MATEFL is an organisation run on a volunteer basis by teachers for teachers of English as a foreign language. It is dedicated to the professional development of its members by facilitating the sharing and exchanging of ideas and keeping abreast of new developments in the EFL world.
The main contributors for this issue

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**Jean Theuma**
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Follow Jean on: @jean_theuma

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Cover photo: Participants at the MATEFL sessions in December 2018. Photo by Natasha Fabri
Hello TEFLers,

Welcome to the latest edition of the MATEFL newsletter! As always, we’ve done our best to bring you an issue that’s jam-packed with thought-provoking ideas.

First, Alan Marsh will show us how to tap into our learners’ imagination with ‘Imagine that! Part 1’. Jean Theuma will give us an update on this year’s IATEFL conference. Our new contributor Aleksandar Mitovski delves into functional language and after that, a great interview with our star guest speaker this year: John Hughes.

As for our regular features, Natasha Fabri talks about introducing GIFs (and memes) to the classroom in the latest instalment of Teacher 2.0. Matt Done will look into using reverse translation in his regular ‘Why not try’.

We hope you enjoy reading this month’s newsletter.

See you again in December!

Matt & Tash

The MATEFL committee

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MATEFL (Malta)
I’m not a very visual person. Anybody who knows me will tell you that. I can’t draw for toffee; I can never remember what someone was wearing, or what a painting or a room looked like, apart from some vague ideas.

I’m much better at remembering feelings – how I felt, or picking up the vibes between people. In my own teaching, too, for years visuals hardly ever played a part in my lessons, apart from a quick stick drawing to contextualise a piece of language I intended to teach.

However, as I became more familiar with the concept of VAK dominant learner styles (visual, auditory and kinaesthetic) and, later, with the theory of Multiple Intelligences, visuals became an increasingly important part of my lessons. Then came video, film, YouTube and the whole world of images came crashing into my classroom.

Then – and this was only quite recently – I came across the concept of using learner-generated images. Now, as well as being a dud at drawing I’m not the greatest techie teacher in the world, and the idea of getting learners to make their own films and other images using technology was something I wasn’t entirely comfortable with. What if something went wrong?

What if they asked me something about the equipment, or the app, and I didn’t know?

But what about drawings? Yes, drawings made by students are learner-generated images too. So I did some research, tried out a few ideas with learners and well, they worked! So let me share some with you.

**Grammatical concepts**

There are two main areas in which I’ve experimented with student drawings, so far. The first of these is grammatical conceptualisations. Let me explain. You know how some grammatical concepts in English (and of course in most languages) are not easy for learners to get their heads around? The different uses of the present perfect spring to mind, especially how it contrasts with the past simple, or the present simple.

For example, why do we switch tenses when we say Yes, I’ve been to Spain. I went there on my honeymoon, actually? And why do we say I’ve been here for a week and not I’m here for a week – as they do in many European languages? The concept of the past being connected or not connected to NOW is of course crucial to this concept. Well, when learners do grasp the concept, we can ask them to draw a picture, an image representing the present perfect in English.

Here are some things you can say to your learners:

- What does the present perfect look like?
• Is it an image from life? If so, what is the image or scene?
• Or is it an abstract? Are there any shapes?
• Is it black and white? Or colour? Or both?
• Draw the present perfect as you ‘see’ it.
• Show it to your partner and explain your drawing.
• PS No time lines, please.

Of course, different learners will perceive the concept in different ways. Then, as they compare, explain to each other, discuss and evaluate each other’s perceptions they become actually involved in a critical thinking activity. This allows them to put down deeper roots into the concept which in turn helps to make the learning more memorable. The image below is an example of the drawings made by learners who have tried this activity.

Other grammatical concepts that lend themselves to this process of exploration – drawing – evaluation include the following – can you think of any others?

• *Present perfect continuous:* She’s been waiting at the bus stop for ages. This verb pattern doesn’t exist in many languages and the concept of temporariness can be a perplexing one.

• *Present perfect simple v present perfect continuous:* He’s cooked supper v He’s been cooking - an eye on the completed product v an eye on the process. Goodness, I still struggle myself with that one myself!
• A v the: article use for general v specific, or shared knowledge v new information: A man walked into the room. Learners with no articles in their own language (e.g. Russian) often really struggle to grasp this.

• Countability: so try explaining why money isn’t countable!

