 6, Sections 2 and 3.

4.2 Developing learner agency?

The focus of this section is on learners’ agency, a driving engine of efficient learning, and the concepts that support its development: motivation and awareness. The concept of the learning environment is important here as, according to van Lier (2004; 2010, a motivating, inspiring learning environment is

a major affordance of efficient learning. Affordances, which may be viewed from different aspects – cultural, social, and cognitive – are central to this study; they are perceived as a tool that facilitates learning, engaging and motivating the learners through culture, knowledge, social encounters, etc. Affordances promote further actions, reveal the meaning and lead to higher levels of interaction.

Agency may be defined in many ways. Basharina (2009), for example, sees agency as an active approach to learning, which can reflect learners' responsibility to keep track of what they learn. This kind of accountability may be understood as self-directed learning (Chapelle 1997). However, even though agency and motivation are often intertwined, agency is not the same as motivation or autonomy (self-directedness) in learning, although they can both be regarded as representations of agency. There is definitely a clear connection between agency and self-directedness in learning, because significant progress (moving forward) in language learning may be observed only if the learner employs agency in a self-directed way (van Lier 2010). On the other hand, learner autonomy cannot be developed without learner agency and ownership (van Lier 2007; Blin & Jalkanen 2014). Ownership in learning is a key component of the readiness to learn which, according to Conley and French (2014), consists of motivation and engagement, goal orientation and self-direction, self-efficacy and self-confidence, metacognition and self-monitoring, and persistence.

Van Lier considers agency to be one of the key concepts in learning. He believes that the employment of agency depends significantly on the learning environment and on an agency-promoting curriculum (van Lier 2010). "The employment of agency depends on a learning conducive environment that allows and instigates a diversity of manifestations of agency at different levels. The creation of such an environment is a major task of pedagogy" (van Lier 2010: 5). Following van Lier (2010), in the context of this study, agency is perceived as progress (moving forward), commitment, engagement, a driving force leading to taking action, a change of state or direction or even as the lack of movement where movement is expected. Van Lier (2008:1) claims that "learning depends on the activity and the initiative of the learner, more so than on any "inputs" that are transmitted to the learner by a teacher or a textbook". This might well be expanded to include language learning websites, multimedia tools, or any technology-enhanced language learning environment.

Emphasizing the significance of affordances in learning, clues in the environment that indicate the possibilities for action in the learning context - tools facilitating the learning and making it more interesting and pleasant - van Lier refers to such scholars as Comenius, Montessori and Vygotsky. Comenius, a pioneer of pedagogy in his time, understood that students would not learn anything if they were not interested in what they were supposed to learn. He suggested various ways of engaging students' interest and increasing their motivation to learn. In his famous work *Didactica Magna* (1638), *The Great Didactics*, he stressed the importance of interactive instruction, where students become the teachers and teachers become the students, which is in line with the role of the

teacher in a constructivist learning environment (Chapter 6.3.5). Montessori's educational approach (2008), based on a constructivist 'discovery' model, offers students affordances which enable learning through working with materials and interacting with their environment rather than by direct instruction.

In his search for a definition of agency, van Lier (2008) points to three features of agency: the learner's initiative or self-regulation; interdependence, i.e., the fact that agency mediates and is mediated by the sociocultural context; and finally, an awareness of responsibility for one's own actions in the learning environment. In his opinion, there are some key issues related to agency that should be considered in the design of curricula. They include initiative (the learner's contributions in classroom interaction, often synonymous with self-directedness), perception, identity, and contingency (incentive learning; positive reinforcement). To clarify the concept of agency, van Lier also offers some binary oppositions. He summarizes some of the dichotomies and examines how they influence language learning. While deliberate or incidental learning is not related to agency, the dichotomy of autonomy-dependence is closely related to agency, as both autonomy and dependence (interdependence) require the learners' engagement. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are also related to agency in many ways, but it is difficult to determine which motivation is related to agency to what extent, as learning is always a mix of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors (van Lier 1996). Self-regulated and other-regulated, and self-initiated and controlled activity are terms derived from Vygotsky's development theory (1980), and they show clear evidence of agency in terms of reaching up to the higher functional levels through interaction in the ZPD.

Dufva & Aro (2015) offer a dialogical view of learners' agency, based on Bakhtin's dialogism (Chapter 3.1.2). They see agency as a dialogical phenomenon "that needs to be examined both as subjectively experienced and as collectively emergent" (Dufva & Aro 2015:38). Learners are viewed as real participants in the interaction, with their own relationships and experiences related to particular time and space. Dufva (2014) places agency in the frame of language learning, which she sees as a process of 'recycling linguistic resources', which is in line with Bakhtin's idea of appropriation (Bakhtin 1981). Bakhtin claims that "the word in language is half someone else's. It becomes one's "own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language... but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own" (Bakhtin 1992: 294). Thus, learner agency arises in the interplay of a range of different factors. Ahearn (2011) points to the sociocultural approaches to agency, focused mainly on the use of sociocultural mediation. Even though these approaches are close to the dialogical approach, they lack the individual's viewpoint (Sullivan & McCarthy 2004).

Seppälä and Bergroth-Koskinen (2012), in their study on the adoption of a design-based research approach to examine learning in authentic contexts in

their teaching, also underline the multimodal nature of agency. They view agency as evolving and emerging in various ways according to the various learning situations.

Agreeing with van Lier, Duff (2012: 15) defines agency as “people’s ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals, leading, potentially, to personal or social transformation”. Agency is learners’ ability to perform new roles and identities, for example, L2 or multi-lingual proficiency, and to take “concrete actions in pursuit of their goals” (Duff 2012: 15). In their recent study on agency and second language socialization (LS) research, Duff & Doherty (2015) point to the interaction between agency and LS reflected in the self-directed socialization often visible in online self-study courses. The interaction may be the result of learners bringing their language learner agency into play. As a result, learners may develop ‘a rejective agency’, which can lead to the decision not to invest time in some parts of the language and/or culture they are learning. This kind of selectiveness allows learners to remove themselves from learning contexts in which they might not be able to take control over their learning process. This type of agency is interesting, as some students of Slovak have also expressed a rejective attitude towards learning Slovak, which they thought they might not need in the future, due to the priority of other languages, other studies, and so on.

4.3 Language (learning) awareness in e-learning?

In the context of this study, awareness means awareness of the *language* that is being learned or acquired, of its specific features and its relation to other languages, as well as awareness (consciousness) of *learning* the language. Language awareness is defined as “explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use” (The Association for Language Awareness, ALA. It includes knowledge of the culture represented by the target language (Dufva 1994a). The increase in language learning awareness through writing, and particularly through writing by hand, has been one of the most interesting findings of this study (Chapter 6.2.2).

Dufva (1994b), in her article on the language and cultural awareness of language learners, points to the interactional element in language awareness. She looks at language awareness not only from the linguistic point of view, but also from the viewpoint of pragmatics and social discourse. In her opinion, cultural awareness is as important as awareness of the language being learned. Language awareness may be the same as learners’ ability to reflect on the language learned and on themselves as learners, and to recognize the similarities and differences between languages.

Bilash & Tulasiewicz (1995) regard language awareness as a key concept of the learner-centred classroom. According to Bilash & Tulasiewicz (1995:49), language awareness is the integration of four elements: “content about lan-

guage, language skills, attitudinal education and metacognitive opportunities, which allow the student to reflect on the process of language acquisition, learning and language use".

What affects learners' language awareness? What do learners become aware of – which specific features of the target language? What has an impact on their learning awareness? The answer may easily be "motivation", hence the close relatedness of these concepts. Dufva (1994) points to 'everyday knowledge' and amongst the sources of this knowledge she numbers learners' personal experiences related, possibly, to the target language or even to a language related to the target language, to learners' views of the language itself as well as of learning the language, and also to 'common knowledge', sociocultural views about the language and the target culture. For the cultural and language awareness of the students of Slovak, see Chapter 7.

With the arrival of technology-enhanced language learning, awareness research has turned its attention to the concept of language awareness in learning through online media. In addition to its presentation in authentic communication, the language is often presented in its cultural setting, which results in more knowledge and awareness of both the language and the culture. The use of various reflective tools, e.g. learner logs or blogs, has also increased language awareness. However, the greatest impact on the development of language awareness and of *language learning awareness* has been observed through writing (Chapter 6.2.2), since the most interesting aspect of online language communication is the relationship between writing and speech (Palfreyman 2007), especially the mix of registers, for example, in the use of CMC (Computer-assisted Communication). Synchronous media use primarily informal, conversational language, e.g. chat, while asynchronous media such as email and discussion boards prefer the use of the written language, which enables the reading and re-reading of texts. Chatrooms enable the reading and even the saving of contributions, thus "in terms of syntactic complexity and lexical density, online communication falls between the norms of speech and writing" (Warschauer 1996 in Palfreyman 2007: 3). In addition to affording the use of authentic communication either face-to face or through multimedia, computer-assisted communication offers various possibilities for presenting the language in a cultural context and of reflecting on one's learning process in learner logs or learning journals, all of which can increase learners' language learning awareness (Farabaugh 2007).

Kennedy & Trofimovich (2010), in their study on language awareness and L2 pronunciation, bring up the question of the relationship between language awareness and language development. They observed that as learners become more proficient in pronunciation they become more sensitive towards some special characteristics of speech. On the other hand, learners' increased awareness of special speech issues (in the context of the study) can even be incorporated into their pronunciation. The authors do not say whether language awareness precedes language development, but they do claim that if language awareness is an inseparable part of language development, then it can be used

as an indicator of the learners' level of development. The same may hold for other language skills.

To sum up, language awareness is the key concept of the learner-centred classroom. It is not only awareness of the language itself (explicit knowledge about the language), but also sensitivity towards the use of the language (the social and pragmatic aspect of language use). It is also awareness of the culture represented by the target language (cultural awareness, Dufva 1994a). When accompanied by an awareness of learning (language learning awareness), for example, through writing and reflecting, it becomes a major tool for raising learners' agency, the final outcome of which may be an overall increase in communicative competence.

4.4 Enhancing learner motivation in e-learning?

Another concept related to planning and implementing an e-learning course is learners' motivation. Motivation is often related to agency and can refer to either successful or unsuccessful learning. Motivation has been investigated and defined by numerous scholars. Schunk (1995), for example, in his study on the relation of self-efficacy and motivation in the cognitive and sports context, perceives motivation as a process that influences what we learn, how we learn and when we choose to learn. Motivated learners are most probably actively engaged; they adopt a deep approach to learning and show enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity (Schunk 2008). Motivation in learning may be connected with learners' cognitive and affective processes, such as their thoughts, beliefs, and goals, and it emphasizes the situated, interactive relationship between the learner and the learning environment (Brophy 2010; Hartnett & St. George 2011).

Similarly, in activity theory, which emphasizes the conscious goal-orientedness and externalization / internalization of activities (Engeström 1999; Chapter 3.1.3), amongst other factors, the main force for engaging in learning is motivation. Motives not only affect the outcomes of learning but also determine the conditions under which the learning goals are implemented; they also directly or indirectly affect especially the spatial and temporal circumstances of learning, i.e. where and when to learn (Johnson 2004; Schunk 2008).

Motivation theories offer explanations as to why humans behave as they do (Dörnyei 1996). As this is one of the most fundamental questions that we can ask, the answer cannot be straightforward. In this section, I will briefly look at goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham 1994), the concept of linguistic self-confidence (Clément 1977; Noels et al 1997) and Williams and Burden's framework of motivation in language learning (1997). Finally, I will introduce Dörnyei's (1996) main motivational dimensions underlying thirteen L2 motivation constructs (motivational orientations).

Norris-Holt (2001) defines motivation in language learning as the learner's orientation to the goal of learning a second language. According to Dörnyei

(2012:117), motivation provides “the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process.” (hence the suitability of the mountain-climbing metaphor for learning a language). From the process-oriented cognitive perspective (Pintrich & Schunk 1996), motivation is the result of various mental processes that lead to the initiation and maintenance of an action. Goals may be seen as engines driving actions and providing the direction of actions. According to Locke & Latham’s goal setting theory (Locke 1994; Locke & Latham 1995), people’s commitment to achieving a goal is enhanced by their belief in the possibility and importance of achieving that particular goal. This theory is reconcilable with expectancy-value theory, according to which the main issue is not what motivates people, but rather what shapes their inner motivation. Goal orientation theory, on the other hand, underlines two goal orientations: the mastery orientation (‘task involvement’ or ‘learning goals’), which is focused on learning the content, and a performance orientation, which is focused on getting good grades or demonstrating ability. These theories are in accordance with Entwistle’s (2001) approaches to learning (Chapter 4.5; Chapter 6.3.3).

I find the concept of linguistic self-confidence (Clémens et al. 1977) and especially its connection to motivation very relevant for the teaching of Slovak. Linguistic self-confidence is described as “self-perceptions of communicative competence and concomitant low levels of anxiety in using the second language” (Noels et al. 1996:248). The concept of linguistic self-confidence has also been extended to some motivational sub-systems in language learning situations where there is minimal direct contact with members of the L2 community but significant indirect contact with the L2 culture, for example, through the media, Internet, etc. (Clémens et al. 1994; Dörnyei, 2012). This has been the case with Slovak instruction in Finland, when often the only person representing Slovak is the teacher, with now and then some Slovak exchange students. The teacher’s efforts to motivate new students to begin to study Slovak or then to continue their studies have not always been successful. On the other hand, even though the numbers of students of Slovak have generally been low, their motivation to learn Slovak has often been high: despite the various constraints, they have managed to learn a lot about Slovakia and Slovak culture, as shown, for example, by the translations of Slovak fiction into Finnish (Chapter 2.3).

Dörnyei’s model of L2 motivation (1994) is composed of a set of motivational components, including the learner’s motivational strategies and group cohesiveness. Dörnyei divides the motivational components into three main categories: The Language Level, The Learner Level, and The Learning Situation Level. The third of these, the Learning Situation Level, is related to various aspects of language learning, for example, the syllabus, teaching materials and teaching methods, learning tasks, etc. One of the most important factors that affects the degree of learners’ motivation is the teacher’s enthusiasm and commitment (Chapter 6.4).

Several attempts have been made to extend Dörnyei’s framework of motivational components and to summarize them (Williams & Burden 1997; Trem-

blay & Gardner 1995). Learning involves both cognitive and social / interactional aspects and, as such, it is always the result of several factors - personal, emotional, collective and rational - and is always affected by learners' personal and /or professional histories. Gillette (1994), in her study on the role of L2 learners', claims that learners' personal orientation towards learning a particular language affects their approach to learning this language. Interestingly, she continues that if the motives behind the learning activities are different, the learning processes of both effective and less effective (or ineffective) learners are also different, even though the outcome of the learning activities may look the same. Undoubtedly, many teachers of less commonly taught languages could confirm her claim.

From the viewpoint of technology-enhanced language learning, an interesting issue is the impact of the new language learning environments on learners' motivation. Ushioda (2005) explored the role of learners' attitudes and motivation in L2 learning in the context of an online language course. The study provides evidence of the relationship between learners' motivation and the development of their language proficiency in technology-enhanced language learning environments. Learners with 'positive' motivation and attitudes managed to control their own studies in both the face-to-face and independent learning sessions, when working alone. The results of their learning were in accordance with their effort; they had good learning results. Ushioda also pays attention to the teacher's role in the motivational process. Teacher-specific motivational components were considered to be crucial in student evaluations of the learning situations in the online courses. The results emphasize the teacher's significant influence on students' motivation: they show that teachers can be influential in affecting students' motivation and creating a favourable, anxiety-free learning community. However, some of the disadvantages of online learning have to be recognized, such as the reduction in teacher-student interaction and the limitations on the use of teaching strategies generally used in traditional classes to get students engaged in learning (Trotter 2002; Ushioda 2005; Chapter 6.3).

4.5 Learners' approaches to learning: deep, surface or strategic?

Finally, the purpose of my study was to explore students' approaches to learning Slovak - whether they learn and how they learn - drawing on Entwistle's model of Approaches to Learning (Entwistle 2001). The term 'approach to learning' was first introduced by Marton and his colleagues (Marton & Säljö 1976; Marton & Booth 1997). According to Entwistle's (2001) model, students' agency, i.e. students' engagement or commitment to learning, is manifested through the use of *deep, surface or strategic approaches to learning*.

The first of these, the *deep approach to learning*, refers to learners' active engagement with the subject matter to be learned (Entwistle & Ramsden 1983). Already in the 1970s, Biggs (1976) and Ramsden (1979), in their study of stu-

dents' everyday learning behaviours, identified the second approach, an *achieving* or *strategic approach* to learning, which was characterized by a strong need for achievement: these students wanted to be successful in their studies and get the best grades, and they feared failure. The third concept, the *surface approach to learning*, indicates rote learning and reproducing what has been learned without really understanding or thinking about it. These concepts are closely connected with the impact of intentions and motivation on learning (Chapter 4.4).

Using cluster analyses of learners' motivation and personality, Entwistle identified 'contrasting' types of learners. He claims that each approach to learning is related to a specific kind of motivation - "intrinsic (deep), extrinsic and fear of failure (surface) and need for achievement (strategic)" (Entwistle 2001: 596) - and is characteristic of a specific kind of personality. According to Entwistle, learners motivated by the need for achievement are often stable and self-confident, maybe even ruthless. Intrinsic motivation is related to 'syllabus-freedom and independent thinking' and fear of failure may be linked to syllabus constraints and anxiety (Entwistle 2001). He also claims that learners' approaches to learning are primarily affected by their personal and educational histories. To a large extent they are also affected by the content and context of the tasks, which may lead to the employment of specific learning strategies in different learning situations (Entwistle 2001). Here again the emphasis is put on both the content and context of tasks (Chapter 4.1 Task-based learning).

The results of a study carried out by Duff et al (2004) aimed at exploring the relationship between personality, approach to learning and academic performance, indicate that the deep approach correlates positively with extraversion and the need to experience something new, and negatively with neuroticism. While the strategic approach also correlates positively with extraversion and conscientiousness and negatively with neuroticism, the surface approach is associated with neuroticism and agreeableness (Duff et al; 8).

Basharina (2009) adapted Entwistle's model to explore the role of agency in learning in international online learning environments through asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC). Through the discourse and content analyses of students' input (messages), she explored students' communication and observed their learning. The analyses, complemented by interviews, revealed students' degree of motivation and, finally, their approach to learning. She also examined students' cultural background, and how students from different cultures use computers in their interactions. In her study, she refers to Thorne's term, 'culture-of-use', which is defined as "historically sedimented characteristics that accrue to a CMC tool from its everyday use" (Thorne 2003: 40). This concept was taken into consideration in the observation of two groups of students of Slovak: an almost fully homogenous group with just one 'outsider', a Polish student, and minimal experience of e-learning, and a heterogeneous group with four international students and some experience of e-learning (Chapter 6).

Basharina's model showed that students with the deep approach to learning use more effective learning strategies, search for meaning, and generally

benefit most from learning. Students with the strategic approach to learning put consistent effort into learning. They provide themselves with the right conditions for study as well as good learning materials, and monitor the effectiveness of their learning strategies (Thorne 2008). Due to their good organizational skills, they generally cope with time pressures and achieve good grades. Students with the surface approach usually have difficulty making sense of new ideas presented on the course and generally do not reflect on their learning, as their intention is mainly to cope with the syllabus requirements. They perceive the course as unrelated bits of knowledge and see little value in the learning activities. They also often suffer from stress caused by the lack of time and planning. According to Basharina's model, learning is a result of a complex interrelationship between the affordances and /or constraints of the learning environment (physical or virtual) and the learner's agency.

Deep approaches to learning underline the socio-constructivist approach to learning, building knowledge on previously learned matter, searching for patterns, being aware of one's learning process and finally becoming interested in learning a new language, Slovak. The strategic approach to learning emphasizes the consistency of effort put into studying, as reflected in the metaphor of learning as climbing. Basharina's model of approaches to learning (2009), adapted from Entwistle (2001), has been adapted to investigate the approaches of students of Slovak to learning a new language, in the case of the present study, Slovak, in an e-learning environment (Section 6.3.3).

5 THE E-LEARNING COURSE AND TEACHING EXPERIMENT

This chapter introduces the pedagogical experiment - the Slovak e-learning course: the course design, layout and course content - and the research carried out to evaluate the experiment. A description of the course is followed by the ideology of the course, based on the metaphor of climbing. Finally, after introducing the participants in the experiment, I will present the research questions and methods of collecting and analysing the data.

5.1 Course design: Mountain-climbing metaphor for learning new languages

The Slovak e-learning course is designed to form a bridge between self-directed, open and task-based learning. Its primary aim is to increase the development of learners' overall communicative competence and learner agency. E-learning can be viewed as a tool, and as a simulated activity system in which learners perform the actions or operations. In the light of this design, an effective e-learning environment should be rich in activities, with a range of tools that support performance, and resources that enable the learners to retrieve different community practices and maintain learners' engagement and motivation (Johnson 2004; van Lier 2004). Thus, the focus is on the learning environment, which creates favourable conditions for sustainable learning and thus motivates students for further learning. Heick (2014) suggests that an efficient learning environment should provide learners with various sources of information and should create favourable conditions for community learning. Moreover, various models for learning should be used, such as enquiry-based, project-based, or task-based, each of which requires specific learning styles and habits, and should promote curiosity, persistence, flexibility, the ability to prioritize, creativity, collaboration and revision. (Chapter 6.2.1)

The curriculum design model for the Slovak e-learning course follows Biggs's constructive alignment, according to which all the elements of teaching, the design of the curriculum, expected learning outcomes, teaching methods, tasks, and assessment procedure, are aligned to each other and turned into learning activities. As the focus of the constructivist pedagogical approach is always on doing, the learning and teaching activities are placed in the very centre of the process (Chapter 3.2.2).

As Lantolf & Thorne (2006) claim, although all learners are generally involved in the same learning activity, cognitively they are not engaged in the same way. Their level of engagement is determined by their motives, which shape their orientation to learn. The orientation to learn is dynamic and flexible and learners function as active agents who are able to direct their activities in specific ways, according to their own objectives, motivations and histories (Coughlan & Duff 1994). The e-learning environment for Slovak was shaped accordingly, following the idea of learning as climbing a mountain (dynamics of learning). All the participants – the teacher and the students - were involved in the learning process (Chapter 5). The idea of expansive learning was implemented by 'stands', standing for a recap after every 'camp'. Thus new matter was acquired after ensuring that what had already been learned had been examined and reviewed (the recap metaphor) (Chapter 5.1).

The physical setting of the e-learning course is the website of the Slovak High Tatra Mountains, which illustrates and supports the idea of learning Slovak as climbing a mountain. The metaphor of climbing also suggests the challenges of teaching Slovak as one of the less commonly taught languages (LCTL), indicating not only the difficulty of climbing, but also the various external constraints that can endanger the learning. In this context, the teacher is not only a climbing guide, but also a climber, who is also constantly in danger but who attempts to reach the summit with the students. The choice of the Tatra Mountains also refers to the teacher's knowledge and former experiences of mountain climbing.

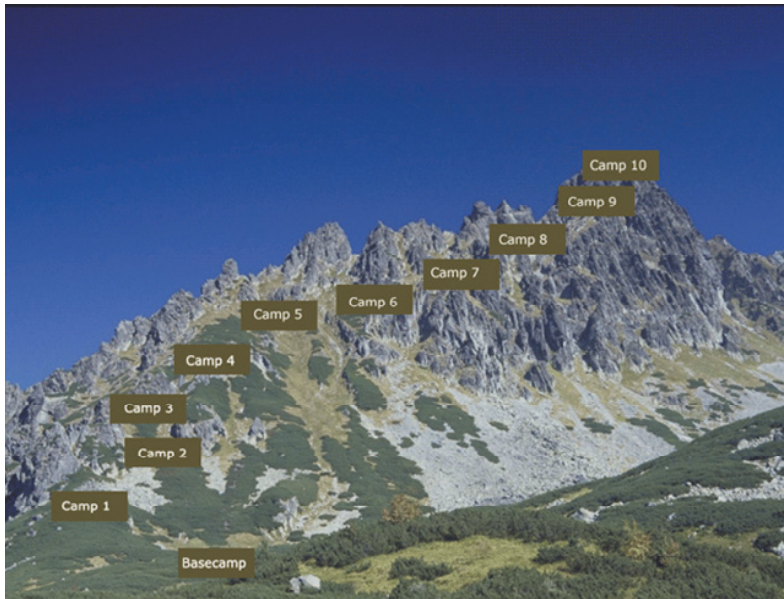


Figure 7 Layout of Slovak e-learning course

The course consists of 10 camps, each of which corresponds to two traditional units in a textbook. In accordance with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the goal of the curriculum (the content of the camps) is to reach proficiency levels A1-B1. The starting point is the Base Camp, which provides basic information about the Slovak language – its phonemic, morphological and lexicological system as well as the pragmatics (social use) of Slovak. Camps 1-3 are equivalent to proficiency level A1, Camps 4-6 to A2, and Camps 7-10 to level B1. The learning outcomes for each camp are introduced on the start page of the camp in the form of ‘can do’ / ‘know how to do’ statements. Table 9 presents a description of the learning outcomes.

Table 9 Learning outcomes according to proficiency levels

Camp/ CEFR Proficiency Level	Learning outcomes according to proficiency levels (CEFR 2001)
Base Camp A0-A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know how to greet and use some basic phrases. • I can count up to ten. • I learn about the Slovak language. • I know how to pronounce some ‘difficult’ sounds. • I know when to use ‘ty’ (‘you’) and when to use ‘vy’ (polite ‘you’). • I know when to write ‘i’ or ‘y’ after the neutral consonants.
Camp 1 A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can introduce my friends and myself. • I can form the simple questions and answers. • I can count from 10 up.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can use the verbs, even the negative forms. • I can use the pronominal and form the Nominative Case. • I know the names of the countries, inhabitants and languages. • I can use the particles 'aj', 'tiež' (also) and 'ani' (neither). • I understand why the vowels in the middle of words disappear
Camp 2 A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can talk about my family and myself. • I can talk with my friends, when I meet them. • I can order something to eat and drink. • I know how to form feminine nouns from the masculine. • I can use the Accusative. • I know how to express the action. • I can use various adjectives and their opposites (antonyms). • I can form the possessive adjectives. • I know how to use prepositions of place and direction.
Camp 3 A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can tell where and how I live and what I have at home. • I know the names of colours and I can read a poem about colours. • I know how to form the Local Case. • I can say what I shall do. • I can use more prepositions. • I can ask the way and I can tell the way (orientation).
Camp 4 A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can tell what the time is and I can ask about the time. • I can talk about my daily routines and I can plan my leisure time. • I can talk about the seasons of the year, my summer and winter hobbies. • I can use ordinal numbers. • I can use some negative, indefinite and reflexive pronominal. • I know how 'double negation' is used in Slovak, like in all Slavic languages. • I know how to use the verb 'ísť' (to go).
Camp 5 A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this camp, I travel to Slovakia. I visit my Slovak friends and we go for a trip. I learn about the sights to see in Slovakia. • I can buy train / bus tickets. • I know how to use the demonstratives 'sem' (here) and 'tam' (there). • I can talk about the past. Fortunately, there is only one form of the Preterit in Slovak! • I can use the Instrumental Case. • I know how I can express possessive suffixes. • I can use more verbs.
Camp 6 A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this camp, I go to the restaurant, cafe and bakery shop. • I can reserve a table / place and order something to eat and drink. • Thanks to the menu, I know what to order. • I understand verbal aspect and the conditional. • I learn about Slovak cuisine, especially about traditional Slovak meals. Thanks to the recipes, I can even try to make some of them myself. • I can use the phrases that are more colloquial.

Camp 7 B1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I go shopping in the shopping mall <i>Pohoda</i>. • I can buy some food, clothes, books, cosmetics and finally I can rest in the cafe <i>Kávičkár</i>. • I can form the Genitive Case and reflexive Passive Voice.
Camp 8 B1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can talk about how I feel. • I can talk about the health and diseases. • I can go to the doctor's and pharmacy. • I know the names of the body parts. • I get to know hospital / Health Care Centre vocabulary. • I can use the Dative Case and Imperative. • I know how to express repeated action. • I know how to say '<i>get something done</i>'.
Camp 9 B1T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I visit Bratislava and go on a sightseeing tour. • I visit the zoo and learn the names of animals. • I understand all that I hear about Slovakia. • I can talk about Finland • I can create the comparative and superlative! • I know when to use capital letters in Slovak. • I know how to use the indefinite numerals '<i>mnoho / mnohí, -é</i>' (a lot, many), '<i>jeden, jedna, jedno / jedni, jedny</i>' (one) <i>koľko / koľkí, -é</i>' (how much, how many), '<i>tol'ko / tol'kí, -é</i>' (so much, so many), '<i>niekoľko / niekoľkí, -é</i>' (some) and '<i>obidvaja, obidva, obidve / obaja, oba, obe</i>' (both).
Camp 10 B1	<p style="text-align: center;">I am finally at the top of the mountain!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I repeat all that I have learned. • I practise reading and listening to an abstract text. • I remember things in the past and I can make plans for the future. • I learn some abstract words, especially words related to nature and protection of the environment. • Finally, I listen to Mikko's, the Finnish musician's, Slovak song <i>Nedorozumenia</i> (Misunderstandings). Mikko has made the song himself - the text and, music and he even plays and sings the song!

Table 10 offers a more specific description of the course content: lexical and linguistic items, including the 'Bonus' section.

Table 10 Description of course content

CAMP	Topics, lexical items	Linguistic items	'Bonus'
Base Camp	Information about Slovakia first greetings and numerals 0-10	Basic information about Slovak, phonemic, morphological and lexicological system. Pragmatic aspect: 'polite you' ('Vy');	Information about Slovak language.
Camp 1	Introducing oneself, getting to know each other; first phrases; first questions and answers; numerals from 10 up	Verb conjugation Noun declension Negative verb forms Nominative Case Vocal alternation Particles 1	Names of countries, languages and inhabitants
Camp 2	Family, friends, study Visiting friends Requesting food and drinks Expressing 'likes' and 'dislikes'	Formation of feminine nouns from masculine nouns; The Accusative Case Verb classes Possessive Adjectives	First prepositions: spatial information
Camp 3	Living City & countryside Places & Colours	The Locative Case; Modal verbs The Future Tense	More prepositions: orientation in space and time
Camp 4	What time is it? Scheduling, planning Holiday, leisure & hobbies Daily planner	Ordinal numbers Irregular verbs 1 Indefinite, negative and reflexive pronominals	Slovak negation Verb 'ísť (to go, to walk) & 'ísť (to attend)
Camp 5	Visiting Slovakia Travelling: booking & buying tickets Inquiry	Demonstrative pronominal Particles The Past Tense The Instrumental Case	Possessive suffixes Irregular verbs 2
Camp 6	Food & meals Restaurant, café, pub Polite phrases	Verbal category of aspect and mood	Slovak cuisine Cooking recipes
Camp 7	Shopping	The Genitive Case Reflexive Passive Voice Word formation	Food and drinks: extended vocabulary
Camp 8	Health and diseases State of mind Doctor's appointment At the pharmacy	The Dative Case The Imperative Mood	Names of body parts Hospital 'dať niečo urobiť (to get something done)
Camp 9	Visiting Bratislava Sightseeing Basic information about Slovakia and Finland	The Comparative and Superlative Capital letters	Indefinite numerals; Animal names
Camp 10	Recap The past and the future Nature protection, living and work environment		Abstract and poetic vocabulary Song <i>Nedorozumenia</i> (Misunderstandings)

Each camp includes three to four texts, which are accompanied by recordings of the texts and vocabulary lists (alphabetical and thematic). Language sections are divided into sub-sections, each of which is focused on different linguistic items, all of them to some extent related to the camp topics. 'Grammar' (language issues) is taught implicitly. For example, the Genitive Case, one of the greatest challenges for students of Slovak as a foreign language, is learned within the topic of shopping and preparing food, and the use of countable and uncountable nouns and the Partitive Case are connected with the amount of ingredients or selling / buying things.

'Bonus' sections offer some interesting linguistic or lexical features, for example, a list of names of animals, including the feminine and neuter forms for young animals. The section called Dangerous (Hazardous) places is devoted to issues generally regarded as tricky or difficult, for example, the vocal alternation characteristic of Slovak and other Slavic languages, or Slavic 'double negation'.

The Task section offers a variety of tasks. The language-focused tasks are tutored by the computer (the Answer key is included). However, most of the tasks are communicative and based on the learners' own performance (dialogues, simulations, letters, invitations for a visit or a party, story-telling, presentations, fairy tales etc.).

Student folders are 'hidden' behind the symbol of a mountain cabin, the symbol of safety and privacy, which leads students to the resource-based platform, Optima (Chapter 5.2.2). Each camp includes computer-as-tool tools: online dictionaries, grammar checkers and other useful topic-related links.

Mountain climbing is an activity that demands continuous care and concentration, given the various external dangers that may lead to a fall. Climbing is described as a process aimed at reaching a summit and thus it can also be used to characterize the process of learning a less commonly taught language: proceeding slowly, sometimes with difficulties, but with the clear aim of reaching the top of the mountain - being able to communicate. Climbing, like language learning, is a process that takes place in stages. The purpose of this study is to reflect on the learners' step-by-step progress.

Climbing generally takes place in pairs or groups of three. However, solo climbing is also possible, even though the risk of falling (dropping out of the course) is greater. However, peer climbing (peer, collaborative learning, learning in a group) is safer. One of the most important issues is the use of appropriate climbing gear (course tools: learning materials). When climbing alone, different climbing techniques (learning strategies) are employed (individual learning vs. community learning or peer learning/ learning in pairs or groups). Climbers must be familiar with the terrain (awareness of learning; consciousness of what is learned and how it is learned) and must have a clear plan of how to proceed (learning path/ learning plan). They must be committed to what they are doing; engagement in climbing is an essential part of success (learner agency). Every rope length increases the climbers' motivation to proceed upwards and reach new, more challenging terrain (upgraded motivation).

Learners can proceed at their own pace. Although progress may at times be slow, it should always be evident. Whatever learning strategies are employed, the aim is always the same: to get from the lower camp to a higher one. Before starting a new 'pitch length of rope' (a new unit), a safe point has to be reached. The metaphor of 'safe stands' corresponds with the idea of a recap (a test; revision) after every camp (making sure that the matter to be learned has indeed been learned).

Symbols of climbing are part of the course layout. The rope symbolizes the structures – reeling off the rope illustrates penetrating into the secrets of language structures. Good rope should be dynamic, flexible, totally reliable, aimed at the best possible performance.

Practice sessions (tasks) are illustrated by abseiling - climbing downwards or backwards - which corresponds to the recaps, the retrieval of what has already been learned. Dangerous (treacherous) places - representing those aspects of what has to be learned that are generally regarded as difficult - are denoted by warning signs. A mountain cabin, in other words, a shelter, a safe place, is the symbol for the student's own folder, situated on the resource-based platform Optima.






	Abseiling: recap, repetition, practice sessions, tasks.
	Topic-related websites.
	Full-length reel of rope: dynamic and reliable. Language structures
	Mountain cabin: shelter; student's 'own place'.
	A sling: grammar

Figure 8 Symbols of Climbing

Planning, familiarizing oneself with the terrain (course), proceeding from easier to more difficult, and the continuous improvement of one's climbing skills, fits with the idea of spiral learning: learners expand their skills and learn something new in each learning session. Learners can stay in one camp for as long as they wish to or need to (sequential learning), and after mastering each topic they can either continue or return to what they have learned before (Chapter 3).

Figure 9 offers the view of the opening website of the camp.

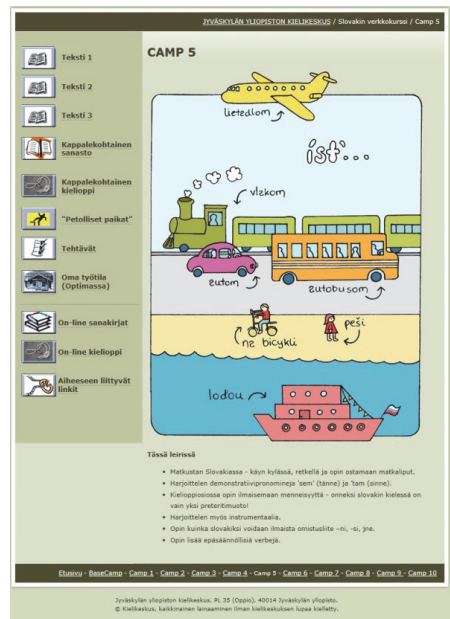


Figure 9 The Camp's introductory website

One of the most important climbing aids is a good climbing guide that includes detailed instructions for a particular climbing route. The guide not only describes the route but also offers some suggestions and practical advice on how to proceed. The metaphor of a climbing guide may be applied to the instructions for e-learning: how to proceed, for example, if a learner's motivation fails, if the task seems too difficult, and so on. The main website includes an explanation of the symbols, detailed descriptions of the content of each website / each camp, as well as instructions on how to proceed in the case of distance learning.

In 2008, just when the pilot stage of the Slovak e-learning course was getting underway, a Language Centre project was launched aimed at the development of learner autonomy and the integration of new language learning environments into teaching and learning. The aim was to apply multi-modal approaches to all the teaching and self-access activities. The result of this project was the design of a student tool kit for on-line courses and e-learning environments. Its aim was to promote effective language learning by offering concrete, practical advice throughout the on-line learning process. There was an emphasis on solving the sort of problems that might arise during an on-line or blended learning sequence, e.g. the varying level of student commitment in on-line learning situations, the wide range of students' on-line learning skills, and possible shortcomings in students' reflection skills on language learning. Even though the tool kit evidently enhanced students' learning, it was not made full use of, particularly by those students who might have benefited from it most.

The climbing rating system or scale of difficulty is a tool that helps a climber to choose a climb that is challenging enough, but is within his / her ability. Rating climbs is to some extent subjective, which often makes consistency between

different climbing areas elusive. Descriptions that give an overall grade for a climb, sometimes called the ‘commitment grade’, include the nature of the climb in terms of time and technical difficulty, taking into account the length of the climb, the number of hard pitches⁴, the difficulty of the hardest pitch, average difficulty, commitment, route finding problems, and overall ascent time.

Similarities between climbing and learning are obvious. Table 11 offers a brief description of a fairly ordinary climbing route (Scale of Difficulty of Climbing I - V⁵), which is supplemented with some equivalent statements for learning, including potential obstacles and challenges. The table is based on the climbing rating system used for Alpine climbing. Climbers can find similar rating systems not only for Alpine climbing, but also for rock climbing or free climbing (the metaphor for *different learning styles*). Alpine climbing includes a seriousness rating, as well as a description of the overall technical difficulty (*proficiency level*). The seriousness rating, expressed as a Roman numeral, denotes such things as remoteness (*distant learning without any contact classes*), the possibility of retreat (*breaking the course, cancelling of course participation*), the difficulty of the approach or descent (various problems generally related to course access and other technical problems) and objective hazards⁶ (*force majeure*) (Source: Mountain Madness⁷).

Table 11 Scale of Difficulty of Climbing / Learning

Scale of Difficulty
<p><i>I Most steeply sloping terrain <u>big breakpoints</u>. Here <u>begins climbing</u>... No special requirements for training...</i></p> <p>A big breakpoint – learning a new language! Basic knowledge about the language – sound system, pronunciation, vocabulary and alphabet. No special requirements for getting to start</p>
<p><i>II Even when difficulty, there are <u>no increased demands</u> on <u>the constitution of climbing</u>. In general, it's sloping terrain with <u>big stops</u>...</i></p> <p>‘Terrain’ is ‘safe’, learning is fast and evident. Basic grammar and vocabulary is acquired (Level A1). Learning progress at his stage is significant. ‘Big stops’ are the contact classes held once in two-three weeks.</p>
<p><i>III The third difficulty is already climbing in steeper terrain. Nevertheless, climbing routes at this level normally not perpendicular, <u>the breakpoints are still very large</u>.</i></p> <p><i>Not too difficult yet, however, quite challenging. Exploring the language, getting deeper into the secrets of structures... (A1-A2) Importance of contact classes.</i></p>

⁴ Number of difficult climbs of the length of the rope.

⁵ Adapted from Mountain Madness <http://www.mountainmadness.com/>

⁶ *Objective* hazards are caused by the mountain and weather and cannot be influenced by men www.outdoorblueprint.com/read/objective-vs-subjective-hazards/

⁷ <http://www.mountainmadness.com/>

<p>IV ...<u>The terrain rises steeply, the breakpoints are already farther apart. Here begins the first requirement for climbing technique.</u></p> <p><i>First trials – struggling with time constraints and motivation.</i></p>
<p>V <u>Demanding climbing terrain, only in exceptional cases appropriate for beginners. Climbing routes in the fifth grade may also have overhanging walls... The fifth grade requires climbers' creativity in addressing individual passages...</u></p> <p>Reaching the summit. Coping with the "tricky" lexical chunks and grammar patterns (B1). Learners' creativity is one of the presuppositions of reaching the top.</p>

Planning, becoming familiar with the terrain (course), accepting the challenge, getting excited about climbing, proceeding from easier to more difficult, improving / maintaining one's climbing skills, attempting harder climbs - this is all entirely consonant with the ideology of learning a less commonly taught language, Slovak, in a new, unconventional learning environment: proceeding from the easier to the more complicated, from simple to more complex. Having a "good guide" may refer to both good written instructions and a good tutor. Climbing in groups, with other like-minded climbers, may be compared to collaborative or peer learning. Solo climbing or bouldering is also quite a common trend nowadays, and in the same way 'solo learning' (autonomous learning) should not be discouraged, even though learning in a group is generally regarded as more efficient.