• Past continuous: Background events to a story? Interrupted action? Parallel actions? Again, not so easy, especially if you don’t have an equivalent in your own language.

• Past continuous v past simple: When I arrived home my husband was cooking/cooked the dinner. Let’s see now .....

• Talking about the future: be going to? Or will? Or present continuous? Or ...? You could do a whole course just on this!

• ???????

I’ve drawn on some of these ideas from an inspiring blog: Jade Blue ELT: http://bit.ly/2HXou95

Next issue
We’ll look at how learner drawings and the ways we can exploit them can play an important role in releasing language learners’ imaginations and, at times, meaningful aspects of their own lives and experiences. This ‘release’ often leads otherwise reluctant or shy speakers to launch into creative speaking fluency activities. In the meantime, try getting your learners to draw some grammatical concepts. It could be really interesting!

Alan Marsh

Did you know?
Some English language trivia!
1. A new word is added to the dictionary every:
   a) 2 hours   b) 2 weeks   c) 2 months

2. What are the only two words in English with three consecutive double letters?

3. What is the longest word in English in which all the letters appear in alphabetical order?

4. What is the longest English word that can be written without repeating any of the letters?

5. What do the following words have in common? Month, orange, silver, purple.

6. More words in English begin with this letter than any other. What is the letter?

7. What is the little dot above the letter ‘i’ called?

8. Where does the word ‘alphabet’ come from?

9. There is a seven-letter word in English that consists of 10 words without rearranging any letters. What is the word?

Source:
https://www.scoopwhoop.com/English-Language-Trivia/
The IATEFL conference was held between the 2nd and 5th April 2019 in Liverpool. I flew over the day before in order to represent MATEFL during Associates Day and had the opportunity to network with members from other associations from all around the world.

The following day the actual conference started with over 3,000 visitors and 500 talks over 4 days, making this conference one of the largest EFL conferences to take place annually. The theme for this year’s conference was ‘The future of EFL’ and many of the events used this theme as a platform for discussion. In his plenary, John Gray thinks that future EFL practitioners and course book writers should take a more inclusive approach when modelling gender and lifestyles in the classroom. In the final plenary, Evan Frendo suggests that the English we teach in the future will be much more work specific as the need for general English in the business environment will become less imperative. Katherine Bilsborough is concerned that the materials writers of today must be principle-led and quality controlled in order to aid teachers of the future to select high-quality materials for their students.

Many of the talks given at this year’s conference, at least the ones I went to, were exceptional. The choice of talks was sometimes overwhelming, with as many as 22 sessions per time slot, which is always an issue when visiting a conference of this size. However, I would like to describe three very varied talks which I found inspiring, informative and interesting.

Richard Harrison gave a talk called ‘Improving critical thinking through asking questions’, in which he discussed the role of critical thinking in the academic EFL classroom. He showed the clear link between creative thinking and critical thinking and how important these two skills are in academic life as they both encourage scepticism and doubt. Harrison proposed three useful, adaptable questions to be used at all stages of academic thinking: What exactly do you mean? What evidence is there for this? What are your sources? Harrison encourages teachers of academic English to challenge conventional wisdom, which maybe false or inaccurate, and woolly thinking, which is maybe exaggerated, lacking in evidence or emotional.

On a completely different note, Jonathan Marks tackled an ignored grammar point in his talk entitled ‘The long and the short of it’. Marks pointed out that most teachers teach the use of the passive as what is used when the subject of a sentence is not known or is unimportant – what he calls the short passive. However, he displayed the following example sentence: The driver was arrested by an off-duty police...
officer who was travelling on the bus.

In this example, the underlined by-agent (the person who carried out the action, i.e. if this had been an active sentence, this is what would have been the subject), is not only known but is also important to the narrative of the sentence. In this case, Marks refers to these as long passives and asserts that they are very useful when going from known to new information in a sentence. In his session, we explored using long passives when describing processes, identifying changes recognised between two pictures, and looking at the relevant intonation patterns.