Going back to Kern and Warschauer's formulation of the Three Waves of CALL (2001), the Slovak e-learning course is typical of Communicative CALL, which underlines the cognitive, constructivist views of learning. The focus is on learners' activities, on what the learners can do with the language. The emphasis is on real-world language use and communication-based outcomes. While learners at the beginner's level are expected to create simple dialogues, e.g. introduce themselves, ask simple questions, compose lists of items, etc., learners at the intermediate level are expected to employ their problem-solving skills and the skill of searching for the required information, e.g. to tell and retell a story, explain something, and/or express their opinion. Learning activities consist of both tasks with immediate feedback, which are focused on language forms and accuracy, and collaborative practices (peer and group tasks) aimed at an increase in communicative competence. The assessment is authentic, continuous and supportive, based on the completion of tasks and on each learner's active participation. However, the shift towards integrative CALL and thus towards socio-cognitive practices is evident.

From the cultural-historical perspective, "language learning is connected with cultural, social, institutional and discursive forces, where language is considered a cultural artefact that mediates thinking and communication between people and within an individual" (Bernat 2006: 3). The e-learning Slovak course has been constantly developed in line with the core aims of activity theory, with the aim of transforming learning and teaching practices in order to improve the conditions and outcomes of teaching and learning. New personal learning envi-

ronments have emerged, and learning via Skype, social media, or mobile learning has become a reality. The new language learning environments will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

5.2 Teaching Slovak: An on-going pedagogical experiment

This section introduces the experiment: the participants in the experiment, the methods of data collection and analysis, and the teacher research carried out to evaluate the experiment.

5.2.1 Course and participants

The e-learning Slovak course was designed in 2007 and implemented with two groups of students in 2008-2010. In the period 2008-2010, 27 students of Slovak (two groups) at the University of Jyväskylä, and in spring 2010, 18 students of Slovak (one group) at the University of Helsinki, participated in the pilot study. In this study, the two groups at the University of Jyväskylä are presented as one group. In what follows, I will explain how the participants were selected and how their consent was obtained.

The students in Jyväskylä were recruited mainly by the teacher addressing the faculties and student organizations of the University of Jyväskylä. Students were told they could participate in a pilot study aimed at the learning of Slovak through an e-learning course, and the results of observation of the pilot study would be used for research purposes. They were told how their learning process would be observed and gave their consent to the use for research purposes of their texts, reflections in learning journals, questionnaires and their answers in interviews. In Helsinki, the students were recruited by the Department of Slavic Languages. As almost all the students there had already studied another Slavic language, the Helsinki group is more homogeneous. Offering a course in Slovak implemented in a new, e-learning environment was at the time attractive. Slovak was a language that the students did not know much about and in addition the four or five credits for the course were worth trying for.

A survey exploring students' reasons for studying LCTLs conducted by the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota, USA found that students who learn the less commonly taught languages are generally interested in some aspect or aspects of the target culture. Learning a LCTL is also often a potential means of career enhancement and self-development. In some cases, learning a LCTL, like Slovak, is simply the result of curiosity. (Chapter 2.3; 6.1.1).

As far as the demographics of the groups were concerned, at the University of Jyväskylä, 20 students were female and four were male. 25 of the students were Finnish, one was Polish and one Estonian. They were all full-time students, with one exception. None of them had any previous knowledge of Slovak, apart from one male student whose girlfriend was Czech, and the Polish student,

who had learned about Slovak and Slovakia in Poland. Thanks to the mutual intelligibility of Slavic languages and especially the unofficial status of Slovak as a lingua franca of the Slavic languages (Chapter 2), the listening and reading comprehension skills of these two students were already at the proficiency level A1-A2 (CEFR, 2001) when they began the course.

Students' e-learning efforts at the University of Jyväskylä were monitored for a period of one term during the academic year 2008-2009 (Jyväskylä group 1) and 2009-2010 (Jyväskylä group 2). The learning efforts of two Finnish female students were monitored for one whole academic year (2009-2010).

At the University of Helsinki, seven students were male and 11 were female, 16 were Finnish, one was French and one was Japanese. Apart from the French and Japanese students, who were majoring in Finnish philology, and two students majoring in Baltic languages, they were all studying Slavic languages, but none of them had any previous knowledge of Slovak. Their e-learning activities were monitored for one term, the spring of 2010.

The tables below give some basic information about the students' main subject(s) and their language repertoire. The students' level of proficiency in the languages mentioned is not given, as only a few of them reported either the level of proficiency or how long they had studied the language. The students' mother tongue is the first (underlined) language in the list.

Table 12 Course participants / University of Jyväskylä

* Students observed for the period of one academic year

Name	Main subject	Languages
Anne	Social science & IT	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, German, French
evi	Psychology	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish
Elisa	Russian	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Russian
Eveliina*	English	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, German, French
Henriikka*	German	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, German
Ilona	Human science	<u>Finnish</u> , Swedish, English
Jouko	Social science	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, French, Polish
Juhani	Romance Languages	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, French, Spanish
Jutta	German	<u>Finnish</u> , Swedish, German, English
Kaisa	Russian	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Russian
Leena	Education	<u>Finnish</u> , Swedish, English
Linda	IT & Economics	<u>Finnish</u> , Swedish, English, Italian
Marita	Literature & Russian	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish,

Marketta	Education	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, German, French
Merja	Russian	<u>Finnish</u> , Russian, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, English, Swedish
Minna	Finnish	<u>Finnish</u> , Swedish, English, German, Estonian
Niina	Russian	<u>Estonian</u> , Finnish, Russian, English, German, French
Noora	Art Education	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, French
Oliivia	English	<u>Finnish</u> , Swedish, English
Olli		
Pauliina	Art History	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, German
Riina	Russian & Social science	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Russian, German, Spanish
Risto	English	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, German
Senja	Romance Languages	<u>Finnish</u> , Swedish, English, German, French, Spanish
Simo	IT	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Czech
Tarja	Special Education	<u>Finnish</u> , Swedish, English, German, Spanish
Wanda	Intercultural communication	<u>Polish</u> , English, Russian, Finnish

Table 13 Course participants / University of Helsinki

Name	Main subject	Languages
Alina	Serbian and Croatian	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Serbian, Croatian
Anna-Maria	Czech	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Czech
Jaana	Polish	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Polish, Russian
Jari	Russian and Czech	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Russian, Czech
Jean-Louis	Finnish	<u>French</u> , English, Spanish, Finnish, Hungarian, Slovak
Elsa	Czech	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Czech
Haruki	Finnish	<u>Japanese</u> , English, Finnish, Slovak
Helena	Polish	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Polish
Juha	Czech	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Czech

Kaarina	Polish and Czech	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Czech, Polish
Kirsi	Latvian & Russian	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Russian
Linda	Polish	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Polish, Russian
Linnea	Latvian	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Latvian
Marianne	Serbian and Croatian	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Russian, Serbian, Croatian
Orvokki	Czech	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Czech, Polish
Olga	Russian	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Russian
Pauli	Russian	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Russian
Sampo	Czech	<u>Finnish</u> , English, Swedish, Polish, Russian, Czech

The Helsinki group was more homogeneous than the Jyväskylä group, which may be explained by the fact that they were all students of Slavic languages, apart from those majoring in Finnish and Baltic languages. In Helsinki the students met for a four-hour session every three weeks, in addition to which they were expected to work independently.

The Jyväskylä group was more heterogeneous, due to the larger variety of main subjects. Apart from the above-mentioned exposure of two students to Slovak through Czech and Polish, none of them had any previous knowledge of Slovak. In Jyväskylä, in addition to independent learning in the e-learning environment, contact classes were offered once every two weeks.

While the Helsinki group actively participated in all the contact classes, participation in the e-learning activities was rather poor. Only 10 students actively participated in all the e-activities; the others were only passively 'present' in the e-learning environment. The Jyväskylä group, on the other hand, was more active: they completed all the e-activities, including the regular updating of their learning journals and responding immediately both to the teacher and to feedback given by their peers.

5.2.2 Data collection

The data were collected through pre-, on- and post-course questionnaires, personal interviews, analyses of students' learning diaries, and teacher reflections. A pre-course personal questionnaire was used to gather information about the students' personal and professional background. The questionnaire was also

designed to elicit the maximum amount of information about the students' language learning history.

Table 14 Source and examples of data obtained

Source of Data	Examples of main issues
Pre-course questionnaires (Appendix 1)	knowledge of Slovak, learners' beliefs and attitudes towards learning Slovak and e-learning, learners' expectations of the course, language learning history
On-course questionnaires (Appendix 2)	e-learning skills and strategies, approaches to learning, writing, maintaining motivation
Post-course questionnaires (Appendix 3)	e-learning skills, blended learning, approaches to learning, evaluation of the course, self-evaluation, language learning awareness
Personal interviews (Teacher's notes)	e-learning vs. 'traditional learning' strategies, teacher & peer feedback, linguistic issues, learner motivation, learner evaluation
Learning journals (including students' self-evaluation)	language learning awareness, linguistic issues, manual vs. electronic writing
Course feedback (Course Evaluation)	course expectations / learning outcomes revisited, course structure, layout, course tasks
Teacher's reflections (teacher's notes)	design of learning environment, task design, approaches to learners, motivational strategies, refining the e-pedagogy

The on-course questionnaire used in the middle of the course was completed by the teacher's notes from personal interviews and information gathered from the students' learning journals. The course evaluation questionnaire consisted of three questions related to students' positive and less positive experiences of the course and suggestions for further development of the course.

Table 15 Course evaluation questionnaire

1. What was good / worked well on the course?
2. What did not work on the course?
3. Any suggestions for further development of the course?
4. Any comments?

The questions related to course evaluation were the same for all the Language Centre courses at the time. More information about course content, assignments, implementation of the learning outcomes, learning strategies, etc., on this particular course was obtained through the on-course and post-course questionnaires and personal interviews. The data retrieved from the students' learning journals, placed in the learners' folders on the research-based platform Optima, offered good insights into learners' general attitudes and beliefs about e-learning.

Optima is an adaptable web-based learning platform that supports independent, self-directed learning. The nature of the platform and its technological properties offer learners the possibility of building a learner portfolio.

Learner folders partly follow the structure of a personal learning portfolio (Morrison, 2013), which involves a student's personal profile, learning journal, course expectations, learning needs, reflections (part of the learning journal), class and home assignments, and peer and teacher feedback, as well as the student's personal space for complementary writing or downloading learning-related resources (websites, media materials, blogs, etc.).

According to Barrett (2005), a traditional learner portfolio involves collecting, selecting, reflecting, projecting and celebrating. In the context of this course, collecting and selecting refers to the completion of assignments. The focus of reflecting is on one's own learning process, while projecting is related to self- and peer-evaluation. Celebrating refers to the final evaluation of one's achievements as well as final assessment of the course.

Table 16 Learning journal – Sample questions

1. What have I learned? What was most interesting?
2. What is still 'unclear'? What don't I know yet?
3. Any new ideas after this session? Any new sources of information?
4. What should I focus on?
5. How should I proceed?

The students' learning diaries served as one of the key tools of learning and raising learners' language learning awareness (Farabaugh 2007). As mentioned above, students were expected to reflect on their learning process through writing down their expectations and learning experiences. The learning diaries were updated regularly, with entries varying in length from several lines to texts resembling essays.

5.2.3 Data analysis

This study is based on qualitative research. Its aim is to provide insight into learning Slovak in an e-learning environment and help to develop the (e-)learning of Slovak. To collect the data, unstructured or semi-structured data-collection techniques were employed, for example, the analysis of words / texts (learning diaries, individual interviews, questionnaires, observations), all of which allow for subjective interpretation (by the teacher) of the data obtained (Neill 2007). At the beginning of the study I did have ideas about the purpose of the study, but I did not have a clear idea how to carry it out – the research design. The design emerged as the study advanced, along with my teaching.

The student observations, students' texts (reflections in their learning diaries), interviews and questionnaires were analysed by means of Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis is a practice in qualitative research used for identifying, analysing and reporting the themes that emerge within the given data. In some respects, TA resembles the Grounded Theory (GT) developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The authors of GT claim that theory must be rooted, or grounded, in observation. In GT, the research begins with the raising of generative questions and as data are obtained, core theoreti-

cal concept(s), which usually mean a pattern, are identified. Normally one tries to evolve towards one central core category. Coding is a process for both categorizing qualitative data and for describing the implications and details of these categories. Coding may be quite open at the beginning of the process but later it becomes more selective and systematic, taking the core concept into account. Coding is followed by memoing, the process of recording the researcher's thoughts during the study. Finally, integrative diagrams and sessions (concept maps, directed graphs, etc.) are used for depicting and sharing ideas.

Thematic Analysis, like Grounded Theory, is a strategy for categorizing the data. After reviewing the data, the data are sorted into categories and, as in GT, patterns emerge which may be developed into themes. Finally, the themes are interpreted and reported. Thematic analysis may be implicitly or explicitly a part of other types of data analysis, including discourse analysis, grounded theory, and case study (Boyatzis 1998). One of the benefits of TA is its flexibility. TA may be started at any time during the project and there are no associations between the data already collected and the result of the project or the analysis (Alhojailan 2012).

Even if used for the interpretation of small-size research topics, "a theme captures always something important about the data in relation to the research question, and it represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set." (Braun & Clarke 2006: 86). The authors offer a model of a six-phase thematic analysis.

Alhojailan (2012), in a critical review of Thematic Analysis, shows that the approaches of TA are appropriate when the data are defined before the beginning of the study, whereas Grounded theory builds on themes determined during the project. I considered TA to be most appropriate for the collection and analysis of my data because of my urge to find out about the concepts I explored and then to interpret the findings. One must bear in mind that the freedom of TA in allowing for linking various concepts and views collected at earlier stages, even in different contexts, and comparing them, making all possible interpretations, means that the researcher should be very exact when dealing with the data observed and collected: the subjective element of interpretation cannot be excluded. However, the purpose of this study is not to provide any statistical data about learning Slovak in the given circumstances, or to generalize the findings obtained from the analyses of the data.

Table 17 Thematic Analysis (Adapted from Braun & Clarke 2006)

Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006)	
PHASE	PROCEDURE
1.	Data description
2.	Sorting items into proto-/sub-themes
3.	Creating thematic maps
4.	Defining the themes (detailed analyses)
5.	Reporting on themes
6.	Communicating and interpreting the meaning of each theme

The data-driven approach means that the data were first collected from the learning journals, questionnaires, interviews and observations, then they were given a preliminary description, the items were divided into themes, which were grouped as pre-, on- and post-course themes, and finally, the themes were interpreted (see Table 10).



Figure 10 Pre-course, on-course and post-course themes

The analysis distinguishes three stages of students' experiences and beliefs – before, during and after the course. The themes that occurred at each stage represent the most frequently occurring concepts. The themes or questions selected by the teacher reflected the teacher's urge to find out the answers to the ques-

tions posed. As mentioned above, in discussing the learners' experiences and views, I draw on data obtained from various sources - learning journals, questionnaires, personal interviews, students' and teachers' observations and reflections, and informal discussions.

5.2.4 On-going teaching experiment: Research questions

The current study is based on an investigation of the teacher's work within an institutional action research programme (Chapter 1). The first part of the study - the pedagogical experiment - presents the development of the new learning environment: the design and implementation of the e-learning course. The goal was to frame the design of the course within the socio-constructivist theoretical framework of learning. The second part offers a discussion of the teacher's and students' perspectives, views, and approaches to teaching and learning Slovak in an e-learning environment.

The research questions address, primarily, students' experiences of learning Slovak in an e-learning environment: their views on the acquisition of all four language skills, how they perceived themselves as e-learners, and their approaches to learning. The focus is on learning Slovak: how have the learners learned in the e-learning environment and what do they believe that they have or have not learned? On the other hand, the study also seeks to explore the role of the teacher in an e-learning environment, especially how to provide systematic, meaningful feedback, what and how to evaluate, and how to maintain learners' motivation. The research questions were framed as follows:

1. What were the learners' expectations before the course? How did they see themselves as language learners and e-learners? How did they perceive the Slovak language as the target language?
2. What were the learners' experiences during the course? How did they respond to the challenges of e-learning? How did they perceive learning the particularities of the Slovak language?
3. How did the learners evaluate the course and their learning outcome after the course? What sort of experiences did they have of themselves as e-learners? How can their approaches to learning be described? What were the teacher's observations of the course(s)?

The answers to these questions will emerge in Chapter 6, which offers students' and teacher's reflections and evaluation of the course. A summary of the reflections and insights offered into learning Slovak as a LCTL, together with some implications for the future of Slovak and/or other LCTLs that emerge from the e-learning course in Slovak, will be presented in the Findings (Chapter 7).

6 STUDENTS' AND TEACHER'S EXPERIENCES OF THE E-LEARNING SLOVAK COURSE: BEFORE, ON AND AFTER THE COURSE

This chapter discusses the main findings concerning the students' and teacher's experiences of the e-learning course. The findings include interpretations of the themes obtained primarily from the students' learning journals, pre-course, on-course and post-course questionnaires, course evaluations, interviews and teacher's observations. Consistent with thematic analysis, the data were sorted, categorized and developed into the themes presented below (Figure 10; Table 18). The findings are presented under the pre-course, on-course and post-course themes and are accompanied by some excerpts from students' learning journals and the teacher's notes.

Table 18 Pre-course, On-course and Post-Course Themes

Pre-course Themes	On-course Themes		Post-course Themes
Slovak language and Slovakia	E-learning skills and strategies		E-learning Revisited
Learners' beliefs of themselves as learners	Language awareness	Learning awareness	Approaches to learning
Learners' beliefs of themselves as e-learners	Linguistic issues	Writing by hand vs. electronically	Evaluation of the course Self-evaluation
Course expectations	Motivation	Approaches to learning	Teacher's role: Teacher & Student perspective

The themes are explained and discussed in the following sections.

6.1 Pre-course themes

The pre-course themes are related to the concepts that emerged most clearly before the course began, as shown in the pre-course questionnaire. They reveal students' interest in learning Slovak and particularly in the Slovak e-learning course, their knowledge of Slovakia and the Slovak language, their concept of learning, with a special focus on e-learning, their expectations for the course, as well as their beliefs about themselves as e-learners. Respondents' answers to the first questionnaire were rated on a scale from 1 to 5: from one (less known) to five (well known) (Table 8).

6.1.1 Interest in Slovakia and the Slovak language

All the students at the University of Jyväskylä had some knowledge of Slovakia and the Slovak language. They knew that Slovak belonged to the group of West Slavic languages and that independent Slovakia was established after the partition of Czechoslovakia in 1992. Almost all of them knew about Slovakia's success in sport, especially in ice hockey.

All the respondents claimed that they intended to learn Slovak because they found learning a new language generally challenging. Slovak was perceived as a new language in their language repertoire, therefore interesting and motivating, even if somehow 'distant'. According to Bao & Lee (2012), students initially study a LCTL because of an attraction to a new, uncommon language; however, after some time they may become intrinsically motivated and learn the language with evident pleasure and satisfaction.

Three respondents said they knew that Slovak was unofficially considered to be the *lingua franca* of the Slavic languages and therefore they had decided to learn it. They believed that knowledge of Slovak might help them in their study of other Slavic languages. Apart from two respondents who on the whole favoured the challenge of coping with a less commonly taught and thus a 'more difficult' language, Slovak was chosen for no special reason. With just one exception, all the respondents strongly believed that they would be able to use Slovak in the future either for work or leisure purposes (instrumental and integrative motivation; Cook 1996), especially when Slovakia joined the Eurozone at the time of this investigation, in 2009.

(1) "Erityisesti kiinnostaa juuri Slovakian kulttuuri, tapakulttuuri, liikekulttuuri, jokapäiväinen elämä, ihmisten arvot ja asenteet." (Niina)

"I am interested particularly in Slovak culture, manners, business culture, people's everyday life, their values and attitudes."

(2) "Olen kerran aikaisemmin käynyt Bratislavassa ja Slovaakin kulttuuri erityisesti osana Keski-Euroopan historiaa on kiehtova." (Linda)

"I've visited Bratislava once. I'm particularly fascinated by Slovak culture as part of Central European history."

An IT student joined the course because of the reputation of Slovak as one of the most comprehensible Slavic languages. The student was recruited by a huge IT programming company which did business with other European countries, amongst them Poland, and he hoped to be able to use Slovak at work. The student was aware of the closeness of the West Slavic languages and especially of Slovak as a '*lingua franca*' of Slavic languages. Thus, in this case, for example, the language learning motivation was evidently instrumental (Deci & Ryan 1985; Cook 1996).

Students in Jyväskylä knew that Slovakia was a small country with approximately the same number of inhabitants as Finland. None of them had visited Slovakia, but some of them knew that Slovakia is a beautiful country. They wanted to learn Slovak because it was a new language and it "looked interesting". Almost all of them wanted to be able to use Slovak when travelling to Slovakia and all of them wanted to learn more about Slovakia's culture.

The students in Helsinki seemed to be well acquainted with Slovakia (Table 8), especially with its social and political situation. They knew that Slovak is a West Slavic language, close to Czech and Polish. Prior to the course, they were aware of the fact that they might benefit from the mutual intelligibility of Slavic languages (Chapter 2) and regarded learning Slovak as 'fairly easy'. They all expected to learn more about Slovakia's culture. The French and Japanese student could speak some Slovak, as one of them had a Slovak girlfriend and the other one a Slovak friend. Especially the students majoring in Czech had a lot of information about the Slovak language and its differences and similarities with Czech, in particular about the so-called false friends in Slavic languages, particularly Slovak-Czech (Nábělková 2007).

Many scholars (Gardner 1985; Gardner & Clément 1989; Dörnyei 1994) have recognized the importance of motivation for successful language learning. Gardner & Lambert (1972) identified two kinds of motivational orientation: *integrative orientation*, which refers to learning a foreign language in order to keep in contact with the members of the community where the learned language is spoken, and *instrumental orientation*, which refers to learning a language for pragmatic reasons, such as getting a job or course credits. The authors also claim that learners with an integrative orientation tend to make a greater effort in language learning and therefore achieve better results, which may eventually be reflected in acquiring greater L2 competence. In the case of the students of Slovak, both kinds of motivational orientation were evident. Many of them believed that they would use Slovak in the future, for example, in interpretation or translation work. The motivation to translate from Slovak to Finnish has been one of the most interesting things to emerge during my teaching career. I believe that the main reason for students' interest in translations lies in Finland's traditional literacy, which is the secret of Finland's PISA (The Programme for International Student Assessment) success. Finnish students have been among the best in reading literacy since the launch of the PISA project in 2000. Reading literacy has been enhanced on all levels of Finland's educational system. Read-

ing is generally followed by writing, which has been widely reflected in Finland's assessment system, that is, written examinations.

More information about students' translation work was presented in Chapter 2.3.

6.1.2 Learners' beliefs of themselves as e-learners

The popularity of e-learning and web-based courses has generally been ascribed to the belief that it means learning independently, without any compulsory lessons, or that it means 'less work'. In 2008-2010, the idea of e-learning was very attractive to both the students and the teacher of the Slovak course, although only two of the students had had any previous experience of it. Students used the terms e-learning, online learning and web-learning interchangeably.

Even though all the respondents expected e-learning to be *more flexible* and *more challenging* than traditional learning, at the same time students without any previous experience of e-learning doubted whether they would be able to practise and learn all the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) in the e-learning environment, or whether they would be able to retrieve all the necessary information from the Internet. Although listening is a skill that can in fact easily be practised online, some students believed that listening should rather be practised in the dialogue context, together with speaking.

The respondents believed that the *physical* absence of the teacher would adversely affect their learning. They expected the teacher to facilitate their learning "in a more concrete, physical way". Not all the students believed in the possibility of efficient e-learning: some students doubted if they would get the answers to more complex questions or proper, immediate feedback on the tasks. They were also afraid that they might forget what they had learned before the next contact session. Overall, contact sessions held once in two weeks were seen as most efficient.

(3) "Oppiminen on mahdollista, mutta suurin vastuu on nyt opiskelijalla eikä niinkään opettajalla. Tulevana opettaja luotan kuitenkin siihen, että kontakti-opetus on aina tehokkain keino oppia." (Marketta)

"(E-)learning is possible, but the greatest responsibility is now with the student, not the teacher. Nevertheless, as a future teacher I put my faith in face-to-face sessions, as contact teaching has always been the most efficient way of learning."

Time management, the need to organize one's use of time throughout the course, was perceived as the greatest challenge of e-learning for both learners and the teacher, as Examples (4) and (5) below show.

(4) "Suurin vaikeus on itsensä saaminen opiskeluun pariin. Liika vapaus aiheuttaa ainakin minulle laiskuutta ja saamattomuutta." (Marketta)

"The most difficult thing will be making myself learn. Too much freedom makes me, at least, lazier and more listless."

(5) "Välillä on helpompi luistaa tehtävistä, kun oppiminen on omalla vastuulla. Mutta jos halua oppia kieltä, in tehtävä töitä" (Eveliina)

"It's easier to skip tasks now and then when you're learning on your own. However, if you want to learn the language, you have to do the work."

However, some students expected the e-learning course to work well, even though they thought that they might be lazier due to the physical absence of the teacher and having too much freedom in terms of time. All but two of the students believed that they would be able to learn a lot. Students estimated that the time they would spend on learning each week would be between three and six hours.

To sum up, the learners' expectations of the course were high, and despite some doubts, their belief in their own learning skills was strong. The new learning environment was perceived as a valuable addition to traditional learning. Nevertheless, the students did express awareness of the fact that the success of e-learning depends on the learners themselves.

6.1.3 Students' self-concept as language learners

Students were also asked about their concept of themselves as language learners. How interesting they felt that what they were going to learn - the new language - was and their motivation had an obvious impact on their learning. Various ideas about language learning emerged: the idea of purposeful learning - that they were learning a foreign language with the prospect of using it in working life (instrumental motivation) - as well as 'learning from curiosity' or intuitive learning (the 'eureka' effect, the sudden 'click') also occurred.

Reflecting on oneself as a learner revealed some interesting reasons for choosing the e-learning option instead of a traditional course. Not all students were enthusiastic about the pair or group work often employed in contact classes. Instead, independent learning was seen as *learning alone*, a better option. (At the time of the pilot study, independent or autonomous learning was considered to be the same as self-study, i.e. learning alone). In the later stage of the course, pair and group work was 'discovered' and found to be useful and motivating.

(6) "Olen aina ollut erityisen kiinnostunut kieltenoppimisesta. Kielissä kuitenkin olisi tärkeää oppia myös käytännön kielitaitoa eli tehdä pari- ja ryhmätöitä. En kuitenkaan kovin paljoa pidä niistä, vaan nimenomaan itsenäisestä opiskelusta, siksi juuri verkkokurssi on minulle erittäin hyvä tapa opiskella kieltä..." (Henriikka)

"I've always been particularly interested in language learning. However, in language learning, it's important to learn the language as it is used, which means doing the pair and group work. Although I don't like that very much, as I really like independent learning. So an e-learning course is a really good way for me to learn a language ..."

Interestingly, some respondents found note-taking an important tool of learning.

(7) "Minulla on hyvä muisti, opin melko helposti sanalistoja sekä kielioppisääntöjä, mutta minulle on tärkeää kirjoittaa muistiinpanoja ylös jonnekin, pelkkä asioiden lukeminen ei riitä. Olen mielestäni visuaalinen oppija, opin parhaiten lukemalla ja katselemalla, en niinkään kuuntelemalla." (Eveliina)

"I have a good memory and can easily learn the vocabulary lists and grammar rules, but it's very important that I take notes, just reading about things isn't enough for me. I think I'm a visual learner, so I learn best by reading and looking, not by listening."

Doing the tasks was experienced as testing oneself, as a form of self-assessment. Task-performing as testing, examining what has been learned, is in line with TBL, where specific language features from the task are highlighted and worked on (Chapter 3.4.1). The design of some tasks allows for independent learning, but some tasks must be completed in groups of two or more.

According to Koohang's constructivism model of learning (2009), which consists of The Design of Learning Activities, Learning Assessment and the Instructor's Roles, learning activities include collaboration and cooperation in addition to scaffolding, self-reflection, the multiple representation of ideas, and social negotiation. Hence there can be a conflict between the designed tasks and a student's desire to avoid collaboration. The aim of Koohang's model is to get learners fully engaged in the knowledge construction process and to support the development of their goals through problem-solving activities, thus encouraging them to take control of their own learning process. An essential part of the design is self-reflection, which results in the promotion of self-directed, autonomous learning (Chapter 3.2.2).

(8) "Tehtävien tekeminen on minulle tärkeää, jotta näkee, kuinka hyvin asiat on oppinut." (Eveliina)

"Doing the tasks is important to me, because then I can see how well I've learned something."

Two learners considered themselves to be superficial learners and said that they generally learned things by heart. One student admitted that she was not a very diligent language learner:

(9) "En ole niin ahkera kuin toivoisin olevani... Tenttejä varten olen omaksunut tyylin, jolla pärjää mukavasti tenteissä, mutta tenttien jälkeen en muista enää paljon asiasta." (Anne)

"I'm not as diligent as I would like to be... For exams I've adopted a strategy which undoubtedly helps me to do well in the exams but after the exams I can't remember much about the matter."

Learning through a 'click' or 'eureka' (intuitive learning) was mentioned as well.

(10) "Oppimisessa nautin eniten oivalluksista. Kun ymmärrän jotakin, jota ei ole suoraan minulle opetettu, rakastan oppimista. Oivalluksen hetket ovat minusta oppimisen palkka." (Eveliina)

I like intuitive learning best. I love learning when I understand something that was not explicitly taught to me. In my opinion, the 'eureka' moments are the reward for learning.

Some students mentioned learning through positive experiences and the possibility of applying the knowledge they had acquired in practical life.

(11) Rakastan oivalluksia! Rakastan sitä, kun olen jotain oppinut. Rakastan oppimista! (Pauliina)

"I love it when I get it! I love it when I've learned something! I love learning!"

(12) "Opin uusia asioita parhaiten silloin, kun asia on mielenkiintoinen ja niinpä asiat jäävät myös paremmin mieleen... Myös se, että opiskeltuja asioita voi soveltaa käytännön elämään vaikuttaa paljon opiskelumotivaatiooni." (Merja)

"I learn new things best when they're interesting and then too I'm able to remember them better ... And the possibility that what I've learned will have a practical application has a big influence on my motivation for learning anything."

Learning through experiences or learning by doing is one of the key principles of experiential learning. The focus is not on the product but on the learning process. In experiential learning, "the results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience and learning" (Association for Experiential Education <http://www.aee.org>). Thus learning may be a very positive experience which will have a long-life influence on the learner if the right balance is struck between all the factors affecting the learning process. Soong, Chan, Chua & Loj (2001) place more emphasis on the technical side of the e-learning environment: they argue that e-learning can be successful if the factors critical for success – the teacher's and students' technical competence, their technical mindset, collaboration and the overall IT infrastructure - are present. (Chapter 7).

6.1.4 Summary of pre-course themes

Students' responses to the pre-course questionnaire were rated on the scale one to five. In Jyväskylä, 18 of the 20 students answered the questionnaire, while in Helsinki 14 of the 16 students answered it.

Table 19 offers a summary of the students' answers, showing what they knew and what they believed. Table 20 presents learners' expectations of e-learning and their concept of themselves as learners and e-learners. 'Pros' indicate learners' positive expectations or beliefs about e-learning and their perception of themselves as learners or e-learners, while 'Cons' refer to their doubts and scepticism.

Table 19 Summary of pre-course themes

PRE-COURSE THEMES
<p>Slovakia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central European country • part of former Czechoslovakia • naturally very beautiful • interesting literature • Bratislava, capital of Slovakia • member of European Union <p>Slovak language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indo-European language • Slavic language • close to Czech • easy • difficult
<p>Learners' beliefs of themselves as e-learners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-learning is more flexible • E-learning is more challenging • Lack of communicativeness • Not all language skills can be acquired • Language cannot be properly learned • Learning a new language is possible. • No difference between <i>learning</i> and <i>e-learning</i> • Lack of proper feedback • Too much freedom of time leading to laziness • Lack of IT support • Superficial learning
<p>Learners' beliefs of themselves as language learners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in a new language enhances learning • Lack of time for learning languages • New ways of learning will enhance learning. • Purposeful learning - instructive orientation. • Learning from curiosity • Intuitive learning • Slovak - 'easy language' to learn. • Learning alone. • Doing the tasks as 'self-testing'. • No beliefs.
<p>Course expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning a lot. • Efficient learning • Challenge • Contact sessions - inevitable part of the course • Independent learning • Fast learning • Slow learning • No expectations

Table 20 Learners' expectations of e-learning and their concept of themselves as learners Pre-course questionnaires

Learners' expectations of e-learning		Learners' concept of themselves as learners	
PROS	CONS	PROS	CONS
efficiency	scepticism about learning	independent learning	learning alone
novelty	teacher's absence	learning through positive experiences	superficial learning, memorizing
flexibility	too much freedom	learning through 'a click'	fear of unsuccessful learning
challenge	speaking & writing	task-based learning	lack of printed text
functionality	lack of interactivity	'fast' learning	'slow' learning

From the viewpoint of successful completion of the course, learners' beliefs and perceptions of themselves as language learners and more specifically as e-learners were very positive. Nevertheless, some of them had doubts about successful completion of the course because of a lack of IT competence or uncertainty about learning in a new learning environment: they mentioned, for example, 'fast learning' through reading vs. 'slow learning' as a result of poor time management.

Some scepticism was expressed about having appropriate IT skills. At the time of this study, not all the students had acquired good IT skills and at this time the teacher too still had relatively little experience of using technology in teaching. According to Oliver (2001), first of all the teacher should demonstrate expertise in online teaching and using technology in teaching and technology currency. This experiment, then, was a technological challenge not only for the students but also for the teacher. The students needed not only access to the technology but also technology literacy, i.e. the skills necessary to appropriately select and responsibly use technology. According to Blake (2015) this meant the skills necessary to appropriately select and responsibly use technology. Oliver (2001) also referred to the need for knowledge of how to use those skills. Blake claims that students who have attained technology literacy are also able to cope with various situations that call for problem solving, are good communicators and manage to locate, use and synthesize information obtained by means of technology – all in all, the skills necessary for the 21st century.

6.2 On-course themes

The **on-course themes** were mainly related to the development of students' e-learning skills and strategies but also to the increase in their language learning awareness, which was reflected in a rising awareness of various language issues, for example, the similarities and differences between languages, language contacts, etymology, etc., and maintaining their motivation for further learning.

Table 21 The On-course Themes

On-course Themes	
E-learning skills and strategies	
Language awareness ↔ Learning awareness	
Language learning awareness	
Linguistic issues	Writing by hand vs. electronically
Motivation	Approaches to learning

6.2.1 Students' views on their e-learning skills and strategies during the course

Watkins (2007) claims that for success in e-learning, two skills are necessary: the ability to adapt traditional study skills used in the face-to-face environment to online strategies, and the ability to adopt new strategies, 'new tactics' for learning and communicating in the online environment. Clarke (2008: 58-60) also believes that successful e-learning requires a solid foundation in traditional learning skills. In addition to that, learners should acquire specific skills related to e-learning: the skills of time management and planning, of self-assessment, problem-solving, coping with stress, self-motivation and reward, reflection, listening and research skills (planning, searching for information, assessing the quality of the information obtained), as well as taking responsibility for one's own learning. These skills are similar to Blake's skills necessary for the 21st century: being able to cope in various situations, to solve problems, and to locate, use and synthesize information obtained by means of technology (Blake 2015; Chapter 6.1.4).

E-learning was an innovation at the time of the study and some guidance was therefore needed as to how to make learning successful. Amongst others who came forward with advice, Clarke offered a list of 14 useful tips for successful e-learners. The tips are almost identical with Clarke's list of e-learning skills (Clarke, 2008).

Table 22 Tips for successful e-learning (adapted from Clarke 2008)

Tips for successful e-learners	
1.	collaboration (peer and group)
2.	writing skills (short, clear messages – “the key to online communication”)
3.	reading skills – reading the e-learning content
4.	motivation – self-motivation
5.	confidence – confidence to take advantage of the opportunities of e-learning
6.	commitment - the freedom of e-learning must be accompanied by a small regular commitment
7.	using the tutor
8.	time management
9.	environment management
10.	exploring / investigating the online environment
11.	feedback – receiving and giving constructive feedback
12.	computer skills – continuous development
13.	using available resources
14.	learning style – awareness of one’s learning preferences

The skills practised on the Slovak e-learning course and refined after the course were the skills of collaboration, time management, and exploring the online environment – searching for appropriate information, using the resources available, and continuous development of one’s computer skills (technology literacy (Blake 2015). The skills of receiving and giving constructive feedback emerged as well, however, most explicitly in the case of the two students who were continuously observed for the whole academic year.

The students’ reflections show that they put special emphasis on *language learning awareness*, language awareness (awareness of learning *Slovak*) and the awareness of *learning* - as well as on the skills which occurred during the learning process, e.g. the skills of time management and planning, of maintaining one’s motivation for e-learning, of rewarding oneself for learning and of coping with stress (Clarke 2008). The skills of self-assessment, self-reflection and collaboration and research were also mentioned. Self-evaluation is commonly used in all the Language Centre courses, but in the context of this study, self and peer evaluation were the skills that were most often mentioned as requiring most practice.

The on-course themes are presented in Table 23. What follow now are some examples of extracts from the students’ journals put within the theoretical framework of the study.

Table 23 Summary of On-course themes

ON-COURSE THEMES
E-learning skills and strategies during the course
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New e-learning skills • Motivation • Self-rewarding / self-motivation • Confidence – confidence to take advantage of the opportunities of e-learning • Commitment - the freedom of e-learning • Time and stress management • Environment management • Exploring the online environment • Feedback – receiving and giving constructive feedback • Computer skills • Learning style – awareness of one’s learning preferences • Reflecting and self-evaluation
Language issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pronunciation • writing – by hand vs. electronically • structures, grammar • etymology • language contacts • language interference
Cultural issues
Language Learning awareness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • writing • reflecting • collaboration

Time management.

Clarke (2008) considers the skill of time management to be one of the most important skills for successful e-learning. He believes that one of the major benefits of e-learning is freedom from time constraints, but on the other hand, one of the major risks is of ‘falling behind’ (the metaphor of falling when climbing; Chapter 5.1). Time management is closely related to planning skills, i.e., the ability to balance different priorities and find good learning practices. Poor time management, which can be the result of the dominance of other subjects, of taking on too much and/or a general lack of planning, was the most frequently occurring problem that students reported.

(13) “Kiireistä on ollut, mutta nyt pakotan itseni koneen ääreen ja slovakin pariin. Tuntuu, että olen haukannut liian suuren palan kevään opintojani suunnittellessa, mutta luovuttaa en aio ennen totaalista burnoutia” (Marketta)

“I’ve been very busy, but now I’ll make myself sit down at the computer and do some Slovak. I seem to have bitten off more than I can chew when I planned my studies for this spring, but I’m not going to give up unless I get total burn-out!”

Despite feeling increasingly stressed and threatened by burn-out, the student tried to make herself study.

(14) "Kiinnostusta kyllä piisaa, mutta jotenkin en osaa tarttua koneeseen ja ruveta tekemään, ellei ole tarkasti määritelty, milloin pitää olla valmista. Kyllä tämä tästä, pitää vain ottaa tavaksi tehdä nämä." (Minna)

"I'm certainly still interested, but somehow I can't get hold of the machine and begin to do anything unless I'm told exactly when it's got to be done by. Well, this is it - I've just got to get into the way of doing this."

(15) "Saa nähdä, mitä tästä tulee. Hirvittävän vaikeaa saada itsensä netin ääreen, kun ei ole ihan pakko. Vaikka se tietysti ainakin kielen oppimisen kannalta olisi hyväksi". (Pauliina)

"Let's see what will come of this. It's awfully difficult to make yourself sit at the computer when you don't absolutely have to. Even though of course it would be very useful at least for language learning"

The lack of clear deadlines and routines, common in all forms of self-directed, autonomous learning, was evident.

(16) "I am very busy. I manage to pinch Slovak for only a couple of hours during the weekend. Now I am struggling with the assignments of Camp 3..." (Jean-Louis)

Panic, and the fear of being unable to keep up with the course schedule and, because of that, with all the assignments, was frequently in the foreground.

(17) "Kuuntelin tekstien dialogit uudelleen ja uudelleen, toistelin fraaseja yksikseni. Hie-man epävarma olo siitä, onnistuuko aktiivinen oppiminen, uskallanko avata suuni sitten kun saan tilaisuuden harjoitella. Mutta ei opiskelu silti vaikealta tunnu näinkään. Tehtäviä näyttääkin olevan huomattavasti enemmän kuin Base campissa ja nyt iski paniikki ajankäytöstä." (Senja)

"I listened to the dialogue of the texts over and over again, and repeated the phrases just to myself. I'm a bit unsure about how successful this active learning will be; shall I have the courage to open my mouth when I get the opportunity to practise? Yet the learning doesn't feel difficult. There seem to be many more assignments now than there were in Base Camp, and I'm getting into a panic about time management."

The higher the camp, the greater the number of learning tasks and activities. The fear of 'unsuccessful performance' led occasionally to panic and in one case even to dropping out of the course.

Learners' stress was mostly caused by their failure to plan properly or their lack of experience in e-learning. To solve this problem, group discussions aimed at identifying and removing the causes of stress were regularly offered (Section 6.2.1.2).

E-learning styles and strategies.

E-learning offers numerous opportunities to employ a variety of learning styles: visual, spatial, auditory, kinesthetic, verbal or linguistic learning, learning in groups or alone. The learners of Slovak recognized their own learning styles as well as the impact of the e-learning environment on their learning strategies.

Nevertheless, there was also some doubt about 'proper learning' in the e-learning environment (Pre-course themes; Chapter 6.1.2).

(18) "Onko olemassa kielten opiskelijoita, jotka ottaisivat verkkokurssin ja sen avulla OPPIVAT kieltä?" (Jouko)

"Are there any language students who would take up an e-learning course and LEARN the language?"

(19) "Luulen, että kun pääsen vauhtiin, en välttämättä tarvitse edes tapaamisia. Kylähän kai muutkin ovat suorittaneet kielikurssejakin kokonaan etäopiskeluna?" (Marita)

"I think that once I get going I don't necessarily need any contact sessions. Surely others too have completed some language courses completely as distance learning?"

However, not all the students recognized their own learning styles. Some students saw no significant differences between e-learning and traditional learning and did not expect to need any special e-learning strategies.

(20) Kaikki mikä oli vaikeaa tässä kurssissa, oli vaikeaa myös muissa kielten kursseissa. En tarvinnut mitään erikoisia oppimisstrategioita...(Taru)

"Everything I found difficult on this course I also found difficult on other language courses... I didn't need any special learning strategies..."

Interestingly, some students were discouraged by the hypertext and the structure of the webpages: learning preferences tied to the traditional structure of a lesson in a textbook seemed to be too strong for them.

(21) "Hermostuin, koska en löytänyt tehtävien asioita leirin kappaleista. Olen tottunut opiskelemaan kirjan avulla, ehkä siitä syystä tuntuu aluksi sekavalta verkkosivujen rakenne. Erityisesti olen tottunut siihen, että kurssin kappaleissa/teksteissä on kaikki tarvittava sanasto ja kielioppi. Mutta kai tuohon järjestykseen tottuu ja on vaan itsekseen löydettävä tunneilla käytyjä asioita..." (Senja)

"I got nervous because I couldn't find the necessary information about the tasks from the Camp units. I'm used to studying with books, perhaps that's why the structure of the web pages felt a bit confusing in the beginning. Especially I'm used to the course units / texts having all the vocabulary and grammar that you need. However, I guess I'll get used to this system and one's just got to be able to find for oneself what we've gone through in the contact classes..."

One of the two students whose learning was monitored for one academic year was frustrated by the fact that the texts were mostly dialogues and hoped for texts that were more 'compact'. (More demanding texts are offered only in the highest camps, 9 and 10).

To sum up, some learners recognized the need for new learning strategies, some did not. Others combined traditional and new strategies, taking notes or making vocabulary lists or using other complementary, 'traditional', learning strategies and materials.

Motivation and reward

Group or team motivation, often recognized as integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert 1972; Dörnyei 1994), was evident from the very beginning of the course. Students' learning diaries revealed their urge to 'catch up with the others' when left behind. Motivation was frequently mentioned in connection with the reward of achieving one's goals. The mechanism of self-motivation (rewarding oneself for the effort) activated learners efficiently.

(22) "Olisi hienoa päästä joskus matkustamaan Slovakiaan ja kokeilla käytännössä miten paljon kieltä pystyy käyttämään!" (Leena)

"It would be nice to travel to Slovakia one day and see how much language I can use in real life!"

Travelling to Slovakia as a reward was mentioned several times. A female student who joined the course as a distance student decided to participate in the course only online, without taking part in the face-to-face sessions. She faced a lot of problems related to the time constraints, so to increase her motivation she decided to reward herself and booked a weekend trip to Bratislava.

(23) "Suoritan kurssin täysin eränä, jännittää, kuinka opin lausumaan oikein. Teen JYU opintoja työn ohella, joten en edes aseta itselleni liian haastavia tavoitteita. Vuorelle kiipeily kuitenkin kiinnostaa ja slovakki vaikuttaa todella mielenkiintoiselta kieleltä...Motivoidakseni itseäni oppimaan olen päättänyt varata viikonloppureissun Slovakiaan." (Linda)

"I'm doing this course completely online (at a distance) and I'm anxious about how I'm going to learn the correct pronunciation. I'm studying at Jyväskylä University on top of working, so I don't set myself too demanding objectives. However, I'm interested in mountain climbing and Slovak seems to be a very interesting language... To motivate myself I've decided to book a weekend trip to Slovakia."

Students' motivation was severely tested when their stress levels soared as a result of their lack of proper planning in the final stage of the course. To facilitate students' learning and increase their motivation the teacher tried to help them find a balance between learning and personal life through informal and personal discussions and out-of-class activities (e.g. a skiing trip, a party with Slovak food, and watching a movie).

6.2.2 Language awareness with Slovak as the target language: phonological, grammatical and pragmatic aspects

Awareness plays an important role in learning. In the context of this study, awareness means both awareness of the *language* to be learned or acquired, of its specific features and its relations to other languages, and awareness of *learning* the language (Chapter 4.3.2). At the beginning of the course, students began to recognize some specific linguistic features of Slovak and search for similarities and differences with other languages. Their learning awareness (their awareness of learning) was fully developed, however, only through writing (Section 6.2. 2), when they had to concentrate on the use of the correct diacritics

and think about the phonemic, etymological and grammatical principles of Slovak, which generally present a big challenge to learners of Slovak. Nevertheless, students not only developed a feel for the proper use of Slovak (pragmatic and discourse competence), but also acquired the skills necessary for 'using the language for the purpose of expressing meaning' (language performance). Online media opened up completely new dimensions for language awareness. Dooly (2007), in a paper on an international collaborative Internet-based project, claims that the use of the new media in network-based collaboration results in an evident increase in students' awareness of different aspects of the target language as well as of the learning process.

Because almost all the respondents were students of languages, special attention was paid to various language issues (such as the phonological system, pronunciation, writing, grammar, language contacts, and language interference). Pronunciation and grammar were regarded as challenging, but writing was considered to be most difficult, due to the diacritic system of Slovak. The mutual intelligibility of Slavic languages was recognized and praised, especially by the students of Russian and other Slavic languages. However, in one case, the student's knowledge of Russian did not contribute to her learning of Slovak, but on the contrary she perceived it as making it more difficult.

(24) "Huomasin tänään erästä tekstiä kirjoittaessani, että olin kirjoittanut kaikki prepositiot kyrillisillä aakkosilla. Tähän asti venäjän kielen osaamisesta on ollut hyötyä, kun on voinut jonkin verran arvata eri sanojen merkitystä venäjän avulla, mutta nyt se selvästi alkaa haitata, esimerkiksi verbien taivutuksissa ja sanoissa. Meinaan koko ajan aloittaa fraasin jollain venäläisellä ilmaisulla. Sitä on ehkä töissä tullut puhuttua niin paljon." (Kaisa)

"Today I noticed in one of my texts that I'd written all the prepositions in the Cyrillic alphabet. So far I've benefited from my knowledge of Russian, as to some extent I've been able to guess the meaning of words on the basis of Russian, but now it's clearly beginning to be a nuisance, for example, in the verb conjugations and words. All the time I keep beginning a phrase with a Russian expression. Perhaps I've used Russian so much at work."

Nevertheless, practice and perseverance helped the student to overcome the problem.

The concept of phonemic awareness – the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words and understand sequences of speech sounds (Yopp 1992) – is essential for reading in the alphabetic system of a target language. The Slovak sound system consists of long and short vowels and hard and soft consonants. The acute mark (in Slovak "dĺžeň", "prolongation mark") indicates a long vowel, for example í /i:/, á /a:/, é /e:/, etc. Another special diacritical mark is the circumflex ("vokáň"), which exists only above the letter "o." - ô. The caron (in Slovak "mäkčeň", "palatalization mark" or "softener") indicates either palatalization or a change of alveolar fricatives into post-alveolar, for example č, dž, š, ž, ň, ľ, ď, ť. In addition to palatalization, the differentiation between soft, hard and neutral consonants also has a grammatical function. This turned out to be one of the most challenging issues especially for those students who had not learned any other Slavic languages before starting on their Slovak course.

The abundance of consonants in Slovak, especially the fricatives (for example, *tri štorťe na štyri, hrča*, etc.), as well as writing the softeners in soft consonants, e.g. *žena, ľažký, čas*, etc., were perceived as highly challenging.

(25) Miten valtava määrä sanoja, joissa paljon konsonantteja ja ei olenkaan vokaaleja!?" (Marketta)

"What an amazing number of words with lots of consonants and no vowels at all!?"

(26) En aluksi tajunnutkaan, kuinka hankalaa on aloittaa sellaisen kielen opiskelu, jota ei ole koskaan kuullut puhuttavan. Aloittaessani englannin, saksan, ruotsin tai ranskan opiskelun tiesin entuudestaan useita sanoja ja jopa sanontoja. Olin myös tietoinen siitä, miltä ne puhuttuina kuulostivat. Slovakian opiskelun alussa en tiennyt kielestä muuta kuin ne asiat, joilla sitä oli joulukuussa minulle mainostettu. (Marketta)

"I didn't realize at first how difficult it is to start learning a new language that you've never heard spoken! When I started English, German, Swedish and French, I already knew some words and expressions. I also knew what they sounded like when spoken. When I started Slovak I didn't apart from what I was told about it in December ..."

The categories of grammatical gender, number and case, which are reflected in the endings of nouns and verbs, as well as the grammatical category of aspect related to the flow of time, were considered to be 'the most difficult' things to grasp, even by the students of other Slavic languages.

(27) Slovakian aspekti on erittäin vaikea. En pysty käsittämään perfektivisten verbien futuuria. (Taru)

"Aspect in Slovak is extremely difficult. I can't figure out the future tense of Perfective verbs!"

Verb conjugation and pronunciation were also regarded as hard work by the students of Russian. Slovak does not resemble Russian to such an extent as they expected!

(28) "Verbien taivutus teetti tosi paljon työtä, sillä yhä edelleenkin mieleeni on iskosunut kielioppiasiat venäjän kielessä eikä slovakissa verbien taivutus muistuta venäjää "tarpeeksi". (Senja)

"The conjugation of verbs gave me a lot of work, because I've still got Russian grammar firmly stuck in my mind, and Slovak verbs don't resemble Russian 'enough'."

On the other hand, modality and different degrees of politeness expressed by means of modal verbs and pronouns, for example, the use of the polite 'you', were not perceived as difficult, as modality occurs in other languages as well.

Observing, exploring, and searching for explanations led to an evident increase in awareness of Slovak. According to Dufva (1994), language awareness is the same as learners' ability to reflect on the language they are learning and on themselves as learners, when they recognize the similarities and differences between languages. Students of Russian recognized some similarities and differences between Slovak and Russian: for example, the similarities of common Slavic words and the differences in intonation and accent.

(29) "Opiskelen venäjää ja ajattelin, että toinen slaavilainen kieli voisi olla hyvä olla kielivalikoimassa. Se saattaisi myös tuoda uutta näkökulmaa venäjän osaamiseen. Ajattelin slovakin olevan helppoa oppia - vähän niin kuin venäjää mutta latinalaisilla kirjaimilla. Nyt olen jo huomannut eroavaisuuksia, mm. slovakissa äänteet ovat vielä monimutkaisempia (suomalaisesta näkökulmasta) kuin venäjässä, esim. L-kirjain. On kova L, pehmeä L ja pitkä L. Vaikka kirjaimet ovat latinalaiset, tuskailin jo merkkien kanssa, joita en saanut kirjoitettua omalla koneella. Kielioppia silmäiltyäni substantiivien ja adjektiivien taivutukset vaikuttavat yllättävän samalta kuin venäjässä, hyvä." (Kaisa)

"I study Russian and I thought that it might be useful to have another Slavic language in my language repertoire. Also it might give me a new way of seeing the study of Russian. I thought Slovak would be an easy language to learn - a bit like Russian but in the Latin alphabet. Now I've noticed the differences, for example, Slovak sounds are even more complicated (from the Finnish viewpoint) than Russian sounds, like the letter L. There's a hard L, a soft L and a long L. Although the letters are Latin, I struggled with the diacritic signs, which I couldn't find on my computer. Glancing at the grammar, the declension of nouns and adjectives look surprisingly similar to Russian. Good."

The student chose Slovak primarily to get a new perspective on her major studies, Russian. A complementary Slavic language is always a bonus in Slavic studies. The student expected Slovak to be 'easy', almost like Russian, but using the Latin alphabet. Nevertheless, comparing the languages and searching for resemblances and differences, starting from the perspective of the Finnish language, resulted in an increase not only in the student's language awareness, but also in her communicative competence (language proficiency).

Students of Slavic languages other than Russian focused on the similarities and differences from the perspective of 'false friends'. Slovak was 'easy' for the students of Czech. However, the closeness of these two languages resulted in some minor misunderstandings, often regarded as amusing, because the same words in Slovak may have a completely different meaning in Czech: for example, *pokoj* ('room' in Czech, 'peace' in Slovak). There are also some differences in the lexical and phonetic systems of the two languages, for example, *stolička* (Slovak) - *židle* (Czech), chair; *choroba* (Slovak) - *nemoc* (Czech), disease; *dedina* (Slovak) - *vesnice* (Czech), village, etc. Major differences were observed in the declensions and conjugations on account of the endings and paradigms. Students of Czech developed a special sensitivity to Slovak, and perhaps a deeper awareness of the language, thanks to the similarities and differences between these two languages. A former student of Czech belonging to the Jyväskylä group acquired such a high level of Slovak that he managed to write the lyrics of a song, which he himself composed and performed. The song is 'a bonus of Camp 10' and serves as a nice conclusion to 'reaching the summit', i.e., concluding the course.

Similarly, the Polish student found learning Slovak relatively easy, although the 'similarities' and the 'contrasts' between Slovak and Polish, both in pronunciation and morphology (e.g. genders), were perceived as challenging, but not too difficult to master.

(30) "Endings are not such a challenge for me in Slovak because some of them are the same like in Polish. However, some endings are different, so I also have to put some effort in trying to find the right one, which is different, then I would normally put in Polish. What is more, some words which are masculine in Polish, in Slovak are just oppo-

site, so feminine. It is not logical for me at all, because if for 24 years of my life the pancake was a man, then it is really weird to find out that now I have to think about 'him' as if he were a woman, so change my way of thinking and... understanding of the world. I have to change the philosophy of my life; pancake is not a man anymore! He changed his sex and now he become a woman☺) "(Wanda)

While, as we have seen, some students recognized the connection between Slovak and other languages, a few of them found no connection at all to the other languages they had learned.

(31) "Kieli ei muistuta juurikaan aikaisemmin opettelemiani kieliä englantia, ruotsia ja saksaa, vaikka toki samaan kieliperheeseen etäisesti kuuluvat. Jonkin verran on toki samantapaisia sanoja ja ne onkin ollut helppo oppia. Myöskin verbin taivutus on onneksi suhteellisen looginen muutamia poikkeuksia lukuun ottamatta." (Eveliina)

"The language doesn't resemble any of the languages I've learned earlier – English, Swedish or German – even though they belong to the same language family (Indo-European). To some extent, there are the same sort of words and it has been easy to learn them. Also the conjugation of verbs seems to be relatively logical, apart from a few exceptions."

Despite the unfamiliarity of Slavic languages, the logics of the language system facilitated this student's learning. While almost all the Finnish students focused primarily on grammar, pronunciation and morphology, the non-Finnish students and the male students of any nationality thought most about the etymology of words or the sociocultural aspect of language use, for example, register, dialects, etc. Their reflections in their learning diaries revealed a relatively high degree of language awareness.

The French student of Slovak found Slovak similar to French. His learning experience supported the claim that 'Slovak is a language which is easily learned'.

(32) "Minun mielestäni slovakki on mielenkiintoinen kieli, koska sitä voi opiskella helposti. Ainakin helpommin kuin suomea. Kielioppi näyttää ranskan kieliopilta. Sanajärjestys on melkein samanlainen, on monta yhteistä sanaa, ja sanotaan asioita samalla tavalla (nimenomaan kun käytetään refleksiivisiä verbejä). Sen lisäksi slovakin kielioppi on hyvin säännöllinen. Verbit ja substantiivit taivutetaan helposti. Jos opiskele ahkerasti, on mahdollista aloittaa keskustelemisen nopeasti." (Jean-Louis)

In my opinion, Slovak is an interesting language, because it is easily learned. At least more easily than Finnish. The grammar resembles French grammar. The word order is almost the same, there are many common words, things are said in the same way (especially when using reflexive verbs). Besides, Slovak grammar is very regular. Verbs and nouns are easily declined and conjugated. If you study hard, you can quickly start talking.

Although listening and reading led to an evident increase in language learning awareness, some students failed to internalize the diacritic system of Slovak through electronic writing (i.e. when writing on a computer). The problem of searching for the diacritic signs resulted in frustration and a loss of interest in writing. At the time of this study, not everyone had the Java editor, which enables the writing of Slavic diacritics, on their home computer. Nowadays, this problem has been overcome by various writing facilitators and other specific features offered by almost all the major computer systems.

Actually, it was pen-and-paper writing that developed the learners' knowledge of diacritics as well as their learning awareness. Students were offered the option either of using the computer or of writing by hand. Those students who wrote by hand generally used the diacritic signs properly, while those who wrote with the computer either totally or partly ignored the diacritic system. The mix of approaches often resulted in a compromise – scanning the hand-written texts. Those who preferred writing by hand claimed that the method definitely increased their awareness of learning Slovak.

One's awareness of learning for example vocabulary or how to write correctly is strong when one puts pen to paper. Several students mentioned this.

(33) "Kun kirjoitan käsin, tiedän, että olen oppimassa ja tiedän mitä olen oppimassa, esim. opin sanastoja paremmin kuin kirjoittamalla tietokoneella." (Pauliina)

"When I write by hand, I know that I am learning and I know what I am learning, for example I learn vocabulary far better than when I write on the computer."

One student observed that writing by hand feels like drawing. The metaphor strengthens the process-like and creative character of learning.

(34) "Ylipäätään käsin kirjoittaminen slovakiksi tuntuu aivan samankaltaiselta kuin piirtäminen. Pidän sitä. En pysty tekemään samaa tietokoneella." (Noora)

"Generally writing Slovak by hand feels like drawing. I enjoy it. I can't do the same on the computer."

Writing by hand may also be connected with the pace of learning.

(35) Minä olen hidas oppija. Minun pitää tietää mitä olen tekemässä. Ainoa tapa, miten opin kirjoittamaan on kirjoitta käsillä. (Noora)

"I'm a slow learner. I have to know what I'm doing. The only way for me to learn how to write is to write by hand."

According to research carried out at the University of Stavanger, writing by hand strengthens the learning process. "When writing by hand, our brain receives feedback from our motor actions, together with the sensation of touching a pencil and paper (Mange 2011). These kinds of feedback are significantly different from those we receive when touching and typing on a keyboard." The experiments proved that when writing by hand, different parts of the brain are activated and the movements of the hand leave 'a motor memory in the sensorimotor part of the part, which facilitates the recognition of the letters. Mange (2011) implies that the brain is even more activated when a verb denoting physical activity is read than when an abstract verb is read, and other experiments suggest that there is a clear connection between touching and human perceptions, between moving and acting. These results support students' increased awareness of learning when writing by hand.

Not only writing by hand, but also reflecting on one's learning enhanced learning awareness. Reflecting is an important skill in all forms of learning (Clarke 2008; Dufva 1994). To gain the maximum benefit, reflecting should be

systematic. Students were asked to reflect on their learning process in their e-learning journals every time they felt they wanted to share some ideas, but at least once a week. As mentioned in Chapter 5.2.2, the learning journals were part of the students' learner portfolios. Students were expected to reflect on what they had learned, how that fitted in to their previously acquired competences, whether or not they had made any progress (climbing upwards), what they believed they had learned and what they had not yet learned. They were encouraged to write regularly, even if only briefly. Thus, learning diaries served both as a learning tool to raise the learners' learning awareness and at the same time as an excellent source of feedback for the teacher.

6.3 Post-course themes

The post-course themes that emerged in the students' learning journals are related to the learners' attitudes to e-learning, their personal and cognitive participation in e-learning, and their beliefs about themselves as (e-)learners after completing the course. The themes at this stage also include learners' approaches to learning, their evaluation of the course, and some reflections on the teacher's role in e-learning from both the learners' and the teacher's perspective.

Table 24 Post-course Themes

POST- COURSE THEMES
E-learning revisited
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blended learning • Frequency of face-to-face tutorials • Learners' participation in e-learning: active & cognitive
Students' perceptions of themselves as (e-)learners revisited
Approaches to learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deep • surface • strategic
Evaluation of the course
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New learning environment / New learning strategies • Course layout • Course content
Teacher's role
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher perspective • Student perspective

6.3.1 E-learning revisited

Students' views of e-learning after completing the course had not significantly changed. All the students appreciated face-to-face meetings. They claimed that the teacher's physical presence and that of their fellow students' had a positive effect on their learning. Their aim was not only to learn but also to learn successfully and with pleasure.

The Slovak e-learning course can be used in various ways: asynchronously, independently of time and space; synchronously, as a virtual classroom (Chapter 3.2.2); or as an addition to class-room instruction, a combination of face-to-face classroom instruction and computer-mediated activities, when it can be either asynchronous or synchronous e-learning, or both of the modes (blended learning). Despite greatly appreciating the flexibility of asynchronous e-learning, which enables learners to spend more time on processing what is to be learned, students regarded blended learning (face-to-face classroom tutorials combined with computer-mediated activities) as the best option for learning a less commonly taught language. Face-to-face sessions were motivating due to the physical presence of the teacher and of other students.

(36) "Tutorials were very useful I got much information and new passion to get ahead..." (Jean-Luis)

Some students reported that learning in class, face-to-face, was more efficient because they paid attention to issues they might have missed when learning alone.

(37) "Täysin ilman kontaktiopetusta en varmaan olisi oppinut/ Jaksanut oppia mitään. Kontaktiopetuksessa olen oppinut paljon pieniä (ja isoja) asioita, joiden oppimiseen olisi mennyt ikuisuus ilman apua. Itse en olisi välttämättä huomannut kaikkia tärkeitä asioita..." (Henriikka)

"Without any contact classes at all I certainly wouldn't have learned / managed to learn anything. I have learned a lot of small (and big) things in the contact classes, which it would have taken me ages to learn without any help. I wouldn't necessarily have noticed all the important things for myself..." (Oliivia)

Almost all the respondents claimed that they would not have completed the course without the regular contact classes. The main source of motivation was the teacher's presence.

(38) "Uuden kielen itsenäinen opiskelu verkkokurssin ympäristössä on ollut haasteellista. Eniten opin luokassa. Kun opettaja on läsnä, niin motivaationi opiskella slovakia on vahvempi." (Merja)

"Learning a new language in an e-learning environment has been challenging. I learn most in the classroom. When the teacher is physically present, my motivation to learn Slovak is stronger."

The teacher's presence and the increase in motivation are an interesting equation. The reason may be confidence in the teacher's expertise and the desire for an

immediate response and feedback, which may help to ensure that students do not make mistakes and that if they do, they will be immediately corrected.

(39) "Vieraan kielen opiskelussa palautteen antaminen oppilaalle ja oppilaan kehityksen seuraaminen on mahdollista myös verkossa." (Merja)

"Giving the student feedback and following the student's development in learning a foreign language is also possible online."

Undoubtedly, the teacher's empathy and excitement about the language being taught contributed to a feeling of successful learning, which bears out Caruso's (2015) claim that learners' emotional involvement in learning a language can lead to more effective language acquisition (Dewaele 2011). According to Kock (2005), synchronous communication often results in an increase in motivation, because all the elements that are typical of 'natural' face-to-face communication contribute to learners' psychological arousal, which is reflected in increased motivation. This may be one explanation for students' increased motivation when participating in the contact classes

Contact classes were offered once in two weeks in Jyväskylä and once in three weeks in Helsinki, in both cases in the form of intensive four-hour sessions. In addition, individual feedback sessions were offered on request. Nevertheless, the students were constantly hoping for more contact classes.

Learning Slovak, like learning any other language at the beginner's level in an e-learning environment, was experienced as demanding. Some students had little faith in the efficiency of e-learning, while others thought that e-learning courses were more appropriate for advanced level teaching and that face-to-face classes would better serve beginners.

(40) Alkeiskurssille minusta sopisi pelkästään kontaktiopetukseen perustuva kurssi. Sitten jatkokurssit voisivat olla yhdistelmä kontaktiopetuksesta ja verkossa opiskelusta." (Linnea)

"In my opinion, courses for beginners should only be offered as contact classes. More advanced courses could be offered as a combination of contact classes and e-learning"

(41) Verkkokurssi on hyvä, se sopii minulle, mutta kyllä ainakin itse tarvitsen myös kontaktiopetusta." (Linda)

"E-learning /online learning is good, it suits me, but I at least need contact classes as well."

(42) "Kontaktiopetustunteja voisi olla enemmän ja useammin, sillä kolmessa viikossa ehtii unohtaa asioita." (Juha)

"There should be more contact classes and they should be offered more frequently, because three weeks gives you time to forget things..."

(43) "Kontaktiopetus on mielestäni erittäin tärkeä vieraan kielen opiskelussa. Kontaktiopetukset voisivat olla 1,5 h: mittaisia ja niitä voisi olla verkkokurssin aikana noin 4-5- kertaa" (Merja)

"In my opinion, contact sessions are very important in learning a foreign language. Sessions could last 1½ hours and they could be offered 4 or 5 times during an e-learning course."

(44) Opetustuokio parin viikon välein on ollut tehokasta. Pidempi väli EI käy! Ehtii unohtaa liikkaa... Silloin tällöin voisi olla opetusta viikon väleinkin (ei aina). (Henriikka)

"Contact sessions once in a couple weeks are efficient. Longer intervals are OUT OF THE QUESTION! You've got time to forget too much... From time to time there could be teaching once a week (not always)."

Hrastinski (2008) introduces the concept of personal and cognitive participation in e-learning. Personal participation is more appropriate for the exchange of less complex information, for example, social support, basic information related to the course, etc., and thus is better supported by synchronous e-learning, for example, face-to-face classes and tutorials, while cognitive participation is more reflective and thus more appropriate for the complex exchange of information, and is generally supported by asynchronous e-learning. Both types of communication were facilitated on the Slovak course. Students' personal participation in the course activities (completing the tasks, participating in the course activities - pair or group work, simulations, dialogues, etc.), which happened most frequently during the contact sessions, was generally high in both groups, but cognitive participation, for example, reflecting in the learner diaries, was significantly higher in Jyväskylä than in Helsinki (Figure 11).

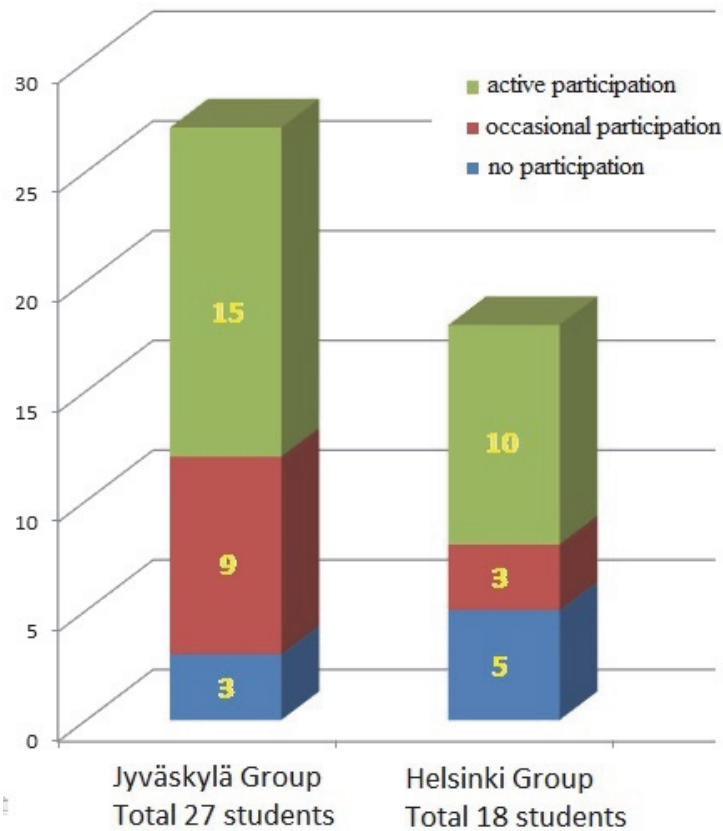


Figure 11 Learners' cognitive participation in e-learning

Interestingly, while the majority preferred synchronous, especially face-to-face communication, the 'deep learners' (Entwistle 2001; Basharina 2009) and those who already had some experience of e-learning preferred asynchronous communication.

6.3.2 Students' perceptions of themselves as e-learners revisited

Before the course began, students were asked about their perceptions of themselves as e-learners (Pre-course themes). After the course, they were asked the same question. Students generally considered e-learning to be highly motivating, but also challenging because of time pressures. Surprisingly, flexibility was perceived as both the greatest bonus and, at the same time, the biggest problem. Face-to-face sessions were clearly seen as most beneficial (Section 6.3.1), on the grounds that they gave the opportunity to ask for clarification and receive immediate feedback, which often led to a feeling of success and a corresponding increase in motivation.

(45) "Kontaktituokiot oli todella hyvät. Vihdoin tajusin asioita, jotka olivat epäselviä..." (Kaisa)

"The contact sessions were really good. I finally understood things which were unclear..."

(46) "Jo ensimmäisen tunnin jälkeen tunsin huojuunusta. En ollut opiskellut itselleni täysin uutta kieltä sitten lukion ensimmäisen vuoden ja vaikkei minulla koskaan ollut ollut ongelmia kielten opiskelun tai uuden oppimisen kanssa, minua jännitti hie-man. Ensimmäisen tunnin aikana huomasin kuitenkin, ettei oppiminen onneksi ollut muuttunut vaikeammaksi. Vaikka aina aluksi oppiminen tarkoittaakin sanojen ja sanontojen ulkoa opettelemista, uuden kielen aloittaminen tuntui mukavalta." (Marketta)

"Already after the first lesson I felt relieved. I hadn't learned a completely new language since the first year in high school and although I'd never had any problems with language learning in general or with learning something new, I felt a bit anxious about it. But during the first lesson I noticed that learning hadn't become more difficult, despite the fact that starting always means learning words and expressions by heart. Starting to learn a new language felt nice."

Some students, however, did not notice any major difference between e-learning and traditional learning; in their opinion, flexibility was only one of the 'advantages' of e-learning.

(47) "Luulen, että olen oppinut verkkokurssilla aivan yhtä hyvin kuin olisin oppinut kontaktiopetuksessakin. Erona perinteiseen kurssiin on vain se, että verkkokurssilla aikataulu ei ole niin ehdottoman tiukka. Motivaatio säilyy parhaiten, kun ei tarvitse hopuilla liikaa." (Henriikka)

"I think that I've learned on an online course just as much as I would have learned in face-to-face teaching. The only difference with a traditional course is that with a web course the schedule is not so relentlessly strict. You keep your motivation up better when you don't have to rush too much."

The teacher's physical presence was repeatedly emphasized as being essential for learning, as it 'guaranteed' students' rising motivation and their active participation in the learning process.

(48) "I think that learning a new foreign language independently by means of an e-learning course suits better for the more advanced learners. Is there anything more important than teacher's presence and encouragement? I noticed that I learned most on the contact sessions, my motivation was at its best at those times..." (Pauli)

(49) "Uuden kielen itsenäinen opiskelu on ollut haasteellista. Opettajan kannustus vaikutti positiivisesti motivaatiooni." (Sampo)

"Independent study to learn a new language has been challenging. The teacher's encouragement (physical presence) had a positive impact on my motivation."

Diaz & Entonado's (2009) study of students' satisfaction with blended, online and face-to-face courses supports the findings of this study: students are generally more satisfied with blended courses. On the other hand, the study carried out by Lim et al. (2008) of students' achievement and satisfaction in the use of different learning styles found no significant differences between online (e-learning) and traditional (face-to-face) learning. A similar investigation con-

ducted by Solimeno et al. (2008) revealed that asynchronous collaborative e-learning can result in an increase in professional competences and can therefore be used to increase the learning of low-efficacy students. Hui et al. (2008), too, in their comparative study on the effectiveness and satisfaction of technology-enhanced and face-to-face learning, claim that technology-enhanced learning has a positive impact on students' acquisition of conceptualized and abstract knowledge and promotes their reflective observation. However, it does not enhance their skills of obtaining knowledge, which requires actual experience.

To return to the students of Slovak, some of them mentioned the need to acquire new skills and adopt specific strategies for e-learning, and to abandon the old habits associated with learning from books.

(50) "Olen tottunut opiskelemaan kirjan avulla, ehkä siitä syystä tuntuu aluksi sekavalta verkkosivujen rakenne. Erityisesti olen tottunut siihen, että kurssin kappaleissa/teksteissä on kaikki tarvittava sanasto ja kielioppi. Mutta kai tuohon järjestykseen tottuu ..." (Linda)

"I'm used to learning from books and perhaps for that reason the structure of the course seemed to be a bit muddled at the beginning. I'm especially used to the course chapters/ texts having all the necessary vocabulary and grammar. Perhaps I shall get used to this new order..."

To sum up, e-learning was generally perceived as highly motivating, although the time constraints of the course made it also challenging. Flexibility, one of the most significant features of e-learning, was regarded as the greatest advantage and at the same time the greatest problem. Synchronous communication, for example, face-to-face sessions, were very much appreciated, although 'deep learners' and those who already had some experience of e-learning preferred asynchronous communication. Learning Slovak in an e-learning environment, like the learning of any other less commonly taught language, was experienced as very demanding. The e-learning of Slovak in particular, but also of any less commonly taught language, was recommended for the more advanced level, but face-to-face classes were often deemed best for the beginner and intermediate levels.

6.3.3 Learners' approaches to learning: deep or surface?

Learning Slovak was primarily explored from the learners' viewpoint – how learners themselves experienced their learning. The students were asked about how they learn, they reflected on their learning in their learning diaries, and their progress was monitored.

Entwistle (2001) defines three basic approaches to learning, each of which is related to a different form of motivation. The deep approach refers to intrinsic motivation, the surface approach to extrinsic motivation and the fear of failure, and the strategic approach to a need for achievement. As for learning strategies, Entwistle (2001:596) claims that "students' approaches are affected by their prior educational and personal histories, which produce habitual patterns of studying. However, the content and context of the task also evoke strategies which

are specific to that particular situation". Table 25 shows the key features of each of the three approaches, the learning strategies generally used, and the learning outcomes.

Table 25 Approaches, processes and outcomes of learning (Adapted from Entwistle 2001)

Approach	Intention	Learning methods	Process	Outcome
Deep	Understanding	Comprehension learning	Building overall description of content area Reorganizing and relating ideas to prior knowledge	Deep level of understanding
Surface	Reproducing	Operation learning	Detailed attention to evidence Incomplete understanding Surface approach Memorisation Overlearning by routine repetition	Surface level understanding
Strategic	Achieving	Well-organized studying	Any combination of the above processes necessary in carrying out the perceived task requirements successfully	High grades with or without understanding

Analysis of the students' perceptions of their own learning strategies and learning outcomes reveals that with only one exception, all the respondents actively participating in the e-learning Slovak course regarded themselves as independent learners with a deep approach to learning the language. Their participation in the course was based on personal interest and group commitment.

As in Entwistle's model (2001), all the learners made a constant effort to understand the teaching material. They constantly built on their previous experience of language learning, comparing the target language to the languages they had already learned. Entwistle (2001: 596) describes this process as "relating ideas to previous knowledge ...looking for patterns and underlying principles". They sought patterns, generalizations and linguistic principles, especially when learning grammar and vocabulary. Not only did their learning awareness develop, but they also became sensitive to Slovak culture, reflecting an approach that Entwistle calls genuine interest in the content (2001) and what Dufva (1994) refers to as cultural awareness.

Learners' reflections on their learning process clearly revealed an increase in learning awareness and the firm belief that they had learned a lot. Evans & Kozhevnikov (2013:20) view this crucial aspect as "being aware of understanding developing while learning" and learning as a stimulating activity.

(51) "Kurssilla on ollut tosi kiva olla. Minulle tämä on enemmän kiva harrastus kuin 'pakollista' opiskelua." (Henriikka)

"I had a great time on the course! To me this is more like a nice hobby than an "obligatory" study..."

(52) "...(verkkokurssissa) käsitellään sellaisia aiheita, jotka ovat täällä (alkeis-) tasolla kielen opiskelussa olennaisia ja motivoivia." (Oliivia)

"...(the e-learning course) deals with topics that are relevant and motivating at the beginner's level."

In line with Mayes & de Freitas (2013; Chapter 3. 2), students constructed knowledge actively, continuously building on what they already knew or could do (cumulative learning), progressing from the easier to the more complex.

(53) "Verkkokurssin "leirit" etenevät mielestäni hyvin loogisesti niin, että alkupäässä on helpompaa ja yksinkertaisempaa ja loppua kohti vaikeutuu ja sanastollisesti monipuolistuu." (Oliivia)

In my opinion, the "camps" in the e-learning course move forward quite logically, so that at the beginning it's easier and more straightforward and toward the end it becomes more difficult and with a more varied vocabulary.

Students with the strategic approach to learning put consistent effort into learning: they set up the right conditions for themselves for study and good learning materials, and monitor the effectiveness of their learning strategies (Thorpe 2002). In this context, the strategic approach to learning emphasizes the consistency of effort put into studying, as reflected in the metaphor of climbing. Students with the deep approach to learning use more effective learning strategies and look for meaning, and therefore benefit most from learning. Deep approaches to learning underline the socio-constructivist approach to learning through building knowledge on what has been learned before, searching for patterns, becoming conscious of one's learning process and finally becoming truly interested in learning a new language. Figure 11 aims to depict the students' approaches to learning Slovak in accordance with Entwistle's model (2001) in Basharina (2009).

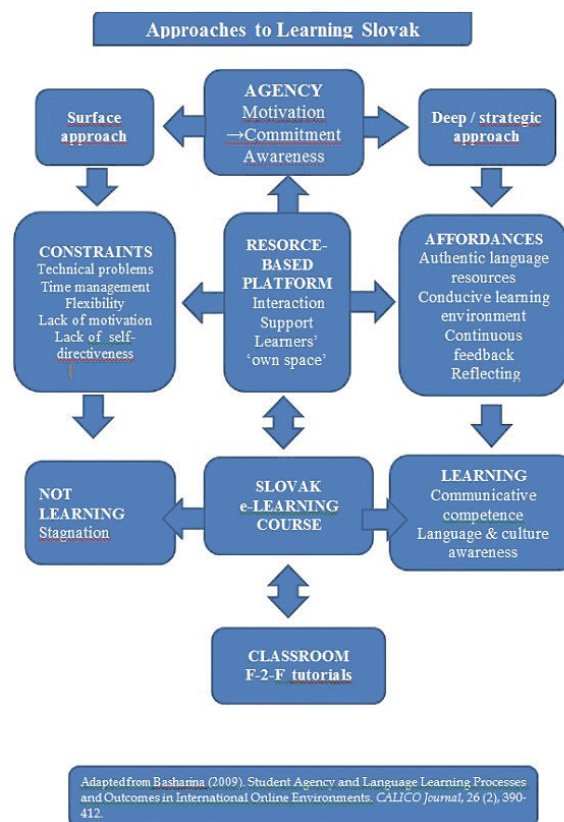


Figure 12 Approaches to learning Slovak (adapted from Basharina 2009)

Table 26 summarizes the most important issues related to students' attitudes towards e-learning after completing the course, their perceptions of themselves as (e)-learners, and their approaches to learning.

Table 26 Post-course Themes: Learners' attitudes, perceptions and approaches to learning

Attitudes towards e-learning	Learners' perceptions of themselves as learners	Approaches to learning
lack of contact classes	new skills	DEEP & STRATEGIC
e-learning for advanced levels only	new learning styles & strategies	language awareness
time constraints	identification with the metaphor of climbing	consciousness of learning
lack of planning	increased motivation	cultural awareness
challenge of writing: awareness	language learning awareness	increased motivation
motivation	creativity	increase in communicative competence
excessive flexibility	successful learning	increase in knowledge

The students' attitudes towards e-learning did not significantly change from beginning to end of the course. Nevertheless, two unexpected issues emerged after the course: the challenge of writing, and the excessive flexibility of e-learning. Students had difficulties with the correct use of Slovak diacritic marks, which perform various functions, for example, prolonging vowels or softening consonants. The difficulties occurred especially when writing electronically, through the computer. To solve this problem they wrote by hand, which evidently supported not only the development of their "diacritic awareness", but also increased their awareness of learning (thus the term 'language learning awareness').

As for the flexibility issue, flexibility is considered to be one of the greatest benefits of e-learning. While flexibility, 'the freedom of time and space', was said by students to be one of their main reasons for choosing the e-learning option of learning Slovak, at the same time they found it to be one of the greatest problems. I think this is due to their lack of experience of self-directed learning. As discussed in the section on pre-course themes (Chapter 5.3.3), self-directed learning means taking responsibility for one's own learning and self-monitoring (monitoring, evaluating and regulating one's cognitive learning strategies; Bolhuis 1996; Garrison 1997). In self-directed learning, learners' efforts are initiated and maintained by motivation and volition. Motivation drives the decision to participate, and volition sustains the will to see the task through to the end so that the goals are achieved (Corno 1992; Garrison 1997). An obvious lack of self-directed learning in a few cases resulted in a struggle to complete the course and in just two cases to dropping out. Apart from these two (one in each group), all the students completed the course and employed the deep or strategic approach to learning, with one exception, one student who employed the surface approach. In addition to their clear increase in overall communicative competence, the students also enriched their linguistic knowledge by the information about Slovak culture and literature, which resulted in increased cultural awareness.

6.3.4 Students' assessment of the e-learning course

The e-learning course was continuously evaluated and developed by both the students and the teacher. The course (content and structure) was evaluated from the viewpoint of clarity, authenticity, functionality and relevance. In the students' opinion, the learning environment should be not only practical and 'easy to orientate to', but also pleasant and motivating, especially when the target language is a less commonly taught language and the learning community is small. The layout, structure of the course and overall content of the course were considered to be visually pleasant and motivating, and very clear and informative, giving students all the information they needed.

(54) "Verkkokurssin rakenne vaikuttaa hyvältä ja idea vuorikiipeilystä on kannustava. Opiskelu on jotenkin helpompaa, kun on välietappeja joihin voi pyrkiä pikkuhiljaa. Olen kuitenkin huomannut jo myös sen, että opiskelu on varsin vaativaa, koska

suurin osa opiskelusta on itsenäistä... kurssin selkeä rakenne ja kontaktiopetus-errat auttavat etenemisessä.” (Oliivia)

“The structure of the e-learning course looks good and the idea of climbing a mountain is encouraging. Learning is somehow easier when there are staging posts which you can try to reach step by step. Nevertheless, I’ve also noticed that the learning is rather demanding, because most of it is independent learning...the clear structure of the course and contact sessions help one make progress.”