Finally, in his workshop ‘Escape the room’, Graham Stanley made his entire session into a prolonged demonstration of how to create a reading and speaking lesson using activities taken from escape-rooms. Participants were told that we had 30 minutes (the length of his session) to find a hidden object and solve a crime. We worked in groups and had to discover hidden information related to a scenario where an ancient Mayan artefact had been stolen during a dinner party. We found clues around the room, were given interesting puzzle boxes and padlocks to open and used UV light torches to find hidden messages leading us to further clues. Throughout the session we were encouraged to read the clues and discuss who the perpetrator of the crime might be. In the final minutes of the session the true solution was revealed after we had found the artefact hidden in the room.

Next years’ IATEFL conference is set to be another good one. It is being held in Manchester Central, Manchester, between the 18th and 21st April, 2020. There are direct flights up to Manchester with both Easyjet and Airmalta at convenient times, at very reasonable prices. Manchester is a great city to visit, with lots to do and see outside of the conference. More good news is that the conference is ELT Council accredited and counts towards the required CPD hours; full attendance to the conference covers 32 hours of CPD. In addition, MATEFL offers scholarships in order to help with the financial burden of registering, traveling and staying in Manchester for the conference. Should you wish to consider attending the conference, remember that IATEFL offers a reduced conference registration fee by taking advantage of the Early Bird discount which is for members only. IATEFL membership can be gained through MATEFL which, as a MATEFL member, entitles you to a much-reduced membership fee for Basic Membership for a year. For more information about the IATEFL scholarship and IATEFL membership, please visit the MATEFL web-site or email me for further information.

Whether you wish to give a talk, or simply go and enjoy the conference, there are always a good number of Maltese participants heading that way. If you would like to be put in touch with someone who is going too, drop us an email at info@matefl.org and we will make sure you do not have to go up alone.

Useful web links


Jean Theuma
What is Functional Language?
By Aleksandar Mitovski

Students can sometimes be overheard saying ‘My teacher wants us to speak for a longer time, but he/she corrects everything I say, or we just talk about questions from a list and I don’t know how to start, and it’s difficult for others to understand me’.

One also overhears teachers saying something like: ‘My lessons are chock-full of speaking, but my students don’t seem to be making any real progress, or are really bored, or just don’t seem to get it! We’ve been over this a few times and they still make so many mistakes, or they give telegraphic replies whenever they can.

Functional language can come to the rescue! Those little tidbits that a native speaker often slips into conversation without too much thought make up a significant part of one’s active vocabulary. They’re readily available to be used for any and all functions one may need in any situation. Functional language is what students will ‘take home’ along with the meat and potatoes of the lesson, they are all the herbs and spices that unite the ingredients into a meaningful, practical conversation.

Thornbury (2005) defines them as ‘specific speech acts... such as complementing, suggesting, requesting, offering...’ Regardless of the language in question, they are, as Thornbury puts it, part of a speaker’s ‘pragmatic knowledge: knowing how to do things with language, taking into account its contexts of use, [which] in turn means knowing how to perform and interpret specific speech acts.’

A linguistic tool: with functional language, one could request for a door to be closed e.g. ‘Could you please shut the door?, which will be met with agreement from the interlocutor e.g. ‘Sure thing!’ and, hopefully, followed by the requested action. If anything, this type of language is inherently practical in nature and generally comes with a complementary function from the other participant(s) in the exchange. For instance, any suggestion or invitation will be met with either acceptance or rejection, just as any greeting will be met with acknowledgement and/or further greeting.

In short, functional language is used for performing and interpreting practical interactions for a purpose. While the purpose can be easily recognizable or even doable in any language, the language necessary for communicating that you want someone to do something can vary from language to language.

The English language has evolved many ways of doing this, which may not necessarily correspond to those phrases in, say, Maltese, Mandarin or Norwegian. Nevertheless, a practical interaction will take place and a goal of some kind will be accomplished.
I firmly believe students should be taught how to express – correctly and without the chance for misinterpretation – that someone is actually giving them advice (If I were you, I’d ...) and not simply regurgitating the second conditional because the teacher said it is widely used, or that two positive words ‘Yeah, right!’ when used with a sarcastic intonation do not necessarily mean that you are agreeing that something is possible.

This depends on the student’s familiarity with the language, as well as their linguistic abilities as per their level. I teach my students phrases about giving a personal opinion, agreeing and disagreeing from the moment I get a new group. I’ve found that this reinforces some structural elements of the English language (the SVO... word order in statements, for instance) as well as the usage of prepositions (e.g. IN my opinion,... It depends ON, etc.).

Another thing I’ve noticed is that most students tend to look for the phrase in their own language and try to compare it to its English equivalent and, soon after, start using it properly.

I cannot tell you the number of times I’ve had to deal with ‘I’m agree’ or ‘I’m disagree’ just because students had not made the distinction between their, probably Romance, language and English. One way I’ve drawn attention to this is that every time the incorrect functional phrase is used, I’d understand it as a different function in a lighthearted way.

Below is a simplified exchange I’ve had with students who make these mistakes:

S: ... I’m agree with this because... (student finishes).
T: So, you agree?
S: Yes, I’m agree.
T: Oh, sorry. I didn’t introduce myself. Hi Agree, I’m Alex.
S: (looks at me like I’m crazy) Yes, teacher, I know.
T: But you just introduced yourself to me. In English, for agreeing we say I agree (using the fingers to count the words) I - AGREE. There’s no verb TO BE.

And we take it from there. Overall, I’ve had good results with this approach. That student would rarely make that same mistake again, and might also start correcting others by the next lesson. With some students, it may merit repeating.

This may not be the most elegant solution to the student’s problem, but I’ve found it to be a practical one for several reasons: First of all, it focuses the student on the function necessary for that speech act – as we saw above that of agreeing, not introducing oneself.

Another thing it does is that it focuses on usage, in our case the omnipresent auxiliary verbs in English. Better yet, it focuses on how the lack of one affects comprehension. Next on the list would be that the student has to stop ‘Google translating’ in their head, since functional phrases are hardly ever translatable verbatim.

Finally, I’ve come to notice that students who do, in fact, pick up and start using such phrases tend to make faster progress, as they seem to have learnt a bit or two
of grammar without realizing, which, in turn, would prove invaluable for communication, or even exams.

Therefore, one may argue that functional language is probably the most important type of scaffolding a teacher can provide for their students. This can be elicited in various ways – from a listening or a reading activity, and from writing as well. A good reminder for the teacher is that your students may have heard some of these phrases before and are therefore somewhat familiar with them, so don’t be afraid to throw the ball in their court.

After all, this is what a lot of teachers seem to do when teaching modal verbs, which offer a wide variety of examples – asking for/giving permission, prohibiting something, giving advice, etc. If you’re surprised by the previous statement about the modal verbs, you’re not alone. You’ve likely been teaching functional language for longer than you think. It often hides in more practical sections within the course books, often labelled as Everyday English, Developing Conversations, Phrase Builder, Natural English, How to…, and so on.

What may come as more of a surprise is that it hides in the way you speak! For example, how do you ask for a glass of water if you’re talking to a friend? ... to a waiter?...to your parents? Teach them that! You don’t like this particular song? Tell them how you express your dislikes! You love the song? Teach them how to say that in various ways! There’s more than one way to skin this particular linguistic cat!

Over to you:

Task 1: Match the functional language phrases (1-7) with their function (A-G)
1. ‘If you do that again, I’ll tell the boss.’
2. ‘Fancy coming round for a cup of tea?’
3. ‘Shall I carry that for you?’
4. ‘In my view, computer games help develop hand-eye coordination.’
5. ‘I see what you mean.’
6. ‘Sorry, I’m not following.’
7. ‘D’you know which bus goes to Valletta from here?’
   a. Asking for directions
   b. Expressing a personal view
   c. Giving a warning/threat
   d. Inviting
   e. Offering (to help)
   f. Signalling understanding
   g. Signalling confusion

Task 2: What phrase(s) would you use...
1. If I asked for permission to go to the toilet?
2. If I had a horrible toothache?
3. If I had to fill in an application form?
4. If I had to repeat something because it wasn’t clear?
5. If I regret taking my wallet out of my bag and lost it?
6. If I wanted to know where the local council is?
7. If I wanted to shift the blame from myself to someone else?

Aleksandar Mitovski
Teacher 2.0: Exploring 21st century teaching
Natasha Fabri shares some practical tips about using GIFs and Memes in the classroom

Ask anyone who has ever texted me in the last couple of years, and they’ll tell you *insert amused or exasperated emoji here* “Tash is a GIF fiend”. I use them because I simply love the richness of meaning and humour they convey even to the blondest, most mundane conversation... so why not try to inject some of that pizzazz into our lessons?