(55) “Verkkokurssi on visuaalisesti kaunis ja motivoi senkin osalta opiskelemaan koska kuvat liittyvät aiheeseen.” (Merja)

“The e-learning course is visually beautiful and that also motivates one to learn, because the pictures are related to the topics.”

The idea of learning as climbing and the overall layout of the course had a positive impact on how active the students were. This particular learning environment promotes the feeling in students that they have learned Slovak (identifying with the mountain-climbing metaphor). Some students, especially the two who were monitored for the whole academic year, identified with the course structure to such an extent that they perceived time – the seasons of the year – within the framework of the course.

(56) “Toivottavasti syksyn mittaan pääsisin ainakin 3-4 leiriä eteenpäin, 10. leiriin asti ei vielä taida ehtiä, sillä syksy on melko lyhyt, mennäänhän nyt jo melkein lokakuussa.” (Eveliina)

“Hopefully, during the autumn I shall get on at least 3 – 4 camps. I doubt if I shall reach Camp 10 yet, as the autumn is rather short – we are almost in October.”

(57) “Kun aspekti selkenee, niin luulen, että saan camp kutosen pian valmiiksi ja joululomalla voin siirtyä seitsemännen leirin pariin. Sijanmuotoja täytyy vielä toki keräillä.” (Eveliina)

“When I understand Aspect better, I think I’ll soon get Camp 6 done and during the Christmas holiday I shall be able to move on to Camp 7. Well, I still have to take another look at the cases.”

Learner autonomy is generally considered to be an essential precondition for self-directed learning. It gives learners greater control over their learning, enabling them to “shape their learning experiences with the purpose of self-development and fulfilment” (Reinders & Hubbard 2014, Atkinson 1993; Stevick 1980). Technology can play an important role in enhancing learner autonomy. On the one hand, learners can take advantage of all the many different kinds of free resources that are available online if they know which to choose and how to use them, and on the other hand, they can profit from the resources that are more specifically pedagogical in nature. Reinders & Hubbard (2014) have listed the affordances of CALL, for example, the authenticity, interaction, situated learning, multimedia, feedback, monitoring of learning behaviour and progress, collaboration and consistent interaction. All of these ‘affordances’ are part of the Slovak e-learning course and have been used by both the students and the teacher.

The e-learning environment set up for this course in Slovak, with all the above-mentioned features built around the metaphor of mountain climbing, was perceived as one of the greatest affordances of the students' e-learning. The content of the course – the texts, vocabulary, listening and language (grammar) sections, including the tasks, recap tests, bonus and 'tricky' sections, the topic-related websites and other complementary materials – were evaluated for their usefulness, interest, appropriateness, clarity and up-to-dateness.

(58) "Verkkokurssi sisältää niin paljon materiaalia, että Bonus-sektioiden tietomäärä voi vaihdella... Tärkeintä on, että opiskelija voi niistä hyötyä halutessaan ja saada tarvitsevansa tiedon." (Henriikka)

"The e-learning course has so much material that the amount of material in the Bonus sections can vary ... the most important thing is that the student can use them if they want to and get the necessary information."

The amount and type of information as well as the variety of learning resources was regarded as sufficient. The content was considered to be appropriate and interesting. The language sections were praised for their clarity.

Following activity theory and the theory of expansive learning (Engeström, 1999; Chapter 3.2.2), according to which a simple idea may be transformed into concrete practice through specific learning actions, which form an expansive cycle or spiral (Spiral Learning, Chapter 3.2.2), the course followed a logical model from the easier to the more difficult and complex, and finally towards the more multimodal material to be learned.

(59) "Verkkokurssin 'leirit' etenevät mielestäni hyvin loogisesti niin, että alkupäässä on helpompaa ja yksinkertaisempaa ja loppua kohti vaikeutuu ja sanastollisesti monipuolistuu.... Verkkokurssi etenee sopivassa tahdissa helpommasta vaativampaan, että vaatuimmatkaan tekstit eivät tunnu enää liian vaikealta." (Henriikka)

"The 'camps' progress in my opinion quite logically – so that at the beginning they're easier and more straightforward, and towards the end they become more difficult and lexically more wide-ranging...As the course progresses from the easier to the more demanding at a suitable tempo, not even the most demanding texts feel too difficult any more."

Thanks to the appropriate pace of the course, the more difficult learning material was not perceived as too difficult.

The learners were continuously monitored and evaluated by the teacher through continuous feedback on home assignments and learning diary entries. After every camp, students were expected to do a test focussed on the topics of that camp. As the learning diaries revealed, the students did not participate in the course with the intention of getting the highest possible grade, but of getting the highest possible number of credits (4–5 credits ECTS for completing the course).

Peer and teacher feedback was considered to be an essential prerequisite not only for successful completion of the course but also for going on to further Slovak studies; some students considered using Slovak in the future, in further Slovak studies, summer courses or employment.

The most frequently occurring themes during and after the course (Chapters 6.3 and 6.4) were related firstly to the skills of time management and sec-

only to various awareness-raising language issues, such as language contacts, or the Slovak language system, with special focus on the sound system, vocabulary and speaking. Special attention was paid to writing (Chapter 6.2.2): writing was one of the greatest challenges, due to Slovak diacritics.

The primary purpose of the course was to get learners interested and enthusiastic about studying Slovak. The aim was not only to develop their communicative competence but also to teach them how to use the language in a real-life context and enrich their knowledge of Slovakia and its culture. These objectives were met. At the time of this study, eight students had decided to continue with Slovak studies and had completed the introductory programme of basic academic studies, and two of them had also completed the programme to Bachelor level. Five students participated in a summer course in Slovak language and culture held in Slovakia and four students participated in the Erasmus exchange programme to Slovakia. One student applied for an internship in Slovakia and became a mountain guide in the High Tatra Mountains.

Table 27 summarizes the evaluation of the course, presenting the most significant and frequently repeated issues retrieved from the learning diaries, evaluation sheets and informal discussions.

Table 27 Course evaluation

Course evaluation (Overall) Criteria	Learning environment Criteria	Course structure (Camps, sections)
clarity authenticity functionality relevancy learner-centeredness promoting learner agency novelty promoting collaboration	authenticity flexibility immediate feedback time for reflection collaboration supportive atmosphere interaction promoting learner autonomy	relevant clear appropriate updated interesting pleasant challenging motivating

The fact that all the answers are positive may be the result of low participation in the course evaluation. Only 7 out of the 18 students in Helsinki and 10 out of the 25 in Jyväskylä expressed an opinion about the structure of the course and the appropriateness of the learning environment.

6.4 Teacher's role: Some reflections

The teaching experiment confirmed the teacher's multiple roles in the teaching process: the teacher as a linguistic and cultural informant, expert, negotiator (Dufva 1994; Caruso 2015), facilitator, mentor, student, and participant in continuous dialogue. The teacher identified herself with all the above-mentioned roles, in addition to being an IT expert, personal advisor, and above all, a friend.

Reinders & Hubbard (2014) claim in their article on CALL and learner autonomy that it has always been the teacher who tries to make the nature of teaching and the learning environment compatible with the individual aspects of learning. The tables below offer a summary of the teacher's role as perceived by the students and the teacher.

Table 28 Teacher's role(s) in e-learning

TEACHER'S ROLE(S)	
Teacher Perspective	Student Perspective
Course implementation	Course implementation
Learner-centred environment	Learner-centred environment
Student-teacher interaction	Motivation, facilitation
Reflection-on-action (Teacher research)	Course communication / interaction
Continuous feedback	Persistent feedback
Teacher as cultural informant	Teaching
Course development	Reflecting / 'feedback to feedback'
Student engagement & motivation	Instructions, advice
Student support	Learning resources
Personal support	Personal support
Reflecting on teaching and on students' reflections	Student engagement
Tutoring & evaluating	Evaluation / feedback

Many attempts have been made over the years to establish the pedagogical foundations or prerequisites for successful e-learning (Govindasamy 2002; Selim 2005; Fresen & Boyd 2005) and e-tutoring. For example, Fresen (2005) emphasizes eight critical groups of factors for the success of high quality web-supported learning and divides these factors into approximately 50 sub-factors. They cover the areas of technology, teaching (interaction with students, student support), the student perspective (peer, group communication, time management, critical thinking, etc.), the instructional design (cooperative learning, reciprocity, student engagement in knowledge construction, interactivity, the enhancement of student motivation, etc.) and pedagogical factors (learner paths to recursive learning, a learner-centred environment, the currency of learning resources and continuous improvement). In the light of these factors, the Slovak e-learning course can be regarded as successful, especially the achievement of a supportive learning atmosphere, the enhancement of learner agency, the increase in learners' motivation and language learning awareness and, especially, promoting the practices of recursive learning (Rimes 2012), with learners organizing and arranging their thoughts in ways that make sense to them. The success is also based on narrating: reflecting on the learning process, curating, students making sense of what they are learning, and finally sharing what they have learned within the group and with others. These are the secrets of the survival of Slovak in Finland for almost 40 years.

Stewart (2014) in her article on the role of the instructor in student-centred online learning emphasizes three key characteristics of an instructor: authority, guidance and presence. Undoubtedly, authority is always associated with the

teacher due to the grading and correcting: the teacher is expected to ‘correct’ students if they say or do something ‘wrong’. Nonetheless, “the professional consensus” of the teacher may be presented in a way that encourages students to reflect, participate in open discussion, and promote their own agency and autonomy. As for the teacher as guide, the teacher is dependable and can be counted on to help students and facilitate their learning. The teacher as guide is also responsible for the design of the learning environment and provides the framework for the course, although students themselves also participate in structuring the course. Finally, the teacher’s presence often represents something less directive than guidance: Stewart perceives the teacher’s presence simply as ‘being present’. I personally consider the teacher’s presence to be essential, especially when the subject in question is a less commonly taught language and when the students are learning in a new language-learning environment. The metaphor of the mountain guide (teacher) offers a guarantee that the climbers (students) will reach the top (the set learning objectives). As the students reflected in their learning diaries, their ‘motivation to learn is higher, when the teacher is present’. Returning to Kock (2005), the teacher in the contact class represents the ‘natural medium’ who can contribute to learners’ psychological arousal, which is reflected in increased motivation (Chapter 6.3.1). It has also been argued, on the other hand, that the teacher does not have to be physically present; even their virtual presence has a significant impact on learners through the design of the learning environment and the enhancement of learners’ interaction (Stewart 2014; Brenna 2014).

When thinking again about my role as a teacher, I found a reflection of my activities in design-based research (DBR; Chapter 2.4). DBR is a methodology for research into and the design of technology-enhanced learning environments that is intended primarily to provide a bridge between pedagogical theories and practical educational innovations, including the use of technologies for language learning (Engeström 2007; Blin & Jalkanen 2014). According to Collin et al (2004), DBR addresses such issues as the nature of learning in a given context, learning in the real world rather than in a classroom or laboratory conditions, formative evaluation, etc. Despite its focus on learning ecologies, DBR has also received some criticism for being ‘a too perfect design’, too linear, ignoring the possibility of various interventions as contested terrains (Engeström 2007 in Blin & Jalkanen 2014). Nevertheless, DBR has been used for exploring both learning and teaching. Even though it is generally the teacher who plays a key role in designing the course, determining the learning outcomes, that is the expected competences, and implementing the educational programme within the given institutional context (*design for teaching*), the teacher never in fact acts alone but always gets the learners engaged in this *teaching-learning* joint project (*design for learning*) (Lund & Haug 2011; Bergroth-Koskinen & Seppälä 2012).

Bergroth-Koskinen & Seppälä (2012), higher education teachers of academic English, used DBR to explore their own teaching. The goal of their research was to find out how students learn, which affordances promoted the development of learner agency, and how the teachers’ design used for this pur-

pose worked. The main focus of this pioneering work of authentic teacher research was on the enhancement of learner agency. The authors summarized their teacher-research experiences as follows:

“The teacher-researcher has to be prepared to assess the course as it was, and that brings the topic very close to self. The teacher-researcher has to be prepared for various feelings (e.g. disappointment) when studying the implementation of the learning designs created by him/herself. Openness, integrity and a good working ethics are required to be willing to acknowledge, document and publish both successful and unsuccessful designs. In DBR the researcher needs to stay open for whatever emerges from the data, especially when studying opportunities for learning, constructed in different ways with different learners” (Bergroth-Koskinen & Seppälä 2012: 108).

Even though I did not use DBR for my study of the Slovak e-learning course, I can fully identify with their experiences. As in mountain climbing, so in learning: in either case the conditions may change in a moment, something unexpected may occur, new situations may emerge. A mountain guide (the teacher) has to be prepared for whatever comes (the metaphor of falling or abseiling, i.e. going back to the previous stages of learning, etc.).



Figure 13 Teacher as a guide

The route to the summit may be long, learning situations may vary. Nevertheless, in this case, the implementation and teaching of the e-learning course has been an enriching pedagogical experience, a continuous dialogue between the students and the teacher, the learning environment and the learners, and the learning environment and the teacher, the results of which are still present in my everyday work.

7 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation is a report on a pedagogical experiment conducted between 2007 and 2010 at the University of Jyväskylä. The experiment consists of the e-learning course in Slovak and teacher research conducted as action research (reflection-on-action research). The e-learning course is based on constructivist learning theories, which emphasize the learner's active participation in learning through actively constructing new knowledge on the basis of his or her prior experience. The constructivist e-learning theory favours collaborative and cooperative learning, authentic assessment, and scaffolding, all of which enhance the learners' performance (Johnson 2004; Koohang 2005; Mayes & de Freitas 2013; Chapter 3.2.2).

The e-learning environment was designed in accordance with the core aims of activity theory: transforming learning and teaching practices in order to improve the conditions and outcomes of teaching and learning. As Lantolf & Thorne (2006) claim, all learners are generally involved in the same learning activity, although cognitively they are not engaged in the same way. Their level of engagement is determined by their motives, which shape their orientation to learn. The orientation to learn is generally dynamic and flexible and learners function as active agents who are able to direct activities in specific ways, according to their own objectives, motivations and histories (Coughlan & Duff 1994). The Slovak e-learning environment was shaped accordingly, following the idea of learning as climbing a mountain, which strengthens the idea of 'dynamic learning' (Chapter 5). The idea of expansive learning (Engeström 1999) was implemented by the metaphor of 'stands', which mean a recap or review after every camp. Thus new material was approached only after 'ensuring', i.e. testing, what had already been acquired (the metaphor of recap) (Chapter 5.1).

In the context of this study, the learning environment means the overall context of learning: the e-learning course, the contact sessions / tutorials, academic practices, the social and political context, and so on. This reflects the importance of the learning environment for learning (van Lier 2004). Van Lier proposed that language learning occurs in the context of communication and interaction: learners learn in an activity-centred context, where the activity and

perception are central. To accomplish the tasks set for them, learners make use of all the resources and tools available (*affordances*), including metalinguistic knowledge (Chapter 3.1.3; Chapter 3.1.4).

A lot of effort was put into the design and implementation of the course, even though nowadays e-learning is by no means rare; on the contrary, it is widely used at all levels of education. Nevertheless, the evaluation and functionality of the course were also key questions in this experiment.

Let us now return to the research questions that were posed in Chapter 5.2.4. The questions were directed at learners' expectations of learning and, in particular, of e-learning Slovak before and during the course, and their experiences of and responses to the challenges of e-learning, especially as regards the particularities of the Slovak language. The questions also focused on the evaluation of the e-learning course from the students' perspective, including their perceptions of themselves as e-learners, their approaches to learning, and their perceptions of the teacher in the e-learning environment.

The main findings are described in Chapter 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4. In what follows, I will add some observations, implications and suggestions.

The learners' expectations of e-learning were high before the course and they did not change substantially during the course. The students recognized the affordances and constraints of their learning. The greatest affordance was the teacher's presence and the greatest constraint was the inadequate time management.

New e-learning strategies were adopted during the course, including, for example, time management and planning, responsibility for learning, commitment to participating in the course, self-assessment, problem solving, coping with stress, self-motivation and reward, reflection, listening, doing research (planning, searching for information, assessing the quality of the information obtained) and collaboration.

The presence of the teacher was perceived as the greatest affordance: students appreciated the combination of face-to-face classroom instruction and computer-mediated activities, either asynchronous or synchronous e-learning, or both (Hrastinsky 2008; Murphy et al. 2011).

During the course, the learners developed further the learning skills they had begun to use, in some cases even combining traditional learning strategies with the new skills, for example, producing lists of vocabulary or taking notes. Interestingly, the need emerged for more complex texts in the online materials.

New learning styles also occurred during the course, such as implicit learning, that is, learning through a 'click' or 'purposeful learning', learning specifically in order to use what has been learned in working life, in this case a less known foreign language, Slovak (showing instrumental motivation), as well as 'learning from curiosity'. A major challenge during the course was posed by the novelty of the Slovak language, its structures, phonology and etymology; this was a challenge even for those who had already studied other Slavic languages. Similarities and differences were identified between Slovak and other Slavic languages, and language interference was observed in the case

of students majoring in Czech. Negative language transfer occurred in one case, a student of Russian.

Regardless of the evident increase in language learning awareness, some students failed to internalize the diacritic system of Slovak through electronic writing (i.e. writing on the computer). The problems involved in finding the diacritic signs resulted in frustration and a loss of interest in writing. Students were given the option either of using the computer or of writing by hand, and as a result, some students wrote by hand. Interestingly, this developed their knowledge of diacritics as well as their learning awareness. Those students who wrote by hand generally used the diacritic signs properly, while those who wrote with the computer either totally or partly ignored the diacritic system. This mix of approaches often resulted in a compromise, the scanning of the hand-written texts. Those who preferred writing by hand claimed that the method had a direct impact on the increase in their awareness of learning Slovak.

Learners' reflections after the course revealed their approaches to learning. Using Entwistle's model of approaches to learning (2001), all the students who actively participate in the e-learning and reflected on their learning process manifested a deep approach to learning, apart from one, who manifested a surface approach (Chapter 6.3.3). Their expectations of the e-learning environment as to layout, design and course content were met. Using climbing a mountain as a metaphor for learning Slovak resulted in the enhancement of their learning and of their motivation.

Their perceptions of the teacher and the teacher's role in the e-learning environment were to some degree identical with the teacher's perceptions of herself. The teaching experiment strengthened the multiple roles of the teacher: the teacher as a linguistic and cultural informant, expert and negotiator (Dufva 1994; Caruso 2015), facilitator, mentor, student, researcher, and participant in continuous dialogue (Chapter 6.4).

Overall, the findings show that Slovak can be learned in a new language learning environment just like any other language. However, not all the language skills can be acquired to the same level without contact classes. Almost all the learners believed that they had learned a lot. According to their reflections, the learners made clear progress in their receptive skills (reading and listening) but had difficulty in developing their productive skills (speaking and writing). As mentioned above, the problem of electronic writing was solved by a compromise: the learners were allowed to choose the writing medium, manual or computer writing. Blended learning (face-to-face tutorials) was used to compensate for the lack of spontaneous speaking. In the context of this study there was no evidence of the mixing of synchronous and asynchronous learning, as students evidently preferred the asynchronous media (learning journals, emails and discussion boards), but there was evidence that they mixed manual and electronic tools (for example, the scanning of hand-written texts).

This experiment has some implications for the teaching and learning of the less commonly taught languages. The greatest challenge in teaching and learn-

ing the less commonly taught languages in an e-learning environment is the availability of web-learning resources and the development of new pedagogies for LCTLs. While numerous ready-made web learning materials and sophisticated learning spaces are constantly available for the most commonly taught languages, very few useful web materials can be found for the less commonly taught languages. The teacher often has to be the course designer and developer for his/her own course. However, current developments and innovations in language learning and teaching underline the use of learner-centred pedagogies in new, personalized learning environments. Thus, I see informal learning as an alternative to current e-learning approaches. Rapidly growing mobile technologies and the use of social media offer new learning platforms for the development of all areas of communicative competence. The emergence of social networking tools is breaking down the borders of the traditionally conceived learning environment and opening the door to multiple learning spaces, both real and virtual. Learning a less commonly taught language is often limited to language learning at three basic levels (beginning, intermediate and advanced), so the question of appropriate technologies and technology-enhanced learning materials at different levels is very important. Nowadays, the internet provides all kinds of materials for a number of LCTLs, but using and developing these materials for efficient learning depends on the language and to certain extent on the teacher's skills.

Students of LCTLs are often expected to make use of the raw materials available on the Web (The Raw Web). As Robin (2014) points out, finding one's way around some of this material can be a challenge even for native speakers who are digitally adept, and it can discourage more ordinary users of the Web. Students of LCTLs are often challenged by the demands of the keyboard: despite various technical facilities meant to make mastering the keyboard easier, excessive concentration on keyboard input may, for example, reduce the attention paid to writing, for example, in employing diacritics in the case of Slavic languages. In addition, too much emphasis on technology might ultimately lead to students losing their motivation.

The results of this study show learners' attitudes towards learning Slovak in an e-learning environment that could throw light on the challenges posed to the instruction of other less commonly taught languages in technology-enhanced learning environments, especially in the practising of speaking and writing. Even though current digital media offer multiple opportunities to integrate new media modes into learning activities and provide the advantage of social participation, the teacher still has most responsibility for choosing which media are relevant in that particular learning context and in the light of the competences of those particular learners. The solution may be informal learning and the employment of Personal Learning Environments (PLE), a pedagogical approach which integrates formal and informal learning and makes use of social media and learning in various contexts and situations. McLoughlin & Lee in an article called *Three P's of Pedagogy for the Networked Society* (2008) envision the new possibilities and applications of Web 2.0 for educational purposes, espe-

cially the Web 2.0-based social software tools such as social networking sites, social bookmarking utilities, wikis, blocks, etc. They perceive these tools to be new affordances for learning. The authors argue that the educational affordances of Web 2.0, social software and other ICT tools for learning must depend on learners' perceptions of them in the contexts of their learning, and their expectations. The authors suggest a framework for a 'revised pedagogy' (Pedagogy 2.0), the main focus of which is the more efficient exploitation of the potential of the Web 2 and social software tools, which in their opinion would promote learner choice in what to do with the information obtained on the web, as well as learner self-direction and engagement in flexible learning tasks and strategies. They propose a new pedagogy based on the 'three P's' - Personalization (learner choice, learner agency, customization, self-regulation and management), Participation (communication, collaboration, connectivity and community) and Productivity (learner-centred content, contribution to knowledge, generativity and creativity and innovation) (McLoughlin & Lee 2008: 16). The Three P's could already be applied in the teaching of some of the less commonly taught languages. The question is whether there are enough resources on the web for these languages, whether, for example, learners of Slovak will find other communities of Slovak learners.

In the course of writing this thesis, I have expanded my understanding of the concept of the learning environment. In the context of this study, I view everything as a potential learning environment, whether it is home, the beach, a laptop in a restaurant, a mobile on the bus, a class, a sports event, or whatever. From this viewpoint, the future of efficient learning is in mobile technologies. This is borne out by the study of Sølvsberg & Rismark (2012), who suggest a dynamic interrelationship between on- and off-campus activities and mobile learning in higher education. Similarly, Laakkonen & Taalas (2015) foresee the future of learning as taking place in a whole range of different environments, not just in one, and as enabling the participation of learners and teachers in the design of new learning environments and setting up the goals for learning. Students' skills in the use of new media and teachers' pedagogical practices may result in flexible personal and shared learning spaces (Laakkonen & Taalas: 238). The courses of tomorrow should be accessible from mobile devices even if they are used in the classroom. The negative aspect of this is that technology-enhanced learning, such as, for example, mobile learning, may lead to superficiality, getting bits and pieces of knowledge, although this 'surface knowledge' may become a learning asset when accessed in class or the home learning environment. According to the authors, benefiting from the affordances provided by mobile learning environments and the combination of various learning spaces will require the design of appropriate learning activities as well as a new approach to planning teaching. This is the next phase in the development of Slovak.

To sum up, while the materials needed for learning the less commonly taught languages are still rare, the Web offers a variety of websites and learning platforms with authentic resources. However, without the proper pedagogical

settings (learning packages), learners cannot take full advantage of the available resources. Nevertheless, the potential already exists for extending self-instruction or technology-enhanced instruction in the learning of LCTLs to the rarer LCTLs. Figure 14 shows the path for Slovak in the Finnish context. In addition to traditional contact classes, Slovak is taught in multilingual and multicultural courses such as the course on Slavic languages and cultures, which offers basic information about all the Slavic languages and cultures, or courses aimed at the expansion of learners' overall language repertoires. These are not courses in Slovak, but they promote the learning of Slovak by stimulating students' interest in the language and raising their awareness of Slovak language and culture.

From e-learning to Personal Learning Environments (PLE)

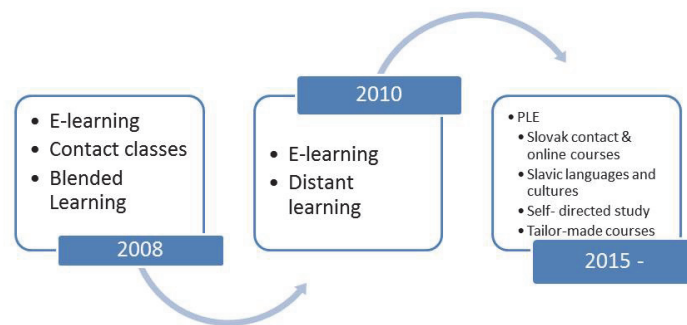


Figure 14 From e-learning to PLEs

The current study on learning Slovak in an e-learning environment has outlined the history of Slovak instruction in Finland and offers insights into a process of pedagogical development aimed at the use of effective pedagogical tools and appropriate technologies. This is an ongoing process that will continue to present new challenges to the teaching of Slovak in the 21st century.

YHTEENVETO

Väitöskirjan tarkoituksena on tarkastella slovakin kielen oppimista ja opettamista uusissa oppimisympäristöissä. Jyväskylän yliopisto on ainoana laitoksena pohjoismaissa tarjonnut slovakin kielen ja kulttuurin ohjelmaa jo liki 40 vuoden ajan. Kun opetus- ja oppimisteknologiat ovat kehittyneet vuosien aikana, niiden myötä on kehittynyt myös slovakin opiskelu. Väitöskirja esittelee tekijän laatiman slovakin verkkokurssin ja opetuskokeilun, jotka ovat syntyneet osana Jyväskylän yliopiston kielikeskuksen monivuotista toimintatutkimusta. Samalla väitöskirja on toiminnallinen ja reflektiivinen tutkimus, jossa tarkastellaan sekä oppijoiden käsityksiä itsestään verkko-oppijoina että tekijän omaa roolia tutkija-opettajana.

Verkkokurssi pohjautuu konstruktivis-kognitiiviseen oppimiskäsitykseen, joka korostaa oppimisen aktiivisuutta ja dynaamisuutta, sekä oppijan keskeistä roolia oppimisprosessissa. Samalla korostuvat oppijan tiedon prosessointi sekä tämän metakognitiivisten taitojen kehittyminen. Verkkokurssin rakenne ja layout pohjautuvat metaforaan oppimisesta ikään kuin vuoren huipulle kiipeämisenä, mikä myös korostaa oppimisen dynaamisuutta ja aktiivisuutta sekä edistää oppijoiden toimijuutta (*learner agency*). Opetuskokeilun olennaisena tavoitteena oli tutkia oppijoiden käsityksiä itsestään verkko-oppijoina ennen kurssia, kurssin aikana sekä kurssin jälkeen. Tarkoituksena oli saada tietoa siitä, miten ja mitä ovat opiskelijat kertoivat oppineensa, miten he kuvasivat itseään (verkko-)oppijoina, mitä he sanoivat mahdollisuudesta oppia verkko-kurssin avulla slovakia, ja miten he kokivat eri kielellisten taitojen (puhuminen, kirjoittaminen, kuunteleminen ja lukeminen) oppimistaan. Oppijoiden käsityksiä, kokemuksia ja odotuksia tarkasteltiin oppimispäiväkirjojen, kyselyn ja haastattelun avulla. Tulokset osoittivat, että opiskelijat kokivat reseptiivisten taitojensa (lukeminen ja kuunteleminen) selvästi kehittyneen, mutta produktiivisten taitojen (puhuminen ja kirjoittaminen) ei koettu edistyneen. Tällöin yhdistelmä verkko- ja kontakti-opetuksesta (*Blended Learning*) katsottiin parhaimmaksi vaihtoehdoksi harvinaisten kielten oppimisessa. Erikoisesti opiskelijat raportoivat kirjoittamisen aiheuttaneen heille vaikeuksia, erityisesti slovakille tyypillisten, runsaiden diakriittisten merkkien takia. Moni opiskelija kertoikin kirjoittavansa mieluummin käsin, koska he uskoivat tämän kehittävän ei vain oppimista, vaan myös tietoisuutta oppimisprosessista ja kielestä (*learning awareness; language awareness*). Lisäksi opiskelijat totesivat, että opetuskokeilun aikana kehittivät uudet verkko-taidot, mm. yhteisöllisyyden taidot, sisällöntuottamisen sekä tutkimuksen taidot. Opettajan he näkivät tutorina, avustajana, mutta myös opetusteknologian asiantuntijana. Yksi tärkeimmistä opettajan tehtävistä oli heidän mielestään toimia kohdekulttuurin lähettiläänä ja edustajana.

Väitöskirja tarjoaa myös verkkokurssin laatimisen ja slovakin kielen opiskelun taustaksi perustietoa Slovakiasta, sen historiasta sekä kielestä (Luku 2). Teoreettinen osio (Luku 3) esittää kielen oppimisen ja opettamisen teorioita ja käsitteitä, jotka ovat vaikuttaneet opetukseeni ja johtaneet slovakin verkkokurssin luomiseen. Taustateoriat esitetään vieraiden kielten oppimisen sekä oppijan

näkökulmasta. Tutkielmassa esitelty vieraiden kielten oppimisen teorit (sosio-konstruktivistiset oppimisen ja opettamisen teorit, sosiokulttuurinen teoria (SCT), toiminnan teoria, sekä tehtäväpohjaisen teoria (TBL)) tukevat näkemystä, jonka mukaan kielen oppiminen on konstruktivistis-kognitiivinen prosessi. Näkemys korostaa oppimisen aktiivisuutta ja dynaamisuutta, sekä oppijan keskeistä roolia oppimisen prosessissa.

Tutkielman luvussa 4 pohditaan oppimisen tavoitteellisuuden näkökulmasta kommunikatiivista kompetenssia sekä oppijan toimijuutta (*learner agency*). Samalla tuodaan esiin tavoite kehittää oppijan tietoisuutta kielestä ja omasta oppimisestaan (*language and learning awareness*), sekä kasvattaa oppimismotivaatiota. Todellisuudessa oppijan toimijuus tulee selkeästi esille myös oppijan asenteissa oppimista kohtaan (*approaches to learning*).

Verkkokurssi, sen layout sekä sisältö esitellään luvussa 5. Samoin luvussa esitellään käynnissä ollut opetuskokeilu, sen osallistujat, aineiston keruu ja analyysi sekä tutkimuskysymykset. Luvussa 6 tuodaan esiin verkko-opetuskokeilun keskeiset tulokset ja pohditaan niitä opiskelijoiden näkökulmasta ja opettajan työn kannalta.

Tutkielman päätelmät tuodaan esiin luvussa 7. Tulokseksi jäi, että verkko-opetus toimii parhaimmillaan sulauttavana oppimisena, yhdistelmänä verkko- ja kontakti-opetusta (*blended learning*), jolloin itsenäisen opiskelun ohella tarjotaan myös kontakti-opetusta. Tällainen opetuksen / oppimisen muoto tukee oppijoiden itse-ohjautuvuutta sekä reflektiivistä, pohdiskelevaa oppimista. Toisaalta se myös vahvistaa opettajan roolia oppimisprosessin tukijana.

Tutkielmassa havaittiin myös, että metafora oppimisesta vuorelle kiipeämisenä tuntui kasvattavan tietoisuutta kielestä ja oppimisprosessista. Oppijat samastuivat tähän metaforaan ja kokivat oppimisensa joko menestyksenä ja tavoitteidensa saavuttamisena - tai vastakkaisesti. Tämä vahvistaa oppimisympäristön ja kontekstin merkityksellisyyttä.

Tutkijalle nyt raportoitava slovakin opetuskokeilu on ollut jatkuvaa prosessia, joka alkoi 1990-luvulla itsenäisten oppimateriaalien kehittämisenä, jatkui itseohjautuvan oppimisen ja opetuksen edistämisenä 2000-luvulla ja lopuksi huipentui verkko-opetuksen toteuttamiseen. Seuraava vaihe on henkilökohtaisten, avoimien oppimisympäristöjen (PLE - Personal Learning Environment) edistäminen. Perinteisen oppimiskontekstin ohella opetuksessa voidaan hyödyntää sosiaalista ja digitaalista mediaa - eli oppia voi milloin vain ja missä vain.

Tutkimuksen tietoa voidaan soveltaa yleisesti vieraiden kielten opetukseen, mutta erityisesti harvinaisten kielten - kuten slovakin - opiskeluun. Näiden kielten kohdalla opiskelijamäärät eivät ole korkeita ja verkko-opiskelu tarjoaa oppimismahdollisuuden myös niille, jotka ovat estyneitä osallistumaan kontakti-opetukseen. Lisäksi tutkimus antaa lisätietoa vähemmän opiskeltujen kielten verkkopedagogiikan kehittämiseksi.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

OPISKELIJAKYSELY 1 / STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE 1

Tervetuloa kiipeilyretkelle! Tervetuloa opiskelemaan slovakia!
Kiitos osallistumisestasi slovakinkielen opiskelua selvittävään tutkimukseen.
Pyydän, että vastaat seuraaviin kysymyksiin. Lomakkeeseen vastaamiseen
sinulta menee n. 30 minuuttia. Sinun henkilötietojasi käsitellään nimettömänä ja
luottamuksellisesti tutkimustarkoituksiin.

*Welcome on the climbing trip! Welcome to learning Slovak!
Thank you for participating in the survey on learning Slovak. Please answer the follow-
ing questions. Answering the questions will take about 30 minutes. Your personal data
will be used for the research purpose anonymously and confidentially.*

1. Henkilötietoja / Personal information

Nimi / Name _____
Osoite _/ Address _____
Sähköposti / E-mail _____
Ikä / tai syntymävuosi _/Age/ or year of birth _____

SUKUPUOLI/GENDER

Nainen / Female
Mies /Male

KOULUTUS /EDUCATION

Suoritettut tutkinnot / Degree(s)

KIELET /LANGUGES

Olen opiskellut seuraavia vieraita kieliä / *I have studied the following languages:*

(Mainitse oppilaitos / koulu, yliopisto, kansanopisto tms. ja opiskelun kesto vuosina tai kuukausina).

(Give the name of the educational institution / school, university, etc., and duration of study in years or months)

ruotsi/Swedish _____
englanti/English _____
saksa / Geman _____
ranska/ French _____
muu, mikä / Other - what _____

II. Käsitksiäsi slovakin kielestä / Concept of Slovak language

1. Mitä täällä hetkellä tiedät slovakista? / *What do you know about the Slovak language?*
2. Miksi haluat opiskella slovakia? / *Why do you want to learn Slovak?*
3. Luuletko, että slovakin osaamisesta tulee olemaan sinulle hyötyä tulevaisuudessa? Millaista? / *Do you think that you will be able to benefit from the knowledge of Slovak in the future? How?*
4. Tunnetko slovakia puhuvia ihmisiä? / *Do you know any Slovak speaking people?*
5. Slovakin kieli tuntuu mielestäni / *The Slovak language seems to be*
 - a) vaikealta / *difficult*
 - b) helpolta / *easy*
 - c) kiinnostavalta / *interesting*
 - d) ei erityisen kiinnostavalta / *not especially interesting*
 - e) etäiseltä / *distant*
 - f) läheiseltä / *close*

III. Käsitksiä Slovakiasta / Concept of Slovakia

1. Mitä tiedät Slovakiasta? / *What do you know about Slovakia?*
2. Onko sinulle tuttua slovakialainen kulttuuri (taide, musiikki, urheilu, jne.)? / *Are you familiar with Slovak culture (arts, music, sports, etc.)?*
3. Kiinnostaako sinua matkailu Slovakiassa? / *Are you interested in travelling in Slovakia?*
4. Mikä muu Slovakiaan liittyvää kiinnostaa? / *What else related to Slovakia are you interested in?*

IV. Käsitksiä verkko-opetuksesta / Concept of e-learning

1. Oletko aiemmin opiskellut kieliä verkkokurssin avulla? / *Have you learned languages by means of e-learning before?*
2. Millaisia asioita odostat verkkokurssista? / *What do you expect from the e-learning course?*
3. Uskotko, että opit kieltä verkkokurssin avulla? / *Do you believe that you can / will learn the language by means of the e-learning course?*
4. Luuletko, että verkkokurssin avulla jää oppimatta joitain asioita? / *Do you think that there is anything that you cannot learn by means of an e-learning course?*
5. Minkä luulet olevan suurin vaikeus? / *What do you think is / will be most difficult?*
6. Luuletko, että kolme kontaktiopetuskertaa kurssin aikana tulee riittämään? / *Do you think that three sessions of contact classes during the course are sufficient?*

7. Miten luulet, että opiskeluusi vaikuttaa se, että opettaja ei ole läsnä?
/How do you think the teacher's physical absence will affect your learning?
8. Osaatko etukäteen arvioida, kuinka paljon aikaa tulet päivittäin / viikoittain viettämään slovakin parissa? / *Can you assess beforehand how much time per day / week you will spend on learning Slovak?*

V. Käsitteitä oppimisesta / Concept of learning

Millainen olet oppijana? / What kind of a learner are you?

Kirjoita vapaasti (noin kappaleen verran, korkeintaan 1 sivun) omasta oppimisestasi. / *Write freely (appr. one chapter, max. one page) about your learning / about yourself as a learner.*

Kiitos. Ďakujem. / Thank you.

APPENDIX 2

Täydentävä kysely verkkokurssista (kurssipalautteen yhteydessä) / **Complementary questionnaire on the e-learning course (part of the course feedback)**

1. Oletko oppinut kurssilla mielestäsi riittävästi? / *Have you learned enough on the course?*
2. Oliko kurssin tehtävät mielestäsi / *Was the course, in your opinion,*
 - a) riittävän motivoivia / *motivating enough*
 - b) liian vaikeita / *too difficult*
 - c) liian helppoja? / *too easy?*
3. Oletko saanut riittävästi opettajan palautetta? / *Have you got enough teacher's feedback?*
4. Kuinka paljon olet käyttänyt verkkokurssia: / *How often have you used the e-learning course*
 - a) 2 tuntia viikossa / *two hours per week*
 - b) enemmän kuin 2 tuntia viikossa / *more than two hours per week*
 - c) vähemmän kuin 2 tuntia viikossa / *less than two hours per week*
5. Mikä olisi voinut olla kurssilla eri tavalla? Mitä muuttaisit kurssilla? / *What could have been different on the course? What would you change?*
6. Mikä on mielestäsi edistänyt / estänyt oppimistasi? / *What has enhanced / prevented your learning?*
7. Millainen (slovakin) opiskelu sopisi sinulle parhaimmin: / *What kind of learning (Slovak) would suit you best:*
 - a) itsenäisesti verkossa / *independent e-learning*
 - b) kerran kahdessa viikossa kontakti-opetusta / *contact session / classes once in two weeks*
 - c) ainoastaan kontakti-opetusta / *only contact classes*
 - d) ainoastaan itsenäistä verkko-opetusta / *only independent e-learning*
8. Aiotko jatkaa slovakin opinnoissa seuraavassa jaksossa? / *Do you intend to continue Slovak studies in the next period?*

Muuta? Kommentit... / *Anything else? Comments...*

APPENDIX 3**KYSELY VERKKOKURSSISTA / VERKKOKURSSIN KÄYTÖN SEURANTA / E-LEARNING COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE DURING THE COURSE**

1. Käytätkö slovakin verkkokurssia? Jos käytät, kuinka usein? Jos et käytä, miksi? / *Do you use the Slovak e-learning materials? If so, how often? If not use, why not?*
2. Mikä on mielestäsi hyödyllistä / turhaa verkkokurssissa? Mitä muuttaisit / jättäisit pois? Perustele. / *What is, in your opinion, useful /unnecessary in the e-learning course?*
3. Ovatko mielestäsi verkkokurssit edelleen ajankohtaisia? / *Do you think e-learning courses are still up-to-date?*
4. Herättääkö / lisääkö slovakin verkkokurssi motivaatiotasi opiskella? / *Does the Slovak e-learning course increase your motivation to learn Slovak?*
5. Onko verkkokurssi riittävästi kommunikatiivinen / interaktiivinen? *Is the e-learning course sufficiently communicative / interactive?*
6. Onko kieliopillinen osuus riittävästi selkeä? / *Is the grammatical section clear enough?*
7. Ovatko harjoitukset riittävästi motivoivat? / *Are the exercises motivating?*
8. Onko kurssin ulkoasu ajankohtainen? / *Is the course layout up-to-date?*
9. Ovatko teemat ajankohtaiset? / *Are the themes up-to-date?*
10. Käyttää vapaata sanaa – tuo esille ajatuksiasi verkkokurssien käytöstä. / *Write freely about the use of e-learning courses.*

Kiitos! Thank you.

ENDNOTES

Pseudonyms were used for all participants.

Students' comments written in Finnish (non-edited) have been translated into English by the teacher.

Students' comments written in English have not been edited.

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

I

SLOVENČINA VO FÍNSKU A NOVÉ FORMY ŠTÚDIA

by

Kyppö, A. (2002)

In Pekarovičová, J. (Ed.), *Slovenčina ako cudzí jazyk*, (pp. 205-210)

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SLOVENČINA VO FÍNSKU A NOVÉ FORMY ŠTÚDIA

Anna Kyppö

Univerzita Jyväskylä, Fínsko

1. História a súčasnosť

Slovenčina "zavítala" do Fínska po prvýkrát v roku 1978, keď na helsinskú univerzitu nastúpila Anna Kušnieriková ako lektorka českého a slovenského jazyka. Lektorát slovenského jazyka na Univerzite v Helsinkách fungoval pomerne krátko (1978-80), ale zanechal po sebe niekoľko aktívnych slovakistov.