What are GIFs and Memes?
Let’s start by defining the terms GIF and meme for the newbies out there. A **meme** [pronounced /miːm/] is any element of culture or system of behaviour that is transmitted from one person to another. The term was first coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976 when he said that ideas can propagate and adapt like viruses. They come in different formats, from still images which are frequently captioned, to short videos. They are often, but not exclusively, taken from popular TV shows, movies. They thrive in superhero and fantasy fandom communities especially on sites like Reddit.

The fascinating thing about memes is how quickly they are ‘remixed’ with different captions or other visuals added on. This way the most popular ones can live on in one form or another for years, sometimes even making a comeback on social media several years later.

One type of meme is the **GIF** [pronounced as /dʒɪf/ or /gif/ — the creator Steve Wilhite insists on the former — or **Graphic Interchange Format** has been around for 32 years! GIFs are animated **Lossless compression** or **Bitmap** files looping over and over. They are in effect dynamic memes, even though not all GIFs reach meme status.

The benefits of using GIFs and memes
They can, if used well and selected carefully, pique the learners’ curiosity more readily and, as a result, they can also be more memorable. It’s the basic principle of showing versus telling, which is especially useful in very low-level classes and younger students.
They can be used very easily for facial expressions and simple actions that would otherwise be tricky to demonstrate e.g. stroll vs. walk or bored vs. sleepy. They are also excellent for showing timelines when presenting tenses.

How I have used them in class, a tentative list

1. Use as is
Since I very frequently use Padlet for most of my classes (see my article on the previous issue last December), it is really easy to incorporate them in my lessons through the search button you can see as you’re posting. N.B. Please make sure to make some time to show your students how to add them on Padlet and help them install GIPHY or TENOR to be able to use them outside of class.

The first way I thought of using GIFs was to help me explain specific idiomatic expressions e.g. to be in awe. If your students happen to know that the man in the stills above is America’s Got Talent judge Howie Mandel, you can even build a narrative around this one GIF and supplement with a clip from the show.

Going further, I have also used GIFs (interspersed with still images and memes) to activate schemata or pre-teach vocabulary to be used later for a listening or reading task.

You can create a little storyboard for your class using GIFs and ask them to relate the story as they understand it, very much like an upgraded static image storyboard e.g. my last holiday. Once they get the hang of it, ask them to create their own as a homework task and then present it in the following lesson, using the GIFs as prompts instead of notes and tell your students to ask questions to their partners to make it more interactive.

You can use GIFs to quickly review target language from previous classes, as well or as prompts in dictations. Use GIFs to give praise or other feedback!

2. Caption it!
Websites like https://ezgif.com/add-text allow mid-to high-level learners to caption images you select for them. This can be used to expand/test their lexical range as well as practise specific grammatical forms.

3. Make your own!
When your students are more comfortable with this medium, give them plenty of opportunities to get creative. Websites like https://gifmaker.me/, https://ezgif.com/maker, https://giphy.com/create/gifmaker/ are all quite straightforward to use. All you need is a few still images or get a Chrome add-on like Screengrab to record actions directly from a video. If you’re brave enough, try taking/using your own images! This is also useful to create dynamic step-by-step instructions for your learners., especially for complex tasks and exam preparation activities.

Natasha Fabri
Some say that it’s become much harder to become a published ELT author. Is there any truth to that?
I don’t agree with that. I think there are lots more opportunities, but you can’t make as much money as you made 10 years ago because publishing has changed a lot. When the Headway series was written there were only two authors, and nobody else was really involved - you had a publisher and editor and that’s it. Nowadays if you bring out a 6-level coursebook series, the publisher needs it so quickly that they need to have a team of authors working on the project. In terms of opportunities though, I think there are loads. Publishers might look online and approach people who have a good blog, for instance, and they’re always looking for authors who are reliable and who can deliver on time. People also self-publish, and even if they don’t sell a huge number of books, they could also get approached by a publisher through that. So actually, I’d say there are more opportunities, it’s just the nature of what authors are doing and how the work has changed.

What tips would you give to someone hoping to become a published materials writer?
I think you should write materials because you enjoy it and you’re the kind of teacher who does it, not because you think you’re going to make a living out of it. If you want to get published, typical tips would be to go to conferences and present, network with publishers, write something for English Teaching Professional or Modern English Teacher, and start a blog. Publishers don’t know about you unless you’re being published, so these last two tips are particularly useful. Also, going through the process of writing an article for a journal and getting feedback from an editor is also a great way to get a taste of what it’s like.