Anna Kušnieriková a Veli Kolari vypracovali v roku 1980 prvú učebnicu slovenčiny pre Fínov (*Slovaikin kielen oppikirja, Helsingin yliopisto 1979*). V roku 1980 došlo k akémusi "teritoriálnemu rozdeleniu" - rozhodlo sa, že na Univerzite v Helsinkách sa bude vyučovať čeština a na Univerzite v Jyväskylä, v strednom Fínsku, slovenčina. Univerzita v Jyväskylä patrí medzi najobľúbenejšie univerzity vo Fínsku (študentský prieskum, 1999). Vďaka mnohostrannosti študijných odborov a rozmanitosti študijných programov, nazýva sa aj "fínskymi Aténami". Popri Centre aplikovanej lingvistiky a Fakulte telesnej výchovy a športu vo Fínsku, ako jediná akademická inštitúcia v severských krajinách ponúka možnosť štúdia slovenského jazyka a kultúry.

S vyučovaním slovenského jazyka sa na jyväslylskej univerzite začalo v roku 1980. Najprv sa študentom ponúkali len základné jazykové kurzy, ktoré boli povinné pre študentov ruštiny v rámci štúdia ďalšieho slovanského jazyka, neskôr vznikali aj kurzy pre neruštínárov. Nakoľko išlo o slovanský jazyk, slovenský lektorát sa natrvalo "usadil" na Katedre ruského jazyka a literatúry. Od roku 1998 sa základné jazykové kurzy slovenského jazyka objavujú aj na "ponukovom lístku" Univerzitného jazykového centra spolu s ďalšími 35 jazykmi a sú otvorené pre všetkých študentov.

V roku 1993 Univerzita v Jyväskylä schválila základný študijný program slovenského jazyka a kultúry (approbatur, 30 ects). Program pozostáva z nasledujúcich kurzov:

- jazykový kurz pre začiatok (4 ects)
- jazykový kurz pre mierne pokročilých (4 ects)
- slovenské reálie (história, zemepis a kultúra, stručný prehľad, 4 ects)
- slovenská literatúra (stručný prehľad literatúry, 4 ects)

- *prekladový seminár* (preklady bežných textov zo slovenčiny do finčiny, 4 ects)

- *textový seminár* (práca s textom – analýza textu, lexikológia, základy slovenskej štylistiky, 4 ects)

- *gramatika* (praktické gramatické cvičenia, produkcia jednoduchého textu, 4 ects)

- *praktická slovenčina* (konverzácia, porozumenie počutého textu, 2 ects).

Program má celonárodný charakter, to znamená, že sa doň môžu zapojiť aj študenti iných univerzít. Popri Univerzite v Jyväskylä do programu sú zapojení deväť študenti zo štyroch fínskych univerzít a vysokých škôl, ako aj jedna študentka zo Švédska.

Študenti majú možnosť zúčastňovať sa na letnej škole slovenského jazyka a kultúry Studia Academica Slovaca, ktorý sa každoročne koná na Univerzite Komenského v Bratislave.

V roku 1998 bola podpísaná dohoda v rámci európskeho programu Erasmus medzi Univerzitou Komenského a Univerzitou v Jyväskylä. Táto dohoda umožňuje vzájomnú výmenu študentov a učiteľov slovenčiny vo Fínsku a študentov a učiteľov finčiny na Slovensku.

V roku 1998 schválilo vedenie univerzity návrh predmetového štúdia slovenského jazyka a kultúry (Cum laude, 40 ects). Program pozostáva z nasledujúcich študijných predmetov: *štylistika, lexikológia, história a kultúra, literatúra, proseminár* (komunikácia a metodológia), *preklad* (obojstranný preklad - slovenčina, finčina, náročnejšie texty). Navyše od absolventov štúdia sa vyžaduje minimálne dvojmesačný študijný pobyt na Slovensku.

Cieľom proseminára je osvojenie si vedeckého myslenia a spôsobov argumentácie, oboznámenie sa s vedeckými metódami, ktoré sa používajú v slovenskej literatúre a jazykovede. V proseminárnej práci študent demonštruje nadobudnuté znalosti - schopnosť riešenia výskumného problému pomocou aplikovania vhodných výskumných metód. Ide o náročný program, ktorého úplné absolvovanie je prakticky možné len na Slovensku. Existuje však aj možnosť čiastočného absolvovania programu na Slovensku (proseminárna práca a preklady vo Fínsku). Program je mimoriadne motivujúci. Študenti sa vo zvýšenej miere uchádzajú o štipendiá a výmenné programy, v rámci ktorých by mohli absolvovať časť programu.

2. Od tradičného vyučovania k samoštúdiu

Postavenie slovenčiny vo Fínsku sa v posledných rokoch výrazne zmenilo. Jazyk donedávna neznámy, priam exotický, sa stal zrazu známym, zaujímavým a hľadaným. Slovensko, ktorého existencia sa vedome, či nevedome ignorovala, sa zrazu objavilo na mape Európy. Prispela k tomu obrovská vlna slovenských rómskych emigrantov do Fínska. Študenti slovenčiny tak dostali jedinečnú možnosť uviesť svoje jazykové znalosti do praxe. Bola to pre nich neopakovateľná skúsenosť. 15 študentov sa zapojilo do prekladania a tlmočenia, niektorí z nich si prostredníctvom slovenčiny našli trvalé zamestnanie ako tlmočníci a prekladatelia. Slovensko konečne vstúpilo do povedomia fínskej verejnosti. V dôsledku tejto skutočnosti prejavilo o slovenčinu záujem väčšie množstvo študentov. Vzhľadom na zvýšený záujem bolo potrebné vypracovať program efektívneho osvojovania si (učenia) slovenčiny. Prispelo k tomu aj zriadenie nového multimediálneho centra v univerzitnom jazykovom stredisku.

Samoriadené (samostatné, autonómne) štúdium slovenčiny sa začalo už v roku 1998. Išlo o experiment, cieľom ktorého bolo zistiť, či je možné realizovať samoriadené štúdium v základných jazykových kurzoch (v kurzoch pre začiatočníkov a mierne pokročilých). Program samoriadeného štúdia bol dobrovoľný a študenti dostali za účasť na programe jeden fínsky kredit (2 ects). Pri samoriadenom štúdiu študent preberá zodpovednosť za svoje štúdium, na rozdiel od tradičného princípu, pri ktorom ide o proces riadený učiteľom. Ide o kognitívny proces sebauvedomovania - hľadania a poznávania vlastných schopností a vedomostí, čo má pozitívny vplyv na zvýšenie motivácie a skvalitňovanie štúdia.

Študenti si sami vypracujú študijný plán, v ktorom si vytýčia konkrétne ciele. Po celý čas si vedú študijný denník, do ktorého si zaznamenávajú všetky aktivity, ktoré súvisia s osvojovaním slovenčiny. Popri rôznych gramatických cvičeniach a pravidelných úlohách, ktoré dostávajú na kontaktných hodinách, uvádzajú aj svoje osobné kontakty so Slovenskom - osobnú korešpondenciu, elektronickú poštu v slovenčine, návštevu www-stránok a pod. Uvádzajú nielen jazykové, ale aj nejazykové aktivity, napr. návštevu slovenských stránok na internete, účasť na diskusiách v internetových diskusných skupinách, čítanie novinových článkov, príp. iných materiálov o Slovensku, a pod.

Samoriadené štúdium sa v roku 1999 rozšírilo aj na ostatné kurzy programu slovenského jazyka a kultúry (reálie a literatúra) a popri samoštúdiu nadobudlo aj formu ***štúdia na diaľku***. Komunikácia medzi

študentmi a učiteľom prebiehala prostredníctvom e-mailu a telefónu, kontrola a hodnotenie prostredníctvom www. Príležitostne (raz za dva mesiace) sa študenti stretnú s učiteľom a spoločne prehodnotia dosiahnuté ciele.

Obľúbenou formou samoriadeného štúdia je tzv. **učenie sa s kamarátom (buddy learning, peer learning, Each One Teach One)**. Tento druh samoštúdia je založený na vzájomnom kontakte dvoch študentov, pričom jeden študent učí druhého slovenčinu a druhý študent učí kamaráta nejaký iný cudzí jazyk, napr. finčinu. Ideálna je situácia, keď sú obaja študenti rodení užívatelia jazyka. Výmenné študentské programy, ako napr. Erasmus, poskytujú ideálne podmienky práve pre tento druh učenia. Vzájomné vyučovanie musí byť systematické, obaja študenti si na začiatku programu vytýčia konkrétne ciele, ktoré chcú dosiahnuť, určia si časový program, podľa ktorého chcú postupovať. Plán schváli učiteľ. Obaja študenti si vedú študijný denník, ktorý pred ukončením študijného programu ukážu učiteľovi. Na konci programu spoločne prehodnotia dosiahnuté ciele s učiteľom.

3. Virtuálna univerzita?

V roku 2001 sa Univerzita v Jyväskylä zapojila do európskeho projektu realizovania tzv. virtuálnej univerzity. V rámci tohto projektu sa hľadajú nové pedagogické riešenia pri využívaní informačnej technológie v učebnom a vyučovacom procese. Slovenčina je jediným "malým jazykom" popri angličtine, francúzštine, španielčine, švédčine a nemčine, ktorý je zapojený do programu využívania nových prostredí pri vyučovaní a učení cudzieho jazyka. Táto úloha si vyžaduje osvojenie nových kompetencií - písania a čítania novým spôsobom. Vyžaduje si nové schopnosti - verbálnu vizuálnosť, prácu s hypertextom, schopnosť prepájania textov na www, schopnosť využívania nových prostredí takým spôsobom, aby napomáhali rozvíjaniu samoriadeného štúdia.

V prvej fáze študenti využívali ponuku multimediálneho centra (Self-access Centre) - audio-vizuálne materiály, účasť v diskusných internetových a e-mailových skupinách, návšteva jednotlivých www-stránok. Začiatkom roku 2002 sa vytvoril nový virtuálny učebný priestor Optima firmy Discendum (Virtual Learning Space). Do pokusného programu sa zapojilo 20 študentov, z toho 10 študentov na diaľku - 9 fínskych študentov a jedna švédka študentka slovenčiny. Každý študent má svoju vlastnú schránku,

do ktorej si ukladá slovenské texty - eseje, slohy, preklady, ale aj iné zaujímavé internetové adresy. Priestor poskytuje možnosť komentára (feedbacku) učiteľa, ale aj kolegov (peer feedback). Vo virtuálnom priestore sú uložené rôzne internetové adresy stránok o slovenskom jazyku, kultúre, histórii, literatúre, a pod. Diskusná schránka poskytuje možnosť otvorenej diskusie, ale slúži aj ako informačná tabuľa. Študenti si vedú virtuálny študijný denník (virtual learning diary), do ktorého si zaznamenávajú všetky aktivity so slovenčinou, a to jednak v slovenčine, ale aj v iných jazykoch o slovenčine.

Prieskum pripravenosti na nové riešenia poukázal na nedostatok technických vedomostí študentov, nedostatok odborného vedenia zo strany učiteľov, ako aj nedostatočné množstvo vhodných materiálov. Tvorba nového typu komunikatívnych úloh si vyžaduje používanie nových vyučovacích metód a techník. Vzniká preto potreba doškolovania učiteľov. Možno vzniká otázka, prečo aplikovať informačnú technológiu, keď je možné dosiahnuť rovnaké výsledky aj tradičným spôsobom. Ide predovšetkým o zvýšenie záujmu o slovenčinu (ľahká dostupnosť a autenticnosť informácií, 'viditeľnosť' slovenčiny), ale aj o zvýšenie motivácie.

Internetová komunikácia nahrádza v súčasnosti tradičnú komunikáciu takmer vo všetkých oblastiach každodenného života, a preto je dôležité, aby si tento druh komunikácie osvojili aj študenti slovenčiny. Nehovoriac o možnosti voľného pohybu v čase a v priestore - možnosť štúdia kedykoľvek, kdekoľvek, kde sa nachádza počítač, čo je mimoriadna výhoda najmä pri štúdiu na diaľku, ako aj schopnosť vyhľadávania, organizovania a zmysluplného využívania získaných informácií. Technológia nemôže v žiadnom prípade nahradiť fyzický kontakt učiteľa a študenta, ani poskytnúť pedagogickú podporu, či vytvoriť nenahraditeľnú atmosféru na kurzoch slovenského jazyka a literatúry. Využívanie www pri vyučovaní je len prídavkom, elektronickou učebnicou v prípade, keď literatúra nie je na dosah, okienkom na Slovensko, keď niet možnosti vycestovať.

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II

SLOVENČINA V NOVÝCH VÝUČBOVÝCH PROSTREDIACH

by

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Slovenčina v nových výučbových prostrediach

Anna Kyppö

Jazykové centrum Univerzity v Jyväskylä

Globalizácia, rapídny vývoj najnovších technológií, ako aj takmer neobmedzené možnosti internetového prepojenia a virtuálnej mobility sa odrážajú vo všetkých oblastiach hospodársko-spoločenského života. Európska univerzitná reforma a rastúce potreby medzinárodnej mobility si vyžadujú nové pedagogické prístupy pri vyučovaní cudzích jazykov. Tradičné kontaktné vyučovanie sa nahrádza rôznymi formami e-learningu. Tradičnú triedu nahrádzajú virtuálne učebné priestory, tzv. nové výučbové prostredia.

Motivujúce prostredie, v ktorom si študent vedome osvojuje cudzí jazyk, čiže sa učí, je skutočnou výzvou pre učiteľa či dizajnéra učebného prostredia, najmä, ak je cudzím jazykom jazyk, ktorý sa zriedkavejšie vyučuje (*Less Frequently Taught Language*). Medzi takéto jazyky patrí aj slovenčina, ktorá sa považuje za veľmi zriedkavo vyučovaný jazyk (*The Much Less Commonly Taught Language*, Brecht and Walton, 1994). Problémom pri vyučovaní a učení sa tzv. malých jazykov je nedostatok dobrých, pedagogicky osvedčených učebných materiálov určených na samoštúdium. Napriek tomu, že existuje množstvo materiálov zameraných na rozvoj gramatickej a lexikálnej kompetencie, nedostatok sa pociťuje v oblasti osvojovania si pragmatických a kultúrnych kompetencií. Integrovanie najnovších pedagogických technológií do učebných plánov si vyžaduje rozsiahlu výskumnú a vývojovú prácu.

Tento príspevok ponúka súhrn poznatkov z výučby slovenského jazyka a kultúry na Univerzite v Jyväskylä vo Fínsku. Slovenský jazyk zavítal na Univerzitu v Jyväskylä v roku 1978. Od roku 1993 Univerzita v Jyväskylä ponúka akademický program základného štúdia slovenského jazyka a kultúry (30 – 32 kreditov) a od roku 1998 program bakalárskeho štúdia (40 kreditov), ktorý sa realizuje v spolupráci s Katedrou slovenského jazyka UK v Bratislave. Univerzita v Jyväskylä je už vyše tridsať rokov jedinou akademickou inštitúciou v severských krajinách, ktorá poskytuje výučbu slovenčiny na všetkých jazykových úrovniach.

Vývoj vyučovania slovenčiny

Vyučovanie slovenského jazyka prešlo niekoľkými vývojovými štádiami. S rastúcim záujmom o štúdium slovenčiny rástla aj potreba nahradiť tradičné formy kontaktného vyučovania formou samoštúdia. O slovenčinu mali záujem študenti žijúci v rôznych častiach Fínska, ba dokonca aj v susednom Švédsku. Po zavedení štúdia na diaľku začiatkom 90. rokov sa vypracoval prvý

program samoriadeného, autonómneho štúdia. Samoriadené, autonómne štúdium vychádza z iniciatívy študenta, ktorý preberá plnú zodpovednosť za svoje štúdium, za aktívne učenie, na rozdiel od tradičného, tzv. riadeného štúdia, pri ktorom nesie hlavnú zodpovednosť za učebný proces učiteľ. Pri samoriadenom štúdiu si študent vytýči reálne ciele, ktoré sa snaží dosiahnuť. Učiteľ je v pozícii tútora. Výsledky výskumu zameraného na samoriadené štúdium so zreteľom na jazykovú produkciu poukázali na zvýšenú motiváciu študentov, a tým aj na lepšie učebné výsledky.

Využívanie počítačov na osvojovanie si jazyka (*CALL*), a najmä zavedenie vzdelávacej komunikačnej technológie do „tradičného vyučovania“ začiatkom nového milénia ovplyvnilo aj výučbu slovenčiny vo Fínsku. Využívaním multimodálnych možností sa vyučovanie a učenie stalo motivujúcejším a podnetnejším.

Vznikali prvé webové učebné materiály, ktoré sa ukladali do virtuálneho výučbového prostredia Optima (Optima je softvérový balíček, do ktorého sa ukladajú e-learningové a webové kurzy. Služi na komunikáciu a podporu sociálno-konstruktivistického učenia). Lahko dostupné multimediálne zdroje (napr. texty, audiovizuálne materiály, onlinové slovníky, a pod.) poskytovali študentom voľnosť pri ich výbere a využívaní, čo evidentne napomáhalo rozvíjaniu samoriadeného štúdia (elektronické portfóliá a onlinové študijné denníky), ale zároveň viedlo študentov ku kritickému prístupu k internetovým materiálom (*critical literacy*).

Akčný výskum

Jedinečnosť slovenčiny vo Fínsku, potreba získať čo najviac záujemcov o slovenčinu, ako aj zaintegrovanie inštitucionálneho akčného výskumu do výučby viedli k vytvoreniu e-learningového kurzu. Akčný výskum je výskum založený na spolupráci, (kolaboračný výskum), ktorý je zameraný na riešenie konkrétnych problémov vo vyučovacom kontexte, ktorého cieľom je skvalitnenie výučby (E. Ferrance, 2000). Cieľom akčného výskumu je sledovanie učenia/osvojovania si slovenčiny v novom jazykovom výučbovom prostredí z aspektu učebného procesu. Výskum sa zameriava na osvojovanie štyroch základných jazykových zručností (*SLA Skills*) v novom jazykovom výučbovom prostredí, ktoré predstavuje e-learningový kurz slovenčiny.

V súlade s koncepciou vedomého osvojovania jazyka (*language learning awareness*) „osvojovanie si jazyka“ (*language acquisition*) sa v kontexte akčného výskumu považuje za podvedomý spôsob učenia na rozdiel od uvedomeného spôsobu „učenia sa jazyka“ (*language learning*). Mimoriadna pozornosť sa venuje kolegiálnej a učiteľovej/tútorovej spätnej väzbe. V rámci výskumu sa venuje pozornosť aj vývoju webových učebných materiálov, t.j. materiálov uložených do virtuálneho prostredia, ako aj hodnoteniu

dosiahnutých učebných výsledkov (evaluácia).

Výskum vychádza z Krashenovej teórie osvojovania si cudzieho jazyka (*Theory of SLA*, Krashen 1985) a z modelu M. Johnsonovej osvojovania si cudzieho jazyka (*SLA*, Johnson 2007), podľa ktorého hlavným cieľom nie je získanie lingvistických kompetencií, teda ovládanie gramatiky a jazykových noriem, ale nadobudnutie zručností a pragmatickej kompetencie potrebnej pri používaní jazyka v rozličných životných situáciách. Výskum sa opiera aj o teórie osvojovania si jazyka prostredníctvom počítača (*CALL Theories*, Warschauer – Kern 2000) a o teóriu motivácie pri osvojovaní si cudzieho jazyka (Z. Dorney, 2001).

Tri štádiá osvojovania si jazyka prostredníctvom počítača

Za mílnik webovej pedagogiky sa považujú tzv. tri štádiá osvojovania si jazyka prostredníctvom počítača (*Three Waves of CALL*, Warschauer – Kern 2000) – behavioristické, komunikatívne a integrujúce štádium. Všetky tri štádiá sú identifikovateľné pri prieskume vývinových štádií výučby slovenčiny vo Fínsku.

Metafora „počítač ako tútor“ (*Behaviorist CALL*) má svoj pôvod v štrukturalistickom prístupe k osvojovaniu si jazyka. Počítač poskytuje normy a gramatické pravidlá. Hlavný dôraz je na jazykovej forme. Učenie prebieha formou memorovania a opakovania. Napriek nesmiernej kritike normativizmu a preskriptivizmu, tento prístup ponúka exaktné jazykové modely a paradigmy, ktoré sú potrebné najmä v začiatočnom štádiu osvojovania si cudzieho jazyka. Pri gramatických a lexikálnych cvičeniach je vítaná okamžitá spätná väzba, ktorá máva často formu „kľúča“ (správnych odpovedí).

Metafora „počítač ako žiak“ (*Communicative CALL*) vychádza z kognitívno-komunikatívneho prístupu k učeniu sa jazyka. Bez ohľadu na to, či učenie prebieha v triede alebo vo virtuálnom výučbovom prostredí, hlavný dôraz je na aktivitách študenta a na jeho schopnosti používať jazyk v praxi. Dôraz nie je na forme, ale na schopnosti študenta aplikovať formu pri praktickom používaní jazyka. Gramatika sa osvojuje/učí implicitne cez spontánnu produkciu jazyka a nie explicitne, ako v prípade behavioristického prístupu.

Metafora „počítač ako nástroj“ (*Integrative CALL*) sa zameriava predovšetkým na využívanie technológie za účelom komunikácie. Úlohou počítača je napomáhať učeniu a výučbe v rámci rozsiahlejšieho kontextu. Tento prístup vychádza zo socio-kognitívneho rámca osvojovania si jazyka. Interakcia učiaceho sa a počítača sa presúva na úroveň komunikácie (interakcie) s inými ľuďmi prostredníctvom počítača (Warschauer – Kern, 2000). K takejto komunikácii dochádza napríklad pri kolaboratívnom učení a učení sa v osobných výučbových prostrediach (*PLE – Personal Learning*

Environments) Prostredníctvom internetových technológií majú študenti prístup k rôznym autentickým zdrojom jazyka. Multimediálne technológie umožňujú prístup k širokej škále médií, z ktorých najefektívnejšie sú hypermédiá, tým že umožňujú integrovanie všetkých štyroch základných jazykových zručností do jednej aktivity ako aj lepšie monitorovanie/riadenie individuálneho učebného procesu.

Pri používaní počítača ako tútora alebo žiaka, počítač často nahrádza učiteľa, napr. pri e-learningovom alebo webovom učení. Počítač poskytuje zdroje a potrebné nástroje (*resource-based learning*), ale zmysluplné využívanie a spracovávanie informácií je úlohou študenta.

Konstruktivisticko-kognitívne teórie e-learningu zdôrazňujú kľúčovú úlohu učiaceho sa v učebnom procese. Hlavný dôraz je na kognitívnych zručnostiach, na riešení problémových situácií (*problem-based learning*) a na schopnosti prepájania novo získaných a skôr získaných vedomostí a zručností. Učenie sa v novom prostredí je obvyčajne výsledkom sociálnej interakcie (*community, peer learning*), ale aj individuálneho, samoriadeného učenia (sebareflexie a sebahodnotenie).

E-learningový kurz

E-learningový kurz slovenčiny vychádza z kognitívno-komunikatívneho prístupu k učeniu. Cieľom kurzu je schopnosť absolventa používať cieľový jazyk – slovenčinu v praxi. V súlade s teóriou osvojovania si jazyka pomocou počítača a s metaforou „počítač ako žiak“ (*Communicative CALL*) je hlavný dôraz na aktivitách študenta, na dosiahnutí dostatočnej komunikatívnej a pragmatickej kompetencie. Kľúčovým pojmom je motivácia.

Fyzickým prostredím e-learningového kurzu je horská scenéria Vysokých Tatier. Učenie sa nového cudzieho jazyka, v tomto prípade slovenčiny, zodpovedá metafore lezenia na vrchol hory. Lezenie (učenie) sa začína v základnom tábore. Študent sa púšťa do často náročného, ale zároveň mimoriadne motivujúceho terénu. Cieľom je dosiahnutie vrcholu, príp. zodpovedajúceho výškového tábora. Kurz zodpovedá jazykovej úrovni A1 – B1 (ECTS). Base Camp 1 – Camp 3 zodpovedá jazykovej úrovni A1, Camp 4 – Camp 7 úrovni A2 a Camp 8 – 10 úrovni B1. Štruktúra webovej stránky tábora pozostáva z textovej časti, nahrávok textov, lexiky k daným textom, gramatiky a cvičení/úloh. Navyše každá stránka obsahuje aj tzv. zradné miesta – špecifické alebo „ťažké“ témy z oblasti gramatiky alebo lexiky, ako aj tzv. bonus – tabuľky, zoznamy príp. iné lexikálne alebo gramatické pomôcky, napr. zoznam zvierat, antonym, a pod. Na konci jednotlivých webových stránok sa nachádzajú webové linky, ktoré sa viažu na tému lekcie. Základný tábor (Base Camp) má orientačnú funkciu. Obsahuje základné údaje o slovenskom jazyku, ortografii, ortoepii, gramatické tabuľky, vybrané slová, a pod. „Vrcholový tábor“ je zameraný na opakovanie.

Metafora lezenia a učenia sa

Podľa oxfordského slovníka, lezenie je činnosť, pri ktorej sa pohybujeme opatrne, ba niekedy ťažkopádne, nakoľko máme strach z pádu. Pri lezení sa zvyšuje hodnota samotného lezenia (Oxford Dictionary, 2008). Symbolika lezenia je súčasťou layoutu kurzu. Neznámy, náročný terén symbolizuje nový, náročný jazyk, v tomto prípade slovenčinu. Horolezec je študent. Učiteľ (tútor) je vo funkcii horského vodcu. Informácie o absolvovaní kurzu a o postupe pri samotnom „lezení“ (učení sa) spĺňajú úlohu horolezeckého sprievodcu.

Lezenie sa obyčajne koná vo dvojici, príp. v trojici. Ako prvý obyčajne lezie skúsený lezec (tútor), ale iniciatívu môže prebrať aj nováčik (kolaboratívne, komunikatívne učenie). Sólové lezenie (individuálne učenie) nie je vylúčené, je však spojené s viacerými rizikami (riziko pádu – prerušení kurzu, a pod.).

Výstroj, dobrý sprievodca (pokyny), zodpovedný horský vodca (tútor, učiteľ) a vhodná lezecká technika (potrebné učebné stratégie) majú kľúčové postavenie pri lezení (učení).. Po každej lanovej dĺžke, ktorá zodpovedá tradičnej učebnej lekcii, sa lezec „zaštanuje“ – formou krátkeho testu si zopakuje učivo z predchádzajúcej lekcie.

Po zaslúženej lezeckej túre lezec oddychuje na horskej chate. Chata je symbolom bezpečia a súkromia študenta. Kliknutím symbolu chaty sa študent dostane do virtuálneho výukového prostredia, v ktorom má svoju vlastnú schránku. Do schránky si ukladá vykonané úlohy a iné učebné materiály, ako aj hodnotenie, ktoré dostáva od učiteľa a kolegov. „Chata“ je priestorom virtuálneho relaxu, priestorom na reflexie a sebahodnotenie.

Pedagogický experiment

Účelom experimentu je získať čo najviac informácií o učení/ osvojovaní si slovenčiny prostredníctvom e-learningového kurzu z hľadiska jazykovej produkcie a učebného procesu. Jedným z vedľajších cieľov je získanie informácií o úlohe učiteľa/tútora pri osvojovaní jazyka v novom výukovom prostredí.

Hlavným zdrojom informácií boli absolventi e-learningového kurzu – dve skupiny študentov a dve študentky. Monitorovanie prvej skupiny pozostávajúcej z 20 študentov Univerzity v Jyväskylä sa uskutočnilo v roku 2007 – 2008. Účastníci experimentu študovali ako hlavný odbor jazyky, spoločenské vedy a ekonómiu. Slovenčina bola pre nich novým jazykom. Druhú skupinu tvorilo 15 študentov slovanských a pobaltských jazykov na Univerzite v Helsinkách. Monitorovanie skupiny sa uskutočnilo v roku 2008 – 2009. Navyše, dve študentky angličtiny a švédčiny na Univerzite v Jyväskylä boli monitorované individuálne po dobu 2007 – 2008 a 2008 – 2009. Účelom

dlhodobého monitorovania bolo získať čo najpresnejšie informácie o učebnom procese v novom prostredí.

Kurz pozostával z 20 hodín kontaktného vyučovania a 20 hodín individuálneho štúdia. Pri tzv. integrovanom osvojovaní si jazyka, kombinácii kontaktnej a e-learningovej formy učenia (*Blended Learning*), je hlavný dôraz na učebnom procese. Jednou z hlavných výhod integrovaného učenia je vzájomná interakcia prostredníctvom počítača (CMC – computer-mediated communication) medzi študentmi a učiteľom, ale aj medzi samotnými učiacimi sa (dištančné učenie). Voľnosť miesta, priestoru a času majú pozitívny vplyv na schopnosti samoriadeného, autonómneho štúdia (Pete Sharma – Barney Barrett, 2007). Pri integrovanej výučbe je potrebné rozlišovať medzi úlohou učiteľa/tútora a technológie. Napriek tomu, že technológia má v procese integrovaného učenia kľúčové postavenie, učiteľ je nenahraditeľný,

. Študenti si na začiatku kurzu vytýčili svoje osobné študijné ciele. Počas kurzu si viedli študijný denník, do ktorého si zaznamenávali reflexie o procese aktívneho učenia, ale aj podvedomého osvojovania jazyka. Na začiatku, uprostred a na konci experimentu vyplnili všetci respondenti dotazník a zúčastnili sa na pohovoroch. Cieľom pohovorov bolo získať informácie o špecifických črtách učenia v novom jazykovom prostredí (napr. rozdiel medzi tradičným a „novým“ učením, tradičnými a „novými“ učebnými materiálmi, podvedomým a vedomým osvojovaním jazyka, a pod.).

Informácie získané z analýz, pohovorov, dotazníkov a študijných denníkov, ako aj výsledky jazykových testov sa spracovali pomocou tzv. tematickej analýzy. Tematická analýza je kvalitatívna výskumná metóda, ktorá sa používa v psychológii na identifikovanie a analyzovanie „malého počtu dát“, čo do množstva respondentov alebo rozsahu analyzovaných tém (V. Brown and V. Clarke, 2006).

Pri integrovanom učení v nových výučbových prostrediach si študenti osvojujú základné jazykové zručnosti takisto ako pri tradičnom učení, ale zároveň nadobúdajú aj nové zručnosti. Pokiaľ ide o receptívne zručnosti, porozumenie počutého textu má síce dôležité postavenie v tradičnom alebo webovom prostredí, ale pri e-learningovom učení je jeho postavenie minimálne. Čítanie si však zachovalo svoje kľúčové postavenie vo všetkých prostrediach osvojovania jazyka. V prípade produktívnych zručností, webové prostredie umožňuje monitorovanie hovorenia len do určitej miery, napr. formou nahraného dialógu (doplňanie replík), pociťuje sa však ako nepriradené a nemotivujúce. Hovorenie sa v e-learningovom prostredí nedá monitorovať. Najdôležitejšou zručnosťou potrebnou vo všetkých jazykových výučbových prostrediach je písanie. V prípade slovenčiny však dochádzalo k paradoxným situáciám, keď študenti odmietali písať na počítači. Príčinou ich negatívneho postoja je diakritický systém slovenského jazyka, ktorý si

vyžaduje používanie medzinárodného klávesnicového systému Unicode alebo webového editora Java (*Java Web Editor*). Slovenská diakritika je mimoriadne náročná pre Fínov. Pokiaľ nemajú vypracovanú vlastnú metódu používania medzinárodnej klávesnice alebo zápasia s inými technickými problémami spojenými s písaním, dochádza veľmi ľahko k strate motivácie a k zbytočnej frustrácii. Zaujímavým riešením bol kompromis: písanie rukou a skenovanie písaného textu do virtuálneho prostredia. Viacerí študenti sa rozhodli pre písanie rukou, a to nielen kvôli technickým problémom vyplývajúcim z používania webového editora, ale aj kvôli prehĺbeniu procesu osvojovania si jazyka. Písanie rukou prispieva k uvedomovaniu si vlastného učebného procesu, k vedomému procesu osvojovania si nielen slovenskej diakritiky, ale zároveň aj gramatiky a lexiky.

„Keď píšem rukou, uvedomujem si, že sa učím a uvedomujem si, čo sa učím. Napríklad, keď píšem, učím sa slovíčka... učím sa, kde sa píše dĺžeň, mäkčeň, ba dokonca sa učím aj gramatiku...“

„Písanie je ako malovanie. Robí mi to radosť. Na počítači sa to nedá...“
“Učím sa pomaly. Keď píšem (rukou), tak sa vlastne učím...”

Popri základných jazykových zručnostiach nadobúdajú študenti aj niektoré nové zručnosti, ktoré sú typické najmä pre nové výučbové prostredia, napr. schopnosť vytvárať obsah, riešiť problémy, pracovať v tímoch, ktoré sú základom nových foriem učenia. Novou a evidentne najdôležitejšou zručnosťou je schopnosť sebahodnotenia a uvažovania nad vlastným procesom osvojovania si jazyka.

Výsledky a implikácie

50% študentov neslovanských jazykov na Univerzite v Jyväskylä absolvovalo kurz a dosiahlo úroveň A1 (ECTS) v priebehu jedného roka, zatiaľ čo 75 % študentov slovanských a pobaltských jazykov na Univerzite v Helsinkách absolvovalo kurz v priebehu jedného semestra a dosiahlo úroveň A2 (ECTS). Študentky, ktoré boli dlhodobo monitorované, dosiahli úroveň A2 a B1 v priebehu jedného roka. Vplyv znalosti iných slovanských jazykov v prípade skupiny študentov z Univerzity v Helsinkách bol evidentný.

Takmer všetci respondenti považovali kurz za veľmi ťažký. Kontaktné hodiny boli nevyhnutné pre ďalší pokrok. Všetci tvrdili, že bez kontaktného vyučovania by kurz neboli schopní absolvovať do konca. Napriek zrejмым pozitívnym výsledkom, len študentky, ktoré boli individuálne monitorované, sa rozhodli pokračovať v ďalšom štúdiu slovenčiny. Informácie získané z analýzy študijných denníkov poukázali na nasledovné skutočnosti:

- štruktúra kurzu je dobrá, orientovanie na webových stránkach jednotlivých lekcí je pomerne jednoduché
- preklad gramatiky (teórie a príkladov) do fínčiny ako aj

Slovenčina v nových výučbových prostrediach

- slovensko-fínsky slovník v každej lekcii je vítaný
- cvičenia a úlohy v danej lekcii sú dostačujúce
- „extra“ (bonusové) materiály sú mimoriadne užitočné
- písanie je mimoriadne zložité (slovenský diakritický systém), vzhľadom na softvérové nedostatky v technickom vybavení niektorých študentov
- písanie rukou má priamy vplyv na zvyšovanie vedomého osvojovania si jazyka (*language learning awareness*)
- komunikatívne cvičenia nenahrádzajú spontánne hovorenie
- pri učení sa v novom virtuálnom prostredí dochádza k socializácii potrebnej na dosiahnutie dobrých výsledkov (*Community Learning*)
- spätná väzba zo strany učiteľa, ale aj účastníkov kurzu napomáha udržaniu motivácie
- napriek dôrazu na praktické používanie slovenčiny, je potreba kompletného onlinového slovníka a gramatiky s cvičeniami jednoznačná
- individuálne učenie zaberá veľmi veľa času, čo má negatívny vplyv na motiváciu
- kľúčovým problémom je nedostatok jasných časových termínov („deadlinov“) pri vykonávaní jednotlivých úloh. Voľnosť času a miesta sa pociťujú ako faktory ohrozujúce proces individuálneho učenia.

Získané výsledky nie sú prekvapujúce, sú v súlade s teóriami učenia sa cudzieho jazyka v nových výučbových prostrediach. Neprinášajú revolučné poznatky o osvojovaní si cudzieho jazyka pomocou najnovších technológií, sú však dôležité pre ďalší rozvoj vyučovania slovenčiny v dobe, kedy sa zdá, že programy a kurzy vypracované v súlade s najnovšími trendmi v oblasti webovej pedagogiky ‚zaostávajú‘ minimálne krok pozadu za poslednými výdobytkami pedagogickej technológie. Potreba nového motivujúceho a zároveň kvalitného učebného prostredia je nevyhnutná v podmienkach, kde slovenčine konkurujú tzv. veľké jazyky. Nové možnosti ponúkajú prostredia osobného, neformálneho učenia (*PLE – Personal Learning Environments*). Ide o učebné prostredie, v ktorom sa spája fyzické prostredie (Web2.0 a 3D), virtuálne prostredie, t.j. sociálne médiá (wiki, blogovanie, Facebook, a pod.) a virtuálne svety. V centre učebného procesu je učiaci sa, ktorý si vytvára svoje učebné prostredie sám podľa vlastných potrieb. Vzhľadom na svoju flexibilitu a interaktívnosť vo forme virtuálnej mobility, osobné výučbové prostredia predstavujú ďalší krok k virtuálnemu vrcholu osvojovania si zriedkavejších jazykov, medzi ktoré patrí aj slovenčina.

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RÉSUMÉ

Slovak Language in New Teaching Environments

Providing a motivating learning environment offering the students the chance to learn Slovak is a challenge. A new virtual Slovak learning environment situated in the mountain scenery aims at meeting this challenge. Learning process is compared to mountain climbing with the mountain rises and descends, 'dangers' and desires faced when climbing a mountain. The eLearning course of Slovak is based on the socio-constructivist approach and its key concept is motivation. Main focus is on the development of communicative, pragmatic and cultural competences. Utilization of new technologies is reflected in the overall increase of language proficiency and the enhancement of self-directed learning. The article provides some results of the action research aimed at the SLA in new language learning environment. The contradiction of the new technologies allowing for distance language learning and students' need for the traditional learning styles especially when acquiring the speaking and writing skills, pose the new challenges of the more personalized language learning environments.

III

SLOVENČINA VO FÍNSKU - OD TRADIČNÉHO VYUČOVANIA K NOVÝM VÝUČBOVÝM PROSTREDIAM

by

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ANNA KYPPÖ

SLOVENČINA VO FÍNSKU: OD TRADIČNÉHO VYUČOVANIA K NOVÝM VÝUČBOVÝM PROSTREDIAM

Anna Kyppö
Univerzita v Jyväskylä



Príspevok ponúka súhrn poznatkov z výučby slovenského jazyka a kultúry na Univerzite v Jyväskylä vo Fínsku. Cieľom príspevku je poskytnúť informácie o vyučovaní slovenčiny v tzv. nových výučbových prostrediach.

Slovenský jazyk zavítal do Fínska už v roku 1978. Základné kurzy slovenského jazyka boli súčasťou programu slovanských štúdií na Univerzite v Helsinkách v roku 1978 – 1980 a na Univerzite v Jyväskylä od roku 1979. Univerzita v Jyväskylä ponúka od roku 1993 akademický program štúdia slovenského jazyka a kultúry (30 – 32 ECTS) a od roku 1998 program bakalárskeho štúdia (40 ECTS), ktorý sa realizuje v spolupráci s Katedrou slovenského jazyka UK v Bratislave. Univerzita v Jyväskylä je už vyše tridsať rokov

jedinou akademickou inštitúciou v severských krajinách, ktorá poskytuje výučbu slovenčiny na všetkých jazykových úrovniach.

Od tradičného vyučovania k e-learningu

Vyučovanie slovenského jazyka prešlo niekoľkými vývojovými štádiami. S rastúcim záujmom o štúdium slovenčiny rástla aj potreba nahradiť tradičné formy kontaktného vyučovania formou dištančného a samoriadeného štúdia. O slovenčinu majú

záujem študenti žijúci v rôznych častiach Fínska, ba dokonca aj vo Švédsku. Po zavedení dištančného štúdia v 90. rokoch bol vypracovaný prvý program samoriadeného, autonómneho štúdia (*self-directed, autonomous learning*). Samoriadené štúdium vychádza z iniciatívy študenta, na rozdiel od tradičného, tzv. riadeného štúdia, pri ktorom nesie hlavnú zodpovednosť za učebný proces učiteľ. Pri samoriadenom štúdiu si študent vytýči reálne ciele, ktoré sa snaží dosiahnuť. Učiteľ je v pozícii tútora. Výsledky výskumu zameraného na samoriadené štúdium so zreteľom na jazykovú produkciu poukázali na zvýšenú motiváciu študentov, a tým aj na lepšie učebné výsledky.

Využívanie informačných technológií na výučbu a učenie sa jazykov pomocou počítača (*CALL – Computer Assisted Language Learning*), a najmä zavedenie vzdelávacích komunikačných technológií do učebných osnov začiatkom nového milénia sa odrazilo aj vo výučbe slovenčiny. V Centre jazykov na Univerzite v Jyväskylä sa vypracovali prvé webové učebné materiály, ktoré sa ukladali vo forme elektronických modulov do nového výučbového prostredia (*new language learning environment*). Inštitucionálnym prostredím Univerzity v Jyväskylä je platforma Optima. Je to otvorený softvérový systém na tvorbu výučbových systémov a online kurzov, ktorý podporuje sociálne-konstruktivistický prístup k vzdelávaniu.

Lahko dostupné multimediálne zdroje (napr. texty, audiovizuálne materiály, online slovníky a pod.) poskytujú študentom voľnosť pri výbere a využívaní učebných materiálov, čo evidentne napomáha rozvíjaniu samoriadeného štúdia. Využívaním multimodálnych možností sa učenie stáva motivujúcejším a podnetnejším, čo sa začiatkom milénia výrazne odrazilo na vzrastajúcom záujme o štúdium slovenčiny.

Slovenčina predmetom akčného výskumu

Špecifikom Centra jazykov je realizovanie akčného (kolaboračného výskumu), ktorý je zameraný na vývojovú prácu v oblasti učenia cudzích jazykov. Akčný výskum

realizovaný v Centre jazykov v rokoch 2005 – 2009 bol zameraný na pilotovanie nových jazykových modelov a na implementáciu nových výučbových prostredí, ktoré poskytovali vhodné podmienky na kvalitné samoriadené štúdium.

Jedinečnosť slovenčiny vo Fínsku a potreba získať čo najviac záujemcov o štúdium slovenčiny viedli k vzniku eLearningového kurzu v roku 2007. V priebehu rokov 2008 – 2009 boli vypracované nové verzie kurzu a prebehlo jeho pilotovanie. Popri samoštúdiu sa kurz používal aj ako súčasť tradičného kontaktného vyučovania (*Blended learning*).

Hlavným cieľom môjho výskumu bolo monitorovanie osvojovania si slovenčiny v novom učebnom prostredí z hľadiska procesu. Výskum bol zameraný na osvojovanie si základných jazykových zručností, t. j. písania, hovorenia, čítania a počúvania. V súlade s konštruktivistickým prístupom k výučbe slovenčiny v centre pozornosti je študent a jeho prístup k učeniu sa v e-learningovom prostredí. Mimoriadna pozornosť sa venuje uvedomeniu osvojovaniu si jazyka (*language learning awareness*). Študent sa učí jazyk, uvedomuje si špecifiká nového jazyka, osvojuje si slovnú zásobu, gramatiku, a pod., ale taktiež si uvedomuje aj to, že sa učí a čo sa učí.

Výskum vychádza z modelu osvojovania si cudzieho jazyka M. Johnsonovej (Johnson, 2004), podľa ktorého hlavným cieľom nie je získanie lingvistických kompetencií, teda ovládanie gramatiky a jazykových noriem, ale nadobudnutie zručností a pragmatickej kompetencie potrebnej pri používaní jazyka v rozličných životných situáciách.

Výskum sa opiera aj o teórie osvojovania si jazyka prostredníctvom počítača (Warschauer – Kern, 2000). V súlade s Kernovou a Warschauerovou teóriou troch štádií učenia sa jazykov pomocou počítača (*Three Waves of CALL*), e-learningový kurz slovenčiny je typickým produktom tzv. komunikatívneho štádia (*Communicative CALL*). Komunikatívne štádium vychádza z kognitívneho prístupu k osvojovaniu si nového jazyka. Bez ohľadu na to, či učenie prebieha v triede alebo vo virtuálnom prostredí, hlavný dôraz je na aktivitách študenta a na jeho schopnosti používať jazyk v praxi. Dôraz nie je na forme, ale na schopnosti študenta aplikovať formu pri praktickom používaní jazyka. Očakáva sa od neho produkcia cieľového jazyka podľa predpokladaného stupňa jazykovej zručnosti.

Hodnotí sa predovšetkým jeho aktívna účasť na kurze – komunikovanie s účastníkmi kurzu a vykonávanie úloh zameraných na zvýšenie komunikatívnej kompetencie.

Evidentný je však posun smerom k tzv. integračnému štádiu (*Integrative CALL*), ktoré ponúka autentickéjšie výučbové prostredie a efektívnejšie využívanie komunikačných technológií. Tento prístup vychádza zo socio-kognitívneho rámca osvojovania si jazyka.

Konstruktivisticko-kognitívne teórie eLearningu zdôrazňujú kľúčovú úlohu učiaceho sa v učebnom procese. Hlavný dôraz je na kognitívnych zručnostiach, na riešení problémových situácií (*problem-based learning*) a na schopnosti prepájania novozískaných a skôr získaných vedomostí a zručností. Učenie prebieha kdekoľvek a kedykoľvek, bez ohľadu na miesto a čas, individuálne alebo v skupine. Technológia je zjednocujúcim faktorom, ktorý umožňuje „učenie sa spolu s inými“. Učenie sa v novom prostredí je obvyčajne výsledkom sociálnej interakcie (*community, peer learning*).

V centre pozornosti je rozvíjanie komunikatívnej kompetencie študenta. V súlade so Spoločným európskym referenčným rámcom pre jazykové znalosti (CEFR, 2009), súčasťou komunikatívnej kompetencie je sociolingvistická, pragmatická a jazyková (lexikálna, gramatická, sémantická, fonologická, ortografická a ortoepická) kompetencia. Je to nielen súhrn jazykových a pragmatických vedomostí učiaceho sa o jazyku, ale predovšetkým jeho schopnosť vytvárať zmysel v cieľovom jazyku (*language performance*).

Učenie sa slovenčiny ako lezenie na vrchol hory

Fyzickým prostredím eLearningového kurzu je horská scenéria Vysokých Tatier. Učenie sa nového cudzieho jazyka je v súlade s metaforou učenia ako lezenia na vrchol hory. Lezenie (učenie) sa začína v základnom tábore. Študent sa púšťa do často náročného, ale zároveň veľmi motivujúceho terénu. Cieľom je dosiahnutie patričného výškového tábora, ktorý zodpovedá stupňom jazykovej zručnosti A1 – B1 (CEFR).

Symbolika lezenia je súčasťou layoutu kurzu. Neznámy terén symbolizuje nový, náročný jazyk, v tomto prípade slovenčinu. Horolezec je študent. Učiteľ (tútor) je vo funkcii

horského vodcu. Informácie o absolvovaní kurzu a o postupe pri samotnom „lezení“ (učení sa) spĺňajú úlohu horolezeckého sprievodcu.

Lezenie sa obvyčajne koná vo dvojici, príp. v trojici. Ako prvý obvyčajne lezie skúsený lezec (tútor), ale iniciatívu môže prebrať aj nováčik (komunikatívne učenie). Sólové lezenie (individuálne učenie) nie je vylúčené, je však spojené s viacerými rizikami („riziko pádu“, t. j. prerušenia kurzu).

Výstroj, dobrý horský sprievodca (pokyny), zodpovedný horský vodca (tútor, učiteľ) a vhodná lezecká technika (potrebné učebné stratégie) sú pri lezení nesmierne dôležité. Po každej lanovej dĺžke, ktorá zodpovedá tradičnej lekcii v učebnici, sa lezec „zaštanďuje“. To znamená, že si formou krátkeho testu zopakuje učivo z predchádzajúcej lekcie.

Po zaslúženej lezeckej túre lezec oddychuje na horskej chate. Chata je symbolom bezpečia a súkromia študenta. Kliknutím na symbol chaty sa študent dostane do virtuálneho výučbového prostredia (elektronický portál Optima), v ktorom má svoju vlastnú schránku. Do schránky si ukladá vykonané úlohy, ďalšie učebné materiály a hodnotenia, ktoré dostáva od učiteľa a svojich kolegov. „Chata“ je priestorom pre virtuálny relax, reflektovanie a sebahodnotenie. Študent si vedie študijný denník (*learning diary*), do ktorého si ukladá reflexie o učení, o slovenčine, hodnotí seba a učebné prostredie a vytyčuje si ďalšie ciele.

Štruktúra webovej stránky jednotlivých sekcií (táborov) pozostáva z textovej časti, nahrávok textov, lexiky k daným textom, gramatiky a úloh. V každej sekcii sú zahrnuté aj tzv. zradné miesta (problematické otázky z oblasti lexiky alebo gramatiky), bonus – zaujímavosti z oblasti gramatiky, fonológie alebo lexiky, ako aj webové stránky viažuce sa na tému lekcie. Základný tábor (Base Camp) má predovšetkým orientačnú funkciu. Popri pozdravoch a základných frázach ponúka základné údaje o slovenskom jazyku, fonológii, ortoepii a pod.

Pedagogický experiment

Účelom pedagogického experimentu bolo získať čo najviac informácií o procese osvojovania si slovenčiny prostredníctvom e-learningového kurzu. Údaje sa získali

monitorovaním dvoch skupín študentov slovenčiny – 22 študentov jazykov a humanitných vied na Univerzite v Jyväskylä a 15 študentov slovanských a pobaltských jazykov na Univerzite v Helsinkách v rokoch 2008 – 2010.

Kurz pozostával z 20 hodín kontaktného vyučovania a 20 hodín individuálneho štúdia. Študenti si na začiatku kurzu vytýčili svoje osobné študijné ciele. Počas kurzu si vedli študijný denník. Informácie o osvojovaní si slovenčiny sa získavali pomocou dotazníkov, neformálnych pohovorov, spätnej väzby (*feedback*), hodnotení úloh a aktivít a analýz študijných denníkov. Údaje boli spracované pomocou tzv. tématickej analýzy. Tématická analýza je kvalitatívna výskumná metóda, ktorá sa používa v psychológii na identifikovanie a analyzovanie „malého počtu dát“, čo do množstva respondentov alebo rozsahu analyzovaných tém (Brown – Clarke, 2006). Získané údaje sa rozdelili do troch tématických skupín: témy pred, počas a po absolvovaní kurzu.

Aktívny prístup študentov k učeniu (*learners' agency*) sa monitoroval pomocou Entwistleho modelu prístupu k učeniu (*Entwistle's Approaches to Learning Model*, 2001). Entwistle tvrdí, že prístup k učeniu sa prejavuje vo využívaní stratégií tzv. hlbokého, povrchového alebo taktického prístupu k učeniu. V kontexte mojej štúdie hlboký prístup zdôrazňuje socio-kognitívny prístup k učeniu, nakoľko poukazuje na využívanie schopností prepájania novozískaných a skôr získaných vedomostí a zručností pri učení. Pri osvojovaní jazyka to znamená aktivovanie predchádzajúcich jazykových znalostí, hľadanie súvislostí a lingvistických prepojení.

Výsledky experimentu

Medzi témy, ktoré sa opakovali pre začiatok kurzu, patria vedomosti o Slovensku a slovenčine, koncept webového učenia a e-learningu, ako aj očakávania študentov od kurzu.

Témy, ktoré sa objavili počas kurzu, sa týkajú nových jazykových zručností a stratégií učenia sa v e-learningovom prostredí (*e-skills*), ako aj vedomého osvojovania si

jazyka (*language learning awareness*). Do popredia sa dostalo aj osvojovanie si nových zručností, ktoré súvisia so samoštúdiom, napr. zvládnutie časového rozvrhu a plánovania práce, sebamotivácia, zvládnutie stresových situácií, sebahodnotenie, sebarefektovanie a spolupráca v rámci skupiny.

Témy, ktoré sa objavili po absolvovaní kurzu, sa týkali synchronného a asynchronného e-learningového učenia, integrovaného vyučovania (prepojenie e-learningového a kontaktného učenia), prístupu študentov k učeniu a celkového hodnotenia kurzu. Pokúsim sa o stručné zhrnutie výsledkov podľa jednotlivých tém.

Témy pred začatím kurzu

Všetci respondenti mali pomerne dobré vedomosti o Slovensku a slovenskom jazyku. Slovenčinu považovali za ťažký jazyk. Záujem o slovenčinu mali najmä preto, lebo na univerzite sa vyskytla možnosť štúdia slovenčiny. Navyše, slovenčinu považovali za exotický jazyk. Všeti verili, že svoje znalosti slovenčiny využijú v pracovnom živote.

Webové a e-learningové učenie sa často považujú za zameniteľné. Ide však o dva odlišné spôsoby učenia. Webové alebo online učenie si nevyžaduje Internet, zatiaľ čo e-learningové učenie si vyžaduje aj počítač, aj Internet. V kontexte tejto štúdie sa webové učenie považuje za synonymum e-learningového učenia.

Všetci respondenti považovali e-learningové učenie za flexibilné a predpokladali, že sa v krátkom čase naučia veľa. Týždenný počet hodín venovaný samoštúdiu odhadovali od troch do šiestich hodín.

Napriek tomu, že verili vo svoje ‚e-learningové schopnosti‘, nepredpokladali, že by si na kurze dokázali rozvíjať spontánne hovorenie a výslovnosť. Od učiteľa očakávali ustavičnú spätnú väzbu. Nové e-learningové prostredie vnímali ako pozitívnu zmenu v porovnaní s tradičným vyučovaním.

Témy počas kurzu

Podľa A. Clarka (Clarke, 2008) jednou z najdôležitejších e-learningových zručností je zvládnutie časového rozvrhu a plánovania práce, nájdenie rovnováhy medzi rozličnými

každodennými prioritami. Jednou z najhlavnejších priorit e-learningu je sloboda času, ktorá má však často za následok hromadenie stresu vzhľadom na sústavné dodržiavanie časových termínov a nedostatočné plánovanie práce. Dôsledkom môže byť prerušenie kurzu alebo jeho ukončenie.

Stresové situácie majú často za následok aj zníženie motivácie. V takýchto prípadoch pomáha sebamotivácia, odmena za vykonanú prácu.

„Ak tento kurz urobím dokonca, pôjdem na víkend na Slovensko“ (citát z denníka študentky).

V súlade s Clarkovou charakteristikou štýlov e-learningového učenia e-learning umožňuje rôzne typy učenia. Študenti slovenčiny si uvedomovali pozitívny vplyv e-learningového prostredia na ich vlastné učebné štýly a stratégie učenia. Napriek tomu, určité problémy sa vyskytovali v dôsledku nedostatku technických zručností, a to najmä v súvislosti s používaním diakritických znamienok pri písaní.

Vzhľadom na to, že účastníkmi kurzu boli študenti jazykov, špeciálnu pozornosť venovali rozličným jazykovým otázkam, napr. fonológii, výslovnosti, diakritickému systému, ktorý považovali za mimoriadne náročný, gramatike, etymológii slov, jazykovým kontaktom, ako aj porovnávaní jednotlivých jazykov. Študenti reagovali na rozličné jazykové javy. Na ukážku uvádzam dva citáty zo študijného denníka:

„Konečne som pochopila rozdiel medzi koncovkami!“

„Ešte som sa nestretol s takou širokou škálou palatalizácie...“

Jedným z najzaujímavejších poznatkov tejto štúdie je koncept jazykového povedomia (*language awareness*), vedomosti o jazyku, o tom, ako jazyk funguje, ‚citlivosti‘ na jazyk, spojený s konceptom vedomého učenia sa, vedomého osvojovania si vedomostí (*learning awarene; language learning awareness*). Keď sa k tomu pridá písanie rukou, výsledkom je učenie sa písaním rukou. Diakritické znamienka sa pri písaní na počítači často zanedbávali. Pri písaní rukou sa im však venovalo viac pozornosti - píšuci si uvedomuje ich zmysel. Na ilustráciu uvádzam tri citáty:

„Keď píšem rukou, uvedomujem si, že sa učím a uvedomujem si, čo sa učím. Napríklad, keď píšem, učím sa slovíčka... viem, kde sa píše dĺžeň, mäkčeň, ba dokonca sa učím aj gramatiku...“

„Písanie je ako maľovanie. Robí mi to radosť. Na počítači sa to nedá...“

„Učím sa pomaly. Keď píšem (rukou), tak sa učím...“

Napriek využívaniu počítača za účelom získavania informácií, komunikovania s účastníkmi kurzu a učiteľom, študenti v začiatočnom štádiu písali väčšinou rukou. Rukou písané texty skenovali a ukladali do svojich schránok. V neskoršom štádiu štúdia slovenčiny písali aj na počítači.

Témy po ukončení kurzu

Témy po ukončení kurzu sú zamerané na synchrónne a asynchrónne e-learningové učenie, integrované učenie, ako aj na prístupy študentov k učeniu, ich vlastnú predstavu o učení sa slovenčiny a celkové hodnotenie kurzu.

Asynchrónne e-learningové učenie (napr. e-mailly, diskusné fóra, a pod.) je metóda, pri ktorej sa využívajú online učebné zdroje bez ohľadu na čas a miesto. Asynchrónne učenie je kľúčovým elementom e-learningu, a tým je mimoriadne dôležitým pre kolaboratívne učenie.

Asynchrónna komunikácia prispieva ku kognitívnej participácii účastníkov, pretože napomáha zvyšovaniu ich schopností spracovania informácií (Robert – Dennis, 2005 in Hrastinski, 2008, s. 52).

Synchrónne e-learningové učenie (napr. chat, kontaktné učenie a pod.) prebieha simultánne, v prostredí, kde sú prítomní všetci účastníci komunikácie. Synchrónne e-learningové učenie je sociálnejšie ako asynchrónne a obyčajne sa odráža vo zvýšení motivácie a zainteresovanosti študentov.

Podľa názoru študentov bol e-learningový kurz vhodný pre asynchrónne, ako aj pre synchrónne učenie. Za najvhodnejšiu formu e-learningového učenia však považovali integrované učenie – kombináciu kontaktného vyučovania a učenia sa pomocou počítača.

Kontaktné vyučovanie sa konalo v dvojtýždňových intervaloch, virtuálne tutorovanie prebiehalo každý deň.

E-learningové učenie považovali za motivujúce, flexibilitu za najvyššiu prioritu. Napriek tomu osvojovanie si slovenčiny na začiatočnickej úrovni pokladali za mimoriadne náročné. Uvádzam citát z denníka:

„Osvojovanie si nového jazyka v e-learningovom prostredí od nuly je veľmi ťažké. Keď je učiteľ fyzicky prítomný, moja motivácia učiť sa slovenčine je oveľa silnejšia.“

Podľa ich názoru je e-learningové učenie vhodnejšie pre pokročilých.

Pokiaľ ide o prístup k učeniu sa slovenčiny, všetci okrem jedného sa pokladali za samostatných študentov využívajúcich stratégie tzv. hlbokého prístupu k učeniu (Entwistle, 2001). Na kurze sa zúčastnili z osobného záujmu a verili, že sa naučili veľa. Takmer všetci prejavili záujem pokračovať v štúdiu slovenčiny. Uvádzam citát z denníka:

„Na kurze bolo výborne! Tento kurz je pre mňa niečo ako hobby... Keď sa učím, cítim, ako sa to všetko ukladá niekde hlboko v mojej mysli. To je učenie...“

Poznámky na záver

Cieľom mojej štúdie bolo zistiť, či a ako je možné učiť sa slovenčine v e-learningovom prostredí a do akého rozsahu je možné osvojiť si všetky jazykové zručnosti. Výsledky poukazujú na to, že slovenčina sa dá osvojovať v nových výučbových prostrediach tak ako akýkoľvek iný jazyk. Respondenti zaznamenali evidentný pokrok v rozvíjaní receptívnych zručností (čítanie a počúvanie), ale mali problémy s produktívnymi zručnosťami (písanie a hovorenie). Písanie bolo problémom predovšetkým v začiatočnom štádiu. Nedostatok spontánnej hovorenej komunikácie sa kompenzoval kontaktným vyučovaním a využívaním tzv. tandemového učenia (*Each One Teach One*), do ktorého sa zapojili slovenskí študenti v Jyväskylä.

Popri rozvíjaní základných jazykových zručností študenti nadobudli aj nové e-learningové zručnosti, medzi ktoré patrí zručnosť skúmania – hľadania informácií, ich spracovávaní a aplikovania v kontexte osvojeného jazyka za účelom vytvárania

zmysluplného obsahu. Ďalšou osvojenou zručnosťou je účasť na spolupráci (práca v tímoch; kolaboratívne učenie).

Napriek novým technologickým možnostiam, ktoré umožňujú výučbu v nových prostrediach, študentov slovenčiny na Univerzite v Jyväskylä z roka na rok ubúda. Tento fakt je v rozpore s rastúcou globalizáciou a so vzrastajúcimi potrebami medzinárodnej mobility. Riešenie v podmienkach Fínska vidím v integrácii štúdia slovenského jazyka a kultúry do rozsiahlejších jazykových a kultúrnych modulov, akým je napríklad program o slovanských jazykoch a kultúrach, o jazykových kontaktoch, akademický program zameraný na získanie multilingválnej interkultúrnej a multikultúrnej akademickej kompetencie, ktorých súčasťou je aj slovenčina.

Súčasný trendy a inovácie vo výučbe jazykov zdôrazňujú využívanie pedagogík zameraných na študenta v nových výučbových prostrediach. Pokiaľ ide o perspektívy vyučovania a učenia sa slovenčiny z hľadiska študenta, učiaceho sa, reálnou možnosťou je neformálne učenie, a to najmä učenie sa v tzv. osobných učebných prostrediach (*PLE – Personal Learning Environments*). Ide o prepojenie fyzického a virtuálneho prostredia, formálneho a neformálneho učenia, čo v praxi znamená napr. využívanie sociálnych médií a rozličných komunikačných technológií. Osobné výučbové prostredia predstavujú revolučnú zmenu v chápaní vyučovacieho procesu, učebných osnov a pozície učiteľa. V centre učebného procesu je aj naďalej študent, ktorý si vytvára svoje učebné prostredie sám podľa vlastných potrieb a predstáv. Vzhľadom na svoju flexibilitu a interaktívnosť vo forme virtuálnej mobility predstavujú osobné výučbové prostredia ďalší krok k virtuálnemu vrcholu osvojovania si zriedkavejších, tzv. malých jazykov, medzi ktoré patrí aj slovenčina.

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Resumé

Slovak language in Finland. From traditional learning to new language learning environments

The article offers some experiences from teaching Slovak language and culture at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. University of Jyväskylä has been the only academic institution in Nordic countries which offers basic academic programs of Slovak language and culture since 1979. The aim of this article is to provide some information on teaching and learning Slovak in the new language learning environments. Slovak e-learning course was implemented in 2009 and consequently, teacher's research aimed at learning Slovak in this environment was launched. The results strongly support the constructivist-cognitive approach to teaching, which emphasize learner's role in the process of language acquisition. In the future, Slovak, as a representative of a less

commonly taught language, may be acquired in Personal Learning Environments (PLE), which integrates both, formal and informal learning into one learning experience.

Key words: e-learning, language skills, e-skills, language learning awareness, Personal Learning Environment

IV

LEARNING SLOVAK IN AN E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT. A CASE STUDY

by

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Learning Slovak in an E-Learning Environment: A case study

Anna Kyppö, University of Jyväskylä

Providing a motivating learning environment for learning a less commonly taught language is a challenge. Developing technology, societal changes, virtual mobility and networking create new demands for teachers and students of these languages. Growing needs for international mobility call for the adoption of new pedagogical approaches. It is the urgency of using more up-to-date, pedagogically acceptable computer-assisted teaching programs that led to the development of the e-learning course of Slovak reported upon in this article. The course is based on a socio-constructivist approach and its main aim is to promote the development of learners' communicative and cultural competence. This empirical study explores the learning of Slovak in an e-learning environment. The main focuses are on students' approaches to learning in an e-learning environment, on raising their learning awareness and on their experiences of e-learning. The initial research questions are whether and how Slovak is learnt in an e-learning environment and whether all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) can be learnt in such a context. Learners' agency – learners' degree of motivation and engagement as well as their conscious approach to learning – is reflected in the development of their communication competence and the growth of their learning awareness, which is manifested in their learning journals and reflections. One interesting outcome about learning awareness was the challenge of Slovak diacritics. Students' awareness of this challenge increased through pen-and-paper writing, not through the e-learning environment. Thus a contradiction emerged: between the new technologies that allow for distance language learning and the need for more traditional learning styles. This contradiction poses new challenges for the more personalized language learning environments. This article reports on the design and implementation of the e-learning course in Slovak, it outlines how students' impressions of the course were collected and analyzed

Keywords: Slovak, less commonly taught languages, e-learning environment, language skills, learner experiences of e-learning

Corresponding author's email: anna.kyppo@jyu.fi

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1 Introduction and background

1.1 The Slovak language

Slovak is an Indo-European language that belongs to the group of West Slavic languages, together with Czech, Polish and Lower and Upper Sorbian. In addition to the 4–5 million Slovaks living in Slovakia, Slovak is also spoken in other parts of the world, with an estimated 2,742,400 speakers of Slovak outside Slovakia. Slovak is the official language of the Slovak Republic.

Studies of Slovak language and culture are offered by more than 40 universities around the world. However, the only academic institution of higher education offering Slovak studies in language and culture in Nordic countries is the University of Jyväskylä. This case study explores students' experiences with a Slovak e-learning environment developed especially for this university.

1.2 Context of the study

At the University of Jyväskylä, Slovak language courses have been offered since 1979. Since the beginning of the 1990s, a more extensive academic program of Slovak language and culture has also been included. Motivated by the uniqueness of Slovak studies, the desire to attract more learners and the urge for continuous development of curricula, this study aimed at exploring the acquisition of Slovak in a new language learning environment. In 2004, development work on the web-based module of Slovak became a project of the Finland's Virtual Language Centre. The integration of traditional class instruction and online communication resulted in the creation of the Slovak e-learning course.

1.3 Technology-enhanced learning of less commonly taught languages

Less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) are generally defined as all the world languages apart from English, French, German and Spanish. LCTLs are perceived as less commonly spoken, exceptional or even exotic (Janus 1997). In accordance with the Brecht and Walton classification of LCTLs (1994), Slovak belongs to the group of the *much less commonly taught languages*. Brecht and Walton's classification partly contradicts the concept of the so-called lesser-used languages (LULs) adopted in the European Union and which comprises any language other than the 23 official languages of the European Union. Thus, for example, Finnish, Czech and Slovak, and other official languages of the European Union are regarded as commonly used and spoken languages.

Technology-enhanced language learning and teaching, with its emphasis on interaction and authentic discourse, possesses enormous potential for language learning. Using technology as a tool for communication offers new possibilities of language learning through various forms of social networking, publishing and communicating online. The urgency of using the more up-to-date, pedagogically acceptable computer-assisted teaching programs and the latest technology is currently one of the major issues in the field of LCTLs. Various task-based learning materials aimed primarily at grammar and vocabulary have

been developed in different languages, but the gaps in teaching pragmatic and cultural competences are still wide. Integration of the latest pedagogical technologies into coherent teaching plans is part of continuous development and a great challenge, especially when technology is perceived as an instructional system, either primary or supplemental to the traditional language classroom. Learning less commonly taught languages is often limited to language learning at three basic levels (beginning, intermediate and advanced), thus the question of appropriate technologies and technology-enhanced learning materials at different levels is of high importance.

Systematic action research into language learning and teaching has been a departmental policy at the University of Jyväskylä Language Centre since 1993. The broad focuses have included the development of learner autonomy and the integration of new language learning environments into teaching and learning. The development projects have been aimed at applying multimodal approaches to all the teaching and self-access activities.

This case study on learning Slovak was part of the institutional action research carried out by the Language Centre from 2000 to 2010. The action research conducted in the first stage (2004–2005) aimed at integrating ICT into language teaching in a pedagogically viable way. In the second stage (2005–2009), the technology-enhanced instructional designs were generally adopted and tested for their contribution to the desired learning outcomes. One of the key issues was the quality development of teaching and learning and the enhancement of self-directed learning. With the integration of educational and communication technology into traditional instruction in the early 2000s, the instruction of Slovak also became more multimodal. Continuous development of the Slovak learning materials finally resulted in the implementation of the web-based module of Slovak language and culture. My main focus in the study has been on how Slovak is learned in the e-learning environment from the viewpoints of language production and learning process. This focus has also allowed me to look into the efficiency of the e-learning environment and the role of the teacher in the e-learning environment.

2 Teaching experiment: Slovak e-learning course

This chapter introduces the Slovak e-learning course – its pedagogical basis, course structure and layout – and the study that resulted from this teaching experiment. First, I discuss the pedagogical basis of the course, that is, the socio-constructivist approach to teaching and learning and the concept of the learners' communicative competence. This discussion is followed by a brief description of the course structure and layout, which is based on the metaphor of learning a new language as climbing a mountain. Finally, the study that was made of this teaching experiment and its main results will be briefly introduced.

2.1 The socio-constructivist approach

The course is based on the socio-constructivist approach. According to Vygotsky's social constructivist approach, learning is a collaborative activity and occurs in an environment that is close to the real world (Johnson 2004).

Learning occurs at any time and in any place, individually and within the group (collaborative learning). Technology works as a uniting factor (a student works alone but is still with the others) and thus enables the acquisition of a common learning experience for all the learners. As social constructivism in learning emphasizes problem-based instruction and peer collaboration between the learners, the main focus is on student activities and the development of their communicative (i.e. linguistic and pragmatic) competence.

Technology has been traditionally viewed as a conveyor of information and communicator of knowledge (Nanjappa & Grant 2003). However, when using technology as a tool, either for accessing or transferring knowledge, learners become engaged in a more meaningful process of knowledge construction: they become the designers and presenters of their personal knowledge. Technology may thus be used as a tool for providing a richer and more motivating learning environment. From the learners' viewpoint, technology may also support new skills through such cognitive and technological tools as the spreadsheets, collaborative learning environments, and other means aimed at the development of cognitive and metacognitive processes. "Constructivism is a doctrine stating that learning takes place in contexts, while technology refers to the designs and environments that engage learners" (Schunk 2000 in Nanjappa & Grant 2003: 39). As to the role of the teacher in the constructivist learning environment, the teacher is perceived as a facilitator and creator of a favourable social climate for collaborative learning.

2.2 Communicative competence

In this context, communicative competence may be equated with language proficiency. In accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), learners' communicative competence consists of the sociolinguistic, pragmatic (discourse and functional) and language (lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic) competence. Communicative competence is the learners' linguistic and pragmatic knowledge about the language and their ability to create meaning in the target language (language performance).

Learners' activities in the Slovak e-learning course are authentic tasks "where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome" (Willis 1996: 4). In accordance with the framework of task-based learning (Willis 1996) and learners' proficiency level, the tasks are aimed at listing and comparing (A1 level), problem solving, sharing personal experience and storytelling (A2-B1 level). The learning outcomes and respective proficiency levels correspond to the Common European Framework levels A1-B1 (CEFR 2009).

2.3 Course design: Mountain climbing metaphor for learning new languages

The structure of the e-learning course is based on the mountain range of the High Tatra mountains in Slovakia. The idea is to illustrate how learning a foreign language is like climbing a mountain. The course homepage features an

image of the Slovakian mountain range. The starting point is the Base Camp, and ten mountain camps represent the stages of the course.

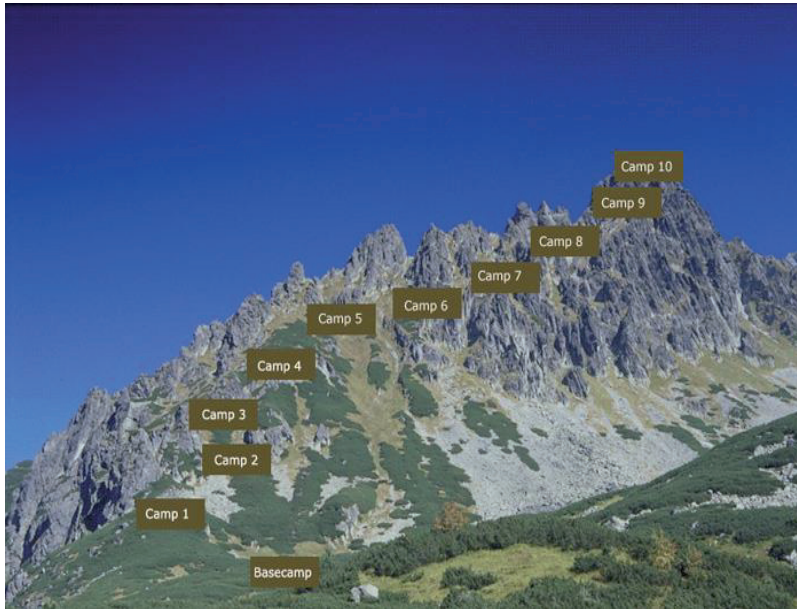


Figure 1. Layout of the Slovak e-learning course

Climbing is usually related to mountains or walls. It is an activity that demands caution and concentration from climbers due to various external dangers that may result in falling down. Definitions of climbing describes it as a process of reaching a summit (i.e. a goal) and thus they can also be used to underline the process of learning a less commonly taught language – proceeding slowly, with difficulties, however, with the aim to learn the language.

Climbing, like language learning, is a process that occurs in stages, and this e-learning course attempted to reflect that step-by-step progress. Thus, mountain climbing became, more concretely, a metaphor for one's progress through the course: learners proceed slowly, with difficulties, as they attempt to reach the summit, that is, to complete the course.

When climbing a mountain, the terrain may be dangerous but also challenging and exciting, particularly when moving in a completely unknown, often treacherous terrain – in this case, a new language. This terrain can consist of tricky grammar or lexical items and other aspects that make a language difficult. Good guidance embodied in the person of a mountain guide (the teacher) or in the written instructions of a climbing guide (the course description and instructions) is invaluable.

Climbing generally takes place in pairs or in groups of three, just as learning often occurs in groups. Solo climbing, however, may also be an option, but when learning alone, the risk of falling down (dropping out) is greater. The climbing gear (the course tools) must be appropriate and it must fulfil all the safety requirements (learners must be provided with basic instructions and IT facilities).

When climbing alone, different climbing techniques (learning strategies) are employed. Whatever the case, the climber must be aware of the properties of the terrain (learning awareness) and must have a clear plan for climbing (learning path).

Figure 2. Slovak e-learning course: Camp 3.

The starting point of the virtual climbing is the Base Camp and the ultimate aim is the top of the mountain. Each camp consists of the following sections: text, vocabulary, grammar, listening assignments, and learners' own space for topic-related websites. In addition, the section called Treacherous Places is aimed at language-specific grammatical, lexical or pragmatic items and the section called Bonus, which offers complementary learning materials (e.g. lists of foods and animals) is included.

2.4 Theoretical background

This study uses Kern's and Warschauer's concept of the three waves of CALL (Kern & Warschauer 2001) and Johnson's model of SLA (2007) as a framework. In accordance with the Kern and Warschauer formulation of the three waves of CALL, the Slovak e-learning course is a typical product of communicative CALL.

The metaphor of computer-as-pupil (communicative CALL) has its origin in the cognitive approach. The main focus is on using the forms rather than on the

forms themselves. Grammar is taught implicitly and learners are encouraged to generate the language on their own. Depending on the learners' proficiency level, they are expected to take creative actions in the target language. While the learners at the beginner's level are expected to create simple dialogues, such as interviewing each other, writing and answering advertisements, describe something or someone, ask for information, order something, etc., the learners at the intermediate level are expected to employ their problem-solving skills and the skills of searching for required information, e.g. to plan a trip to Slovakia, tell and retell story, explain something and/ or express their opinion. The activities included consist of both, tasks with the immediate feedback, which are focused rather on the language forms and accuracy, and the collaborative practices (peer and group tasks) aimed at the increase of communicative competence. The assessment is based on the completion of the real world tasks and learner's active participation. However, the shift towards integrative CALL, which is based on multimedia technology, more authentic learning environments and computer-mediated communication (CMC), is also clear, because the focus is primarily on collaborative practices and exploitation of the web resources (group work, stimulating students' discussion or writing activities and thus promoting their critical thinking).

Johnson views second language acquisition (SLA) in terms of performance. In her work *A Philosophy of Second Language Acquisition* (2007), she presents a dynamic interrelationship between the social and individual plane. Learning a second language does not occur in the human brain, but in the interactions conducted in sociocultural settings. Her model may be traced back to the work by Vygotsky (1896–1934) and Bakhtin (1895–1975), who shared similar views on the role of society and culture in the development of language and communication. According to this model of SLA, the origin of second language competence lies in the language use which takes place in a real social context – in the interaction between language competence (knowledge of the language) and performance (the skills of using the language in real or almost-real life contexts). Definitions of competence have been continually developed. According to Newby (2011), three general hypotheses referring to the definition of competence may be perceived. The first is based on the general acceptance that language is a cognitive phenomenon and that the use of the linguistic code (performance) is stored in the speakers' minds. This view includes also the Chomskyan language-specific view of competence and the theories of cognitive linguistics. The second hypothesis is based on recognizing language not only as the subject of linguistic description but also as a part of a speech community and culture. The third hypothesis offers the view of language as a chain of interactional processes by which human discourse is created and maintained (language use).

Johnson's model is one variation to the constructivist-cognitive theories of e-learning, which emphasize the learner's key role in the learning process. In her model, the main focus is on learner's problem-solving cognitive skills and the skills of linking the acquired knowledge to the previously acquired knowledge and skills.

2.5 Learners as agents

As I explored the learning of Slovak as experienced by the learners, the concept of agency as a driving force emerged. According to van Lier, agency is one of the key concepts in learning. Van Lier perceives agency as a movement, as a change of state or direction or even as “the lack of movement where movement is expected” (van Lier 2010). Agency is not exactly the same as motivation or autonomy in learning, even though both autonomy and motivation may be seen as manifestations of learner agency. Significant progress (moving forward) in language learning may be observed only if the learner employs agency in more self-directed ways. The employment of agency significantly depends on the learning environment and on an agency-promoting curriculum. “The employment of agency depends on a learning conducive environment that allows and instigates a diversity of manifestations of agency at different levels. The creation of such an environment is a major task of pedagogy.” (van Lier 2010: 5) Basharina (2009) views agency as an active approach to learning, as the learners’ use of accountability, which may be defined as their responsibility to keep track of what they learn. This kind of accountability may be a synonym for self-directed learning (Chapelle, 1997 in Basharina 2009).

To monitor learners’ agency, Entwistle’s model of Approaches to Learning (Entwistle 2001 in Basharina 2009) was adapted. Entwistle claims that agency may be manifested through the use of deep, surface or strategic approaches to learning.

Entwistle’s Approaches to Learning Model (2001)

Deep approach: Seeking meaning	Surface approach: Reproducing	Strategic approach: Reflective organising
Intention – to understand Ideas for yourself, by:	Intention – to cope with unit requirements, by:	Intention – to achieve the highest possible grades, by:
Relating Ideas to previous knowledge and experience	Treating the unit as unrelated bits of knowledge	Putting consistent effort into studying
Looking for patterns and underlying principles	Memorising facts and carrying out procedures routinely	Managing time and effort effectively
Checking evidence and relating it to conclusions	Finding difficulty in making sense of new ideas presented	Finding the right conditions and materials for studying
Examining logic and argument cautiously and critically	Seeing little value or meaning in either unit or tasks set	Monitoring the effectiveness of ways of studying
Being aware of understanding developing while learning	Studying without reflecting on either purpose or strategy	Being alert to assessment requirements and criteria
Becoming actively interested in the unit content	Feeling undue pressure and worry about work	Gearing work to the perceived preferences of lecturers

Figure 4. Entwistle’s Approaches to Learning Model adapted by Basharina (2009)

In the context of this study, deep approaches to learning underline the socio-constructivist approach to learning through building knowledge on previously learned matter, searching for patterns, being aware of one's learning process and finally becoming interested in learning a new language.

3 Research questions and methodology

3.1 Research questions

The research questions address the learners' experiences of learning Slovak in an e-learning environment, learners' views on the acquisition of all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) and their views of the teacher's role in a technology-enhanced learning environment.

1. Do the learners of Slovak experience that they are acquiring language in the e-learning environment? How do they experience their learning?
2. What are the learners' views on the acquisition of all four language skills in an e-learning environment?
3. How do the learners perceive the role of the teacher in the technology-enhanced learning environment?

3.2 Data collection

This section provides the information on the data collection and analysis. The teaching experiment was implemented with two groups of students: 22 students of Slovak at the University of Jyväskylä in 2008–2009 and 15 students of Slovak at the University of Helsinki in 2010. The demographics of the groups were as follows. At the University of Jyväskylä, 21 students were female, 1 was male; 20 were Finnish and 1 was Polish. All of them were language students without any previous knowledge of Slovak. Their e-learning efforts were monitored for a period of one academic year. At the University of Helsinki, 8 students were male, 7 were female; 13 were Finnish, 1 was French and 1 Japanese. All of them were students of Slavic languages without any previous knowledge of Slovak. Their e-learning efforts were monitored for a period of one academic term.

The purpose was to obtain the maximum amount of information about their learning – what and how the learners learned. To capture the overall learning process, students were asked to keep learning journals.

The data were collected through pre-, on- and post-course questionnaires, interviews, content analyses of the learning journals, course feedback and teacher reflections. A pre-course personal questionnaire was used to gather information about the personal and professional background of the students.

3.3 Data analysis

The data were interpreted by means of thematic analysis, a conventional practice in qualitative research used for the interpretation of small-size research topics (Braun & Clarke 2006). After the collected data were described, the items were

divided into the themes and their meanings were interpreted. The themes were then grouped as pre-, on- and post-course themes. By means of a thematic analysis, something important in relation to the research, even though minor in size, may be spotted, reported and interpreted within the given data set. Braun and Clarke (2006) offer a model of a six phase thematic analysis:

1. Data description
2. Sorting items into proto-/sub-themes
3. Creating thematic maps
4. Defining the themes (detailed analyses)
5. Reporting on themes and
6. Communicating and interpreting the meaning of each theme.

4 Findings

In this chapter, the findings of the study are reported. The findings are presented under the themes (pre-course, on-course and post-course themes). The concepts related to the themes are determined in the context of interpretation of findings.

4.1 Pre-course themes

The pre-course themes were related to the learners' concept of Slovakia and the Slovak language, concept of learning with a special focus on web-based and independent learning, learners' expectations of the course, as well as their beliefs about themselves as e-learners.

4.1.1 Slovakia and Slovak language

All learners had some basic knowledge of Slovakia and the Slovak language. They knew that Slovak belonged to the group of West Slavic languages and that independent Slovakia was born after the partition of Czechoslovakia in 1992. All respondents wanted to learn Slovak because they found learning a new language generally challenging. Slovak was perceived as a distant, however, a challenging language

Two respondents knew that Slovak was considered to be a lingua franca of Slavic languages and the reason why they decided to learn Slovak was to learn other Slavic languages through Slovak. Apart from one respondent who favoured the challenge of coping with a less commonly taught and a thus a more difficult language, Slovak was chosen without any special reason. Apart from one, all respondents believed that they would be able to use Slovak in the future either for work or leisure purposes.

4.1.2 Web-based learning/ e-learning

Web-based learning and e-learning are often used as interchangeable terms, yet these concepts represent slightly different types of learning. Web-based learning or online learning is associated with materials delivered in a web browser or in

some other way that is readily accessible on the computer (Tsai & Macado 2010). Web-based or online learning does not necessarily require the use of the networks (Internet). On the other hand, the e-learning is associated with activities that involve both computers (resource-based learning) and networks simultaneously. However, in this study, web-based learning is regarded as a synonym to e-learning. Students themselves used the terms web-based learning and e-learning interchangeably.