What are the ingredients for an engaging and successful course book?
A colleague of mine always used to say that it’s all about the images and the texts. We talk about ‘flick tests’, where a teacher or student picks up the book and flicks through it. They don’t look at the comprehension questions or the exercises first, they look at the topics of the texts, or the images. It’s a bit like picking up a newspaper or magazine. Authenticity is also very important – not necessarily of the texts but of the ideas in them. Texts have to be about something real because we know that students are checking. Also, it’s good to include some elements of fun and quirkiness. Sometimes course books are criticised because they follow a pattern or routine. That’s done for a reason, and sometimes students like that because they know what to expect, but it’s good to throw it a little ‘wow’ moment every now and then - something that can surprise you, like a board game.

What are the main challenges of writing a coursebook?
It depends on the book. There used to be a time when the author wrote the book, brought it to the publisher, and that was it – it was all ‘your baby’.
Nowadays that’s unlikely to happen because publishers have gone around the world doing research, and they have a 5-year publishing plan. That research is very important, but as an author you still want to be able to bring your own personal flair to it. I guess the challenging thing is making sure there’s good teamwork and communication between publishers and authors, because there might be something you feel really works in the classroom and you’re very keen to include it, but it might not fit with the format that the publishers are pushing. Authors need to be able to compromise on their ideas. If you think about it though, the most successful creative partnerships are the ones where there’s a bit of ‘pushback’, where people look at what you have and ask you to adapt it. It’s quite easy, as an author, to become obsessed with your idea and not see beyond it, so it’s good for someone to challenge that.

**What is your definition of ‘critical thinking’?**

In our book ‘Critical Thinking in ELT’ it’s very much focused around the Bloom-Anderson-Krathwohl model. It encourages students to analyse, evaluate and discover things for themselves and to ask the right questions. Sometimes this is referred to as ‘middle order’ thinking. I think it’s also a mindset that teachers can encourage students to adopt – to think, analyse and evaluate. In other contexts though, like business English, the emphasis can be slightly different. In the business world, critical thinking is more strongly associated with problem-solving. Or if you were teaching negotiation skills, a good negotiator needs to be a critical thinker because they need to be able to understand people on the other side, so the definition is slightly different in this context. In English for academic purposes, critical thinking might have more to do with research and supporting your ideas with evidence.

*How easy is it for teachers to integrate critical thinking into their lessons if the materials they are using don’t focus on it specifically?*

It might be that some exercises in course books do actually develop students’ critical thinking skills.
Ranking activities, for example, are critical thinking tasks, because there’s a lot of evaluation and analysis going on. So I do think there are books out there that have some critical thinking activities in them, but they might not be flagged as critical thinking exercises. Still, there are an amazing number of books that only have lower-order thinking-based exercises, where students never get away from that ‘remember-understand-apply’ pattern. It’s almost as if they’re self-study books being used as student books. I do think you need to have critical thinking built into the exercises. For instance, if you do a reading task, the text itself has to have something there – some kind of edge to it. Otherwise, there’s not much to think critically about.

We’ve spoken a lot about students thinking critically, but what about teachers? How can critical thinking feed into teacher development?

Any teacher going to conferences or seminars probably already thinks critically about their own teaching, otherwise why would they bother going? ELT is full of people presenting new methodologies, but a teacher who thinks critically will try it out, see how it works, and then evaluate its effectiveness, rather than just take everything at face value and accept what they hear. I also feel that directors of studies, school owners, and teacher trainers have a responsibility to encourage teachers to think critically. It’s not that teachers don’t know how to, but as with anything in life, you need guidance.

How does the idea of critical thinking go down in cultures with a more ‘top down’ way of thinking?