All respondents expected e-learning to be more flexible as well as more challenging than traditional learning. Apart from one, they all believed that they would be able to learn a significant amount. Students estimated their weekly amount of learning hours to be approximately three to six hours.

Despite the strong belief in themselves as e-learners, the students doubted that they might be able to develop their speaking and pronunciation skills without contact classes. The teacher's physical absence was considered to affect their learning negatively. They all expected the teacher to facilitate their learning and provide them with immediate feedback.

The learners' expectations of the course were high, and their belief in their own learning skills was strong. The use of a new learning environment was seen as a valuable addition to traditional learning.

4.2 On-course themes

The **on-course themes** were related to the development of e-learning skills and strategies and the raising of the language learning awareness. A special focus was on the new skills learnt, e.g. the skills of time management and planning, motivation for e-learning and rewarding oneself, as well as the skill of coping with stress (Clarke 2008). Skills for self-assessment, self-reflection, collaboration and research were also regarded as highly important. These themes are exemplified below with extracts (1)-(21) from the students' journals.

4.2.1 Time management

According to Clarke (2008), one major e-learning skill that is crucial for successful completion of a course is the skill of time management: balancing different priorities, reflecting on learning preferences and searching for good learning practices. Next to the skill of time management is the skill of planning.

One major benefits of e-learning is the freedom of time. The structure of conventional courses is often fixed and supportive. However, Clarke (2008) considers the structure of conventional courses to be limited. By offering the freedom of time, e-learning courses reduce the supportiveness. One of the greatest risks of e-learning courses is falling behind or even failing.

The problem of time management and planning occurred frequently.

On the one hand, the learners longed for a fixed period of completion for the course tasks. On the other, they found the e-learning stressful due to the deadlines and the lack of planning skills.

- (1) *"Clear deadlines should be set up. Learning should become a daily routine..." "Shall I complete the course within the schedule?" ... "I've got the panic as to the deadlines..."*

- (2) *“Too much work... Perhaps I took up a too big mouthful when planning my spring studies... I will not give up, unless I get a total burn-out”...*

Learners faced the stress caused mostly by the lack of proper planning or lack of experience in e-learning. To solve the problem, group discussions aimed at identifying the cause and removing the stress were offered.

4.2.2 Motivation and reward

Motivation and the reward for the achieved goals were mentioned frequently. Even though the goals were set at the beginning of the course, the stress caused by the lack of time evidently affected the learners' learning process. To solve the problem of stress, which often resulted in a decrease of motivation, the teacher tried to help learners find the balance between studying and personal life. The mechanism of self-motivation (i.e. rewarding oneself for the effort) seemed to be an efficient activator.

- (3) *“It would be nice to travel to Slovakia and try in real what I have learned on this course...”*
- (4) *“I have learned something new! Today I happened to sit next to a Slovak exchange student and I asked him “Ako sa voláš?” (What's your name) ...”*
- (5) *“To motivate myself, I decided to book a weekend trip to Slovakia...”*

4.2.3 E-learning styles / strategies

In accordance with Clarke's description of e-learning styles (Clarke 2008), there are plenty of preferences about the way learners like to learn. E-learning provides opportunities to learn visually (visual learning), learn through listening (auditory learning), learn through doing (kinaesthetic learning, making choices, interacting with the content and working with others through communication technologies).

The learners of Slovak recognized the specific and positive impact of the e-learning environment on their learning strategies or learning styles.

- (6) *“Web-learning requires specific learning strategies. I am used to learning from the books. I guess I just have to find my own way of learning...”*
- (7) *“Learning is easier due to the contact sessions and short-time objectives.”*

However, some learners did not find any remarkable difference between e-learning and traditional learning.

- (8) *“Everything I found difficult on this course, I also found difficult on other language courses... No special learning strategies are required...”*

On this course, an effective learner was expected to acquire at least basic ICT skills. Despite the teacher's efforts to make the learners feel comfortable in the e-

learning environment by encouraging them to participate in the online activities and providing them with continuous support, at some times the learners got frustrated due to various technical problems, especially in relation to writing. The Java editor, enabling the writing of Slavic diacritics, was not available in all participants' home computers. Nowadays, this problem has been overcome by means of various writing facilitators and other specific features offered by almost all major computer systems.

(9) *"It is incredibly difficult to get myself on the Internet.... The Web is definitely a desirable environment for language learning..."*

(10) *"Help! All the diacritical marks got lost!"*

4.2.4 Independent learning

Learning independently without any obligatory lessons is generally the secret of popularity of e-learning or web-based courses. E-learners are expected to be more responsible for their learning activities but they are also provided more freedom of how and what to learn. The initial e-learning experience produces a conflict: There is excitement over doing something new, but at the same time, there is also the uncertainty of having actually learned something, of having acquired the knowledge.

(11) *"The course has been interesting, even though 'learning on one's own' is very demanding..."*

Sceptical attitudes towards e-learning existed as well.

(12) *"Are there any other language students, who would take up the e-learning course and LEARN the language?"*

4.2.5 Specific language issues

The focus of this study was on the process of acquiring the target language (i.e. on how the Slovak is learned) in an e-learning environment. Learners' interaction, their use of the language was continuously monitored. Learners continuously evaluated themselves and reflected on their learning process in the learning diaries. Because all respondents were students of languages, special attention was paid to various specific language issues (e.g. the phonological system of Slovak, pronunciation, the diacritic system). E-learning diaries were the only channel for interpreting their learning experiences when encountering the new language. The phonological and grammatical system of Slovak was regarded as a great challenge. Of these, the Slovak diacritic system was considered to be the most difficult.

Phonological and grammatical aspects

The Slovak sound system consists of long and short vowels and hard and soft consonants. The acute mark (in Slovak "dlžeň", "prolongation mark") indicates a

long vowel, for example í /i:/ á /a:/, é /e:/, etc. Another special diacritical mark is the circumflex ("vokáň"), which exists only above the letter "o." - ô. The caron (in Slovak "mäkčeň", "palatalization mark" or "softener") indicates either palatalization or a change of alveolar fricatives into post-alveolar, for example, č, dž, š, ž, ň, ľ, ď, ť. In addition to palatalization, the differentiation between the soft, hard and neutral consonants also has a grammatical function. This turned out to be one of the most challenging issues, especially for those students who had not learnt any other Slavic languages apart from Slovak.

A number of issues related to spelling and pronunciation puzzled the learners. These issues included the abundance of consonants and the phonemic principles of Slovak spelling (e.g. the assimilation law, which states that the forms derived from the same stem are written in the same way even if they are pronounced differently), as well as the grammatical principle, according to which there is a difference in writing (but not in the pronunciation) between the basic singular and plural form of masculine adjectives.

(13) *"I have never ever bumped into such a diverse palatalization, is this the symptom typical for all the Slavic languages?"*

(14) *"What a great number of words with plenty consonants and no vowels!?"*

Pronunciation exercises were offered in the introductory unit (Base Camp). The exercises aimed at listening and speaking were included in all units.

Like all Slavic languages, Slovak is an inflected language. It means that the endings of nouns, adjectives, pronouns and numerals change depending on the grammatical gender, the grammatical number and the grammatical case.

(15) *"I finally learned how to differentiate between the endings of feminine and masculine substantives..."*

The grammatical category of aspect related to the flow of time was perceived as one of the greatest challenges by the Jyväskylä students in particular.

(16) *"The aspect in Slovak is extremely difficult. I am not able to figure out the future tense of Perfective verbs!"*

Pragmatic aspects

Expressing different degrees of politeness by means of modal verbs and pronouns (the use of the polite form of 'you') did not cause any significant problems, as it also occurs in other languages.

(17) *"Polite 'you' may be found in other languages, so it was not difficult to understand the main idea..."*

Learners had the opportunity to practice grammatical and pragmatic matters in two ways - through traditional 'computer-as-tutor' exercises, without teacher's feedback, and through various activities aimed at the use of the language in real or almost real-life contexts.

4.2.6 Writing and language learning awareness

Awareness of learning plays an important+ role in the process of learning a new language and serves as an efficient motivator. The concept of phonemic awareness – the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words and understanding of sequences of speech sounds (Yopp 1992) – is essential for reading in the alphabetic system of a target language. However, the development of writing awareness (writing with computers) was not successful. The learners of Slovak failed to internalize the diacritic system of Slovak through electronic writing (i.e. writing with computers).

Interestingly, it was not the computer-enhanced practice but pen-and-paper writing that developed the learners' knowledge of diacritics as well as their language learning awareness. They were encouraged to produce the written texts and save them in their folders. Some learners wrote with the computer and either totally or partly ignored the diacritic system. Others delivered their handwritten texts to the teacher and peers on paper. This mix of approaches, making use of the technology or writing by hand, resulted in a compromise – scanning of the hand-written texts and downloading them in learner folders. Those who preferred writing by hand claimed that the method had a direct impact on the increase of their awareness of learning Slovak.

- (18) *"When writing (by hand), I am aware of learning and I am aware of what I am learning. I know I am learning, for example, I can learn the vocabulary far better than when I write on the computer."*
- (19) *"When writing by hand, I am learning. I am getting aware of the signs (spelling), even of the grammar... "*
- (20) *"When I write in Slovak, it feels like painting. I enjoy it. I cannot do the same on the computer."*
- (21) *"I am a slow learner. I have to be fully aware of what I am doing. The only way to learn how to write is to write by hand."*

Not only writing by hand, but also reflecting on one's learning process enhanced the increase of learning awareness. Reflecting is an important learning skill in all forms of learning (Clarke 2008). To gain the maximum benefit, reflecting should be approached in a systematic way. The learners were asked to reflect on their learning process in their e-learning journals. They were encouraged to write regularly, even though the entries were short. They were also encouraged to reflect on their colleagues' entries. Thus the learning journal served as a learning tool for raising the awareness of learners' learning in general.

4.3 Post-course themes

The **post-course themes** are related to synchronous, asynchronous and blended learning, to learners' approaches to learning, specifically e-learning, and to the evaluation of the course. Student voices are presented in extracts (22)-(31).

4.3.1 Asynchronous, synchronous and blended learning

Apart from several hours of guided discussion, learning was mostly asynchronous and blended.

Asynchronous e-learning (e.g. emails, discussion boards) is a learner-centred teaching method that uses online learning resources to facilitate the sharing of information free from time and place. Asynchronous e-learning is considered to be a key component of efficient e-learning due to its flexibility (freedom from time and space) and thus essential for collaboration. Learners enter the e-learning environment at any time and thus spend more time on accomplishing their tasks and other learning activities. According to Robert and Dennis (Robert & Dennis 2005 in Hrastinski 2008), asynchronous communication increases learners' ability to process information and thus supports learners' cognitive participation.

Synchronous learning (e.g. chat, videoconferencing, face-to-face learning) takes place in a learning environment in which everyone participates at the same time. Synchronous e-learning is perceived as a more social activity, in which learners are participants rather than isolated learners, which often results in an increase of commitment and motivation (Kock 2008 in Hrastinski 2008). Synchronous e-learning primarily supports the learners' personal participation.

A blended learning approach is the combination of face-to-face classroom instruction and computer-mediated activities with an aim to form an integrated instructional approach.

The e-learning course discussed in this case study was considered to be highly appropriate for synchronous and asynchronous learning. However, the students saw blended learning (face-to-face classroom tutorials and computer-mediated activities) as the best option for learning a less commonly taught language.

(22) *"Learning without the contact classes would have taken me the ages! I have learned plenty of small (and big) things in the contact classes, the things I would not have noticed when learning completely alone..."*

(23) *"Tutorials were very useful I got much information and new passion to get ahead..."*

The respondents claimed that without the regular contact classes (face-to-face tutorials) they would not have completed the course.

(24) *"Learning a completely new language in the e-learning environment is very difficult. I learn most on the contact lesson. When the teacher is physically present, my motivation to learn Slovak is far stronger."*

4.3.2 Attitudes towards e-learning

Students generally considered e-learning to be highly motivating and challenging due to the lack of time constraints and lack of pressure. Flexibility was regarded as the highest priority.

- (25) *“I think that I have learned on the e-learning course as much as I would have learned in the class. The only difference between an e-learning and traditional course is that the schedule is more flexible.”*

With respect to the students' way of life and their learning styles, the e-learning course was considered to be the right option. However, learning Slovak, as well as any other language at the beginner's level in an e-learning environment, was experienced as being very demanding.

- (26) *“I would not have ever believed that learning a completely new language might be so difficult! When I started with English, German and French, some words and expressions were already familiar. As to the Slovak, I had no idea how the words would sound like...”*

- (27) *“Web-learning requires specific learning strategies. I am used to learning from the books. I guess I just have to find my own way of learning...”*

The necessity of acquiring the new skills and specific strategies for e-learning was recognized. Breaking the old habits of learning from books was also acknowledged.

4.3.3 Approaches to learning

Learners' agency (i.e. their active approach to learning) was monitored by means of Entwistle's model of approaches to learning (Entwistle, 2001). Apart from one student, all respondents regarded themselves as independent learners who employed the deep approach to learning. Their participation in the course was based on their personal interest and group commitment, which resulted in deep learning and minimum dropout. In compliance with Entwistle's model, all learners made a constant effort to understand the language system of Slovak and to learn as much as possible, what Entwistle (2001) calls the “intention to understand ideas by oneself”. They constantly built on their previous experience of language learning, comparing the target language to previously acquired languages. Entwistle (2001) describes this process as “relating ideas to previous knowledge...looking for patterns and underlying principles”. They sought patterns, generalizations and linguistic principles, especially when learning grammar and vocabulary. Along with the development of their learning awareness, they also became sensitive to Slovak culture, which was reflected in their written compositions on various issues related to Slovak history, culture and language, the approach Entwistle saw as “becoming actively interested in the content”.

The learners' reflections on their learning process revealed the evident increase of learning awareness and their belief in having learned a lot. Entwistle

viewed this crucial aspect as “being aware of understanding developing while learning”. They viewed learning as a stimulating activity.

- (28) *“I had a great time on the course! This is for me more like a hobby than any “obligatory” study...When I am learning, I can feel how all what is getting saved deeply somewhere in my mind. That is learning. In the contact class, it is the teacher who generally provides the answers to the questions but on the e-learning course it is the learner who tempts at getting the answers...”*

Learning a new language at the beginner’s level was regarded as difficult and the teacher’s presence at the initial stage was seen as inevitable. The teacher was perceived as a facilitator, supporter and motivation initiator, a view that is in line with the socio-constructivist image of a teacher as a facilitator, motivator and creator of positive social climate (Nanjappa & Grant 2003).

Independent web or e-learning was considered to be better suited for more advanced learners.

- (29) *“I think that learning a new foreign language independently by means of an e-learning course suits better for the more advanced learners. Is there anything more important than teacher’s presence and encouragement? I noticed that I learned most on the contact sessions, my motivation was at its best at those times...”*

- (30) *“ Learning a completely new language in the e-learning environment is very difficult. I learn most on the contact lesson. When the teacher is physically present, my motivation to learn Slovak is far stronger.”*

The learners were continuously monitored and evaluated by the teacher and themselves (self-evaluation). They participated in the course without any intention of getting the highest possible grade, but they did aim at getting the highest possible number of credits (4–5 credits ECTS).

4.3.4 Assessment of the e-learning course

The e-learning course was continuously evaluated and developed by the learners and the teacher. The course was evaluated from the viewpoint of clarity, authenticity, functionality and relevance. The e-learning environment, based around the mountain metaphor, was perceived as one of the major affordances for learning Slovak and as a valuable addition to traditional learning. In their opinion, in addition to practicality and clarity, the learning environment should also be pleasant and motivating, particularly when the target language is a less commonly taught language and if there are not many learners of the target language.

- (31) *“ The structure of the course is good and the idea of climbing is motivating and encouraging...”*

The primary purpose of the course was to inspire learners and to arouse their interest in Slovak studies. The aim was to develop their communicative and

cultural competence: to learn how to use the language in a real life context and thus also to enrich their knowledge of Slovakia and its culture.

5 Concluding remarks and implications

The initial research questions of this study were whether and how Slovak is learned in an e-learning environment and to what extent a good command of all four language skills, especially writing and speaking, may be acquired.

The findings showed that a less commonly taught language (in this case Slovak) may be learned in a new language learning environment as any other language. However, not all language skills may be acquired at an equal level without contact classes. However, the results show that this particular learning environment promotes the feeling in students that they have learned Slovak. Based on their reflections, the learners showed clear progress in their receptive skills (reading and listening), but had difficulty in developing their productive skills (speaking and writing). Furthermore, the new e-learning skills, such as research, content creation and collaboration, were highly appreciated. Blended learning – face-to-face classroom tutorials and computer-mediated activities – was used to compensate for the lack of spontaneous speaking. The problem of electronic writing was solved by a compromise –hand-written texts were accepted and the learners were given the freedom to choose the writing medium.

The difference between learning the less commonly taught and more commonly taught languages in an e-learning environment is in the availability and development of web-learning resources. While the Internet offers numerous ready-made learning materials and sophisticated learning spaces for major languages, very few efficient web materials may be found for lesser commonly taught languages. It is often the teacher who is the course designer and developer for his/her own course. Current developments and innovation in language learning and teaching underline the use of learner-centred pedagogies in new learning environments. Thinking about the future of less commonly taught languages, I see informal learning and Personal Learning Environments (PLE), that is learning in different contexts and situations, as an option to current e-learning approaches. Rapidly growing mobile technologies and the use of social media will offer new learning platforms for the development of all areas of communicative competence.

The current study on learning Slovak in an e-learning environment offers insight into the long history of the so-called small languages and thus contributes to the general pedagogy of less commonly taught languages. Nevertheless, some issues related to the use of effective pedagogical tools and appropriate technologies for teaching Slovak continue to present a challenge to teaching.

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**VIRTUAL SLOVAK: INSIGHT INTO LEARNING SLOVAK IN
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by

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4 Virtual Slovak: insight into learning Slovak in an e-learning environment

Anna Kyppö¹

Abstract

This paper offers insight into learning Slovak in an e-learning environment. The need to reach distance-learners of Slovak led to the implementation of a web-based course on Slovak language and culture in 2008–2010. The pedagogical basis of the course, called Virtual Slovak, is the socioconstructivist approach to teaching and learning, in which the focus is on the development of learners' communicative competence. This teaching experiment led to a study in which the focus was on learners' beliefs and experiences regarding learning Slovak in an e-learning environment. The results showed that this particular learning environment had a positive impact on the development of learners' agency. This impact was demonstrated by an evident increase in motivation and language learning awareness as well as in a conscious approach to learning. At the centre of this investigation is the evaluation of the e-learning environment, especially its appropriateness at the beginners' level for the acquisition of a less commonly taught language, as well as of the teacher's role in the learning process. Furthermore, the results revealed that learners' attitudes towards learning in technology-enhanced learning environments pose challenges to the instruction of less commonly taught languages. Even though current digital technology offers multiple opportunities for the integration of new media modes into learning activities, the choice of relevant media for the learning context and learners' competences seems to remain one of the teacher's main responsibilities.

Keywords: e-learning, learning environment, Slovak, less commonly taught languages, LCTL, communicative competence.

1. Language Centre, University of Jyväskylä, Finland; anna.kyppo@jyu.fi

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1. Context of the study

This study offers insight into learning Slovak in an e-learning environment. One of the challenges for teaching in the last decade or so has been the design of new learning environments for language learning and the efficient employment of versatile ICT²-enhanced approaches and resources. The development of new course content and learner training modules, as well as of collaborative practices between teachers and students within distance learning programmes focusing on the efficiency and multimodality of learning materials, generated the idea of a new learning environment designed specifically for learning Slovak. The Slovak e-learning course *Virtual Slovak* was designed and piloted in 2008–2010. The pedagogical basis of the course is the socioconstructivist approach to teaching and learning. The main focus is on the development of learners' communicative competence, which is perceived as their linguistic and pragmatic knowledge about a language and their ability to create meaning in the target language. This teaching experiment then led to an investigation of how Slovak is acquired in an e-learning environment. The main focus is on the learners: how they experience their learning in such an environment and what they believe they have or have not learned.

1.1. Slovak

Slovak is an Indo-European language belonging to the group of West Slavic languages, together with Czech, Polish and Lower and Upper Sorbian. In addition to the roughly 4.5 million Slovaks living in Slovakia, Slovak is also spoken in other parts of the world, with altogether about 2.7 million speakers of Slovak outside of Slovakia (Ondrejovič 2009). Slovak is the official language spoken in the Slovak Republic. Due to its regular structure and closeness to all Slavic languages, it is often called the lingua franca of Slavic languages. Together with approximately 30 other languages, Slovak is one of the Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL) (Brecht & Walton 1994).

2. Information and Communications Technology

1.2. Slovak in Finland

Studies of Slovak language and culture are offered by more than 40 universities around the world. In the Nordic countries, however, the only academic institution of higher education that has offered Slovak studies for over 30 years is the University of Jyväskylä. In addition to various projects aimed at the translation of Slovak literature into Finnish and the dissemination of knowledge about Slovakia in Finland, one of the greatest challenges was the design of an open, web-based learning course of Slovak. To meet this challenge, Slovak instruction had to move through several stages of development aimed, first, at the enhancement of self-directed learning, and second, at the integration of ICT into language teaching. In the early 2000s, the instruction of Slovak became more multimodal due to the integration of educational and communication technology into so-called traditional instruction (Kyppö 2007). The next challenge was the design of efficient learning materials for distance learning, and finally, the implementation of the e-learning course, which was piloted with two groups of students in 2008–2010.

2. Slovak e-learning course: pedagogical principles

This section introduces the main concepts and theories supporting the development and implementation of the Slovak e-learning course. These concepts include the socioconstructivist approach to learning; Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), frequently referred to as e-learning; communicative competence, which I consider to be one of the most important objectives of any process of language learning; and learners' agency manifested by an increase in their motivation and language learning awareness as well as the growth of deep and strategic approaches to learning.

2.1. The socioconstructivist approach to learning

In constructivist learning theories, learning is perceived as an active process in which knowledge is constructed on the basis of learner's personal experiences.

Social constructivism emphasises the importance of the cultural and social context (learning environment) and learner-centeredness. The term learning environment evokes an image of a place and a space, that is, “room to move and explore” (Wilson 1996: 4). Thus the learning environment may be determined by various physical and virtual locations. In the context of the current study, the learning environment is the overall context of learning which involves not only the e-learning platform and course setting, but also students’ attitudes to learning, their histories and their learning cultures.

The focus of the approach is on student activities and the development of their communicative competence. Problem-based instruction and peer collaboration among the learners as well as between the learners and the teacher are in the foreground. As constructivism allows for flexibility, imagination and creativity, constructivist learning environments are generally designed so that they promote the autonomy, creativity and engagement of the students and the teacher. One of the variations to the constructivist-cognitive learning theories, which emphasise the learner’s key role in the learning process, is Johnson’s (2004) model of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). This model is based on the dialogical framework of Vygotsky’s (1986) sociocultural theory and Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogised heteroglossia. In SLA, the focus is on learner’s problem-solving cognitive skills and the skills of linking the acquired knowledge and skills to those which have been previously acquired. Second language acquisition is viewed in terms of performance. Learning a new language does not occur in the human brain, but in the interactions conducted in sociocultural settings. Bakhtinian dialogism, which also emphasises the interactional and dynamic aspect of language, has been used to frame language learning as a continuous dialogue between language and the external world, between the language learner and his/her inner world, between the language learners themselves, and between the learners and the teacher (Dufva 1994b). As the constructivist theories of learning emphasise the importance of learning-by-doing, learning tasks – their nature, structure and performance – are central. In accordance with Task-Based Learning (TBL) (Willis 1996), the objective is not only to enhance the learner’s current language skills, but also the teacher’s imagination and creativity. The teacher is responsible for providing learners

with the whole range of tasks which may motivate them to experiment with the language and use it spontaneously, as in so-called real life – hence the origin of second language competence, which, as suggested by [Johnson \(2004\)](#), lies in the interaction between language competence (knowledge of the language) and performance (the skills of using the language in real or almost-real life contexts).

2.2. E-learning: asynchronous, synchronous and blended learning

E-learning has become popular due to its flexibility in terms of time and space as well as for its learner-centeredness. It is generally characterised as less expensive to support and not constrained by geography, and thus it is appropriate in almost all contexts. It may be implemented either asynchronously or synchronously.

Asynchronous e-learning (e.g. emails, discussion boards) is considered to be a key component of efficient e-learning due to its flexibility (freedom from time and space) and thus essential for collaboration. Learners may enter the e-learning environment at any time and then spend longer periods on various learning activities. According to [Robert and Dennis \(2005\)](#), asynchronous communication increases learners' ability to process information and supports their cognitive participation.

On the other hand, synchronous learning (e.g. chat, videoconferencing, face-to-face learning) may be perceived as a more social activity in which learners are participants rather than isolated learners, a status which often results in an increase of commitment and motivation ([Kock 2005](#)). Synchronous e-learning primarily supports learners' personal participation.

Furthermore, combining face-to-face classroom instruction and computer-mediated activities, with the aim to form an integrated instructional approach, offers an opportunity to redesign teaching ([Vaughan 2010](#)). In blended learning, both modes of e-learning, the asynchronous (e.g. a course management

system, e-learning environment) and synchronous learning (virtual classroom) accompanied by face-to-face sessions, may be used. If designed and used meaningfully, the result may be an evident increase in learners' self-directed learning and clear development of communicative competence.

Mayes and de Freitas (2013) proposed a curriculum design model for e-learning that includes the descriptions of the intended learning outcomes, the design of teaching and learning activities, the assessment of achieved outcomes and assessment of the curriculum alignment. Their curriculum design is based on constructive alignment, in which all teaching elements, expected learning outcomes, teaching methods, tasks and assessment procedures are aligned with each other and turned into learning activities (Biggs 2003). As the focus of the constructivist pedagogical approach is always on doing, learning and teaching activities are placed at the centre of the process. One of the implications of this model for teaching is how it reshapes the sociocultural setting of a learning environment into one that is more favourable and motivating. In practice, it means the design of a genuine social context. The interaction in such a context, like in this course, may take various forms, including collaborative or knowledge building dialogues with peers or online resources, or various real-life simulations.

2.3. Communicative competence

Because one of the key questions of this study is learning Slovak in an e-learning environment, a key assumption is that learning, which is expected to result in the acquisition of the four language skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking), is reflected in the level of communicative competence. Communicative competence can be viewed from various perspectives. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR 2001: 9) defines communicative competence as “the sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions”. In the light of this definition, learners' communicative competence includes three types of competence: sociolinguistic, pragmatic (discourse and functional) and linguistic (lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic).

As [Johnson \(2004\)](#) has claimed, the origin of second language competence lies in the language use that takes place in real social contexts. In practice, learners are expected to learn not only the language, but also what to do with the language, that is, how to use it in real-life contexts. To that end, they need to develop their knowledge of the target culture and its practices, and through that enhance their intercultural awareness ([Byram, Nichols & Stevens 2001](#)).

2.4. Learner agency, motivation, awareness and approaches to learning

The focus of this section is on learner agency. A number of authors have identified agency as being demonstrated by an increase in learners' motivation, language learning awareness and development of deep or strategic approaches to learning (see [Basharina 2009](#); [Entwistle 2001](#); [Kyppö 2014](#)).

2.4.1. Learner agency

Agency and motivation are often intertwined. Both of them are closely related to self-determination, autonomy, responsibility, locus of control and self-efficacy ([Brown 2014](#)). Agency may be perceived as one of the key concepts in learning, as a movement, a change of state or direction, or even as “the lack of movement where movement is expected” ([van Lier 2010](#): 4). Drawing on [van Lier \(2010\)](#), agency in the context of this study is perceived through the increase in learners' motivation and in their consciousness of the target language and learning (language learning awareness). Furthermore, agency is reflected in their approaches to learning. [Van Lier \(2010\)](#) sees that the employment of agency significantly depends on the learning environment, including the whole context of learning and an agency-promoting curriculum.

2.4.2. Motivation

One of the most evident manifestations of learner agency is motivation. The main force for engaging in goal-oriented learning (mastery or performance orientation) is constituted by motives ([Engeström 1999](#)). They not only affect the outcomes

of learning but also determine the conditions under which the learning goals are implemented and directly or indirectly affect the circumstances of learning (learning context) both spatially and temporally (Johnson 2004). Dörnyei (1998: 117) claims that motivation provides “the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process”. His model of L2 motivation (Dörnyei 1991) is composed of a set of motivational components that includes, among others, learner’s motivational strategies and group cohesiveness. Motivational components involve the level of language, the learner, and learning situations related to various aspects of language learning such as curricula, teaching materials and methods, and learning tasks. However, one important factor that substantially affects the degree of learner motivation is the teacher’s enthusiasm and commitment (Dörnyei 1998; Dufva 1994a).

From the viewpoint of technology-enhanced language learning, an interesting issue is the impact of new language learning environments on learner motivation. Ushida (2005), among others, has explored the role of learner attitudes and motivation in L2 learning within an online language course context. Her study provides evidence for the relation between the learners’ motivation and the development of their language proficiency. The learners with positive motivation and attitudes managed to control their study in both face-to-face and independent learning sessions. Their results, in other words, corresponded to their effort. Interestingly, the teacher-specific motivational components were considered to be crucial in student evaluations of learning situations in the online courses. This study also points to the relation between learners’ motivation and the development of their language proficiency. However, maintaining motivation throughout the course appeared to be one of the teacher’s greatest challenges.

2.4.3. *Language learning awareness*

In this study, awareness means the consciousness of the target language, of its specific features and relations to other languages as well as consciousness of learning the language. This concept includes the knowledge of the culture represented by the target language, what Dufva (1994a) identifies as cultural

awareness. In Dufva's (1994a) view, language, interaction and culture are intertwined aspects of language awareness. Language awareness may also be seen as the same as learners' ability to reflect on the learned language, on themselves as learners, and to recognise the similarities and differences between languages. But there are questions of what the learners become aware of and what has an impact on their learning awareness. The answer may be motivation, hence the close relatedness of these concepts. However, most significant is the impact of learners' everyday knowledge, that is, their personal experiences. These may be related to the target language, to their views of the language itself or to learning a language, as well as to so-called common knowledge, the sociocultural views of the target language and culture.

Bilash and Tulasiewicz (1995: 49) perceive language awareness as a key concept in the learner-centred classroom. In their opinion, language awareness is the integration of four elements: "content about language, language skills, attitudinal education and metacognitive opportunities, which allow the student to reflect on the process of language acquisition, learning and language use" (Bilash & Tulasiewicz 1995: 49).

Ellis (2003) believes that one of the most important awareness-raisers is the teacher. The teacher is responsible not only for the design of the curriculum and tasks, but also for raising the learners' language awareness (consciousness) aimed at becoming sensitive to foreign languages. In the context of this course, language awareness was raised implicitly by the teacher, but also explicitly, as learners themselves discovered similarities and differences between their native languages and Slovak, built on their previous linguistic knowledge and developed their own language awareness.

2.4.4. *Approaches to learning*

Learning Slovak was explored in this study from the learners' viewpoint; from how the learners themselves experience their learning. The framework used to investigate their experiences is based on Entwistle's (2001) model of approaches to learning. According to this model, agency may be manifested through the

use of deep, surface or strategic approaches to learning. The deep approach to learning refers to learners' active engagement with the content, which in turn leads to personal understanding of learning material. The surface approach indicates the reproduction, even the memorisation, of the learned matter. These concepts point to the strong impact of intentions and motivation related to learning. The third approach, strategic, is strongly based on the need for achievement (success or getting the best grades). This approach is characterised by the fear of failure.

To explore the role of agency in learning in international online learning environments, Entwistle's (2001) model was adapted by Basharina (2009). She found that students with a deep approach to learning use more effective learning strategies, seek meaning and therefore benefit the most from learning. Students with the strategic approach put consistent effort into learning. They provide themselves with the most favourable conditions for study, find good learning materials and monitor the effectiveness of their learning strategies (Basharina 2009; Thorpe 2002). Due to their good organisational skills, they generally cope well with time pressures and achieve good grades. On the other hand, the students with the surface approach usually have difficulties in making sense of the new ideas presented in a course and typically do not reflect on their purpose of learning, because their intention is mainly to cope with the syllabus requirements. They perceive the course as unrelated bits of knowledge and see little value in learning activities. In addition, they often suffer from the stress caused by the lack of time and planning. Basharina's (2009) model of approaches to learning presents learning as the result of a complex interrelationship between the affordances and constraints of a learning environment (physical or virtual) and the learner's agency.

3. Course design: mountain climbing as metaphor for learning new languages

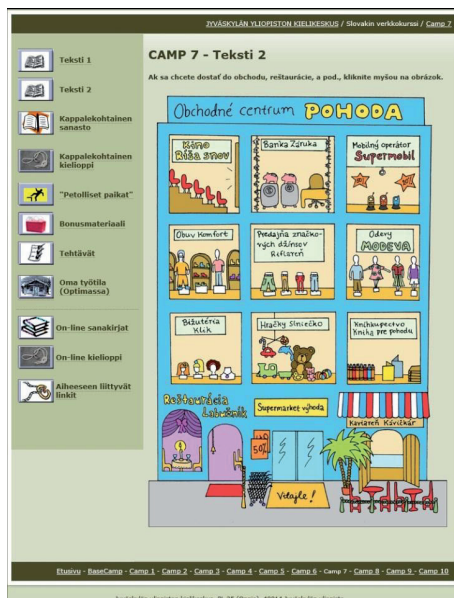
This section introduces the Slovak e-learning course: its structure, layout and content as well as its ideology, which is based on the metaphor of learning as climbing (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Figure 1. Layout of the Slovak e-learning course (Kyppö 2014)



The pedagogical purpose of the Slovak e-learning course was to bridge the gaps between self-directed, open and task-based types of learning. Its aim was to increase the development of learners' overall communicative competence and enhance their autonomous learning. The focus was on the learners' activities; on what they could do with the language. While learners at the beginner's level are typically expected to create simple dialogues (e.g. introduce themselves, ask simple questions, and compose lists of items), learners at the intermediate level know how to employ their problem-solving skills and ability to search for required information to perform tasks such as telling as well as retelling a story and expressing their opinion. Learning activities consisted of both tasks with immediate feedback, which were focused primarily on language forms and accuracy, and collaborative practices (peer and group tasks) aimed at increasing communicative competence. The assessment was based on the completion of tasks and learners' active participation.

Figure 2. Structure of a camp webpage³



The website of the e-learning course was built around an image of the Slovak High Tatra Mountains, which acted likened the approach to learning Slovak to climbing a mountain. The climbing metaphor also depicted the challenges of teaching Slovak as one of the less commonly taught languages, pointing not only to the difficulty of climbing, but also the various external constraints that may endanger climbing (learning). In this metaphor, the teacher was both climbing guide and climber, one who was also constantly in danger but who also attempted to reach the summit together with the students. The course consisted of 10 camps. In accordance with the [CEFR \(2009\)](#), the curriculum was equivalent to the proficiency levels A1–B2. The starting point was Base Camp, which presented the basics of Slovak – its phonemic, morphological and lexicological system as well as information about its social use. Learning outcomes for respective camps were introduced on the startpage of the camp in the form of *can do / know how to do* statements.

3. http://users.jyu.fi/~akypko/virtuaalislovakki/c7_text2.htm

References to climbing and its symbols were part of the course layout. These included planning, getting familiar with the terrain (course), proceeding from the easiest towards the more difficult, and continuous skill improvement (e-learning skills and strategies). They complied with the idea of spiral learning: with each session learners expanded their skills and learned something new. While the content (i.e. the themes) of various camps varied, the website structure remained the same. Visual symbols corresponded with the metaphor of climbing (Kyppö 2014). For example, a rope symbolised language structures. A good rope was the guarantee of the *best performance*. Task sessions were illustrated by *abseiling* (i.e. a controlled descent), which corresponded with the lesson recaps. Dangerous places (i.e. tricky language issues) were denoted by warning signs. The mountain cabin was a safe place indicating each learner's own space in the Optima online environment.

4. Data collection and analysis

This section introduces the main areas of teacher investigation and provides some information on the collection and analysis of the data. The main questions (Table 1) address the students' experiences of learning Slovak in an e-learning environment, their views on the acquisition of all four language skills and the teacher's role in an e-learning environment. Nevertheless, the focus is on the learners' beliefs: what they believed they learned and/or did not learn, and how they experienced their learning.

Table 1. Research questions

Focus	Question
Learning Slovak in an e-learning environment.	Do the learners of Slovak feel that they learn the language in the e-learning environment?
Learners' views on the acquisition of language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) in the e-learning environment.	Can all four language skills be equally acquired in the e-learning environment?
Teacher's role (feedback, evaluation, motivation) in the e-learning environment.	What is the teacher's role as perceived by the learners?

In 2008–2009, 22 students of Slovak at the University of Jyväskylä participated in the study. In 2010, 15 students from the University of Helsinki took part. The demographics of the groups were as follows: at the University of Jyväskylä, 21 students were female, 1 was male; 20 were Finnish and 1 was Polish. At the University of Helsinki, 8 students were male, 7 were female; 13 were Finnish, 1 was French and 1 was Japanese. They were all language students without any previous knowledge of Slovak. In addition to the contact sessions held once every two weeks in Jyväskylä, and once every three weeks in Helsinki, students were expected to learn independently. Their e-learning activities were monitored for the period of one academic term.

The data were collected from three questionnaires, personal interviews, learning journal content, course feedback and teacher reflections. A pre-course personal questionnaire was used to gather information about the personal and professional background of the students. The purpose was to obtain the maximum amount of information about their language learning history.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark 2006). Taking a data-led approach, the collected data were initially described and then the items were divided into themes that were grouped as pre-, on- and post-course, and finally, the interpretations were developed.

5. Key themes

This chapter reports the key themes identified during the data analysis. The findings are presented under the pre-course, on-course and post-course themes and are accompanied by excerpts from the students' learning journals (Table 2).

The *pre-course themes* are related to the learners' concept of Slovakia and the Slovak language, their concept of learning with a special focus on e-learning, learners' expectations of the course, as well as their beliefs about themselves as e-learners.

Table 2. Pre-course, on-course and post-course themes

Pre-course themes	On-course themes		Post-course themes
Slovak language and Slovakia	E-learning skills and strategies		E-learning revisited
Students' beliefs of themselves as learners	Language awareness	Learning awareness	Approaches to learning
Students' beliefs of themselves as e-learners	Linguistic issues	Manual vs. digital writing	Course evaluation Self-evaluation
Learners' course expectations	Motivation	Approaches to learning	Teacher's role: teacher & student perspective

5.1. Slovakia and Slovak language

All learners had some knowledge of Slovakia and the Slovak language. For example, they knew that Slovak is a West Slavic language spoken in Slovakia. Slovak was perceived as a new language, which became a motivating factor. Two respondents chose Slovak because they knew it was considered to be a lingua franca of Slavic languages. They believed that the knowledge of Slovak might facilitate their study of other Slavic languages. Even though no specific reasons were given for learning Slovak, all respondents except for one strongly believed that they would be able to use Slovak in the future either for work or leisure purposes, especially when Slovakia joined the Eurozone in 2009.

5.2. Learners' expectations of e-learning and their beliefs of themselves as learners

Table 3 displays results of the thematic analysis aimed at learners' expectations of e-learning and their concept of themselves as learners.

Flexible learning is generally the secret of popularity for e-learning. Due to its novelty, the Slovak e-learning course was attractive for both the students and the teacher. All respondents expected the e-learning to be more flexible and more challenging than traditional classes, but some doubted whether they would be able to acquire all four languages skills. They were most sceptical about speaking. Nevertheless, they believed that the success of e-learning depends on their own

efforts, so there was confidence that they might find a way of enhancing their spoken communication. Overall, learners' expectations of the course were high, and their belief in their own learning skills was strong. The use of a new learning environment was perceived as a valuable addition to traditional learning.

Table 3. Learners' expectations of e-learning and learners' concept of themselves as learners

Learners' expectations of e-learning		Learners' concept of themselves as learners	
PROS	CONS	PROS	CONS
Efficiency	Scepticism about learning	Independent learning	Learning alone
Novelty	Teacher's absence	Learning through positive experiences	Superficial learning, memorising
Flexibility	Too much freedom	Learning through sudden insights	Fear of unsuccessful learning
Challenge	Speaking & writing	Task-based learning	Lack of printed text

The students saw themselves as independent learners that learn the most through positive experiences. Some of them believed in learning incidentally. The inherent interest of the content, motivation and the curiosity of learning a new language positively affected their learning. The terms "reasonable learning" – learning a foreign language with the prospect of using it in working life (instrumental motivation) – as well as "learning out of curiosity" occurred several times.

"I learn most efficiently when the subject is interesting. If the subject is too difficult, I need more time for learning..."

"If I know that I will be able to use my skills and knowledge in the future, then I get motivated".

Surprisingly, a few students expressed a preference for e-learning over face-to-face sessions. Two learners described themselves as superficial learners who generally learn through memorisation. Learning through a sudden insight occurred as well.

“When learning, I mostly enjoy the moment when I get it, when I understand something that has not been taught directly... The moments when something clicks into place are the rewards for learning” (Student 3).

With the exception of two learners, all of the students perceived themselves as efficient learners if the content was interesting and if they knew that they would be able to apply their knowledge and skills in the future.

The *on-course themes* are related to the development of students’ e-learning skills and strategies as well as the development of their language learning awareness. This development was reflected in the awareness of various issues related to the similarities and differences between languages, but also in how they became more conscious of their learning, in particular through writing.

5.3. E-learning skills and strategies

E-learning provides opportunities to employ a variety of learning styles. To ensure success in e-learning, two skills are necessary: the ability to adapt traditional study skills used in the face-to-face environment to online strategies, and the ability to adopt new strategies for learning and communicating in the online environment (Watkins 2007). Clarke (2008) argues that successful e-learning requires a solid foundation in traditional learning skills. In addition, learners are expected to acquire specific skills related to e-learning, such as time management and planning, responsibility for learning, self-assessment, problem solving, coping with stress, self-motivation, reflection, and research skills (e.g. planning, searching for information, assessing the quality of the obtained information). In line with Clarke’s (2008) claims, in this course special emphasis was placed on the new e-learning skills. Students recognised self-assessment, self-reflection and collaboration as new and highly important skills for any learning. While only some students recognised their own learning styles and the impact of the e-learning environment on their learning strategies during the course, almost all of the respondents claimed that they benefitted from such new skills as self-assessment, self-reflection and collaboration.

5.4. Motivation

Motivation in language learning is defined as learner's orientation to the goal of learning a second language (Norris-Holt 2001). While motivation theories generally focus on the amount of motivation compared to the results of learning, Guyan (2013) recommends that teachers focus instead on creating the conditions that facilitate the internalisation of learners' motivation in the online and classroom context. As part of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Ryan and Deci (2008) propose the satisfaction of students' three basic needs: competence (a sense of being able to do something), autonomy (a sense of control and freedom) and relatedness (a sense of being connected to others).

The authors recommend the use of strategies which may be used in both online and classroom situations. Such strategies include, for example, allowing the learners some level of control, providing them with continuous and meaningful feedback, incorporating social elements into the course and giving them opportunities for collaboration. In the current study, learners were provided with continuous feedback and various opportunities for collaborative learning (e.g. simulations and task-based activities). Collaborative learning – sharing experiences and engaging in common tasks – was a new learning experience for most of the students.

Group motivation, perceived as part of group cohesion (Dörnyei 2001), was evident from the beginning of the course. It was reflected in various group activities, the purpose of which was to increase students' motivation by, for example, enriching their knowledge of Slovakia and its culture and meeting Slovak people. Despite the teacher's consistent efforts to maintain the group motivation, students' personal motivation was frequently at risk, especially when they were overwhelmed by stress due to a lack of time or proper planning.

To facilitate their learning and maintain their motivation, the teacher tried to preserve the balance between learning and personal life as well as to create more pleasant conditions for learning (Kypö 2014).

5.5. Writing and language learning awareness

Awareness plays an important role in the process of learning a new language and serves as an efficient motivator. The learners of Slovak successfully developed their learning awareness through listening and reading, but they failed to internalise the diacritic system of Slovak through digital writing. The problem with searching for the diacritical signs resulted in frustration and a loss of interest in writing. To solve this problem, students had the option to use the computer or to write by hand. Those who wrote by hand generally used the diacritic signs properly. In contrast, those who wrote with the computer either totally or partly ignored the diacritic system. This mix of approaches, making use of the technology and manual writing, often resulted in a compromise: scanning of the hand-written texts. Those who preferred manual writing claimed that writing by hand had a direct, positive impact on their awareness of learning Slovak.

“When I write in Slovak, it feels like painting. I enjoy it. I cannot get the same feeling on the computer” (Student 4).

These results reflect some of the latest research on manual writing, which suggests that writing by hand strengthens the learning process and that typing on a keyboard may mitigate it (see [Saperstein Associates 2012](#)). Studies have shown that when writing by hand, different parts of the brain are activated and the movements of the hand leave a motor memory in the sensorimotor aspect of bodily activity, which facilitates the recognition of the letters.

Other experiments suggest that there is a clear connection between touching, moving and acting, and human perception ([Mangen & Velay 2010](#) cited in [Toft 2011](#)). These results support the students’ reported increase in language learning awareness for manual writing.

The *post-course themes* are related to learners’ approaches to e-learning after the course, their approaches to learning and their evaluation of the course. They also include some reflections on the teacher’s role ([Table 4](#)).

Table 4. Learners' attitudes, perceptions and approaches to learning after the course

Attitudes towards e-learning	Learners' perceptions of themselves as learners	Approaches to learning
Lack of contact classes	New skills	Deep and strategic
E-learning for advanced levels only	New learning styles and strategies	Language awareness
Time constraints	Identification with the metaphor of climbing	Consciousness of learning
Lack of planning	Increase in motivation	Cultural awareness
Challenge of writing: awareness	Language learning awareness	Increase in motivation
Motivation	Creativity	Increase in communicative competence
Excessive flexibility	Successful learners	Increase in knowledge

5.6. Attitudes towards e-learning revisited

The Slovak e-learning course was generally considered to be appropriate for synchronous and asynchronous learning. Nevertheless, students believed that blended learning was the best option for learning not only Slovak but any less commonly taught language.

“Learning without the contact classes would have taken me ages! I have learned plenty of small (and big) things in the contact classes, things I wouldn't have noticed when learning completely alone...” (Student 6).

Students claimed that without the regular contact classes they would not have completed the course.

“Learning a completely new language in the e-learning environment is very difficult. I learn most on the contact lesson. When the teacher is physically present, my motivation to learn Slovak is far stronger” (Student 7).

E-learning was generally perceived to be highly motivating, but it was also seen as highly challenging due to the time constraints. Flexibility was regarded as the

highest priority and, at the same, as the greatest obstacle in e-learning. Learning Slovak, as well as any other language at the beginner's level, was considered to be too demanding in this particular learning environment. Nonetheless, the presence of the new skills and specific strategies for e-learning (e.g. self-estimation, self-reflection and collaboration) was recognised.

5.7. Learners' agency: approaches to learning

In line with [Entwistle's \(2001\)](#) model of approaches to learning, all learners made a constant effort to understand Slovak and learn a significant amount. Except for one, all respondents regarded themselves as independent learners with the deep approach to learning. Their participation in the course was based on their personal interest and group commitment, which resulted in deep learning and minimum dropout.

[Basharina \(2009\)](#) suggests that e-learning consists of a complex interrelationship between the affordances and constraints of a learning environment and a learner's agency. Although students with the deep approach to learning generally employ more effective learning strategies, actively seek meaning and benefit the most from learning, the students with the strategic approach to learning put consistent effort into learning, provide themselves with the right conditions for study and good learning materials, and monitor the effectiveness of their learning strategies ([Thorpe 2002](#)). In the context of this study, the strategic approach to learning reflects the consistency of effort needed for studying that is expressed in the course's climbing metaphor. During the course, students were constantly building on their previous experience of language learning, comparing the target language to previously acquired languages (see [Mayes & de Freitas 2013](#)).

“I had a great time on the course! This is for me more like a hobby than any ‘obligatory’ study...When I am learning, I can feel how all that is getting saved deeply somewhere in my mind. That is learning. In the contact class, it is the teacher who generally provides the answers to the questions but on the e-learning course it is the learner who attempts to get the answers...” (Student 8).

Along with the development of their learning awareness, students also became sensitive to Slovak culture, thereby building what [Dufva \(2004\)](#) calls cultural awareness. Learners' reflections revealed an evident increase in learning awareness and a solid belief that they had achieved significant learning gains.

5.8. Teacher's role

The teaching experiment revealed some of the teacher's multiple roles: linguistic and cultural informant, expert and negotiator ([Dufva 1994a](#)), facilitator, mentor, student, and participant in the continuous dialogue. The metaphor of teacher as a mountain guide provided a guarantee that the climbers (students) would reach the top (learning objectives). Thus the teacher was seen as a tutor, guide, facilitator and, above all, as a friend.

The students' reflections revealed that their motivation to learn was higher when the teacher was present. This aligns with [Kock's \(2005\)](#) claim that the teacher in the contact class represents a natural medium that may contribute to learners' psychological engagement and promote an increase in motivation. Interestingly, even the teacher's virtual presence may have a significant impact on the learners through the design of the learning environment and through the enhancement of learner interaction ([Phillips 2014](#); [Stewart 2014](#)).

5.9. Assessment of the e-learning course

The e-learning course was continuously evaluated and developed by both the learners and the teacher. The course was evaluated from the viewpoint of clarity, authenticity, functionality and relevance. In the students' opinion, a learning environment should not only be practical and easy to navigate, but also pleasant and motivating, especially when the target language is a less commonly taught language and the learning community is small in size. Blended learning was regarded as the best option for learning Slovak, a result that agrees with the results of other studies examining student satisfaction with blended, online and face-to-face courses ([Diaz & Entonado 2009](#); [Lim & Morris 2009](#); [Solimeno, Mebane, Tomai & Francescato 2008](#)). The overall organisation of the course,

including the teacher’s individual and group feedback, was considered to be an inevitable prerequisite not only for successful completion of the course, but also for further Slovak studies.

The metaphor of learning as climbing and the overall layout of the course had a positive impact on students’ activities. The course structure and layout was perceived as well organised, functional and visually attractive. Table 5 presents a summary of the students’ feedback, including an overall evaluation of the course, the e-learning environment and the course structure.

Table 5. Course evaluation: student perspective

Course evaluation (overall) criteria	e-Learning environment criteria	Course structure (camps, sections)
Clarity	Authenticity	Relevant
Authenticity	Flexibility	Clear
Functionality	Immediate feedback	Appropriate
Relevancy	Time for reflection	Up-to-date
Learner-centeredness	Collaboration	Interesting
Promoting learner agency	Supportive atmosphere	Pleasant
Novelty	Consistent interaction	Challenging
Promoting collaboration	Promoting learner autonomy	Motivating

In addition to the development of students’ communicative competence in Slovak, one of the purposes was to inspire learners and arouse their interest in Slovak studies. Based on the students’ feedback and reflections, this objective was met.

6. Concluding remarks and implications

The initial research questions of this study were whether and how Slovak is learned in an e-learning environment and to what extent a good command of all four language skills, especially writing and speaking, may be acquired. The findings showed that an e-learning environment may be used for learning less commonly taught languages. However, not all language skills may be acquired at an equal level without contact classes. Furthermore, the results show that

this particular learning environment promotes the feeling in students that they have learned Slovak (identifying with the metaphor of learning as if climbing). All of the learners, with the exception of two, believed that they learned a good deal about Slovak. Based on their reflections, the learners showed clear progress in their receptive skills (reading and listening), but had difficulty in developing their productive skills (speaking and writing). The problem of digital writing was resolved with a compromise in which the learners were given the freedom to choose the writing medium. Blended learning – face-to-face classroom tutorials and computer-mediated activities – was used to compensate for the lack of spontaneous speaking. Furthermore, new e-learning skills such as research, content creation and collaboration were adopted and further developed.

This teaching experiment shows that technology-enhanced learning of lesser commonly taught languages can be successful. Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of sustainable learning (i.e. knowledge management and exchange in the target language), the contact classes may be more efficient, particularly at the beginners' level. The greatest challenge in teaching and learning less commonly taught languages in an e-learning environment is the availability of web-learning resources and the development of new pedagogies. While numerous readymade web-learning materials and sophisticated learning spaces for major languages are constantly offered, very few effective web materials may be found for less commonly taught languages. The teacher thus often ends up being the course designer and developer. However, current developments and innovations in language learning and teaching emphasise the use of learner-centred pedagogies in new, personalised learning environments. Rapidly growing mobile technologies and the use of social media offer new learning platforms for the development of all areas of communicative competence. The emergence of social networking tools removes the borders of the traditional concept of a learning environment and opens the gate towards multiple learning spaces, both physical and virtual. New technological opportunities that involve the integration of new media modes such as blogs and wikis into learning activities make use not only of multiple resources and learning environments, but also of the interconnectivity and social participation among

the learners (McLoughlin & Lee 2008). This type of interaction may result in an increase of the learners' communicative competence and motivation.

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VI

SLOVENČINA V MULTILINGVÁLNOM KONTEXTE. PRÍPADOVÁ ŠTÚDIA

by

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SLOVENČINA V MULTILINGVÁLNOM KONTEXTE. PRÍPADOVÁ ŠTÚDIA

– ♦ –

Anna Kyppö

Jazykové centrum Univerzity v Jyväskylä

Kľúčové slová: multilingválna a multikultúrna komunikácia, multikultúrne a multilingválne kompetencie, multikultúrne povedomie, slovanské jazyky a kultúry

Key words: multilingual and multicultural communication, multilingual and multicultural competences, multicultural awareness, Slavic languages and cultures

SLOVENČINA VO FÍNSKU

Slovenčina nie je na severe Európy neznáma. Do Fínska zavítala po prvýkrát v roku 1978, keď sa na Univerzite v Helsinkách otvoril lektorát češtiny. V dôsledku nesprávnej interpretácie vtedajšej jazykovej situácie sa slovenčina a čeština vo Fínsku považovali za jazyky, ktoré sú si natoľko podobné, že ich nie je potrebné rozlišovať, a teda lektor slovenčiny mal ovládať aj češtinu, a samozrejme, očakávalo sa od neho aj jej vyučovanie.¹ Na Univerzite v Helsinkách sa popri češtine začala

¹ NUORLUOTO, Juhani: *Slaavien kirjalliset traditiot ja kirjakielet*. Helsinki : Yliopistopaino, 2003.

vyučovať aj slovenčina – najprv len kurzy pre začiatočníkov, ale neskôr aj slovenské reálie. Po dvoch rokoch sa slovenčina presunula vyššie na sever – na Univerzitu v Jyväskylä v strednom Fínsku, kde existuje podnes. Od roku 1993 je možné absolvovať základný program slovenského jazyka a kultúry (32 kreditov ECTS) a od roku 1996 aj bakalárske štúdium (45 kreditov ECTS) v spolupráci s Katedrou slovenského jazyka a centra Studia Academica Slovaca FiF UK v Bratislave. Lektorát slovenského jazyka, jediný v severských krajinách, existuje *de iure* od roku 2008. Domovom lektorátu je Jazykové centrum Univerzity v Jyväskylä.

Šírenie slovenskej kultúry bolo vždy dôležitou súčasťou akademického programu slovenského jazyka a kultúry. Organizovanie seminárov a prednášok o slovenskej literatúre a histórii či organizovanie rôznych kultúrnych podujatí – výstav, večierkov, stretnutí s poprednými slovenskými kultúrnymi činiteľmi,² premietanie filmov, a pod. má dlhodobú tradíciu. Jedným z konkrétnych výsledkov záujmu o Slovensko a jeho kultúru sú aj preklady slovenskej literatúry do fínčiny³, ako aj preklady detskej literatúry do fínčiny v 80. rokoch.

Po rokoch „temna“ – období 80. rokov, keď sa vo Fínsku vedelo o Slovensku málo, záujem o Slovensko a slovenčinu v 90. rokoch začal vzrastať. Prispel k tomu jednak vznik samostatnej Slovenskej republiky, ale najmä migrácia slovenských Rómov do Fínska v roku 2005. V tomto období sa dá hovoriť o rozmachu slovenčiny. Na jazykové kurzy sa hlásili desiatky študentov, slovenčina sa začala objavovať na fínskej verejnosti, v médiách, hľadali sa znalci na prekladanie a tlmočenie. Študenti slovenčiny sa stávali expertmi. Uvedomovali si, že vďaka slovenčine si môžu nájsť aj zamestnanie. Mnohí, ktorí si vtedy po prvýkrát vyskúšali svoje prekladateľské a tlmočnicke znalosti, pracujú so slovenčinou podnes. Záujem fínskej verejnosti o Slovensko a slovenčinu sa odrazil na vzraste počtu študentov. Nakoľko Univerzita v Jyväskylä bola a naďalej je jedinou akademickou inštitúciou, ktorá

² KYPPÖ, Anna: *Learning Slovak in an E-Learning Environment: A case study*. APPLS – Journal of Applied Language Studies, 8, 2014, č. 1, s. 127 – 146.

³ M. Rúfus: *Modlitbičky* (2005); *Antológia slovenskej literatúry* (2006); M. Válek: *Dotyky* (2009), *Milovanie v husej koži, Nepokoj* (2013).

ponúka štúdium slovenčiny v severských krajinách, bolo potrebné vypracovať program dištančného štúdia a zabezpečiť študijné materiály, ktoré by sa dali využiť pri autonómnom, samoriadenom štúdiu.

OD TRADIČNÉHO VYUČOVANIA K VYUŽÍVANIU TECHNOLÓGIÍ

Zatiaľ čo hlavnou výzvou 90. rokov a prvých rokov milénia bolo vypracovanie základnej koncepcie vyučovania slovenčiny a zabezpečenie efektívnych učebných materiálov, po roku 2004 bolo potrebné zareagovať na výzvy rýchle sa rozvíjajúcich edukačných technológií, výučbu a učenie sa jazykov pomocou počítačov (CALL). V Jazykovom centre bolo zriadené Centrum samoriadeného štúdia (*Self-access Centre*) a začala sa práca na výskumnom projekte zameranom na vývoj samoriadeného štúdia (*self-directed learning*) a učebných materiálov vhodných na učenie sa pomocou počítačov.

Aj slovenčina sa zapojila do projektu, ktorý sa realizoval formou akčného výskumu.

Socio-konstruktivistický prístup k osvojovaniu jazyka zdôrazňuje význam prostredia, v ktorom k osvojovaniu jazyka dochádza, a tak výsledkom projektu bol e-learningový kurz slovenčiny. Kurz sa pilotoval v rokoch 2009 – 2010 (Verzia 3, 2010). E-learningový kurz slovenčiny, jeho tvorba, dizajn a používanie je predmetom výskumu zameraného na využívanie nových výučbových prostredí pri učení sa jazykov. Cieľom výskumu je zistiť, či sú technologické prostredia (*technology-enhanced environments*), akými sú napr. e-learningové prostredia, vhodné na učenie sa slovenčiny, ktoré jazykové zručnosti sa osvojujú v takomto prostredí ľahko a čo je potrebné vylepšiť. Pozornosť sa venuje aj úlohe učiteľa ako inštruktora a mentora, ako aj rôznym faktorm, ktoré vplývajú na rozvoj motivácie a angažovanosti a zanietnosti učiacich sa (*learner agency*) v nových výučbových prostrediach. O výsledkoch projektu sa referovalo vo viacerých článkoch.⁴

⁴ KYPPÖ, Anna: *Slovenčina v nových výučbových prostrediach*. In: *Slovenčina (nie-*

Aj napriek tomu, že rozvoj edukačných technológií neustále napreduje a zdá sa, že e-learning je minulosťou, e-learningový kurz slovenčiny sa stále aktívne používa, a to jednak za účelom štúdia na diaľku, a jednak ako doplnok ku kontaktnému vyučovaniu. Výsledky pilotovania kurzu sa využili na prácu zameranú na zefektívnenie učenia a vyučovania slovenčiny v podmienkach fínskeho vzdelávacieho systému v nových výučbových prostrediach (e-learning, využívanie elektronických platforiem, napr. Optima), ale aj pri kontaktnom vyučovaní „v tradičnej triede“, kde sa technológia používa ako doplnok ku kontaktnému vyučovaniu (*blended learning*). Dôležitým krokom vo vývojovej práci bolo vytvorenie takého prostredia, ktoré napomáha samostatnému, autonómnemu učeniu, poskytuje dostatočné informácie, rozvíja interaktívnosť a zároveň motivuje študentov.

Zatiaľ čo sa začiatkom milénia presadzovalo využívanie počítačov pri vyučovaní a učení sa jazyka (tri fázy vyučovania a učenia sa jazykov pomocou počítačov – *Behaviouristic, Communicative, Integrative CALL*⁵), v posledných rokoch k týmto fázam pribudla aj štvrtá fáza, Sociálny CALL (*Social CALL*), pri ktorom sa kladie dôraz na kolaboratívne učenie a rozvíjanie komunikačných kompetencií. Učenie sa koná v autentických výučbových prostrediach, pričom sa využívajú rozličné multimediálne technológie. Učebné aktivity sú väčšinou za

len) ako cudzí jazyk v súvislostiach. Ed. L. Žigová – M. Vojtech. Bratislava : Univerzita Komenského, 2011, s. 197 – 205.

KYPPÖ, Anna: *Learning Slovak in an E-Learning Environment: A case study*. APPLS – Journal of Applied Language Studies, 8, 2014, č. 1, s. 127 – 146.

KYPPÖ, Anna – ATRI, Teija – PIETARINEN, Margarita – SAARISTO, Pekka: *Use your languages! From monolingual to multilingual interaction in a language class*. In: *Voices of Pedagogical development – Expanding, Enhancing and Exploring Higher Education Language learning*. Ed. J. Jalkanen – E. Jokinen – P. Taalas. Dublin : Research-publishing.net, 2015, s. 319 – 337.

⁵ DAVIES, Graham – OTTO, Sue E. K. – RÜSCHOFF, Bernd: *Historical Perspectives on CALL*. In: *Contemporary Computer-Assisted Language Learning*, Ed. M. Thomas – H. Reinders – M. Warschauer. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney : Bloomsbury, 2013, s. 19 – 38.

merané na riešenie úloh alebo problémov. Autentickosť, spolupráca / tímová práca zvyšujú motiváciu a zaniatenosť študentov, čo sa odráža v rozvíjaní ich kreatívnosti, kritického myslenia a osvojovaní si takých schopností, ako sú napríklad projektové, výskumné schopnosti, schopnosť sebahodnotenia a hodnotenia iných, dávanie a prijímanie spätnej väzby a pod.

V duchu Sociálneho CALL-u dochádza k integrovaniu kurzov slovenčiny. Napríklad do textového kurzu sa začleňuje preklad, história a literatúra sa ponúkajú ako jeden predmet, učebné úlohy nadobúdajú charakter projektových úloh, ktoré vyžadujú i tímovú prácu. Príkladom jedného súčasného „miniprojektu“ je prekladový kurz, ktorý sa realizuje na elektronickej platforme Optima. Slovenská študentka fínčiny, ktorá študuje prekladateľstvo na UK v Bratislave, pravidelne komentuje preklady fínskych študentov zo slovenčiny do fínčiny. Spätná väzba, ktorú študenti dostávajú od slovenského experta, zvyšuje ich zaniatenosť a motiváciu. Podobne sa využívajú aj znalosti a kompetencie slovenských študentov pôsobiacich na Univerzite v Jyväskylä v rámci výmenných bilaterálnych programov.

Výzvou do blízkej budúcnosti je vytváranie tzv. osobných učebných prostredí (Personal Learning Environment, PLE), ktoré by boli k dispozícii kedykoľvek a kdekoľvek a umožňovali by učiacim kontrolovať svoj proces učenia s ohľadom na vytýčené učebné ciele, pričom by im umožňovali aj vzájomnú komunikáciu počas procesu učenia. Mobilné technológie a využívanie sociálnych médií už personálne učebné prostredia čiastočne umožňujú. Jedným z najnovších projektov Jazykového centra je pilotovanie takéhoto prostredia na kurze multilingválnej a multikultúrnej interakcie.

NOVÁ STRATÉGIA: MULTILINGVÁLNE KURZY

V dobe vzniku e-learningového kurzu bol o štúdium slovenčiny pomerne veľký záujem, ktorý umocnila aj pozitívna kampaň medzi študentmi ruštiny, ktorí ju (oprávnene) považovali za *lingua franca* slovanských jazykov. V priebehu niekoľkých rokov však došlo k via-

cerým organizačným a štrukturálnym zmenám na fínskych univerzitách. Zmeny neboli práve najpriaznivejšie pre tzv. menšie jazyky, a tak aj záujemcov o slovenčinu začalo ubúdať. Popri tzv. veľkých jazykoch slovenčine konkurujú predovšetkým iné jazyky, ktoré ponúkajú podobné programy jazyka a kultúry ako slovenčina – španielčina, japončina, čínština a portugálčina. Vďaka vedeniu Jazykového centra výučba slovenčiny pokračuje na všetkých úrovniach, a aj pri pomerne nízkych počtoch študentov sa naďalej rozvíja.

Ako získať čo najviac študentov, ale najmä ako ich udržať? Ako konkurovať populárnym jazykom? Rôzne reklamy, pozývacie listy zasielané na začiatku akademického roka na katedry, študentským zväzom a klubom, „pop-up“ akcie, pri ktorých sa spustil audio-vizuálny program, ktorý oboznamoval náhodne okoloidúcich študentov o výhodách ovládania slovenčiny, ako aj rozdávanie letákov a iných rekvizít sú síce zaujímavé akcie, ale neprinášajú očakávané výsledky.

V súlade s fínskym vzdelávacím programom je poslaním Jazykového centra v prvom rade zabezpečovanie jazykových kurzov zamerané na rozvíjanie základných akademických jazykových a komunikačných kompetencií, ktoré sú určené pre študentov na všetkých stupňoch univerzitného vzdelávania. Popri tom Jazykové centrum poskytuje aj podporu univerzitnému personálu pri výučbe a výskume a ponúka programy zamerané na rozvíjanie nových pedagogických prístupov a stratégií, ktorých účelom je osvojovanie digitálnych a akademických zručností.⁶ Všetky aktivity centra majú jedného spoločného menovateľa – internacionalizáciu vo svojej mnohotvárnosti, multimodalite, ktorá sa prejavuje vo viacjazyčnosti, multilingválnosti a multikultúrnosti.

⁶ *Voices of Pedagogical development – Expanding, Enhancing and Exploring Higher Education Language learning*. Ed. J. Jalkanen – E. Jokinen – P. Taalas. Dublin : Research-publishing.net, 2015.

MULTILINGVÁLNA KOMUNIKÁCIA: AKTIVÁCIA JAZYKOVÉHO REPERTOÁRA

V roku 2013 sa začala výskumná práca na projekte zameranom na rozvoj multilingválnych a interkultúrnych kompetencií (MIC) v akademickom kontexte. Súčasťou projektu bolo pilotovanie kurzu, ktorého cieľom bolo získanie kompetencií potrebných na multilingválnu a multikultúrnu komunikáciu, ako aj schopností, ako využívať individuálny multilingválny a multikulúrny repertoár účastníkov komunikácie a ako používať stratégie úspešnej komunikácie. Jedným z cieľov bolo poukávanie na faktory, ktoré ovplyvňujú multilingválnu a multikultúrnu komunikáciu (*awareness of multilingual and multicultural communication*). Projekt získal inšpiráciu z európskeho projektu MAGICC (*Modularising Multilingual and Multicultural Academic Communication Competence 2011 – 2014*), ktorého hlavným cieľom je integrácia multilingválnych a multikultúrnych akademických komunikačných kompetencií do škály požadovaných akademických zručností a vedomostí na úrovni bakalárskeho a magisterského štúdia. Cieľom nie je používanie jedného alebo viacerých jazykov, „bezcychbná komunikácia“, či správna gramatika, ale využívanie viacerých jazykov a prostriedkov neverbálnej komunikácie tak, aby si účastníci komunikácie navzájom porozumeli, pričom by nedochádzalo ku konfliktom (napr. strata tváre, nedostatok zdvorilosti a pod.). Dôraz sa kladie na rozpoznávanie faktorov ovplyvňujúcich komunikáciu v multilingválnom a multikultúrnom kontexte.

Účelom kurzu multilingválnej komunikácie (*Multilingual Interaction: Use your Languages!*) je aktivácia multilingválneho a multikultúrneho repertoára účastníkov kurzu a uvedomovanie si faktorov, ktoré ovplyvňujú komunikáciu v multilingválnom a multikultúrnom kontexte.

Podľa J. Blommaerta⁷ multilingvalizmus neznamená len viacjazyčnú komunikáciu, ale využívanie špecifických semiotických zdrojov

⁷ BLOMMAERT, Jan: *The Sociolinguistics of globalization*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2010.

a jazykových schopností na rozličnej úrovni za účelom dorozumenia sa. Pri tomto komunikačnom procese dochádza k vytváraniu významu a zmyslu pomocou jazyka, a tým vlastne dochádza k samotnému učeniu sa jazyka (*translanguaging*)⁸. Pod pojmom multilingvalizmus sa teda nechápe len komunikácia v dvoch alebo viacerých jazykoch, ale aj používanie iných semiotických prostriedkov (znaky, neverbálna komunikácia). Pri systematickom kombinovaní dvoch alebo viacerých jazykov pri vykonávaní učebných aktivít dochádza k flexibilnému využívaniu celkového jazykového repertoára účastníkov komunikácie, čím sa vytvára sociálny priestor medzi účastníkmi formou sprostredkovávania a vytvárania významu (*mediation & intermediation*)⁹.

Údaje z troch kurzov (2014 – 2016) poukazujú na interdisciplinárnosť a internacionálnosť. Účastníkmi kurzu boli fínski a zahraniční študenti rôznych odborov na rozličných stupňoch. Ich jazykový repertoár pozostával z angličtiny, fínčiny, švédčiny, španielčiny a francúzštiny, ale boli zastúpené aj iné, tzv. zriedkavejšie jazyky, napr. sámí, kazaština a pod. Učiteľský tím predstavovali pedagógovia s viacjazyčným repertoárom. Zo slovanských jazykov bola silne zastúpená ruština, ale aj slovenčina, slovinčina, srbčina a čeština, ba dokonca aj čiernohorčina a bosniačtina. Prostredníctvom týchto jazykov boli účastníci kurzu schopní porozumieť aj iným slovanským jazykom (čítaný a počutý text).

⁸ GARCIA, Ofelia: *Bilingual education in the 21st century: a global perspective*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

GARCIA, Ofelia – SYLVAN, Claire E.: *Pedagogies and practices in multilingual classrooms: singularities in pluralities*. *The Modern Language Journal*, 95, 2011, č. 3, s. 385 – 400.

LEWIS, Gwyn – JONES, Bryn – BAKER, Colin: *Translanguaging: origins and development from school to street and beyond*. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 18, 2012a, č. 7, s. 641 – 654.

LEWIS, Gwyn – JONES, Bryn – BAKER, Colin: *Translanguaging: developing its conceptualization and contextualization*. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 18, 2012b, č. 7, s. 655 – 670.

⁹ PARK, Mi Sun: *Code-switching and translanguaging: potential functions in multilingual classroom*. *Working Papers in TESOL & Applied linguistics*, 13, 2013, č. 2, s. 50 – 52.

Socio-konstruktivistický prístup k osvojovaniu jazyka zdôrazňuje učenie pomocou robenia (*learning-by-doing*)¹⁰. Dôležitou súčasťou kurzu boli simulácie rozličných multikultúrnych situácií, napr. multilingválna argumentácia, rokovanie, reklama / prezentácia samého seba alebo nejakého materiálneho alebo nemateriálneho produktu v tzv. slabšom jazyku, neverbálna komunikácia, sprostredkovanie informácií (*mediation*) pomocou silnejšieho alebo slabšieho jazyka, multilingválne čítanie a pod. Pri multilingválnom čítaní si študenti najprv vypočuli text a potom na základe svojej jazykovej histórie sa mu snažili porozumieť (*intercomprehension*), príp. sa ho pokúsili dešifrovať z písomnej podoby. Na čítanie študenti reflektovali na elektronickej platforme REAL, ktorá umožňuje viacjazyčné písanie a čítanie. Pri sebarefektovaní si vymieňali poznatky o obsahu textov a prezentovaných jazykoch v rôznych jazykoch. Pri rozličných multilingválnych aktivitách sa zdôrazňovalo porozumenie bez znalosti daného jazyka, odvaha osmeliť sa používať aj jazyky, ktoré „nevieme“, resp. si myslíme, že ich neovládame.

Kurzu sa zúčastnili aj niektorí študenti, ktorí mali základné znalosti slovenčiny. Pre nich bol kurz priestorom na aktiváciu tých znalostí, ktoré mali, aj keď o svojich vedomostiach neboli presvedčení. Napríklad fínska študentka, absolventka základných kurzov slovenčiny, dokázala nielen komunikovať po slovensky, ale aj po slovensky prezentovať svoju záľubu, ktorá je dôležitou súčasťou fínskej kultúry – zimný rybolov (lovenie rýb pod ľadom). Nielen že dokázala použiť špeciálnu rybársku terminológiu, čo si vyžadovalo vyhľadávanie informácií a špecifickej slovnej zásoby, ale si pripravila aj video, na ktorom pre istotu aj vizuálne demonštrovala svoju zimnú záľubu. Vďaka vizuálnosti, neverbálnej komunikácii a čiastočnému sprostredkovaniu informácií pomocou iných jazykov jej prezentácii všetci porozumeli.

Kurz bol zameraný na využívanie, aktivovanie multilingválneho a multikultúrneho repertoára študentov, najmä na komunikovanie

¹⁰ MAYES, Terry – DE FREITAS, Sara: *Review of e-learning theories, frameworks and models*. London : Joint Information Systems Committee, 2013. Dostupné na: <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearningpedgogy/outcomes.aspx>

v tzv. slabších jazykoch. Vzhľadom na multikultúrny a multilingvál-ny charakter kurzu si aj učitelia aktivovali svoj jazykový a kultúrny repertoár.

Vedľajším „produktom“ kurzu bolo aj vzbudenie záujmu o nové jazyky. Často prvý kontakt s novým jazykom, v tomto prípade so slovenčinou, vedie k zvedavosti, ktorá obyčajne prebúdza záujem o poznanie a neskôr štúdium jazyka. Po dvoch kurzoch multilingválnej a multikultúrnej komunikácie sa na slovenčinu prihlásilo osem študentov.

Na záver vyberám niekoľko zaujímavých poznámok zo študentských denníkov:

„Multikultúrna komunikácia nie je len viacjazyčný akt. Je to stretávanie viacerých spôsobov konania, správania sa, konania, ktoré je historicky podmienené...“

„Je komunikácia medzi príslušníkmi rôznych skupín spoločnosti multikultúrna, najmä ak ide o skupiny, ktoré sú označované za 'nízke, okrajové' v porovnaní s 'hlavnými' kultúrami?“

„Môže človek, ktorý neovláda jazyky, byť multikultúrny?“

Po ukončení posledného kurzu študentka reflektovala na kurz nasledovne (text nie je editovaný vzhľadom na vstupy iných jazykov do písaného textu).

„Maybe the realization of the amount of different languages one can understand, even though he/she has never studied the language in question would be one of the things I've learned during this course. For instance, it has been fascinating to notice that I could understand some words from Russian or Slovak, when the teachers have been speaking. Zum Schluss, it's good to understand that languages can be used without the perfect fluency in one: the learning comes also from using the languages, so it has been nice to try and speak for ejemplo svenska, even though I've forgotten many things and can't speak it fluently anymore.“

Ďalším krokom vo vývojovej práci na kurze multilingválnej a multikultúrnej komunikácie je vytvorenie vhodného osobného učebného prostredia (PLE), ktoré by napomáhalo zvyšovaniu multilingválneho

a multikultúrneho povedomia a umožňovalo by využívanie sociálnych médií.

KURZ O SLOVANSKÝCH JAZYKOCH A NÁRODOCH

Druhým multilingválnym a multikultúrnym projektom zameraným na zvyšovanie multilingválneho a multikultúrneho povedomia je kurz o slovanských jazykoch a kultúrach. Kurz poskytuje základné údaje o slovanských jazykoch a národoch (klasifikácia slovanských jazykov, stručný prehľad vývinu spisovných jazykov a nárečí, náčrt histórie jednotlivých národov, prehľad kultúry, súčasnej spoločensko-politickej situácie a pod.). Pozornosť sa venuje aj slovanským mikrojazikom – lužickej srbčine (hornej a dolnej), rusínčine (karpatskej a panónskej) a kašubčine. Cieľom kurzu je aj získanie schopnosti rozlišovania jednotlivých slovanských jazykov patriacich do spoločnej jazykovej rodiny. Študenti majú na kurze možnosť otestovať koncept často spochybňovanej koncepcie vzájomnej zrozumiteľnosti slovanských jazykov (*Language Intelligibility*)¹¹.

Špecifikom kurzu sú „hostia“ – rodáci, príslušníci jednotlivých slovanských skupín, ktorí predstavujú účastníkom kurzu svoj jazyk, národ a kultúru tak, ako ju sami vnímajú. Súčasťou jazykovej prezentácie sú aj ukážky z literatúr, prezentácie videofilmov a hudobných ukážok, ako aj výučba základného slovníka vo forme *survival* kurzu. Napríklad pri prezentácii Slovenska v rámci prezentácie západoslovanských jazykov sa účastníci kurzu oboznámili so slovenskou prírodou prostredníctvom videa a so slovenčinou prostredníctvom odrecitovanej básne. Slovenčina sa prezentovala spolu s češtinou, čím sa potvrdila

¹¹ LINDSAY, Robert: *Mutual Intelligibility among the Slavic Languages*. 2010. Dostupné na: https://www.academia.edu/4080349/Mutual_Intelligibility_of_Languages_in_the_Slavic_Family
NUORLUOTO, Juhani: *Slaavien kirjalliset traditiot ja kirjakielenet*. Helsinki : Yliopistopaino, 2003.

blízkosť týchto jazykov a posilnila povest' slovenčiny ako *lingua franca* slovanských jazykov. Na ilustráciu uvádzam úryvok z denníka slovenskej študentky, prezentátorky slovenčiny.

„V jednej z prezentácií sme si ukázali rozdiely medzi slovenčinou a češtinou. Niektoré slová máme skoro rovnaké, pre iné máme úplne rozdielne pomenovania. Nikdy nezabudnem, ako sa počas prvých týždňov tu vo Fínsku skoro všetci zahraniční študenti čudovali a nechápali, že keď som sa rozprávala s nejakým Čechom, každý sme hovorili svojim rodným jazykom, no aj tak sme jeden druhému rozumeli bez problémov. Najvtipnejšie je, keď nás začnú presvedčať, aby sme priznali, že je to ten istý jazyk... :)“

Pri oboznamovaní sa so slovanskými jazykmi a kultúrami, ako aj pri analýzach súčasnej spoločensko-politickej situácie jednotlivých národov do popredia často vystupuje pojem kultúrnej identity (*cultural identity*), ktorý zahrňuje nielen históriu, ale aj spôsob života, hodnotový svet a národné skúsenosti Slovanov. J. Pekarovičová¹² poukazuje na interkultúrnu / multikultúrnu kompetenciu, ktorá popri citlivosti voči iným kultúram a tolerantnému správaniu sa zahrňuje aj sociálno-kultúrne vedomosti, historické skúsenosti, ktoré sa odrážajú v národných ľudových tradíciách a v samotnom jazyku. Popri evidentnom náraste multikultúrneho povedomia (*multicultural awareness*), ktoré sa odráža v citlivosti voči vyššie uvedeným hodnotám, a získaným poznatkom o slovanskom svete, absolventi kurzu dokázali identifikovať jednotlivé slovanské jazyky na základe počutého a v niektorých prípadoch aj na základe písaného textu.

Častou témou diskusií a reflektovania v študentských denníkoch boli otázky týkajúce sa jazykovej a národnej identity. Za základnú zložku v procese vývinu národnej identity sa považoval jazyk. Na potvrdenie tohto tvrdenia uvádzame ukážku zo študentského denníka v preklade.

¹² PEKAROVIČOVÁ, Jana: *Lingvodidaktická koncepcia slovenčiny ako cudzieho jazyka*. In: *Slovenčina ako cudzí jazyk*. Ed. J. Pekarovičová. Bratislava : Stimul, 2002, s. 11 – 26.

„Slovo ‚identita‘ sa silne viaže na pojem ‚jazyk‘ a ‚národ‘. Myslím, že jazyková identita bola silná na Slovensku a v Poľsku, ale myslím si, že nebola veľmi silná v Česku... Aj jazyková identita Bielorusov je silná, nakoľko postavenie bieloruštiny bolo slabé, považovala sa za dialekt. Národná identita nás, Fínov, je silná...“

Na záver kurzu si študenti pozreli dokument o rusínskej obci Osadné (2009), ktorý ponúka zaujímavý, humorom podfarbený zápas malej východoslovenskej dedinky o prežitie. Dokument mal veľký úspech medzi fínskymi, ale aj slovenskými účastníkmi kurzu.

„Ako sme si aj spomínali, všetky súčasné kodifikované slovanské jazyky vychádzajú z jednotlivých dialektov. Hoc aj malé slovanské národy majú vskutku široké spektrum nárečí, variácií oficiálneho jazyka. Dokument (Osadné) v mojich očiach odzrkadľoval neupadajúcu odhodlanosť Slovanov deklarovat' svoju suverenitu a túžbu v tejto čoraz multikultúrnejšej spoločnosti dôstojne vyhlásiť: My sme tu a máme byť na čo hrdí!“

(slovenská študentka)

Spätná väzba študentov potvrdila to, čo sa dalo predpokladať – za najzaujímavejšie na kurze považovali návštevy hostí a prezentácie jazyka a kultúry, ktorú predstavovali z ich zorného uhla. Možnosť prezentovania slovanských jazykov a národov očami príslušníkov týchto národov bola pre študentov výzvou zacielenou na rozvíjanie ich kritického myslenia. Multilingválnosť – používanie viacerých jazykov sa vnímalo ako niečo „extra“, obohatenie jazykového repertoára, hoci niektorí študenti očakávali, že si na kurze osvoja základy viacerých slovanských jazykov. Tak ako v prípade kurzu multilingválnej komunikácie, aj tento kurz sa bude v budúcnosti realizovať v multimodálnom personálnom učebnom priestore, čím sa zvýši motivácia a záujem študentov o slovanské jazyky a v neposlednom rade aj o slovenčinu.

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SUMMARY

Slovak in Multilingual Context. A Case Study

The aim of this paper is to provide basic information about the instruction and study of Slovak in Finland. In the period of growing globalization and language competition, program of Slovak language and culture is offered in a multilingual context. Two case studies of multilingual and multicultural courses implemented at the Jyväskylä University Language Centre are presented – the course of multilingual interaction and the course about Slavic languages and nations. The course of multilingual interaction is primarily

focused on the use of means of linguistic and nonverbal communication and activation of one's linguistic repertoire in multilingual and multicultural setting. One of the course assets is to obtain the information about the factors influencing the communication in a multilingual and multicultural context. The course on Slavic languages and cultures provides basic information about Slavic languages and cultures. One of the main learning outcomes is to get familiar with Slavic languages through searching for the similarities and differences of closely related languages and to acquire basic knowledge about the history and culture of Slavic nations. In addition to multicultural and multilingual communication aimed at sharing information across different Slavic cultures, discussions on various issues related to the concept of cultural identity and awareness resulting in general increase of students' multicultural awareness and enhancement of critical thinking.