I was recently in Vietnam and we had a session on critical thinking. One teacher said he didn’t think critical thinking lent itself to a collective culture, which sparked a huge debate among teachers, many of whom disagreed passionately. I think there’s a danger of looking at a culture and the nature of governments and thinking we can decide where people think critically and where they don’t. There’s also the self-satisfied assumption that ‘we come from a democratic country, so therefore we must be doing it right.’ But as we know, there’s plenty of countries with democratic governments where people don’t necessarily think critically. I’ve been to China a lot recently, and even though I hear a lot of teachers in the UK saying their Chinese students don’t think critically, I’ve found that there’s a new wave of young, enthusiastic teachers there who are desperate for ideas and are fascinated by the idea of critical thinking. So I don’t think we can just look at a culture and its government and make assumptions on that basis. There is also the issue of what kind of educational culture teachers and students come from. Exam systems in some countries might encourage students to simply regurgitate facts, and when doing critical thinking exercises with students from such countries, you might get questions like ‘is this on the test?’ You then have a responsibility to convince the student that the task will help them memorise the language, but it can be a hard sell. I don’t really see this as an east-west difference, though. There are plenty of countries in Europe that operate on that basis, where students are not necessarily encouraged to think critically.
Find all 12 of the extreme adjectives in the grid below.
Words in this puzzle can appear horizontal, vertical, diagonal as well as backwards!

---

DELICIOUS
DELIGHTED
DISGUSTING
FANTASTIC
FASCINATING
FILTHY
HILARIOUS
HORRENDOUS
MORTIFIED
SPOTLESS
STARVING
TERRIFIED
In 2018, a total of 87,112 students attended courses at English language schools in Malta. This represented a small decrease of 0.1% from 2017. As can be seen from the NSO table below, the overwhelming majority (27%) of students were from Italy, with students from Germany, France, Russia and Poland making up the rest of the top 5. However, the number of students from all these countries was slightly lower than in 2017, with the exception of Poland.

The table also shows that female students (53,364) comfortably outnumbered males (33,748). In fact, there were more female students than males from every country in the table with the exception of Turkey.

---

**Table 1. Foreign students following courses in local licensed ELT schools by sex and citizenship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Males 2017</th>
<th>Females 2017</th>
<th>Total 2017</th>
<th>Males 2018</th>
<th>Females 2018</th>
<th>Total 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>11,209</td>
<td>14,385</td>
<td>25,594</td>
<td>9,880</td>
<td>13,602</td>
<td>23,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4,275</td>
<td>6,002</td>
<td>10,277</td>
<td>4,014</td>
<td>5,977</td>
<td>9,991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>3,572</td>
<td>5,566</td>
<td>9,138</td>
<td>3,450</td>
<td>5,394</td>
<td>8,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1,876</td>
<td>2,942</td>
<td>4,818</td>
<td>2,006</td>
<td>3,300</td>
<td>5,306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>1,513</td>
<td>2,999</td>
<td>4,512</td>
<td>1,407</td>
<td>3,004</td>
<td>4,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>1,436</td>
<td>1,671</td>
<td>3,107</td>
<td>2,002</td>
<td>2,361</td>
<td>4,363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>1,594</td>
<td>2,925</td>
<td>4,519</td>
<td>1,409</td>
<td>2,951</td>
<td>4,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1,380</td>
<td>2,231</td>
<td>3,611</td>
<td>1,454</td>
<td>2,517</td>
<td>3,971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>2,180</td>
<td>2,924</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>2,602</td>
<td>3,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>905</td>
<td>1,387</td>
<td>2,382</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>1,193</td>
<td>2,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1,363</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>2,329</td>
<td>1,046</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>1,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>957</td>
<td>1,475</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>1,016</td>
<td>1,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>1,288</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>1,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>1,063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>1,031</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>1,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>1,179</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries</td>
<td>2,537</td>
<td>3,800</td>
<td>6,337</td>
<td>2,469</td>
<td>4,235</td>
<td>6,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>35,112</strong></td>
<td><strong>52,078</strong></td>
<td><strong>87,190</strong></td>
<td><strong>33,748</strong></td>
<td><strong>53,364</strong></td>
<td><strong>87,112</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

1 includes students arriving in 2017 and 2018
2 includes students whose citizenship is unknown
The second table shows the ages of students from the top six countries. The majority of students were aged 15 and under, with nearly half of this number coming from Italy. 16-17 was the next most common age range, followed by 18-25, with Italian and French students the most numerous in both cases. Among the top six countries, the fewest students fell into the 50 and over age range. The majority of students in this age range were from Germany.

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Why not try... Reverse translation?
By Matt Done

Recently I was watching a promotional video on YouTube for a language school in Spain. When it came to the ‘Why study with us?’ segment of the video, they proudly announced that ‘We use ONLY English in the classroom. Using Spanish is completely prohibited!’

This got me thinking about the whole issue of translation and L1 (first language) use in our English lessons. The L1 policy of the Spanish language school is certainly not unique. Indeed, many schools, teachers and students hold the view that using L1 in the classroom is undesirable, and that a strict ‘English only’ policy should be adhered to. Here are some of the most common arguments levelled against translation and L1 use:

- Translating can be messy and confusing, as not everything in English has a straightforward equivalent in the students’ own language.
- If we spend classroom time on L1, then we’re cutting into our students’ opportunities to be exposed to English, and to practice speaking it.
- If students get used to translating things into their own language, they may come to rely on this, and may therefore fail to develop their fluency and autonomy.
- Students should learn English the way they learn their first language; that is, without the interference of another language.

However, despite these arguments, the principled use of translation and L1 in the classroom is supported by masses and masses of research, and most authors are in favour of it. Professor Guy Cook, for instance, says that the arguments for using translation and L1 in the classroom are now so strong, that it should be an accepted part of teaching, and that schools and teachers who ban it must justify doing so.

The aim of this article is not really to get into the debate (if there even is one) about whether translation and L1 use in the classroom are a good idea. I would, however, like to present one beautifully simple translation activity which, I believe, can be incredibly useful for students (and teachers too!). One major advantage of this activity is that it doesn’t matter whether you’re teaching a multi- or monolingual class, and it doesn’t matter whether you speak any of your students’ languages.

**Step 1**: Take some language that your students have already been exposed to. This might be a segment of text from a reading comprehension, or it might just be some chunks of language that have emerged during...
the course. The trick is not to make the text too long or off-putting.

**Step 2:** Get the students to translate the text/chunks into their own language. Once they’ve finished, they can compare their translations with a partner. If the two students speak the same language, they can check whether they agree with each other’s translations. If they speak different languages, they can talk each other through their translations and maybe ask questions like ‘what does that word mean?’ or ‘how do you pronounce that?’ I’ve found that students usually enjoy talking about things related to their national identity, and their language is obviously a huge part of this.

**Step 3:** Collect the students’ translations and keep them somewhere safe.

**Step 4:** After some time has passed (a couple of days/a week/even a month), redistribute the translations to the students, and get them to translate them **back into English, without looking at the English original.** Let the students do this alone.

**Step 5:** Once the students have translated as well as they can, let them compare their attempt to the English original. Actually, you probably don’t even need to give this instruction, as they’ll be itching to do this anyway. If you like, you can get the students to talk to one another about how accurate their attempt was. This is an incredibly simple activity, and yet potentially, so many things are going on at the same time. In no particular order, here is a far-from-comprehensive list of some of the benefits of reverse translation:

- It serves as excellent revision.
- It forces the student to engage with the meaning of the language they’re being asked to translate.
- It’s cognitively challenging.
- It’s self-motivating – students really want to check the original version after their reverse-translation attempt!
- It’s something students can easily do by themselves, and so is a great tool for autonomous learning.
- It gives students (and the teacher) an idea of what gaps (lexical, syntactical) there are in their knowledge or ‘interlanguage’.
- It can trigger a lot of useful ‘aha!’ moments when students see a word or structure that they couldn’t remember (or remembered incorrectly).

What I also love about this activity is that its ‘success’ doesn’t really lie in getting the translation correct. What’s more useful is the actual process of translating, and the noticing that hopefully occurs when the students are comparing their attempt to the original. So, the next time you have 20 minutes left and you’re not sure how to fill it, why not try a reverse translation activity?

**NB. This activity, and many others like it, can be found in Philipp Kerr’s book ‘Translation and own-language activities.’**

Matt Done
MATEFL events in pictures
Some pictures from the winter sessions, held on the 1st of December 2018

From the top:
Alan Marsh’s session called ‘Making grammar sexy’; Kevin Spiteri, with ‘The building blocks of learning - Alternative uses of LEGO® in the ELT classroom’ and Jean Sciberras in “Creativity is contagious – pass it on!” Albert Einstein.
MATEFL events in pictures
Some pictures from the AGM and CPD session, held on the 27th March 2019

This year’s AGM and Alan Marsh’s CPD session: ‘Imagine that!’.
MATEFL events in pictures
Some images from the spring session. Held on the 18th of May 2019

John Hughes focussed on Critical Thinking and materials writing.